

Beneath Every Wreath Lies a Story, or Two

The use of garlands, wreaths and festoons dates back to ancient Greek times and it was adopted into the Christian religion as a symbol of the victory of the redemption of man.

The wreath is a symbol of never-ending (life). Its circle form may also be associated with resurrection and rebirth.

The laurel wreath is usually associated with someone who has attained distinction in the arts, literature, athletics or the military.

This is circular tour through Spital Cemetery connecting seven of the headstones and monuments with wreaths and telling something of the stories behind these graves. Guided by a few angels!

Map: see attached

Distance: 1/2Km or 1/3 mile

Time: 30 minutes, not accounting for time spent seeking out the headstones and monuments, reading inscriptions and observing the skilful work of the masons.

Accessibility: The cemetery is open all the time. The notices about opening times at the entrance are out of date! Paths are uneven and some have low steps as Spital Cemetery is built on a hillside. There has been subsidence and tree roots have come to the surface in places. There was mining in this area. The map shows roadways and paths that are wheelchair accessible. Please do not lean on the gravestones. If you leave the paths be especially careful where you tread.

Red - directions

Italics - story

Black regular - Notes

Start

The wreath trail starts at the top gates into the cemetery on Hady Hill. Park just inside on the roadway flanked by an avenue of lime trees. Walk along the roadway. Just past the path on your right, which runs parallel with Hady Hill, you will see, also on the right, underneath the fourth lime tree, the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC) headstone with a red ribbon belonging to Private Wheldon.

Private John William Wheldon was in the Royal Army Medical Corps and died, aged 39, in April 1921 from wounds or illness contracted while serving in WW1. John William was the son of John and Lily Wheldon, husband of Elizabeth Wheldon of 99 Queens Road, Fairfield, Buxton, Derbyshire.

This is the only CWGC headstone in the cemetery made from Botticino Marble, quarried in Italy. The majority of the WW1 headstones were made from the local Hopton Wood Stone. All of the WW2 headstones were made from Portland Stone. Two were made from Woodkirk Stone, quarried in Leeds. Five on the CWGC graves list are in family graves.

Jon Gedling, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Director of Works said, "When the guns finally fell silent a century ago, the Commission began the mammoth task of remembering the war dead. Only the very best materials were fit to mark the graves of the fallen and we began our long association with Portland stone – producing more than 1 million headstones to mark the graves of those who had sacrificed their lives to defend our liberty."

Return to the roadway and continue towards the chapels. On the left you will see a lone small stone building under the lime trees. The Tool House was where the sextons, gravediggers, stored their tools and could heat up a brew. They didn't have a toilet but there was a toilet block elsewhere in the cemetery for them and visitors to use, sadly long gone. Walk onto the path beside the Tool House, heading due east.

About 1/3 way along the Tool House Path, on your right, some distance from the path, you will see the distinctive CWGC headstone with a red ribbon tied around it belonging to Corporal Terence Patrick Navin.

Terence Patrick was in the Royal Army Medical Corps and died, aged 26, in July 1943 from wounds or illness contracted during service in WW2. His place of death is given as Greenoch, Scotland. We may assume he was in hospital there. His parents bought this plot at that time so later when Susannah died in 1952 and John in 1953 they were also buried here, but did not add a headstone of their own. John had been a caretaker.

Terence Patrick's stone is made of Portland Stone.

As you stand facing south, with the Navin grave beside you, all the land below you, stretching on your left to the wall on Cemetery Road, up to the wall at the back of the gardens on Valley Road and Stanley Street and up to the chapels on your right, is packed with Roman Catholic graves. Although

the cemetery was opened in 1857 Roman Catholics were not given land until 1859. Roman Catholic services have always been held elsewhere. Many are unmarked, common graves, so they belonged to Chesterfield Borough Council. The families will have paid just for the burial of their dead. Many of these families had come to work in Chesterfield from Ireland or Europe to provide the labour for the mines, road, rail and canal building. Some will have lived in overcrowded conditions in the area called the Dog Kennels in the centre of Chesterfield where sanitation was poor and disease spread quickly. Infant mortality was high.

Return to the main roadway and follow it past the chapels where the burial services would have been held for Anglicans and Non-Conformists. Continue on the roadway as it takes you left, due south, and then turns sharply right and downhill. Keep a lookout to your right. You will pass a large pollarded ash tree and shortly after you will see the Shelbourne headstone.

The grave of Hannah and Henry Shelbourne. This grave space was purchased in 1931 when Hannah Maria died, aged 60. It was recorded that she was a Boiler Fireman's wife. Henry joined her two years later, aged 65. The cemetery records inform us that he was an Engine Man and that they lived at 27 Valley Road, Spital.

Continue on the roadway a short distance and then turn right between the graves on your right belonging to William and Ellen Facer and JT Wright and his wife Hannah. John Thomas was one of our skilled stonemasons. see if you can find his name carved on some of the headstones with beautiful flower carvings. Continue straight on this path.

This used to be a path in the original cemetery layout, one of the arms of the cruciform which was in the front of the chapels, but this arm has since been buried on. See the original map of cemetery layout in downloads on our website.

Ahead of you you will see a leaning angel and Mayor Spooner's monument. Just before you get to these monuments, look to your right and you will see a line of crosses. The last one marks the grave of Elizabeth Short, her brother Samuel Redfern and her husband, William Short. There is a beautiful floral wreath hung on the arms of the cross.

When Elizabeth Redfern married William Short, two upwardly mobile Chesterfield families came together. In 1894, Elizabeth's brother (local well-known butcher Samuel E. Redfern) died in a tragic passenger train accident and Elizabeth (aged 53) inherited money and property. At the time of her death, in 1898, the far longer list of properties she owned clearly shows how

enterprising Elizabeth Short had been. Her astute business sense had seen her money invested in purchasing, selling and developing properties all over Chesterfield. Elizabeth's will provided assets for each of her children, who were shareholders in the new firm of S.E Redfern Ltd. Information courtesy of J.A.B Short Ltd.

Elizabeth and William lived in Lordsmill Street, Chesterfield. Most of this street was demolished to enable the building of the bypass. Elizabeth featured as one of the Extraordinary Women in Spital Cemetery who we celebrated on Heritage Open Days in 2018, and in the Chesterfield Museum exhibition of the same name. Details about this can be found in their past events on their website. <https://www.chesterfield.gov.uk/explore-chesterfield/museum/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/extraordinary-women.aspx>

Return to the rectangular bed in the centre of the cruciform with the aforementioned leaning angel and continue along the path heading north. You will pass two large yew trees on the left. At the end of the path, at the T junction, turn left, downhill. Just after the junction you will come to the first shallow step, look to your right and between a holly tree and a pine tree you will see the monument belonging to Captain William Hume, hidden under the branches of a lime tree.

A couple of years ago the tallest tree in the cemetery, a magnificent Ash tree, just uphill from the lime tree, lost a very large branch and it had to be severely pruned. You will see the damage it caused to the top of the lime tree beside the Hume Monument.

Captain Hume had retired from the army at the time of his death in 1869 aged 62. His obituary in the Derbyshire Times read, "Captain William Hume, late 2nd Derbyshire Militia. This officer served with the 72nd Highlanders in the Caffre war, 1834-5 and for 19 years as Garrison Adjutant and Quartermaster, at Gibraltar, where for his able and faithful performance of arduous duties, both civil and military, he received the thanks of all the successive Governors, retiring from the army in 1863, after a service of 39 years. He was subsequently appointed to the Militia as Quartermaster to the Chatsworth Rifles, but was obliged to resign that appointment last year from ill-health, contracted during the above service abroad."

Research by Andy Miles

Captain Hume had been living on Spring Vale, a row of houses on Spital Lane across from the end of Valley Road. In the same grave space is his wife, Mary, and son Henry.

Return to the path and head back uphill until you get parallel with the Chapels. Here you will join a broad path, recently resurfaced, The Terrace.

Turn left onto The Terrace and walk nearly to the end. On your right, just before the iron railings around the monument to the Eastwood family, you will see the monument to members of the North family. They will have bought the four grave spaces (8ftx4ft) stretching back from the path.

William North was a Sergeant Instructor in Musketry. Willian died in 1878 aged 36 at Chatham. Since 1812 the Royal School of Military Engineering has been in Chatham, Kent. Also buried here are his parents, George and Ann North, who died before William, 1 year old Precilla Heathcote North, described as a widow's son, John and Charles North who was a steward. Two other children are remembered on the monument but are buried in Little Ilford Cemetery, London.

George North's story:

Jaunty George North, the baliff, was closely associated with the old gaol. He lived there for some years, and many esteemed it to be a great honour to be his guest, although his home was within the shadow of the debtors' cells. His manners varied – at times he resembled the gay “Micawber”; but his general deportment was full of dignity, and he had a certain rough grace that won him much respect both from friends and foes. Beau Brummel scarcely excelled him in his tasteful attire; and he was an authority upon etiquette and the ways of good society. Above all, he was an epicure.

Source: Old and New Chesterfield (abridged version) by John Pendleton.
1882

Research by Janet Murphy

Continue along the Terrace until you come to the T-junction. Immediately ahead of you is the monument to the Mason family, and here our final wreath is held by the angel.

Do spend some time to look at the carvings on this monument, the mourning woman clinging to the gravestone, the fairies, the plants and flowers all with heavy symbolism particularly to visitors in Victorian times. It will not surprise you that Joseph Mason Snr was a monumental mason. There are a number of stonemasons buried in the cemetery who also were responsible, along with others, for the outstanding collection of carvings on headstones that we have in Spital's Victorian Garden Cemetery.

This magnificent monument occupies two grave-spaces. They were bought in 1875 when 4 year old Leonard Mason died in 1875.

There followed:

Joseph Henry Mason, aged 9 in 1882. A builder's son.

Sarah Elizabeth Mason, aged 19 in 1888. A monumental mason's daughter.

Joseph Mason, aged 61 in 1901. A monumental mason. And finally Sarah

Mason, aged 74 in 1906. A widow.

All except Sarah were living in Hollis Lane when they died. When Sarah died she was living in New Queen Street, Chesterfield.

Turn right, uphill, and return to the top gate, to complete your circular walk. If you turn left, downhill, you will get to the bottom entrance.

Note: If any of the people written about here are in your family tree, we would love to hear from you. The cemetery records contain the minimum of information and records of the life of ordinary people are scant. We would love to add more detail to our records if you would be willing to share. Thanks for the help we have already received from Janet, Andy and John (descendent of Elizabeth Redfern).

Compiled by Liz Cook
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