

A new cemetery for Eye

No doubt Francis Woolnough, Town Clerk and Clerk to the Burial Board, felt no small sense of satisfaction when, on 23rd July 1889, the Bishop of Norwich completed his three-day visit to Eye. The climax of the octogenarian bishop's packed programme was the consecration of the extension to the cemetery, at which Francis presented the petition for consecration. Whilst proceedings were somewhat curtailed by a rainstorm, nevertheless the visit was deemed a success, concluding a project in which Francis had been intimately involved for the past two years.¹



The mortuary chapels at Eye Cemetery.²

Francis' connection with the cemetery extends to its inception thirty-five years previously. Starting in 1848, London experienced a particularly virulent cholera epidemic that lasted well into the next decade. Contemporary miasma theory, which ascribed the spread of infectious disease to 'noxious odours', provoked concern around the city's overcrowded and badly maintained churchyards. Looking to the examples of French and American burial practices, reformers demanded an end to burials inside churches, with the constant exposure of decomposing corpses that this entailed. Extramural burials were no longer to be made in mass or crowded graves, but in spacious plots at a depth of four feet. Once a burial was made, the ground was to be left undisturbed for at least four years. Clearly, new burial sites were required, both to provide much-needed extra space, and because the overworked soil of most churchyards was considered incapable of absorbing any further toxicity. Legislation in 1852 granted permissive powers to London ratepayers to establish parochial burial boards to provide and manage new cemeteries; these powers were extended beyond the capital in 1853. Fearful of politicising the issue, the government framed its guidelines for new

¹ *Ipswich Journal*. (1889) The Bishop's Visit to Eye. *Ipswich Journal*. 26 July. p. 5d. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 06 July 2023.

² Images: Photograph. Mortuary chapels at Eye Cemetery. 23 March 2024. Eye, Suffolk, England. Photographed by Jonathan Lodge.

sanitary burial practices as advice designed to support the burial boards through an administrative process to close ancient burial sites and create new cemeteries.³

The process began in Eye in February 1854, with a visit from the Home Secretary's inspector. His report ordered the immediate closure of the church and Baptist chapel for intramural burial and the closure of their respective burial grounds from January 1st, 1855.^{4,5} In May, nine ratepayers were voted onto the newly established Burial Board, including the Reverend James William Campbell, and Walter Craske the Elder as chairman.⁶ The Board had already identified a two-acre plot on the Yaxley road, the property of Sir Edward Kerrison and then part of Magdalen field, to be purchased for £114. Later, advertisements were published inviting tenders from builders to erect two chapels (one for Anglicans and one for Non-Conformists) and entrance gates, and for offers for a loan of £500 to be paid back from the Poor Rates over twenty years; replies were to be addressed to Francis Woolnough, Clerk to the Burial Board.^{7,8} The news was not universally well-received – a piece in the *Suffolk Chronicle* bemoaned the increased burden on ratepayers, specifying not only the cost of the loan, but also “the fees of the clerk to the Burial Board, whose bill is expected as long as your arm.”⁹ Satirical verses published in April suggest friction between the town's Anglican and Non-Conformist populations.^{10,11}

The consecration of the new cemetery seems to have been a muted affair, performed perhaps without ceremony. Samuel Hinds, then Bishop of Norwich, suffered chronic ill health and was forced to resign his office in 1857 amidst criticism of his reserved and retiring manner.^{12,13} Owing perhaps to both factors, the sentence of consecration was enacted by George Spencer, late Bishop of Madras, deputising for the Bishop of Norwich, on 5th September 1855.¹⁴ The first burial had occurred in early

³ Tulchinsky, T. H. (2018) John Snow, Cholera, the Broad Street Pump; Waterborne Diseases Then and Now. *Case Studies in Public Health*. Epub. 30 March. pp. 77-99. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-12-804571-8.00017-s. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7150208/> : accessed 20 July 2023.

⁴ *Suffolk Chronicle*. (1854) Eye, Feb[ruary] 23. *Suffolk Chronicle*. 25 February. p. 3d. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 06 July 2023.

⁵ *Norfolk Chronicle*. (1854) Eye. – Mr Grainger, the Government Inspector... *Norfolk Chronicle*. 16 September. p. 6e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 11 July 2023.

⁶ Eye Vestry. Extract from minutes of Vestry Meeting. 09 May 1854. Diocese of Norwich: Consecration Papers, 1784-1972. DN CSP 5/10/2. Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, England.

⁷ Eye Burial Board. (1854) Eye Burial Board. To Builders. *Suffolk Chronicle*. 04 November. p. 2c. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 08 July 2023.

⁸ Eye Burial Board. (1854) Eye Burial Board. To Capitalists. *Ipswich Journal*. 23 December. p. 1c. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 08 July 2023.

⁹ Moore, John. (1854) Correspondence. *Suffolk Chronicle*. 23 December. p. 3c. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 08 July 2023.

¹⁰ *Suffolk Chronicle*. (1855) Eye, April 5. *Suffolk Chronicle*. 07 April. p. 3e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 11 July 2023.

¹¹ *Suffolk Chronicle*. (1855) Eye, April 12. *Suffolk Chronicle*. 14 April. p. 3e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 11 July 2023.

¹² *Norfolk Chronicle*. (1857) In our supplement we publish... *Norfolk Chronicle*. 04 April. p. 2e. Collection: British and Irish Newspapers. <https://www.findmypast.co.uk> : accessed 07 September 2024.

¹³ *Times, The*. (1857) The parting address of the Bishop of Norwich. *Times, The*. 31 March. p. 9b. The Times Digital Archive, 1785-2019. <https://www.gale.com/> : accessed 19 July 2023.

¹⁴ Diocese of Norwich. Sentence of consecration. Eye Cemetery. 05 September 1855. Diocese of Norwich: Consecration Papers, 1784-1972. DN CSP 5/10/1. Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, England.

January, when the 66-year-old Mary Marriott, a carpenter's wife of Lambseth Street, died of a stroke.^{15,16}

By 1887, the new cemetery was becoming full, and plans were made to purchase an additional two acres extending the cemetery northwards, then in the ownership of Lady Bateman and rented out as allotments; an additional half-acre was to be purchased for the erection of a caretaker's cottage.¹⁷ By April 1889 The Eye Friendly Society of Oddfellows had offered to extend a loan of £400 at 4% interest over twenty years, and local builder Daniel Day had submitted tender to erect the cottage for £217 (later negotiated down to £198). Plans were made to submit a petition for consecration of the cemetery extension at a cost of £4 in fees. It was also agreed to award Francis Woolnough an honorarium of £10 for the "large amount of extra work" he had undertaken in the cemetery extension project, "for which [he] suitably thanked the...Board."¹⁸

The story of the creation of Eye Cemetery is a fascinating insight into the achievements of local initiative working with the latest scientific guidance and support from government to improve the community. Francis Woolnough emerges as a capable, if officious, local administrator whose presence in the town extended well beyond the Burial Board. Buried in the cemetery after his death in 1909, his funeral was attended by a host of local dignitaries; his contributions were further honoured at a civic memorial service.^{19,20}

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¹⁵ Eye Burial Board. Register of Graves Book 1. MARRIOTT, Mary. Grave no. 1, p. 1. 08 January 1855. Eye Town Council. Eye, Suffolk, England.

¹⁶ Deaths (CR) England. RD Hartismere, Suffolk. 04 January 1855. MARRIOTT, Mary. Entry no. 118. Vol. 04A, p. 411.

¹⁷ *Ipswich Journal*. (1887) The Cemetery Question At Eye. *Ipswich Journal*. 07 October. p. 7e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 06 July 2023.

¹⁸ *Ipswich Journal*. (1889) Eye Burial Board. *Ipswich Journal*. 12 April. p. 7d. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 08 July 2023.

¹⁹ *Diss Express*. (1909) Death of Eye Town Clerk. *Diss Express*. 16 April. p. 5e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 09 July 2023.

²⁰ *Evening Star*. (1909) Memorial Services. Alderman Peck and Major Woolnough. *Evening Star*. 19 April. p. 4e. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> : accessed 09 July 2023.

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