

English: KS2

A Tale of Two Sextons



Lye and Wollescote Cemetery and Chapels were opened in 1879.

In the building there are two chapels, one for Anglicans and one for Nonconformists. The cemetery is also divided into these two areas. As such, the cemetery required two grave-diggers or Sextons.

In October 1878 The Burial Board advertised for a Sexton. Mr Thomas Robinson, a 60 year old clay miner and gardener applied and was given the job. His wife Eliza soon joined him to clean the chapels.

Meanwhile the Sexton of Christ Church Mr William Pearson, complained to The Burial Board that as Sexton of the parish he was entitled to dig the graves in the consecrated Anglican area of the new cemetery and should be paid to do so at his usual rate. He argued that any money paid for graves already dug should be given to him. The Burial Board disagreed and Mr Pearson was left angry and annoyed.

By 1880 Mr Robinson was finding the work too hard to do. He also reported problems in the cemetery from vandalism and from young children playing in the cemetery. It was decided that young children under the age of 10 were not now allowed in the cemetery unless accompanied by an adult.

Mr Pearson still tried to get money and took his claim to the County Court. He claimed he was now owed £4 18s 0d in fees for the graves that had been dug in the Anglican part of the cemetery. The Judge agreed and awarded him the sum of £5. Mr Pearson and Mr Robinson continued to dig graves on opposite sides of the cemetery, with Mr Robinson being paid a lower wage to do so.

By 1882 Mr Pearson was causing problems. On one occasion he had not dug out a big enough grave which led to the coffin lid coming off. On another he buried someone in the wrong grave altogether! Finally The Burial Board had had enough and offered him a final settlement of £54 14s 0d to leave his job. This he did in October 1884.

How might Mr Robinson feel about being paid a lot less for doing the same job?

What rivalry could there have been between the two gentlemen?

Vocabulary:

Sexton – someone who looks after a graveyard and digs graves

Anglican - people who follow the beliefs of the Church of England

Nonconformist - Protestant Christians who do not follow the teachings of the Church of England

Consecrated – an area of land or a building (normally a church) that is dedicated to a sacred or religious use

£ s d – pounds, shillings and pence – old money used before 1971

Questions:

1. In what year did the cemetery and chapels open?

2. What two religions have chapels there?

3. What job does a Sexton do in the cemetery?

4. What was the name of the man appointed as Sexton to Lye Cemetery in 1878?

5. Why did Mr Pearson think he was owed money?

6. How much money did the Judge award Mr Pearson on his visit to The County Court?

7. At what age were children allowed to come into the cemetery without an adult?

8. In what year did Mr Pearson leave his job?
