

Gravestones with tales to tell

IT WAS the Victorians who invented the municipal cemetery when the traditional village churchyard became too small to accommodate the increase in population and subsequent increase in burials. They became the last resting place for many a hardworking soul who lived during the industrial age, the

majority of whom lie in unmarked graves. But for some who made the most of life's opportunities, gravestones have been left behind to tell the tale.

On Saturday 24th July, Jean Weston and Marlene Price, co-authors of "A Victorian Cemetery and its Notable Burials", which is all about The Lye & Wollescote Cemetery and Chapels, were on hand to provide

guided walks around the cemetery grounds, sign books, and generally promote the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust's efforts to preserve the cemetery's chapels for the future. It was cloudy, but at least dry when Jean began her first tour of a number of graves which she and Marlene had decided were of particular interest, the majority of which are covered in the book. Both ladies have spent the past ten years taking a keen interest in the cemetery, researching its history and many of the people buried in it, and thoroughly enjoy putting all their research into practice in front of a live audience.

Jean was joined by at least thirty people on the first tour, a cross section of old and young, locals and those from further afield, who had given up their Saturday to find out more about some Black Country people from the past, individuals who Jean pointed out lived at a time when Lye

was the centre of the region's hollowware industry and one of the most prosperous towns in the Black Country.

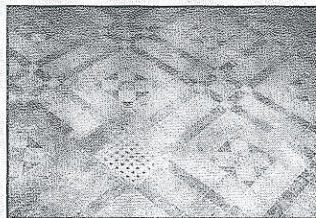
And although names appeared as just marks engraved in stone, birth and death dates simple statistics, Jean managed to illuminate the life stories of several with a series of events, triumphs and tragedies that were responsible for shaping their lives.

Hanging on her every word the group lasted the pace, asking questions in between, and the tour ended at the grave of David, the son of Joseph and Mary Ann Hingley, who tragically lost his life at the New Homer Hill coal pit in Cradley, aged just 21 on December 30th 1879. He was therefore one of the first to be buried at the cemetery which was formally opened earlier the same year.

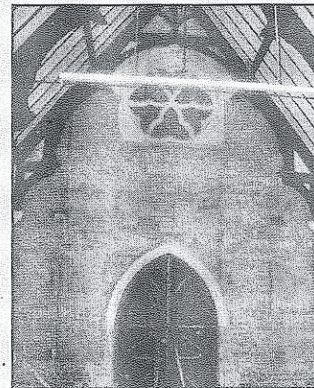
The cemetery chapels were as much an attraction on the day as the cemetery tours, and despite the boarded up



Jean Weston pointing out details on a gravestone in the middle of her guided tour.



The Victorian tiles in one of the chapels.



The chapel architecture.

windows the West Midlands Historic Buildings Trust had done a splendid job illuminating the two chapels and adjoining reception with flood-lights.

Rarely can anyone see inside this Victorian edifice, and although the building was stripped of fittings long ago, there was still enough architecture to make it a worthwhile visit, the chapel windows, roof timbers

and tiled floor particularly interesting. The chapels were designed by **Thomas Robinson**, the son of a Wollaston spade maker, who became an accomplished architect, and it is hoped that one his finest creations will be

restored to its former glory, albeit for another purpose.

The Lye & Wollescote Cemetery & Chapels, A Victorian Cemetery and its Notable Burials is still available at the Bugle Shop.



Authors and historians Marlene Price and Jean Weston, take time out during a hectic day at Lye & Wollescote cemetery.