



## Box Brief History of Box Cemetery

Over 130 years ago, the then village council, then represented by the Church Vestry, decided that a new burial ground was required after the graveyard at St Thomas à Becket had insufficient space. On 26 January 1858, the Vestry decided to create a Burial Board which was to obtain the land for the new cemetery, lay out the site, arrange for the construction of a chapel, lodge and entrance gates and then to manage the cemetery.

The land was given by Mr Northey and was described as part of a field adjoining the Turnpike Road, known as Nap Stile or Great Lye Mead. Dates of completion are not recorded, but the site was probably laid out before it was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of Gloucester & Bristol on 9 December 1858 for interment of the dead, according to the rites of the United Church of England and Wales.

Parish Councils were established by Act of Parliament in 1894 and the affairs of the Burial Board subsequently came under the jurisdiction of the new Parish Council, instead of the Vestry. In April 1896, the Burial Board met and resolved to hand over its authority to the Parish Council. So from that date the affairs of the Cemetery, or more accurately the Burial Grounds, have been managed by the Burial (now Cemetery Management) Committee of Box Parish Council. Almost five decades later it became necessary to extend the Burial Grounds, so in 1943 a further area of land to the east of the Burial Grounds was acquired from Mrs Shaw-Mellor and became known as the New Cemetery.

### Architecture and the Cemetery

The Chapel of Rest, the lodge and the gateways and walls fronting the Cemetery are classified as Grade II in the schedule of buildings of historic and/or architectural interest prepared by the Department of the Environment. The buildings were all designed in highly ornate Gothic style by architects Poulton and Woodman of Reading in 1857 and the local quarry owners, Pictor & Son, constructed the buildings at a cost of £1,000.

The Chapel of Rest is built of crazed rubble stone banded in ashlar; it has stone tiled roofs with saw-tooth ridges, coped gables and cross filials.

Rectangular in plan, the Chapel has projecting North Porch and South Vestry and a needle spire to the north-west. It is described as Unusually elaborate Gothic (style) with highly carved window tracery and a virtuoso display of contrasting stonework. The Lodge is of similar construction and style as the Chapel, with openings emphasised with alternating rubble and ashlar voussoirs (wedge-shaped stones). The entrance gates and walls are again of ashlar banded in crazed rubble stone with original ironwork gates and panels.

Much of the building is original, but obviously repair and maintenance are vital for the conservation of these interesting and important local structures. The roofs, for example, of both Chapel and Lodge, had to be replaced in 1926 and 1966 respectively. One of the panels of carved tracery in the North Porch and two of the stone cross filials on the Chapel roof were replaced by the mason Mr SR Davis, of Corsham, in 1987 and 1989 respectively.

### **Cemetery in Wartime**

In all, seven servicemen from the First World War are buried in the cemetery: Arthur John Cox, Herbert Percy Hancock, Reginald Isaac Hancock, Edward Lambert, George William Milsom, Lewis William Smith and Percival Vezey.

It had unusual burials of German servicemen during the Second World War, still recalled by the original wooden cross now hanging in the Chapel. Originally this marked plot number C1 containing the remains of five Luftwaffe Crewmen: Rudolf Beck aged 20, Rudolf Kirchhoff aged 31, Hans Fritz Merz aged 22, Gunter Wittkamp aged 24 and Johann Schmidt aged 21. Four had been shot down in the same plane near Woolverton on the Somerset Border on the 25 September 1940. A fifth suffered a similar fate two days later. In 1963, all were re-interred in Cannock Chase German Military Cemetery, Staffordshire, specially provided for nearly 5,000 German and Austrian personnel from both World Wars and maintained under an inter-governmental agreement of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

### **More recent History**

In 1966 the small robing room or vestry was adapted for use as a Chapel of Remembrance for display of the inscribed velum Book of Remembrance. In 1984 the Memorial Garden for the interment of cremated remains, was created. It is sited at the highest point in the Cemetery with far-reaching views over the Grounds and beyond: in this area of the Cemetery splayed tablet memorials are used, surrounded by rose bushes, some of which have been kindly donated in remembrance. In 2014 the Memorial Wood to the left of the Chapel was planted enabling the naming of trees by relatives of their dead loved ones.

### **Footnotes**

For a more detailed history, see Cemetery on the Box Parish Council website: <http://www.boxparish.org.uk>

The Cemetery is non-denominational and non-parishioners are also able to make use of the services and facilities. Copies of the statutory regulations are available from the Clerk to the Parish Council

The burial registers (dating back to around 1850), have been transcribed and placed on a computer database. Anyone wishing to obtain details or perhaps a search should email the parish clerk: [mailbox@boxparish.org.uk](mailto:mailbox@boxparish.org.uk). Original registers are deposited with the History Centre in Chippenham.

**Source: Box Cemetery Chapel; Box Parish Council**