Origin of Ellesmere Cemetery.



Shropshire Archive holds a few documents relating to the establishment of the Swan Hill burial ground and the consecration of the chapel and part of the cemetery.

Under reference P105/B/7/5 containing 27 items there is to be found a letter of May <u>1856</u> from Whitehall to 'Ellesmere' to instruct that no new burial ground is to be opened in the parish under Public Health Grounds without the permission of Her Majesty's Secretary Sir George Grey.

The likely reason for this letter to have been sent to Ellesmere (Parish Council) is because of the 1848 Public Health Act.

The 1848 Public Health Act was the first step on the road to improved public health. One of the individuals who played an important role in its creation was Edwin Chadwick, a social reformer.

Edwin Chadwick was one of the architects of the 1834 Poor Law, which was based on the principle that making the provision of poor relief so unpleasant would put off all but the most desperate.

Whilst working as secretary to the Poor Law Commissioners he investigated the issue of sanitation amongst the poor.

In 1842 he published 'The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain', paying the costs of publication himself as the Poor Law Commission did not want to be associated with the report.

Chadwick's argument was economic, as he was convinced that if the health of the poor were improved, it would result in fewer people seeking poor relief; knowing that much of the poor relief was given to the families of men who had died from infectious diseases.

Money spent on improving public health was therefore cost effective, as it would save money in the long term.

He considered that the most important steps to improve the health of the public were:

- improved drainage and provision of sewers
- the removal of all refuse from houses, streets and roads
- the provision of clean drinking water
- the appointment of a medical officer for each town

After much campaigning by the Health of Towns Association, and another severe outbreak of cholera in 1848, the government was forced to act, and the Public Health Act of 1848 was passed.

The Act established a Central Board of Health, but this had limited powers and no money.

Those boroughs that had already formed a 'Corporation', were to assume responsibility for drainage, water supplies, removal of nuisances and paving.

Loans could be made for public health infrastructure which were paid back from the rates.

Where the death rate was above 23 per 1000, Local Boards of Health had to be set up.

The main limitation of the Act was that it provided a framework that could be used by local authorities but <u>did not compel action</u>.

Document P105/B/7/4 (6) entitled 'Protection of Public Health' says that the "opening of any new burial ground in any city or town should be prohibited or discontinued without prior approval". This order signed "V.R." (Victoria Regina) especially mentions:

Manchester

Halstead (Kent)

Tamworth,

Madeley (Salop) and

Ellesmere.

re-opened unless to bury another member of the same family, in which cases half a yard in thickness of earth shall be left above the previously interred coffin, no undecayed remains to be disturbed, no new grave to be within half a yard of any other grave, no grave or vault to be used which is not free from water.

ELLESMERE, SALOP.—In that part of Ellesmere Churchyard which is within ten feet of the eastern and northern boundary wall, and which is not free from water and free from remains, no grave in the said churchyard to be less than five feet deep, and that every coffin buried in a vault or brick grave be embedded in powdered charcoal, and separately entombed in an air-tight manner.

Halstead, Kent.—In the parish church of Halstead, and in the Old Churchyard, with the exception of vaults and brick graves which can be opened without disturbing soil that has been buried in, and in which each coffin shall be separately entombed in an air-tight manner and be covered with three feet of earth, measuring to the general level of the ground.

TAMWORTH.—In Tamworth Church; and also in Tamworth Old Churchyard, except in vaults and walled graves in which each coffin shall be embedded in powdered charcoal and

Given that the dates of these documents are 10 years or so <u>before</u> Swan Hill Cemetery was opened <u>these instructions from Central Government appear to be related to the burial ground at St Mary's Church.</u>

It must be the case then, that plans were put in place to close St Mary's and look to open a new burial ground (at Swan Hill).

Document 6042 is a letter saying that the closing of the churchyard at Ellesmere may be extended to 1st May 1865.

Documents within the archive hold details for the people who were employed to lay out and construct the Swan Hill Cemetery.

For example:

- John Cartwright stonemason- was employed to erect the front wall and front entrance.
- William Clay[s] was employed to erect the iron railings.
- Charles Price erected the 3 sides of the cemetery walls and,
- John Edge was employed to build the chapel.

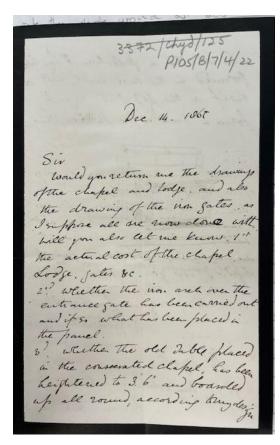
The chapel itself was designed by:

Sir George Gilbert Scott (13 July 1811 – 27 March 1878), a prolific English 'Gothic Revival' architect, chiefly associated with the design, building and renovation of churches and cathedrals, although he started his career as a leading designer of workhouses.

Scott was the architect of many notable buildings, including, St Pancras Station, The Albert memorial and The Foreign Office.

He might well have been approached by Ellesmere Town Council because between 1848–49 St. Mary's Church was altered and restored by him.

Shropshire Archives holds a letter in Gilbert-Scott's hand of December 1865 (P/105/B/7/4/(22) written to a Mr Wyatt querying some points about the design of the chapel, the lodge, the gates and the altar and saying that with the work completed he was requesting that his drawings be returned to his address at The Manor House, Ham, London.





The first Minute Book of The Ellesmere Parish Burial Board is dated 1864 (Shropshire Archive 6042)

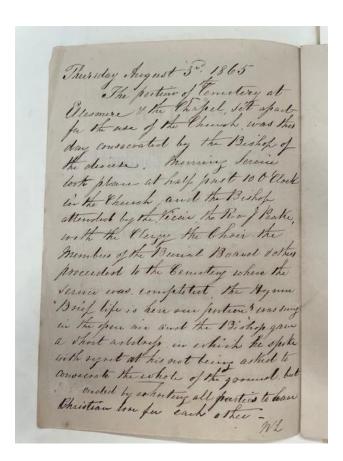
The original **'Ellesmere Cemetery Grave Plan in Sections'** that is retained by Ellesmere Parish Council is dated 3rd August 1865.

Its author was Godfrey B Hirst, Surveyor. It was he who laid out the plan of the cemetery and the sections within it.

Doc: P105/A/8/4 (Shropshire Arc) is the first reference to the process of consecration.

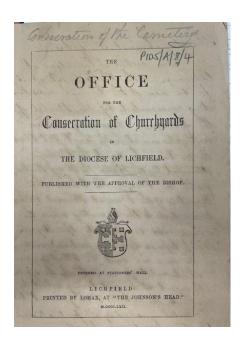
"Thursday August 3rd, 1865. The portions of the cemetery at Ellesmere and the chapel set apart for the use of the Church as this day consecrated by the bishop of the diocese. Morning service took place at half past 10 o'clock in the church and the bishop attended by the Vicar the Revered Peake, with the clergy, the choir, the members of the burial board and other proceeded to the cemetery where the service was completed. The hymn 'Brief Life is Here our Portion' was sung in the open air and the bishop gave a short address in which he spoke with regret at his not being asked to consecrate the whole ground but added by exhorting all parties to have Christina love for each other".

Image of the same:



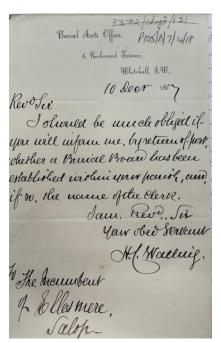
A copy of the Order of Service that day is held within the Archives:

Doc: P105/A/8/4 (Shrops. Arc).



Only 5 days later Swan Hill saw its first interment with the body of 78-year-old Rebecca Hayes being buried in plot D42.

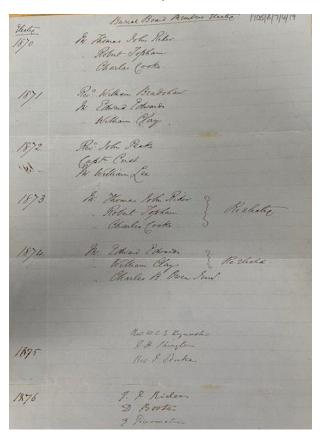
Document P105/B/7/4 (18) is a letter from Whitehall dated 10th December 1867 asking whether Ellesmere had set up a Burial Board and if it had, to supply the name of the Board's Clerk.



Another document P105/B/7/4 (19) lists the member of the Board between the years 1870 and 1873.

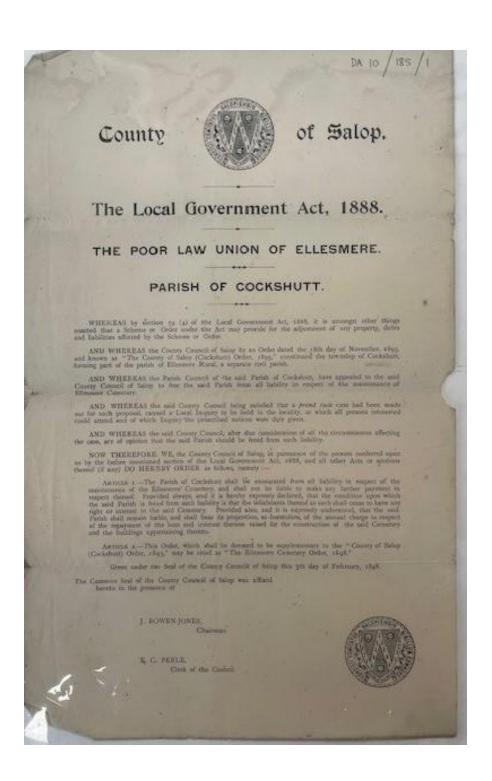
In 1870 the Board comprised:

Thomas Rider, Robert Topham and Charles Cook.

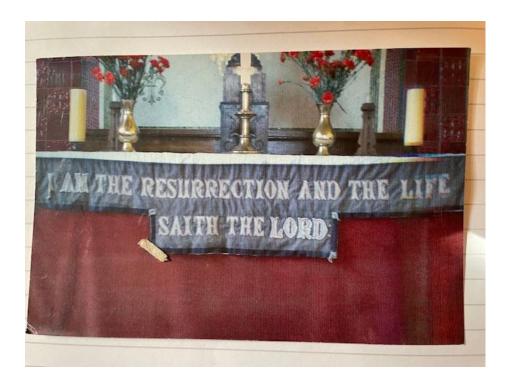


After the Swan Hill Cemetery was opened the good people of Cockshutt applied for an exemption under the 1888 Local Government Act.

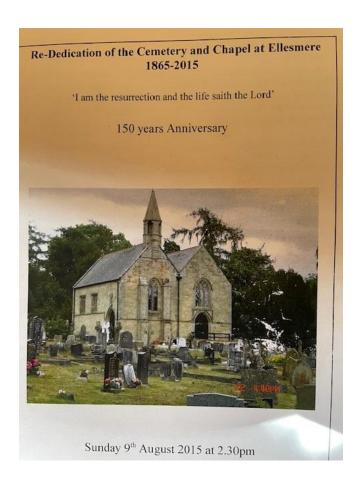
Document DA10/185/1 dated February 5th, 1898, gave permission for Cockshutt Parish to exempt itself from paying into the up-keep and maintenance of Swan Hill.



This is a picture of the original alter cloth obtained from Mrs A. Harris.



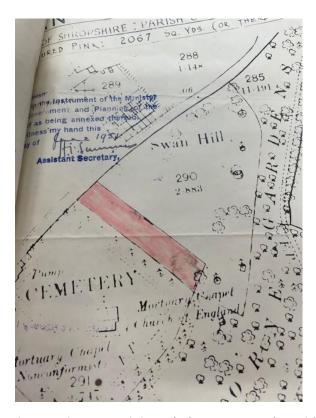
The chapel was rededicated on 9^{th} August 2015 following a programme or restoration.



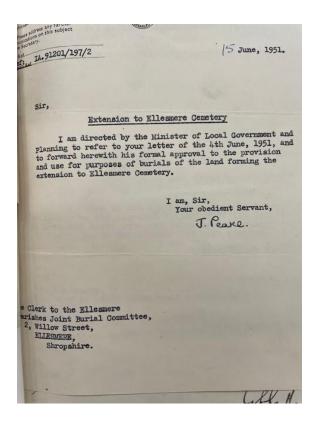
Post-script - additional information from the Shropshire Archives.

Cemetery Extension 1951 onwards.

As time went by the original cemetery in Ellesmere began to run short of space and a piece of land was purchased at what is now the top of the cemetery where the 'modern' sections and the Memorial Garden are situated. These sections comprise A to F, N, P, Q and R.



Approval to extend the existing cemetery into this new land came in 1951.



By 1952 the Burial Committee were already looking at the future and at the land beyond this extension (later subject of the failed compulsory purchase).

Dear Sir,

EBC/C/l.

The Burial Committee as you are aware, have recently purchased a strip of land for the extension of the Commetery and at the present rate of burial this additional strip will only last approximately 10 years so that my Committee have under consideration the question of buying the whole of the adjoining field with a view to protecting the Cemetery and to plan for further extension of the Cemetery.

The Duke of Westminster is prepared to sell the whole of the field camprising 2.453 acres subject to the existing tenancy and to formal Contract at the price of £440.

My Committee have instructed me to obtain the views of the Orban District Council and the Parish Council who will have to provide the money in due course and I shall be pleased to hear that the Urban Mistrict Council approve of the steps being taken by my Committee to protect the Cemetery. It will not be necessary to take more than the strip of land equal to the one recently purchased to enable the burials for the next 20 years to be provided for and in the meantime the present Tenant Kr. Aykroyd will be allowed to continue to occupy the remaining portion of the land on the understanding that he will give it up as and when it is required for further development.

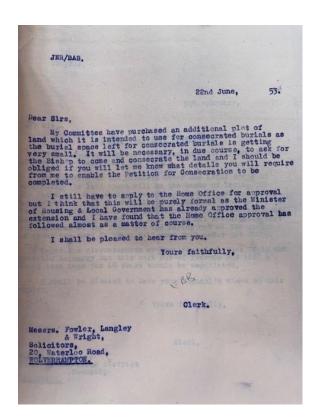
In view of the cost of purchasing this land, my Committee feel that the purchase and the lay-out should be covered by way of loan as it will not be possible to do this out of income and I shall be pleased to hear whether the Urban District Council agree to this course.

The Elleamere Rural Parish Council have approved in the action of my Committee subject to your Council approving. I shall be pleased to hear from you.

Yours faithfully,

In 1953 plans were made to consecrate the extended section.

. Horton, Esq.,



Conclusion.

Despite a visit to the Shropshire Archive, an email to the Gilbert Scott Archive and a certain amount of internet research it seems that the cemetery chapel has left little in the way of a footprint in terms of its history.

The obvious source of information would be Gilbert -Scott's own archive.

There appears not to be any history available in terms of a book, pamphlet or other source material currently.

AGC