

HOUGHTON HILLSIDE CEMETERY

DETACHED CHURCHYARD OF ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS CHURCH
SUNDERLAND STREET, HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING, CO DURHAM
CONSECRATED ON SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1854

GUIDE BOOK & MAP

6th EDITION



PAUL LANAGAN

HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING CEMETERY QUESTION.

GENTLEMEN,

In the columns of the "*Sunderland Herald*" of this day there appears an epistle from Mr. William Stokoe; who, not content with the notoriety he has obtained in this locality, from the part he has acted on the question of a New Burial Ground for this Parish, has proceeded to the extremity of impaling himself in print.

Mr. Stokoe has had the misfortune of being accused with "double-facedness" in reference to the subject alluded to; and to remove this stigma from his good name, he publishes a letter which he has contrived to obtain from Mr. Thomas Lynn, which, "*as far as that gentleman is concerned,*" acquits him of the charge.

As I was the individual who cast upon Mr. Stokoe the imputation which has so rudely disturbed his peace, I beg to state, in my own justification, and for the public satisfaction, that though his conduct, in his communications with Mr. Lynn, may have been "perfectly truthful and consistent," in those he held with me it exhibited anything but the manly straightforwardness, and unequivocal veracity for which he shows so laudable an anxiety to obtain credit.

While he was laying before the public the letter from Mr. Lynn, which is given in the *Herald*, I am surprised that he did not for the further edification of those whom he seeks to influence in his favour, explain the means by which he induced that gentleman to give him the "testimonial to character" which he has sent to the newspapers, as a safeguard for his reputation in distant places, rightly considering that at home, where he is "sufficiently known," any effort to that end would be trouble thrown away.

People very often commit "great mistakes" in doing what they conceive to be "kind actions;" but compliance with *ad misericordiam* appeals, like Mr. Stokoe's to Mr. Lynn, for the "certificate" above alluded to, cannot be received as conclusive evidence of the impeccability of those who find it necessary to resort to such devices, and will not be so regarded, at all events *by those who know better.*

I am, Gentlemen,

Yours obediently,

THOS. W. U. ROBINSON.

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Houghton-le-Spring, 16th December, 1853.

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SUNDERLAND NEWS.

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PAUL LANAGAN

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A GRAVE SUBJECT

"In 1853 considerable excitement occurred in the town of Houghton-le-Spring relative to the formation of a new cemetery, an influential portion of the rate-payers having opposed a plan brought forward by Rector John Grey, for converting a quarry into a place of sepulture. Public meetings were held on the subject, and several angry publications issued from the press. A service of plate was presented to Mr E D Welford, as a testimony of approval of his conduct during the struggle. The new

was, however, formed and consecrated on the 4th of September, 1854, by the Bishop of Exeter. An order from Lord Palmerston, then Home Secretary, had been received, authorising interments in the new cemetery, and thus terminating the disputes on the subject which had agitated the parish. Burials decreased from the 1940s, with the last taking place in the 1970s. The site became the final resting place of many well-known and note-worthy people but is now in a very dilapidated condition."



THIS GUIDE BOOK IS the 'tip of the iceberg' of 12 years worth of research into Houghton Hillside Cemetery, affectionately known as the Old Cem to locals. In 1999 I started to photograph the Cemetery and its remaining memorials; by March 2003 I realised that I should also document the precious inscriptions which were being eroded by the weather and vandalism. Much of the work can now be found on the Houghton Heritage website.

This Guide Book continues to expand with each passing year and I do hope you will find it useful should you ever visit Houghton Hillside Cemetery. Print a copy and take it with you!

Paul Lanagan
PAUL LANAGAN
HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING
HERITAGE SOCIETY, 2012

THE SEXTON'S LODGE

The original entrance to Hillside Cemetery was through the neighbouring Hill Farm until the rock was blasted away and the lych gate and Lodge were added in around 1873. The 1881 census records **William Reid** (60 years old), the Parish Sexton, his wife Mary (59) and daughter Mary Jane (24, schoolteacher), as living in the Cemetery Lodge. The sixty-year-old Sexton and his wife originated in Ireland. Mary was buried at Hillside on June 20th 1886.

A trade directory from 1895 records **George Brown**, Sexton, as living at the Church Cemetery, Sunderland Street. The burial registers suggest that George had a 5-year-old son called William who was buried at Hillside on August 30th 1894.

Edwin Place was Sexton and resided in the Lodge from the late 1890s to 1920s. At this time, goats were used to keep the grass down. The burial registers record Margaret Place (27 years old), residence: Cemetery Lodge, as being buried on November 9th 1903.



In the 1930s **Bill Scott**, gravedigger, and his wife, occupied the Lodge. Bill was a drinker – but never in pubs – and his wife made homebrew in the Lodge cellar. One day a shelf collapsed and Mrs Scott cut her hands and knees on the glass. It is said that she subsequently died from blood poisoning. Older Houghtonians have recollections of old **Mr Ely** looking after the Cemetery in the 1940s. He would keep the gate closed and chase the mischievous children away! The Lodge was occupied from the late 1950s to the early 1960s by **Mr & Mrs Green** and their son and daughter. The Lodge was vacant by 1964 and is now derelict.

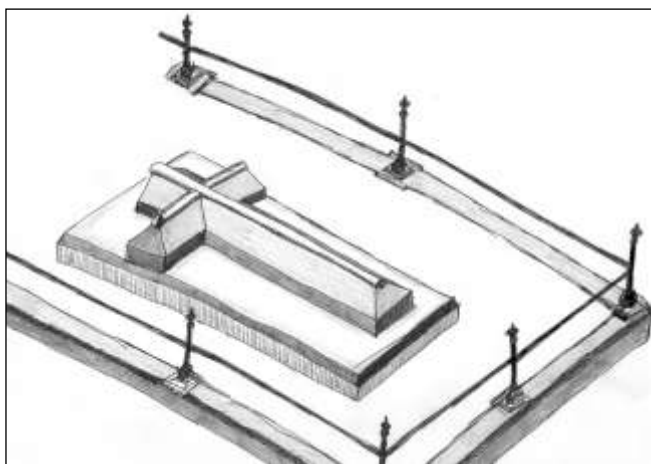


THE PLATEAU



These headstones, memorials and kerb sets were controversially bulldozed by contractors hired by the then *Houghton Urban District Council* on behalf of *St Michael & All Angels Church* in 1973. Permission for the clearance, under 'operation eyesore', was granted by the *Diocese of Durham Advisory Committee* on September 4th 1973 – the 119th anniversary of Hillside Cemetery's consecration. Many of the bulldozed memories, albeit damaged, were retrieved in 2010.

REV & HON JOHN GREY. MD, DD



Rector Grey was buried at Hillside Cemetery on November 14th 1895, aged 83 years. It is said locally that whilst on his deathbed in the Rectory he could hear the mean blasting the rock in preparation of the grave he was soon to occupy.

His Hillside Cemetery proposals in 1853 had caused outrage in Houghton-le-Spring. He was branded a “double dyed disgraceful and deceitful priest” and the Cemetery was labelled a quarry hole. Throughout the dispute he always insisted he would be buried at Hillside Cemetery whether it was a quarry hole or not!

SIR GEORGE ELLIOT, BART., MP



Sir George, or Geordie as he was known, was born in Gateshead in 1815, the son of a miner. He started work at the age of ten as a trapper boy at Whitfield Pit, Penshaw, and eventually owned this colliery later in his life. In 1849 he became a wire rope manufacturer and his company laid the first Atlantic cable. He became an M.P. on November 26th 1868 and he was made a Baronet on May 15th 1874 by Queen Victoria. In his capacity as an M.P. he made arrangements for the new tongue of Big Ben, in Westminster, London, to be forged at Hopper's Iron Foundry in Houghton-le-Spring. His local residence was Houghton Hall.

Sir George also advised Prime Minister Disraeli to buy shares in the Suez Canal, resulting in England having control over the sea route to India.

The Elliot vault, which dates from 1862, was vandalised and bricked up in 1957. It originally had an outer door which lead into a large, shelved cavity with an ornately tiled floor. No inscription remains. His funeral was held at the Hillside Cemetery on December 28th 1893 and was attended by a very large gathering of mourners.

WILLIAM STANDISH STANDISH ESQ

It is still widely believed that William Standish Standish died as a result of a tragic accident, that he was riding along the moors of Houghton-le-Spring one night and plummeted over the cliffs of the new burial ground (which had opened two years earlier in 1854) and was later interred on the spot where he met his end. Research by photo-journalist David Allan suggests otherwise. It is more likely that William died at Cocken Hall from an illness, as is suggested by newspaper reports and, more importantly, as stated on the inscription upon his vault! William's modern day descendants are **the 18th Marquess of Winchester** and his son, **The Earl of Wiltshire**. William's direct ancestors were royalty, including: **Kings Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, and Prince Edward the Black and King Richard II**. William's great-great-great grandparents, **Ralph Carr** and **Anne Fairfax** are buried in the south transept of St Michael & All Angels Church, Houghton-le-Spring.



SADLY THE STANDISH STANDISH VAULT HAS BEEN FREQUENTLY DESECRATED OVER THE YEARS. IN THE 1970S WILLIAM'S HEAD WAS DISCOVERED BEING USED AS A FOOTBALL BY YOUTHS – IT WAS THEN REBURIED IN ST MICHAEL'S CHURCHYARD.

THE BECKWITH FAMILY

The memorials to the Beckwith family can be found on the rock face. The inscription reads:

In memory of GENERAL WILLIAM BECKWITH of Silksworth and Trimdon Colonel 14th Hussars who died Feb 23rd 1871 aged 75 years and PRISCILLA MARIA BECKWITH widow of Genl W. Beckwith who died June 3rd 1877 aged 70 years and JOHN BECKWITH of Silksworth and Trimdon formerly of Calcutta who died April 23rd 1891 aged 87 years.

Mrs Beckwith, a shadowy Victorian lady, founded of the Catholic community in Silksworth. Genl Beckwith was in the Army and once quelled a riot by beheading the rioters.



GEORGE WHEATLEY



Crimean War veteran George Wheatley had fought at the battle of the Alma at the siege of Sevastopol for which he had received two medals with clasps. It was here that his right leg was blown off by a cannon ball – he was only nineteen years old. George was discharged from the Navy and went on to found the well-known Wheatley's confectionery business in Houghton.

He is buried alongside his second wife Josephine and mother-in-law, Elizabeth Finlay. He was survived by six sons and seven daughters.

THE 1894 EXTENSION

A new cemetery opened on Durham Road on March 1st 1892 at a cost of £4000. The *Local Board of Health* refused to have a section of it consecrated despite the municipal cemetery at neighbouring Hetton-le-Hole having a consecrated section. Rector Grey sought permission from the Home Office to extend Hillside Cemetery, and the extension was consecrated by the Bishop of Durham. The first burial, for Martha Storey, took place on December 22nd 1894. Six trustees were responsible for the new extension, including **Avery Norman Robinson**. He was the last of the trustees to die, and his grave can be found next to that of George Wheatley.



2012
THE GRAVE OF AVERY NORMAN ROBINSON AS SEEN AT HILLSIDE CEMETERY IN 2012.



2003
THIS GRAVE IS STILL VISITED BY THE DECEASED'S SON. NOTE THE ABSENCE OF ANY TREES IN THE EARLIER VIEW. THE WHOLE OF THE SURROUNDING AREA IS NOW OVERGROWN BY SELF-SEEDING SYCAMORE TREES, WHILE THE BANK SIDE SUFFERS FROM SEVERE EROSION.

OTHER NOTEWORTHY GRAVES

One of the main objectors to the Cemetery proposals in 1853 was *Thomas William Usherwood Robinson*, the son of a well-known Houghton brewer - and, surprisingly, a Churchwarden of St Michael's Church!

At the age of 62 years Thomas was laid to rest at the Hillside Cemetery on the 28th of August, 1888, following his death at Sedgefield three days earlier. His funeral service was performed by none other than Rector John Grey.

12

2004



"With even more than the precipitancy that you condemn in others, you have, without consultation with any person or party – at all events as far as is publicly known – endeavoured to cram your scheme of a quarry-hole burying ground down the throats of your parishioners, without allowing them to have a voice in the matter.... It would thus seem that you are not disposed to content yourself with huddling the bodies of the dead into the hole of your choosing, but are determined, if you have the power, to drive the living into a corner from which they shall have no means of escape or evasion."

LETTER TO RECTOR JOHN GREY FROM THOMAS WILLIAM USHERWOOD ROBINSON, 1853

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Many of the miners killed at Houghton Colliery were buried at the Hillside Cemetery. A handful are found within the vicinity of each other in the 1894 extension.

Thomas Guy was killed down the pit on *January 8th 1913, aged 30 years*. He was hewing alone when a piece of stone fell on to him and broke his neck; the saucer-shaped stone was 3 feet across and 9 inches thick in the middle (13 on the map).

Sixteen year old **Edward Bray** was accidentally killed at Houghton Colliery on January 20th 1913 when his head was crushed between a tub and a prop (14 on the map).

Thomas Moody, aged 56 years, was killed by an empty set at Houghton Colliery on January 14th 1896 (15 on the map).

14



15



TO THE PARISHIONERS OF HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING.

FELLOW PARISHIONERS,

Our Rector having again broken faith with and deceived us all, we are now, for the fourth time, called upon to meet on Monday next, in the Vestry, to assert our independence, and to fight the battle of Civil and Religious Freedom against the double-dyed, disgraceful, and deceitful Priest, our haughty and honourable (?) Rector, so termed the Honorable and Reverend JOHN GREY; a man who, coolly and deliberately breaks a solemn pledge, made by him at a Public Meeting through the medium of his Solicitor, and that after due consideration and much reluctance, because he now thinks if he kept it, it would be construed into an admission that he wishes to tyrannise over your independence, a fact which is known, thanks to the Press, throughout England, and Scotland too. He knows you would accept of no word of his, but that you preferred his Bond, and gaily upon these terms, at his earnest entreaty, that you agreed to waive obtaining a New Grave-yard, under your own management. He, after considering all these matters, made the offer, which was, in a spirit of peace, accepted by you, and the meeting adjourned solely for the purpose of preparing the legal documents, as you and the public will perceive from perusing his own authority, the "Durham Chronicle," that it is so. Yet, forsooth, it pleased him, after nineteen days have elapsed, to violate his solemn pledge; a pledge when given ought to be respected by all men, much more a Clergyman, but perhaps he holds a dispensation for telling falsehoods; but, to his own shame and disgrace, his offer, at his own solicitor's instance, is entered in the minute book of the parish, a concession which you wrung from him when he knew he was on the eve of another signal defeat, to prevent which, and for the purpose of gaining time, he pledges his word to return to the old scale of fees; and further that he would bind himself, by a Deed of Covenant with a Trustee, to be chosen by his Parishioners, to make and complete his new grave-yard within two years, and that no rate whatever should be exacted from you for making or maintaining it, so long as he remained the Rector of Houghton-le-Spring. This promise, without hesitation, he violates; and has the impudence to ask you to trust to his word. Faugh! The man must be an idiot to believe any man in his senses could, after his repeated falsehoods and deceit, believe him to be an honorable man; you know that there is none about him except the prefix to his name.

Who asked for a Rate of *Elevenpence* in the Pound to defray the expense of inclosing his Quarry-Hole? &c,

Who asked for a Rate of *Sixpence* in the Pound, for the like purpose, when he was unable to get the *Elevenpence*, and proclaimed a majority of *Twenty-one Votes*, and refused a scrutiny because he knew there was no such majority? Let him shew the Poll Book for the Rate, but, he dare not, and he was compelled to desist from enforcing such illegal Rates, and now speaks of saving you the expense.

Who used every effort, and all the influence of the Earl of Durham to boot, to prevent you having a Church Yard of your own, and kindly offers his Old Quarry-Hole to inter your dead and promises to reduce his exorbitant fees?

Do not believe a word of what he says—you have read him and found him wanting, make him restore your Church, its Galleries, and Pews—resist all attempts at coercion and intimidation—shun all his spies—mark them well, and brand them with infamy! Let him join his fellow-friend the Russian Bear, whose pupil, and an apt one too, he is. Let him stick to cow-jobbing or attend to his mummeries, pocketing what fees he can get, out of the Quarry-Hole, but do you not pay for these? Take care and watch his proceedings at Easter, a fat priest with £1,700 per annum, ought to pay for washing his surplice—let him get rid of his petty Puseyite minor *Canons*—would-be-Committee-men of your Mechanic's Institute, but thanks to the firmness of its members, rejected for their Masters disgraceful conduct.

He tells you he will not interfere to prevent you obtaining a new Burial Ground under your own management, but his slaves say, his poor relative is to contest, in litigation, your right to obtain it.

Believe none of them, let them all walk over to Rome, and have a Public Meeting amongst yourselves, to petition Parliament to know if his practices are sanctioned by the Laws of England—Be up and stirring, lose no time in supineness and inactivity—Canvass every Ratepayer in the Parish and solicit his vote and support in favor of your liberty—publish his conduct throughout the length and breadth of the land, and scrutinize closely his conduct in the various charities.

Remember all must Vote and also attend the Meeting for MONDAY NEXT; go for the Burial Board and nothing else, and in the meantime consider of a

A GRAVE SUBJECT.

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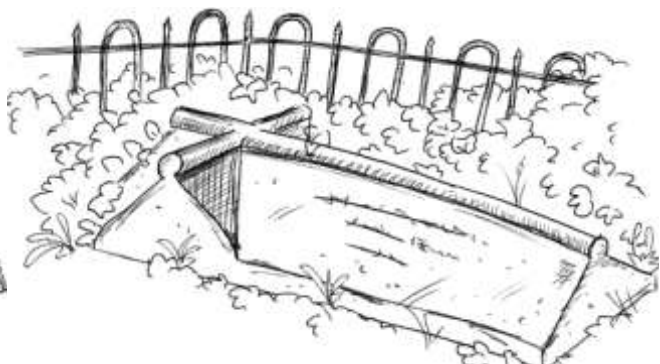
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HOUGHTON HILLSIDE CEMETERY

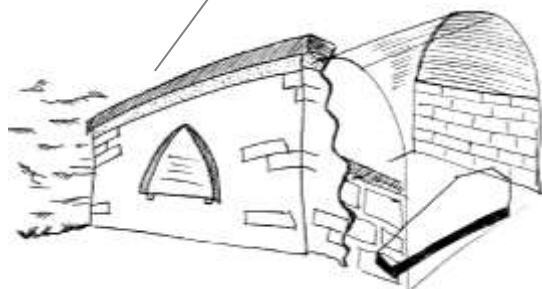
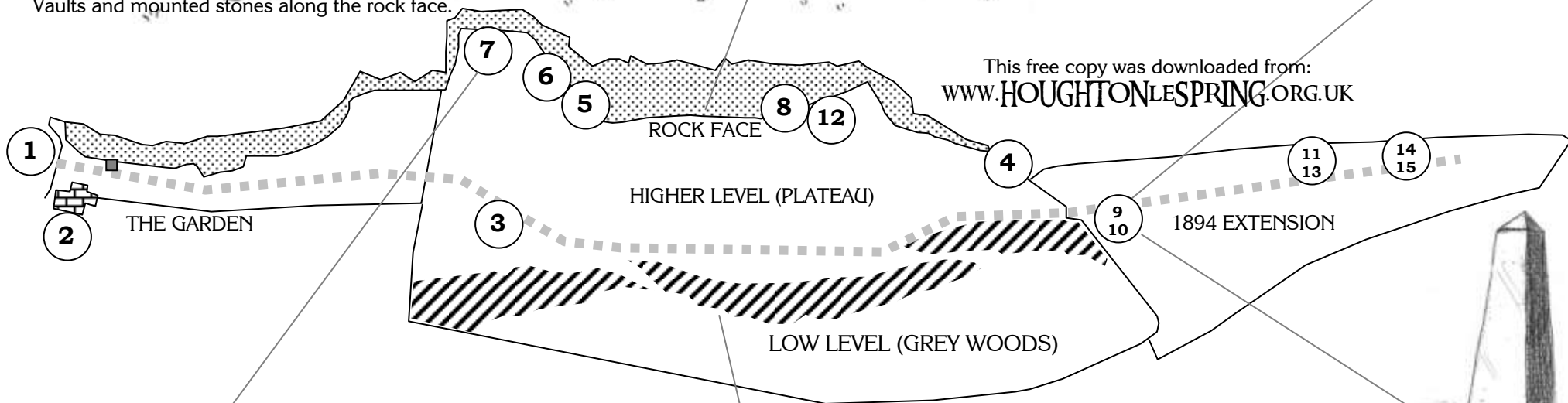


Vaults and mounted stones along the rock face.



INSCRIPTION: AVERY NORMAN ROBINSON
DIED AUGUST 26TH 1926 AGED 68 YEARS

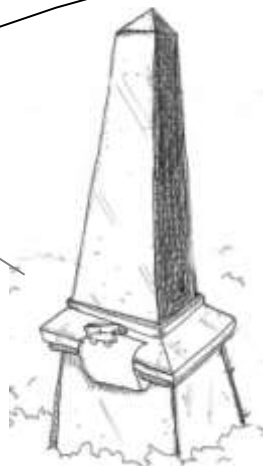
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INSCRIPTION: WITHIN THIS TOMB LIES THE REMAINS OF THE
DESERVEDLY LAMENTED WILLIAM STANDISH STANDISH ESQR OF
DUXBURY PARK COUNTY OF LANCASHIRE AND COCKEN HALL
COUNTY OF DURHAM WHO DIED AT COCKEN HALL JULY 10TH 1856
AGED 48 YEARS. BLESSED IS THE POOR IN SPIRIT FOR SUCH IS THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.



The oldest headstones and
memorials can be found in this
section, including this uniquely
shaped memorial to the LIDDELL
family. Interestingly it faces west
instead of the customary east.



INSCRIPTION: CRIMEA ALMA SEVASTOPOL IN LOVING
MEMORY OF GEORGE WHEATLEY WHO DIED 11TH DEC.
1906 AGED 78 YEARS. ALSO ELIZABETH FINLAY, WHO
DIED 17TH MAY 1909 AGED 88 YEARS "AT REST" ALSO
JOSEPHINE LOWSON WHEATLEY WIFE OF THE ABOVE
WHO DIED 15TH DEC 1915 AGED 65 YEARS.



CAUTION

Careful attention must be taken on uneven surfaces and in overgrown areas.
As in all cemeteries and burial grounds, be aware of potential risk from memorial stones.
Map not to scale and for illustrative purposes only. No rights of way are suggested or depicted on this drawing.
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