

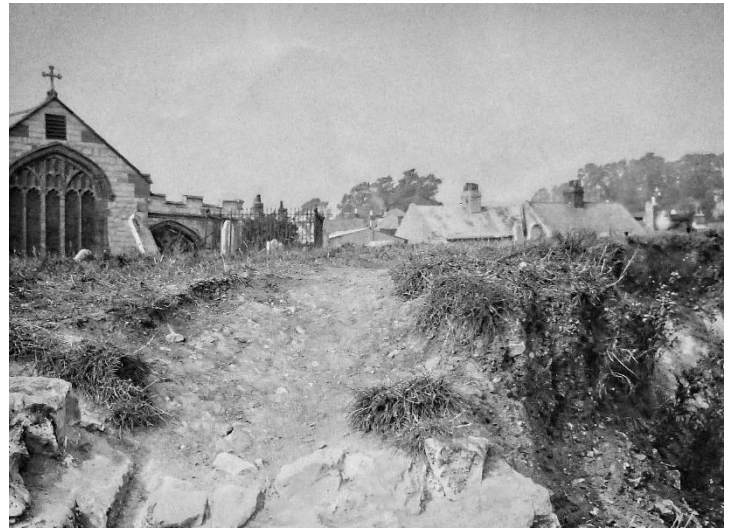
Lyme Regis Cemetery – An Introduction

Fred Humphrey, May 2020

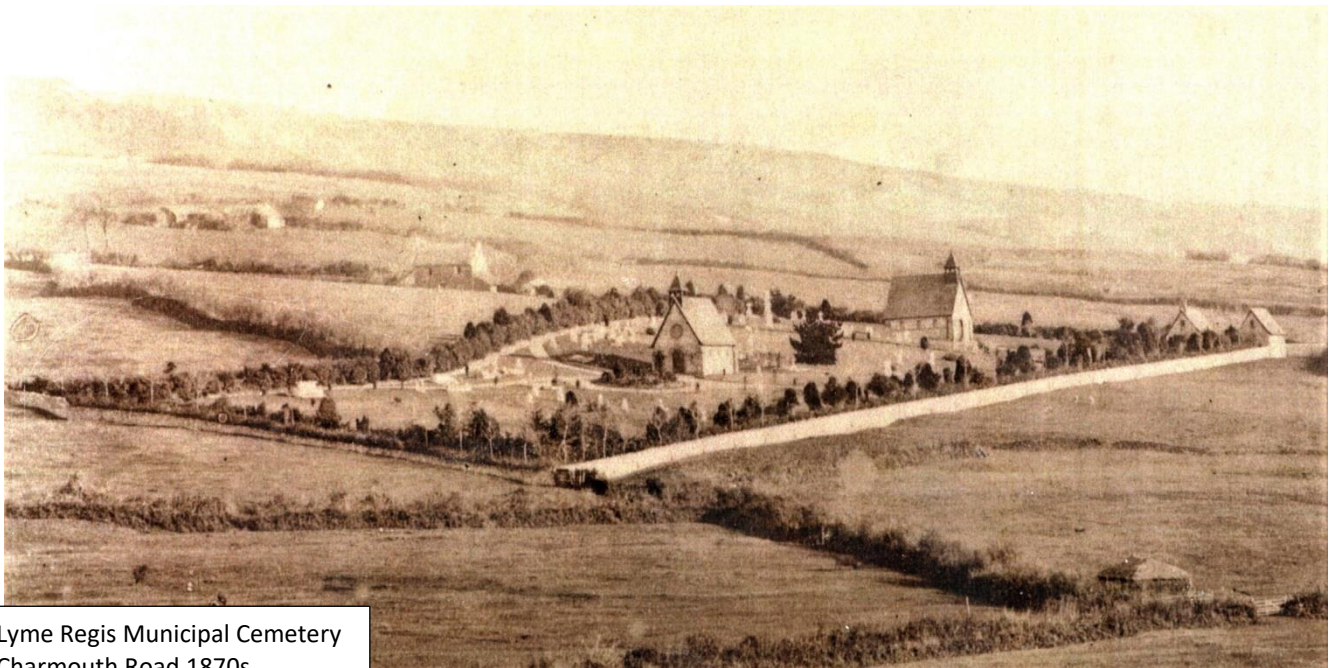
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The graveyard surrounding St Michael the Archangel, Lyme's Parish Church, was used until the middle of the 19th Century. It had long been subject to serious erosion, with several graves being lost to the sea.

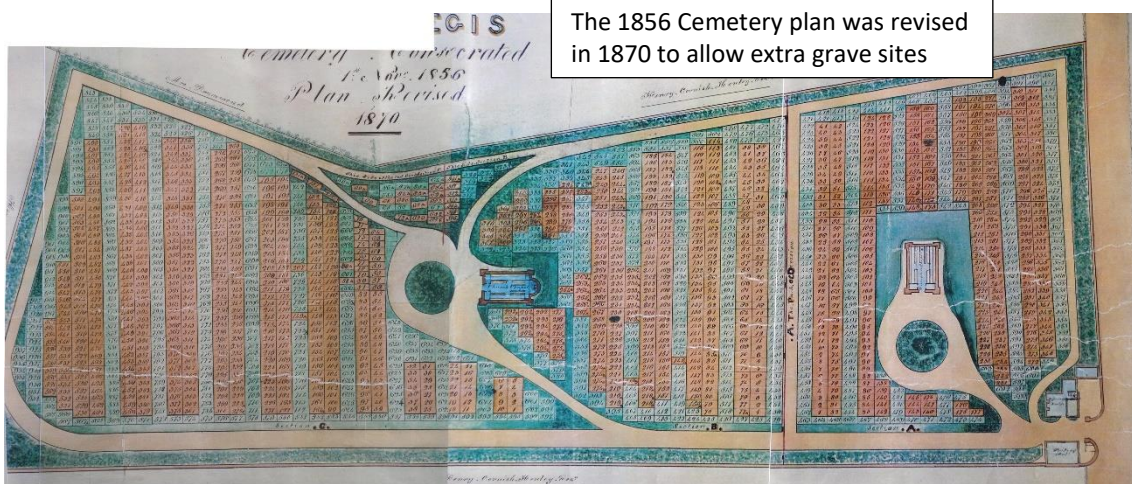
In the 1850s, it was decided to create a Lyme Regis Municipal Cemetery at the present Charmouth Road site. A conveyance from a local landowner, H.C. Henley was arranged in February 1856.



Continuing erosion of the churchyard shown in this 1909 photo



Lyme Regis Municipal Cemetery
Charmouth Road 1870s



The 1856 Cemetery plan was revised in 1870 to allow extra grave sites

The ground was consecrated by the Bishop of Salisbury in 1856, and the first burial occurred on the 16th of November. In time, a westerly extension to the cemetery was required and that was consecrated by the Bishop of Sherborne in 1935. The oldest graves in the cemetery are to the north and east, and trees and shrubs were first planted as shown in the 1870s photograph, but many more were planted in commemoration of the Coronation of King George VI in 1937, as part of a nationwide movement for the beautifying of the country. Originally the paths up to the chapels were wide enough for horse drawn carriages.

The Philpot sisters, Mary, Margaret and Elizabeth, created a significant collection of fossils and often worked with Mary Anning. After their deaths the fossil collection was presented to Oxford University. Mary Anning, her brother Joseph, Mary and Margaret Philpot are all buried in the parish churchyard, but because of its subsequent closure, Joseph's wife Amelia is buried in the cemetery, as is Elizabeth Philpot whose grave was later joined, in close proximity, by further graves of the Philpot family.

Six members of the crew of HMS Formidable are buried in section C of the cemetery. They were brought ashore in a lifeboat after their ship was sunk by torpedo on January 1st 1915.

A very detailed specification for the building of the chapels was dated 10th February 1856. It required one chapel for Church of England services, and one (nearest the road) for Dissenters (Nonconformists). The design for each chapel was identical, except that the Dissenters' chapel did not have a chancel, but three lancet windows instead. The 1870s photo shows each chapel to have a bell and bell tower, which were removed in the 1930s as they had become unstable.



Church of England chapel

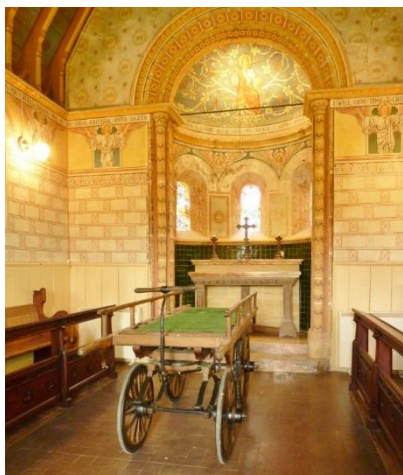


Nonconformist 'Dissenters' chapel

The existing Porter's Lodge is sited by the entrance gates. At one time this building formed a two-roomed cottage as the home of the porter, his wife and their four children. It was later extended to form a mortuary and post-mortem room. Today, the lodge is used for storage by the Town Council.



Porter's Lodge, present day



Present interior of C of E chapel with Victorian bier. The cost of this decoration in 1892 was met by the vicar, Rev Charles Myers.

A Waiting Hall, also by the gates was demolished in the 1930s. The original gates, purchased in 1893 were lost, probably for iron reclamation in the Second World War. In wet weather, there was also a portable wooden 'sentry box', which has now disappeared. This would have been carried to the graveside for the vicar to conduct the service.

The C of E chapel is still open for services; there is seating for about 30 and in winter heating is available. The Victorian bier is fully sprung and in working condition for a coffin to rest during the service. The Dissenter's chapel is now a store for Lyme Regis Pantomime Society and Lyme Regis Musical Theatre.

Survey of Lyme Regis Cemetery, Dr Joan Walker 1978
LRM Research Team's Digital Archive