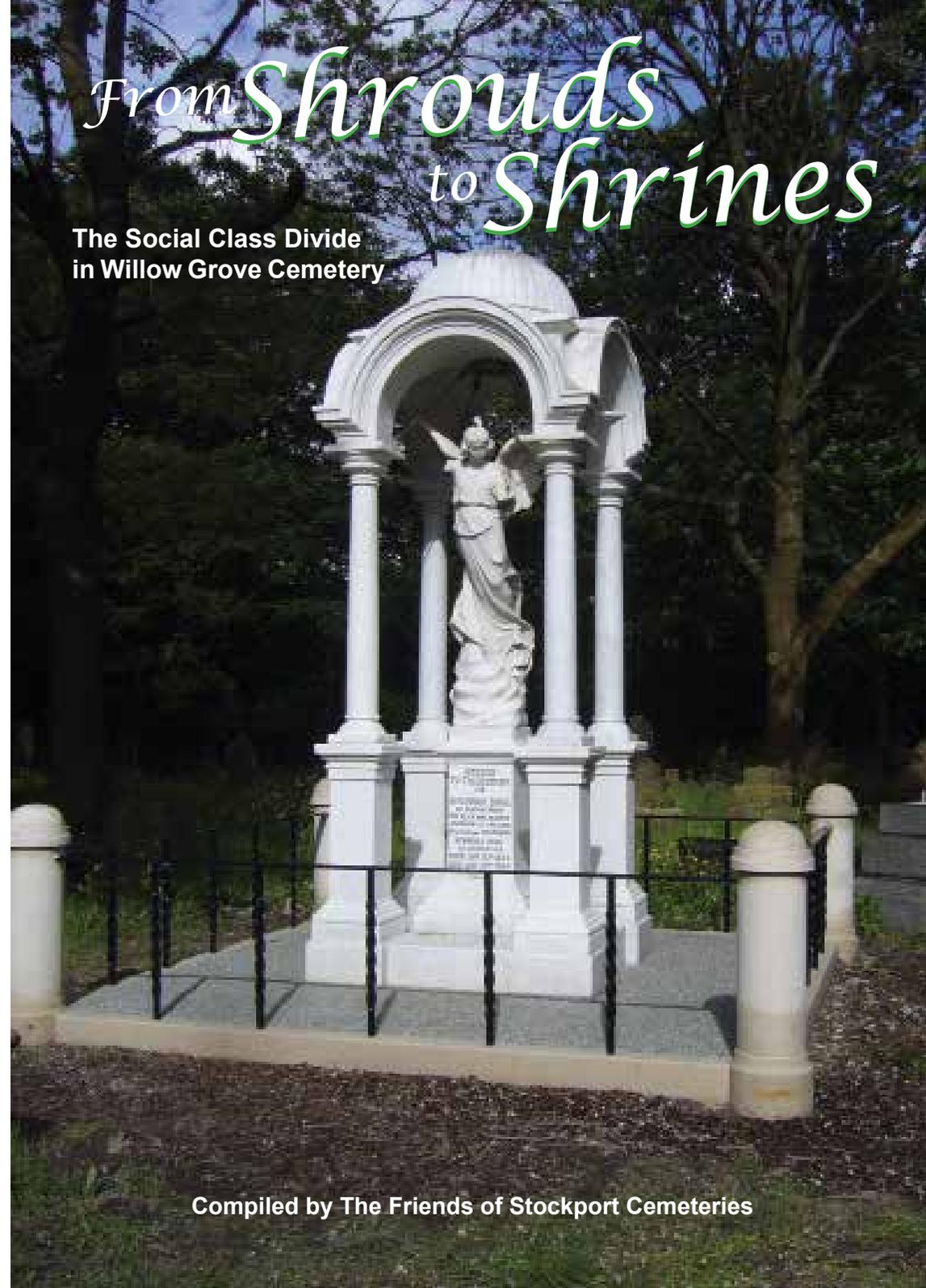


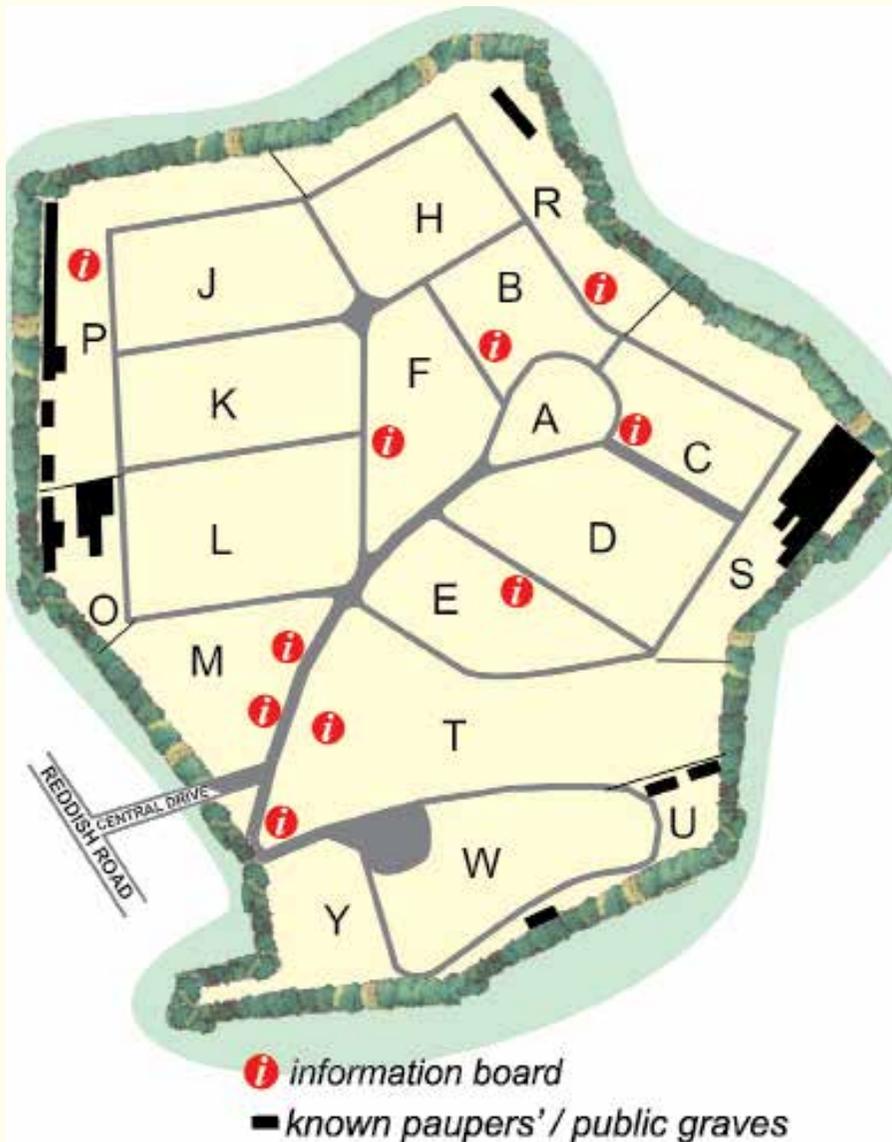
From Shrouds to Shrines

**The Social Class Divide
in Willow Grove Cemetery**



Compiled by The Friends of Stockport Cemeteries

Plan of Willow Grove Cemetery



From Shrouds to Shrines

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Introduction

by Mike Hughes

In 1854, the Chief Constable of Stockport wrote that the funeral expenses of a child (although the principle was undoubtedly also true of adults) depended on “the differences in the parents’ notions of respectability...in a very low class of life, £2 (around £230 today), others £4, £8 and some even £10.” Just fifty years later, the will of Susannah Bogg, daughter of a prosperous piano dealer from Heaton Moor, made provision for her tombstone, exclusive of the cost of the grave and funeral, to be not less than £500 (around £27,000 today). The marked contrast between rich and poor illustrates the clear relationship in that era between social standing and funeral costs. This booklet sets out to give the reader an understanding of that social divide, adding another dimension to the history of Willow Grove Cemetery and the communities it served.



Those with wealth displayed it with elaborate memorials but those of more moderate means marked graves with more plain and simple gravestones. Memorials and gravestones were seen as a status symbol with the paupers' / public graves having no visible marking at all and mostly placed around the cemetery perimeter.



History and Background

Willow Grove Cemetery in South Reddish was established by a private company in 1877 to meet the needs of the rapidly-expanding population of the township. It eventually became the final resting place of more than 35,000 people across the social spectrum, from wealthy industrialists and noble benefactors to destitute paupers and nameless infants. It is said that death is the great leveller but the class divide remained evident even thereafter, with magnificent marble edifices erected to mark the graves of the prosperous, such as Susannah Bogg, while those at the other end of the scale lie buried with strangers in unmarked communal plots, their families too poor to afford to give them a decent burial and the degradation of their poverty exposed to public scrutiny.

The opening of Stockport Crematorium in the 1930s led to a marked decline in the number of traditional burials and Willow Grove began to show signs of neglect as its revenue decreased. By the 1960s, it was in poor condition, despite pressure from the grave owners and Stockport Council on the Willow Grove Cemetery Company to implement much-needed improvements. The Council took ownership of the cemetery in 1973 and began a major clean up operation, clearing rubbish and weeds and gradually transforming the neglected burial ground into a lawned cemetery. Sadly, the improvement was short-lived and the following thirty years saw further serious deterioration. In 2003, Willow Grove was once more in the headlines when



The Susannah Bogg memorial stands in the background in stark contrast to the modest headstone for her sister, Martha.

the “Friends of Stockport Cemeteries” (FOSC) was established; this group has worked closely with Stockport Borough Council over the last thirteen years to reinstate memorials and restore the cemetery to its former glory. A great deal has been achieved since the formation of the group and by 2007, the FOSC had secured external funding in order to provide magnificent new gates, install seating and waste bins and carry out planting and landscaping, together with environmental enhancements for the benefit of the local wildlife. Further work to improve access and promote the use of Willow Grove for educational and leisure purposes, and as a haven for quiet reflection, was completed by 2010. A heritage trail through this once desolate and forbidding landscape now provides an insight to the area’s history and some of its characters, while a military trail reveals a wealth of information about some of the local men, and some not so local, who served in both world wars.

By 2012, almost all the objectives of the FOSC and the Council had been achieved and Willow Grove’s once uncertain future had begun to look distinctly brighter. Two major tasks remained however, ie the recording of all of the Cemetery’s monumental inscriptions and the restoration of that most impressive monument to Susannah Bogg. The once graceful memorial, which had become known as “The Angel of Willow Grove”, by then lay broken and disconsolate on the ground, having been extensively damaged over the preceding years. Much-needed financial assistance was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and 2013 saw the start of both projects; in the process of restoring the “fallen angel”, FOSC not only discovered more about Susannah herself but also learned something of the class divide which endures even after we have left this Earth.



Entrance to Willow Grove (then on what is now Willow Avenue) around 1900 and entrance gates today on Central Drive.



Restoring the Susannah Bogg Memorial



destitute of people, the ones who ended their days in the Union Workhouse and for whom virtually the only option was for the Parish to bear the cost of the burial. With the absolute minimum of expense and sometimes without even a mourner to “heave the pious sigh”, the bodies of these unfortunate souls would be consigned to communal graves, ie obscure, unmarked plots, which were owned by the local Burial Board and which were referred to as paupers’ graves but later as common or public graves. “Pauper burial”, or being buried “on the Parish”, was the ultimate indignity and shame and the stigma tainted not only the deceased but any surviving family, the public perception being that the relatives of the person who had died were either too feckless or improvident to have made provision for the funeral expenses or even worse, that they were not sufficiently grief-stricken by the death to care enough provide a decent funeral in a private plot. The repercussions of funeral arrangements had to be carefully considered for other reasons too; in years gone by it was common practice for people to buy goods “on the slate”, settling the bill each week on pay day but, having consigned a relative to burial in a public grave, an individual might find themselves denied credit, having been dismissed by an erstwhile creditor as profligate and financially irresponsible.

Sadly, paupers’ funerals were not confined to those who died in the Workhouse; many families found themselves without the means to meet the cost of a funeral or to buy a private plot and so even when the person had died outside the Workhouse

Willow Grove Cemetery,

REDDISH.

	Special.			1st Class.			2nd Class.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Land for Double Vault ...	12	0	0	10	0	0	8	0	0
“ Single Vault ...	6	0	0	5	0	0	4	0	0
“ Single Grave ...	3	0	0	2	10	0	1	15	0

DUES, FEES, &c.

Fees for Interment in Double Vault	2	10	0
“ “ Single Vault	1	10	0
“ “ Private Grave	0	15	0
“ “ “ (Still-born Child)... ..	0	6	6
“ Single Interment in Grave selected by the Board (Adult)	0	15	0
“ Single Interment in Grave selected by the Board (Children under Seven years)... ..	0	12	0
“ Interment of Still-born Child	0	2	6
Morning Fee in General and Catholic Ground (extra)	0	15	6
“ “ Church of England Ground	1	2	0
Special Afternoon Fee (Half-past Two)	0	7	6
Any Funeral quarter-of-an-hour after time ordered	0	2	6
“ half-an-hour “ “	0	5	0
“ three-quarters “ “	0	7	6
“ one hour “ “	0	10	0
Fee for Removing and Replacing Headstone.....	0	5	0
“ “ “ “ & Kerbstone	0	7	6
Certificate of Ownership.....	0	2	6
“ Burial.....	0	2	7
Fee for fixing Iron Railing	0	15	0
Fee for Permission to place Maker’s name on Iron-work under the value of £50.....	0	10	0
Above the value of £50 at the rate of one per cent.			

The above Fees are issued subject to Revision at any time.

JOHN CLARKE, Registrar.

walls, their final destination was still a common grave in “God’s Acre”, indistinct, to all intents and purposes, from that of the Workhouse pauper. In other cases, poorer people who could afford neither funeral nor private plot could pay a nominal fee to have a loved one buried in a public grave. In this manner, a vestige of respectability could be salvaged and it was common for friends and family to rally round to scrape together the necessary fee in order to save both the deceased and the bereaved from the shadow of the ignominy and shame associated with dependence on the Parish. Even then, denied ownership of the burial plot and not permitted to mark or personalise it in any way, the families felt that they had been forced almost to relinquish their relationship with the person placed within, surrendering their very ownership of the body to the Parish. So great was the stigma and so deeply-felt was the need to maintain a bond with a loved one that it was not unheard of for families of the deceased, having once saved enough money after the initial burial to buy a private plot, to apply to have the body exhumed and reinterred. Ironically, the cost of that entire process was high but, respectability having been thus restored, all concerned could rest easy. So widely understood was the taint of shame and disgrace conferred by burial in a public grave that the relevant Burial Board and ultimately, the Home Office, would treat these applications almost as a formality, being sympathetic to the families’ need to re-establish kinship with their dead.

WILLOW GROVE CEMETERY,
REDDISH, STOCKPORT.

Grave Certificate.

Letter *B* Number *131* Department *Church*

The EXCLUSIVE RIGHT OF BURIAL in the above Grave is now vested in
Mrs Sarah Clarke

of *1 Willow Grove, South Reddish, Stockport*
subject to the RULES, REGULATIONS, CONDITIONS, and RESTRICTIONS, now in force, or which may hereafter be instituted, made, or issued, with regard to Graves and interments within the said Cemetery, by His Majesty's Secretary of State, or by the Owners of the Cemetery, or any other competent authority.

Dated this *11th* day of *October* 19*16*

By order of the Board.
E. C. Clarke REGISTRAR

Each Grave is still subject to the Rules and Regulations printed on the back hereof, and especial attention is directed to Rules Nos. 7, 8 and 9, otherwise the Grave will be forfeited.

This Certificate must be produced whenever the Grave is required to be opened. Should this Certificate be lost, the owner must, at his or her own cost and expense, make such declaration before a Magistrate or Commissioner as the Registrar shall require, in proof of his or her ownership.

Public Graves in Willow Grove

Extensive research has revealed a distinct pattern of interments at Willow Grove, with “special” burials such as Susannah Bogg’s being sited on the perimeter of each section of the Cemetery while the “ordinary” graves lay, closer together, towards the centre of each section. By even more marked contrast to the “special” burials, the paupers’ and public graves identified at Willow Grove are situated around the perimeter of the cemetery, usually hard up against the boundary, in O, P, R, S, T and W sections. Where those at the top of the social hierarchy left elaborate and imposing monumental evidence of their perceived superiority on display for posterity, those at the bottom could leave no such legacy, as in most cases, as mentioned earlier, the marking of public graves was forbidden and they were simply grassed over, invisible, anonymous and largely forgotten. To date, some 750 pauper burials have been identified and located in Willow Grove and research has revealed that one such plot in 1931 P10020, on the west side of Willow Grove, received six adults and twenty-eight babies and children over a period of just six months. The final ignominy for the stillborn or short-lived infants who occupy the public graves in Willow Grove was that they were denied even the dignity of a funeral service. Thankfully, we are more enlightened today.

While the vast majority of Willow Grove’s communal plots

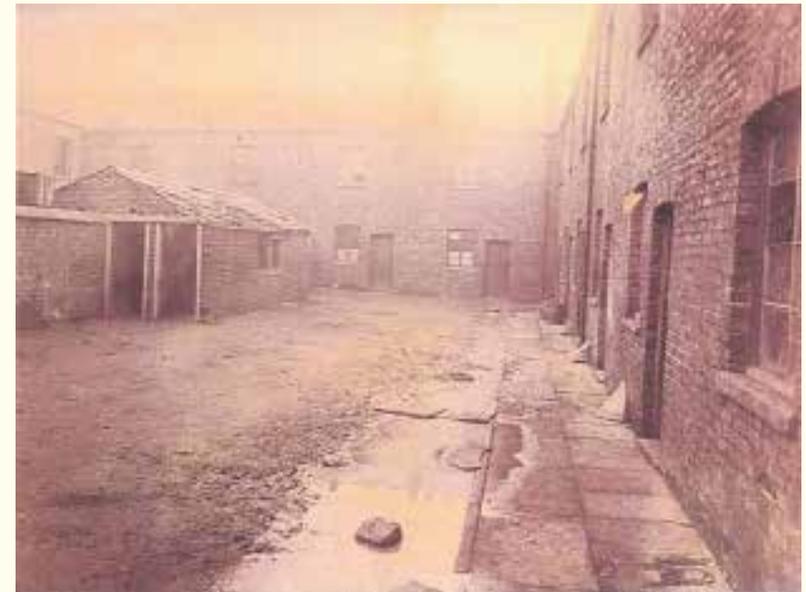


In memory of
SARAH WOOD November 1882 aged 27 years.
JOHN WILD November 1882 aged 39 years.
ELIZABETH CHADWICK December 1882 aged 40 years.
ADA NEWMAN January 1st 1883 aged 5 years.
REUBEN ROTHWELL January 11th 1883 aged 1 year.



remain unmarked, there is a headstone on what is believed to be such a grave in R section, where just four people, apparently unrelated, who died between November 1882 and January 1883 lie buried. These long-dead individuals were saved from eternal anonymity by their names having been inscribed on this stone – by dint of whose generosity, we do not know.

Only those who could afford a headstone could leave us any information about their lives and deaths whereas burial indices of course include everyone, rich and poor alike. Transcription of Willow Grove's old burial registers has illustrated time and time again the alarming rate of infant mortality in Stockport. Although this was said to have begun to decrease between the world wars, that news evidently did not reach Newtown, an area of South Reddish bounded by Sandy Lane to the east and the Stockport branch of the now defunct Ashton Canal to the west. Here, streets comprising rows of small, damp terraced houses provided homes for the many people who were employed in the factories, mills and engineering works which were plentiful in that area, especially close to the canal, in the last century. For some unknown reason, the death rate among the infants of Newtown was higher on Weston Street than on any other and the name of that street appears with astonishing regularity in the old burial registers, particularly in the 1930s. Newtown was razed in the 1960s and the houses on Weston Street no longer exist, having taken their secrets with them as they fell prey to the bulldozer.



*Weston Street, South Reddish, in the 1930's.
This street had a very high rate of infant mortality.*



Information and Notes

All the information collated from the Willow Grove project is to be deposited at Stockport Heritage Library and Stockport Cemetery Services and Crematorium. In addition, there is currently an exhibition of photographs, film footage and recorded memories of local people, at the Stockport Story Museum in the market place. The project has culminated in a valuable legacy for the people of Stockport and for genealogists and family historians across the world.

In the production of this booklet we have taken full advantage of all the information collated from the Willow Grove project and would like to thank all who helped.

We are indebted to Maureen Fahey for the text, to Mike Hughes for the Introduction, to Peter Fuller for his skills in graphic design and print and to Sheila Robins and Glennys Singleton for their wealth of knowledge and invaluable contributions to the compilation of this booklet

FOSC can be proud of what they have achieved so far and are confident that they can achieve yet more in the future.

Copies of this publication are available from Stockport Heritage Library on Wellington Road South.



 **Friends of Stockport Cemeteries**

THE WILLOW GROVE CEMETERY CO., LTD.

Telephone STO 2953



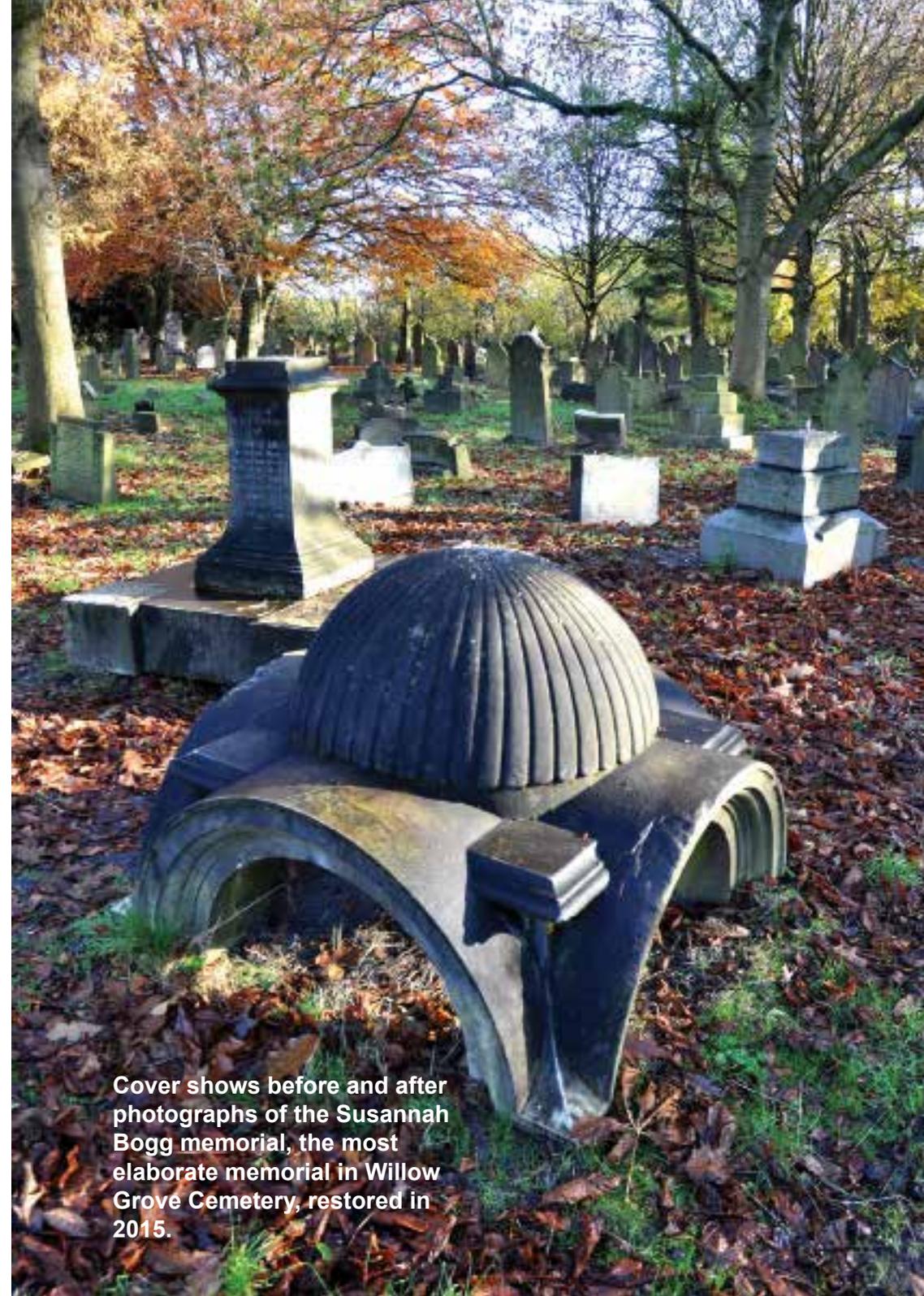
The Entrance

FOR PARTICULARS and

SCALE OF CHARGES and FEES

Apply to the Registrar,

CHARLES ROBB



Cover shows before and after photographs of the Susannah Bogg memorial, the most elaborate memorial in Willow Grove Cemetery, restored in 2015.