

# The Eastham Archivist

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## “The Churchyard is Overcrowded...”



*Left - Lithograph of St Mary's Church, Eastham from the Church Lane aspect - pre 1835. The cottage on the right was occupied by John Dunn, opposite him was John Washington's cottage (both coloured pink on the Tithe Map) & lower down (346 on map) was John Roscoe's.*

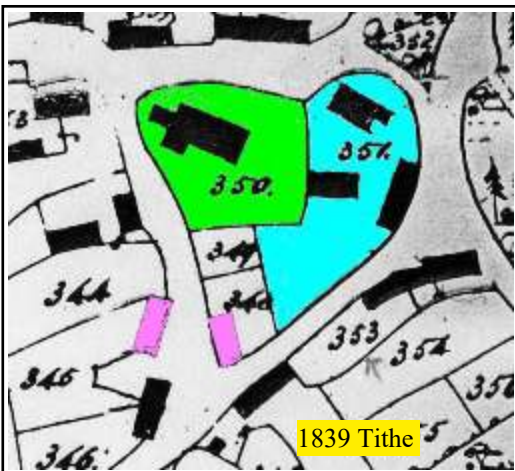
Tithe map, which was then owned by Richard Naylor who had bought it in the Stanley 'fire' sale of 1849, boasted a neat cottage known as Eastham Cottage and tenanted by the wonderfully named Harvey Crackenthorpe and his wife Jane.

The deeds describe the land as a "garden" and it included "greenhouses, a coach house, stables, a cowshed and a yard". It is difficult now to visualise what the scene would have looked like. Eastham Cottage would have been thatched with perhaps some fruit trees in the garden. Hens would have been scratching in the yard, horses in the stables, perhaps a cow and her calf in the cowshed with maybe Harvey's horse & trap waiting in the yard. Harvey was a wealthy man and farmed over 160 acres of land in Eastham and Bromborough.

There was another thatched cottage on the corner of Church Lane and Eastham Village Road with a smaller dwelling on the opposite corner (see lithograph top left & coloured 'pink' on the Tithe map). White Row cottages, the School, the Hooton Arms and what is now Jemina's were all a part of the scene. It was a peaceful rural prospect enlivened only by the colourful stage coaches clattering along the turnpike road (Eastham Village Road) on their way to and from Eastham Ferry.

However, the Stanley sale map (lower) of 1849 shows that the cottages adjacent to the church had disappeared, possibly demolished and Harvey's garden appears to have been extended. It also shows in greater detail the footprint of Eastham Cottage (green) and the outbuildings (pink). This indicates a substantial property.

The Churchyard saga had begun in 1855 when the Church's Vestry committee became alarmed at the way the Churchyard was filling up. On the 4<sup>th</sup>

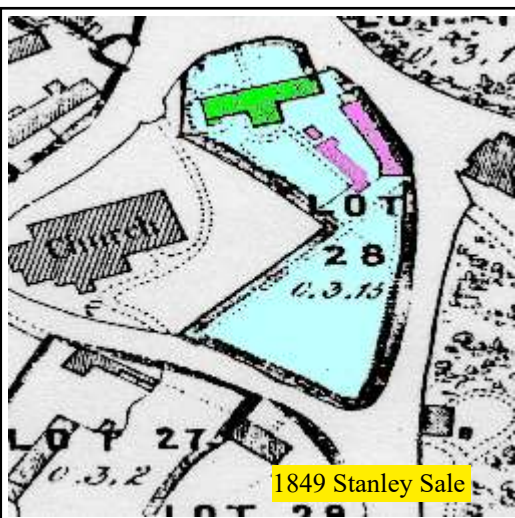


***“the church yard is overcrowded to an indecent extent and additional Burial ground is urgently needed.”***

This cryptic line from a report penned over 160 years ago by the then church wardens Robert Lloyd and Capt. Hope Jones triggered a series of events which were to transform the centre of Eastham Village.

Before 1864 the Churchyard was half the size that it is today. (Coloured 'green' on the 1839 Tithe map above left). The entrance to the Church lay on Stanley Lane opposite the school and accessed by a flight of stone steps. The land coloured 'blue' on the

*Upper - 1839 Tithe Map (published 1843). 'Green' land (350) is the churchyard; 'blue' land is the Crackenthorpe dwelling (Eastham Cottage) & garden*  
*Lower - 1849 Stanley sale map. The cottages in Church Lane have gone and the Crackenthorpe garden seems to have been extended over where they had been sited. The ground plan of Eastham Cottage, clearly an impressive building - compare it to the size of the Church - is in 'green' and the outbuildings in 'pink'.*





October 1855 they set up a sub-committee to look into the problem. The committee met and reported back to the main Vestry Committee at their meeting of the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1856. At that meeting it was agreed to ask the Church Warden to investigate the possibility of taking over Mr Crackenthorp's garden which adjoined the existing Churchyard.

At a further meeting of the Vestry on the 11<sup>th</sup> September they inaugurated the Eastham Burial Board (under the Burial Act of 1856) and appointed its members; these were "prominent Eastham ratepayers" and included, the Rev Eaton (vicar), and Messrs Naylor, White, Hope Jones, Lloyd, Maddock, Lingard and Grey.

The Burial Board wasted no time and just eleven days later had its first meeting. They appointed Wm Blackmore as the Clerk and authorised him to ascertain the terms on which Mr Crackenthorp would part with his garden.

The Board were to meet again on the 31<sup>st</sup> October to hear the result of the clerk's efforts. He advised that Mr Crackenthorp had "courteously but firmly and positively declined to part with any of his garden for the purposes of a cemetery". The Board went on to admit that they were therefore "compelled to abandon the idea of enlarging the present Churchyard."

However the overcrowding problem remained and the Board still had to solve it. The Clerk was therefore authorised "to advertise in one of the local and one of the Liverpool papers for a site for a new burial ground of not less than two acres....." An advert was duly placed in the Liverpool Mercury of the 7<sup>th</sup> November seeking "a plot of land of two to five acres within the Parish of Eastham....., the neighbourhood of Great or Little Sutton preferred." (see copy of the advert below right).

The Burial Board next met on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1857 when the clerk reported the results of the advertisements. The minutes record :- "that in the opinion of the Board the offer of Mr John Ithell of the Sitch Field in the township of Little Sutton containing about two acres and a half as a site on the north side of Mather's or Autiuus' Lane for the new Burial Ground at the price of £250 is the most desirable offer which has been submitted to the Board". This potential site can still be identified today from the Tithe Map. It lies on the northern side of what is now Station road in Little Sutton, a few



hundred yards past Little Sutton station and is now partially built on and named Station Avenue. Sitch is old English dialect word referring to 'land through which a small stream may wander but which dries up in summer' - not perhaps the best place for a burial ground!

All of this information about the potential site was presented, to a meeting of the Vestry Committee held on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1857 in a beautifully written report in copper plate hand. The Vestry weren't terribly impressed! They rather haughtily "noted the report" and asked the Burial Board to "renew their efforts". The Burial Board met later that same day and "noted" the Vestry's request. At the same meeting, clearly a little irritated by the dismissal of their efforts, they turned their attention to the "extra parochial internments that had recently taken place in the Churchyard". They resolved "that the Board were of the unanimous opinion that only Parishioners should be interred in the Churchyard" and the clerk was

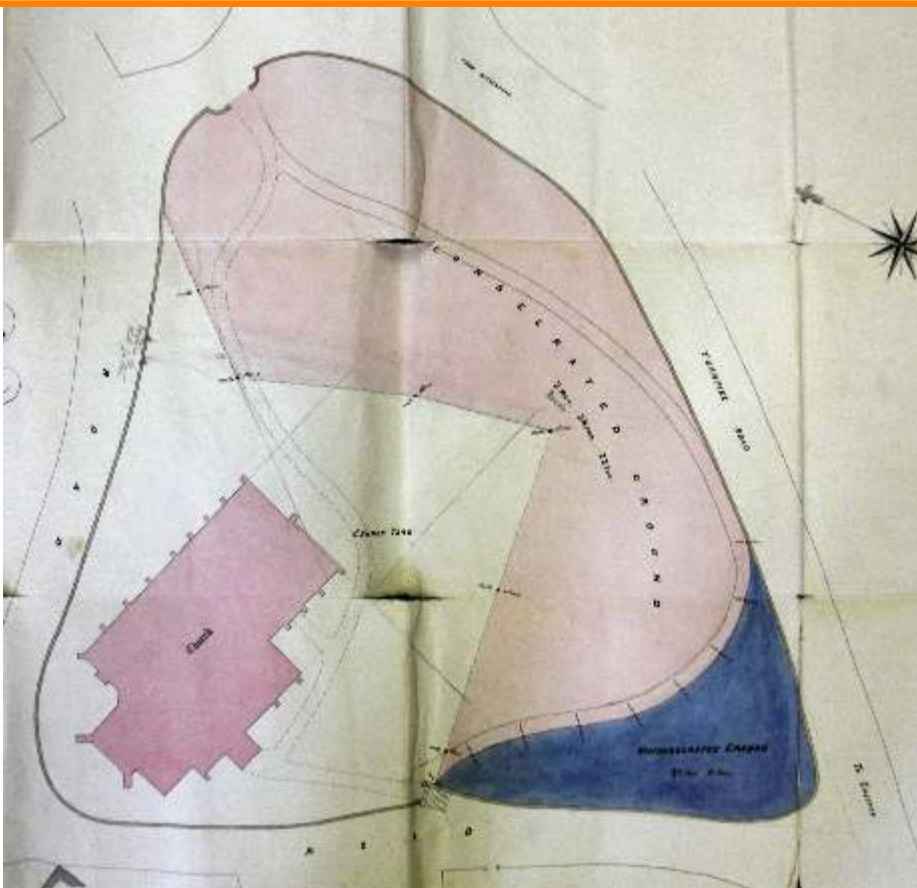
Top - Little Sutton Tithe Map showing the site of the proposed new burial ground (The Sitch Field). The road shown green is today's Station Road then Mather's Lane  
Lower - The site today outlined in red.

asked to forward a copy of this resolution to the vicar. No one who lived outside the Parish was going to be buried in their overcrowded Churchyard! So with this final flourish they went into a deep sulk, shut up shop, and didn't meet again until 1861 – some four years later!

In the meantime events outside human control were beginning to shape the future. On the 29<sup>th</sup> September Jane Crackenthorp died aged 68; she was buried in the Churchyard next to her home. She was followed by Harvey, her husband who departed this life on the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1861 and is buried in the same plot as his wife. Eastham Cottage was now vacant. (See Crackenthorpe headstone - bottom of page 3).

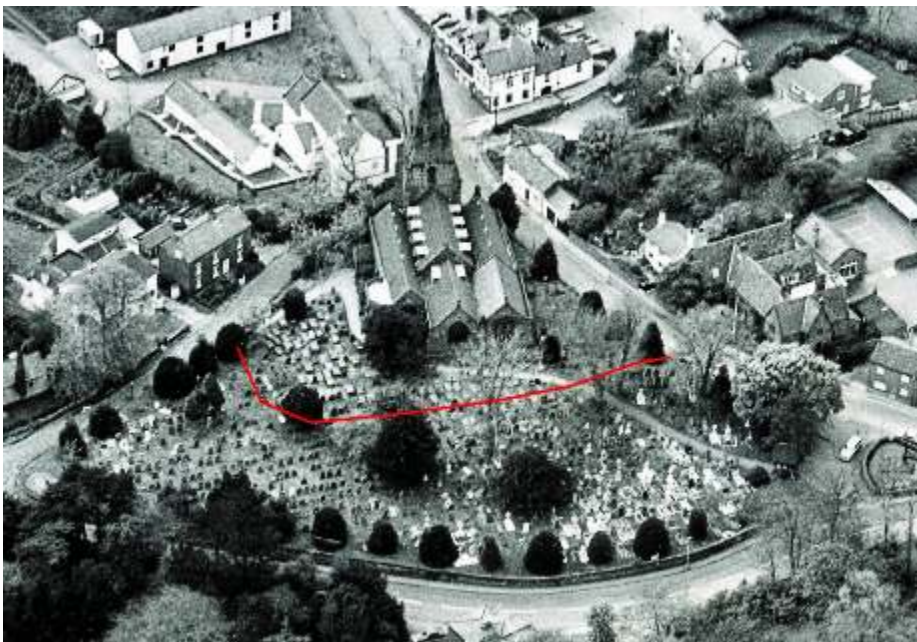
**WANTED TO PURCHASE**, by the Eastham Burial Board, a Plot of LAND, containing from two to five acres, and situate within the parish of Eastham. The land is required by the Burial Board for the purpose of a Cemetery, and the neighbourhood of either Great or Little Sutton will be preferred. — Parties willing to treat are requested to send full particulars to William Blackmore, Longway clerk to the board, 1, Exchange-street West. — Liverpool, Nov. 4, 1856.





With perhaps indecent haste the Vestry Committee met on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1861, just three weeks after the death of Mr Crackenthorp, and having considered a letter from Richard Naylor resolved unanimously “that instructions be given to the Burial Board to accept Mr Naylor’s offer of the late Mr Crackenthorp’s house and garden for the purpose of adding to the present Churchyard”. So much for the independence of the Burial Board – it was clearly just a creature of the Vestry!

However it met on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1861 to do its master’s bidding. The clerk reported the instruction from the Vestry and went on to report two further letters from Mr William Hope and Mr William Jackson referring to the proposed addition of Mr Crackenthorp’s house and garden to the Churchyard. As a result of these letters the clerk was asked to obtain the consent of everyone who lived within one hundred yards of the proposed extension, a consultative formality clearly not considered by the Vestry. The result of the consultation was presented to the next meeting of the Burial Board on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1861 where it was reported that Mr Hope and two of his tenants persisted with their objection on “sanitary grounds”. To overcome the objection the clerk was authorised to “make any arrangements as regards the future laying out of the proposed addition which would overcome these objections”. Whatever he did obviously worked, for at the meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1861 it was reported that “Mr Hope had consented to withdraw his objection provided the churchyard was laid out to his satisfaction.”



But alas their problems were not over. At the same meeting at which Mr Hope withdrew his opposition a letter was received from Mr Naylor in which he altered the terms of his offer. This revised offer obviously caused some consternation amongst members of the Burial Board as they Resolved “that the revised offer was inadmissible and be not accepted”. Strong language from a Board in a weak position.



Further correspondence reveals that the point of conflict revolved round the demolition of the late Mr Crackenthorp’s house. This demolition was evidently required by Mr Naylor as an additional stipulation to his original offer. The Board in their response to the new clause stated “that having regard to the heavy demand which will be made on the Parish for the repayment of the principal and interest it was considered inadvisable to sacrifice the £20 or £25 per annum which can be readily obtained for the house”.

Top - 1864 plan showing the ground left unconsecrated (blue). Note also the path, the position of the boundary (mete) stones and the old entrance in Stanley Lane.

Centre - 1964 image with the approximate dividing line shown in red.

Lower - The headstone marking the resting place of Jane & Harvey Crackenthorp





The boundary or mete stones still existing today which mark the division between the old churchyard (CH) and the new burial ground owned by the Burial Board (BB). These stones were provided by stone mason & local quarry owner John Woodward and cost £2.3s.6d for the lot - a bargain!

They also indicated "that the terms of any tenancy would be such as to prevent the property being used otherwise than as a dwellinghouse". This evoked a fairly dusty response from the Naylor camp; the agent's reply said quite unequivocally "that if his terms are not agreed, viz that all the building shall be immediately pulled down and no other erected except for the purposes of a cemetery he withdraws his offer altogether" and to show that he meant business he tersely added "he must have an answer within ten days from this date".

All must have ended happily as the minutes of the next meeting of the Burial Board held on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1862 says that the Secretary (elevated from clerk) had produced the agreement for purchase "the secretary was authorised to affix the seal of the Board thereto". And then in a moment of self-satisfaction at 'mission accomplished', like all committees they immediately set up a subcommittee which consisted of five members of the seven man board with the remit "of laying out the new burial ground and making other arrangements".

The Vestry committee met on the same day - presumably after the Burial Board meeting as the members were mostly common to both - and were graciously pleased to confirm the contract that the Burial Board had entered into for the purchase of the land. But now the real worries began - they had to finance the deal and draw up a plan for the work. The responsibility for the finance - £1050 was the agreed price plus interest, amounting to a total of £1200 - belonged to the Vestry committee but once again they delegated responsibility to the Burial

Board. At a very well attended meeting held on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1863 with 25 members present they approved a long winded resolution that stated "that the money should be secured by a mortgage on the Poor Rate, that it should be repaid over 20 years at £60 a year and that the Burial Board should be empowered to carry out such arrangements".

By the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1863 work was well underway on constructing the new Burial Ground with £50 being paid to "Woodward for taking down old walls and rebuilding them round the new Burial Ground as per contract". So it is clear from this that these walls, which still exist today, were built partly from stone recovered from those original churchyard walls. Further stone probably came from the now demolished Crackenthorp house. Other expenses - £10-13s was paid to John Peers for teamwork (perhaps to do with horses?), four labourers (Lloyd, Ellersby, Thomas and Washington) were paid £19-4s-8d, grass seed cost £2-1s-6d, Woodward was paid an extra £10 for "getting rock, taking out foundations etc" and on the 26<sup>th</sup> January 1865 £2-3-6 was "paid to Woodward for Boundary Stones". However income was not getting the same attention; the Board had received some £213 for the three years 1862 to 1864, £80 of this coming from Mr Naylor himself to provide some working capital.

There is no indication of where the material for filling in the new Burial Ground had come from, but there must have been a lot of carting involved. By the end of 1864 all must have been ready as the Burial Board met again on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1864 to arrange the Consecration of the new ground.

However the first burial had already taken place - on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1864 - when twelve year old Ann Lewis of Pooltown was laid to rest. She was swiftly followed by her three year old sister, Elizabeth on the 7<sup>th</sup> March. Their grave is in row O2 and is plot number 7. These sad family deaths would suggest perhaps a disease such as measles or Scarlet fever, epidemics of which are regularly reported at the time.

The new burial ground was consecrated by John, the Bishop of Chester, on

Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> November 1864, but intriguingly the Church Lane/Eastham Village Road corner was deliberately excluded from the Consecration. The original map shows this area coloured blue. This plot was left separate to hold the remains of those not covered by the rites of the Church of England. The area of this unconsecrated ground was defined with 'mete stones' or boundary stones as indeed was the boundary between the old churchyard and this new burial ground. These marker stones still exist today defining the internal boundary of the new burial ground. (See photos above left).

At the same meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> November 1864 the Board appointed the Vicar as Chaplain to the cemetery and Mr John Woodward as Sexton. They also decided that the same fees that existed for the old Churchyard would apply to the new burial ground. The meeting was then adjourned to be reconvened a week later on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1864 to settle the thorny question of money. They resolved "to direct the several townships of the Parish to collect the sum of £266-17-6 for the purpose of paying R.C. Naylor two years

12 year old Ann Lewis was the first burial to take place in the new ground on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1864, followed by Elizabeth, her sister, on the 7<sup>th</sup> March - before the ground had been consecrated.





*instalments and interest*". With this rather brusque and perhaps hopeful resolution they sat back and waited for the funds to roll in! Instead on the 24<sup>th</sup> January a letter was received by the Rev Smith at The Vicarage, Eastham from Mr Simpson (Naylor's agent) reminding the Vicar that first instalment had been due nearly two years ago and the second in October the previous year - the Burial Board had some serious arrears with which to contend.

One has the feeling that they were rather hoping that Mr Naylor would prove to be generous and donate the land, but this didn't happen, so the board gritted its collective teeth and decreed that a 3d rate would be levied on the various townships making up the Parish of Eastham and this would have to be paid on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. Although this must have caused some resentment amongst the parishioners nothing is recorded. But all must have been well as £250 was paid to Richard Naylor on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1865.

The sandstone walls surrounding the churchyard make an absorbing archaeological study. Either side of the lych-gate they are of large sandstone blocks, neatly cut and all of the same size and clearly produced for the job – you would want the entrance to the church to look impressive. However, go further round into Eastham Village Road and here the sandstone blocks are irregular in size, much more roughly hewn and incorporated in what appears to be a rocky out crop which the builder has incorporated into the wall. This mix of rock and irregular blocks continues until a few yards from the Church Lane corner when it abruptly stops and the blocks then become small cubes, neatly laid and of a regular size with no sign of the rock so prominent a few yards away. Might this anomaly be where the Church Lane cottage was situated and which itself formed a boundary to the road?

Although in 1856 the need for a new burial ground was described as 'urgent' nevertheless 53 new plots were opened in the old Churchyard between 1856 and 1870, although some of these may have been pre-purchased. Records also show that between 1864 and 1870 some 76 graves were opened in the new Burial Ground.

It had taken eight years from when the alarm bells had first rung. There had been many trials and tribulations before the final plan was implemented, transforming the face of Eastham Village. One has to wonder what the village would



have looked like today if indeed the new Burial Ground had been located in the Sitch Field at Little Sutton. So the position remains today as it was in 1864 - a United Church with a divided churchyard!

*Refs*

*Minutes of Eastham Burial Board Wirral Archives ref C/99*

*Minutes of the Vestry – Cheshire Record Office ref P195/10/4*

*Deeds and plans – Wirral Council Asset Management*

**Top** - Hewn regular sandstone blocks for the Church entrance.

**Centre** - In Eastham Village Road worn random stone blocks are blended with existing rock outcrops - probably re-using the original churchyard walls.

**Lower** - An abrupt change in the wall near the corner with Church Lane - could this define the boundary of the demolished cottage?

My grateful thanks for the courteous help received from Wirral Archives, Chester Record Office & the Asset Management section of Wirral Council in researching this article, & also to Marion Swindlehurst of the Group for her Internet expertise - David Allan