

Graveyards, Burial Grounds & Cemeteries in and around Cirencester.
Places of Worship in Cirencester.

When the Romans arrived in AD 45 they built a fort which eventually became a city called Corinium. Inevitably soldiers and local people died so the Romans created a cemeteries outside the city walls. One main cemetery was where the offices of St. James's Place are located. Some of the artefacts and headstones from which can be seen in the Cirencester Museum. Previously in order to enhance the examination of the Bath Gate cemetery a study of the known burial pattern around the town was undertaken. The full gazetteer, mf. 5/5, brings together all the recorded information of burials within the immediate environs of the Roman town, culled from journals, manuscripts, museum records, newspaper cuttings, and excavations.

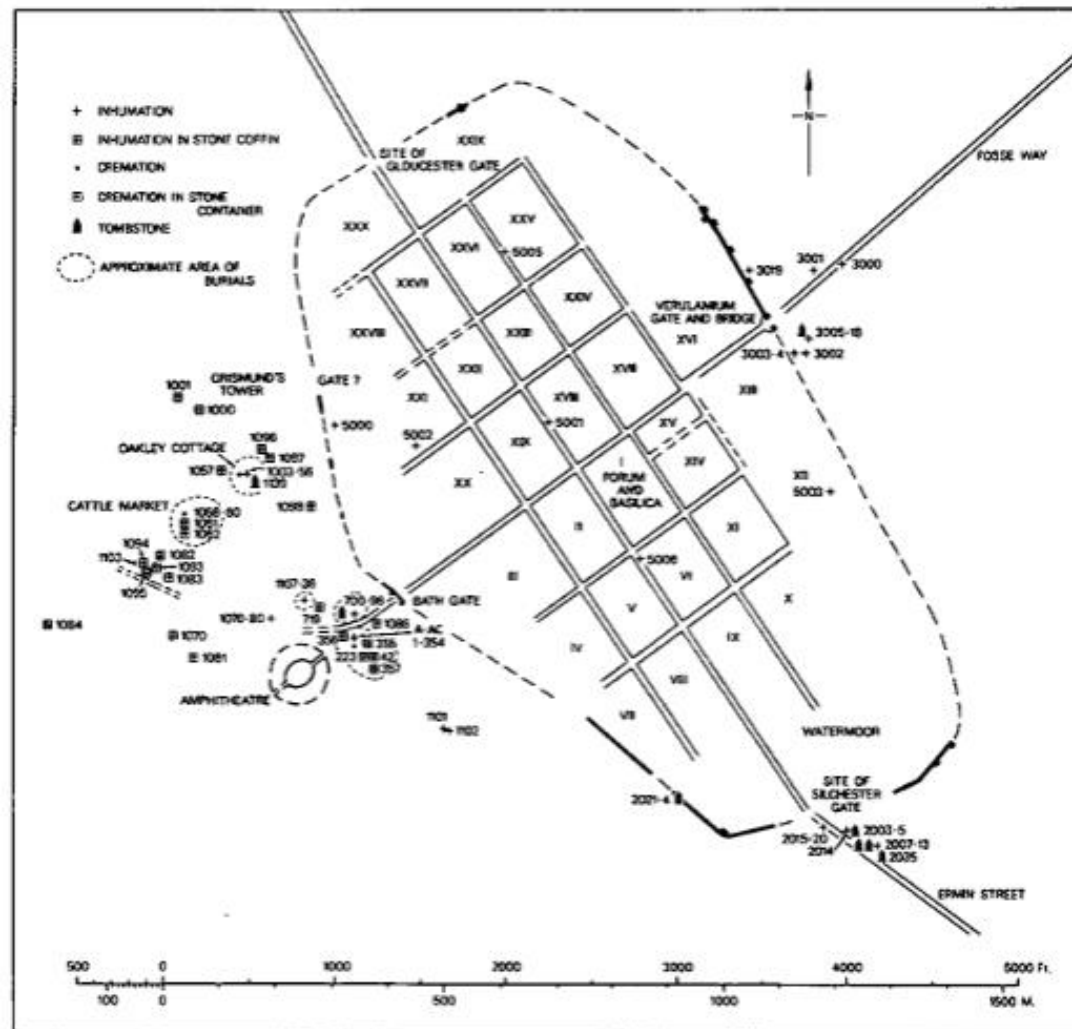


Fig. 87. Plot of Gazetteer burials

The Romans left Britain in the 5th Century and subsequently an Anglo-Saxon church was built with a graveyard in the centre of the town which by then was called Cirencester.

In 1117 King Henry I granted permission for the Augustinians to build the Abbey of St. Mary but the townspeople were not allowed to worship in the Abbey Church so they started to replace the Anglo-Saxon church with the parish church dedicated to St. John Baptist around 1157. Of course the population were all Roman Catholics until King Henry VIII fell out with the Pope and created the Church of England in 1539. Not everyone was happy with the new order and Roman Catholics met secretly, Unitarians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Strict Baptists and Quakers all established meeting places and chapels in Cirencester, some of which allowed burials within their buildings and in the

grounds. Burials naturally occurred within the Parish Church and in the adjoining churchyard until it was declared closed in 1872. The Town Commissioners purchased a field in Chesterton Lane and this continues to be used as the Town Cemetery. When Holy Trinity Church was built in Watermoor Road it was unsuitable for a graveyard due to the high water table so only cremated remains are interred there. A non-conformist graveyard was also used in Watermoor Road and the Quakers buried their members in the rear of the Meeting House in Thomas Street. Similarly the Baptists used their chapel in Coxwell Street for burials. A larger number of burials also took place in the Unitarian Chapel in Gosditch Street. Other places of worship within the town were:

- Temperance Hall, Thomas Street
- Independent Chapel, Sheep Street
- Congregational Church, Dyer Street
- Oakley Hall Chapel
- Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, London Road. (The Catholic Church before St Peters was built)
- Primitive Methodist Chapel, Lewis Lane
- Henry Tanner's Chapel for Strict Baptists, Park Street
- Methodist Chapel, Gloucester Street
- Methodist /United Reformed Church, Ashcroft Road
- St. Peters RC Church, St Peter's Road
- Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, Meadow Road, Cirencester. GL7 1YA
- Desiring Truth Ministries, Unit 2, Beeches Workshops, Beeches Road, Cirencester. GL7 1BN
- Cirencester Holy Nunnery, 37 Springfield Road, Cirencester. GL7 1SJ
- Cirencester Spiritualist Church, Room 4, The Old Memorial Hospital, Cirencester. GL7 1QW

Although they may have memorials within the premises, no burials were made at any of the above locations.

Of course many people could not afford to erect tombstones in memory of the departed, but wealthy wool merchants and other townsfolk spent large sums on memorials both inside the Parish Church and in the churchyard. Chest tombs were fashionable in the 17-19th Centuries and although many have disintegrated over time some 25 chest tombs in the Parish Churchyard have been listed as Grade 2 by Historic England and another 9 in the former Unitarian graveyard in Gosditch Street. Thus in the records held, many burials cannot be located and also many gravestones cannot be identified due to weathering and old age.

I am quite willing to amend the records or plan if there are any points that I might of missed.

Mike Timbrell

07889 181187

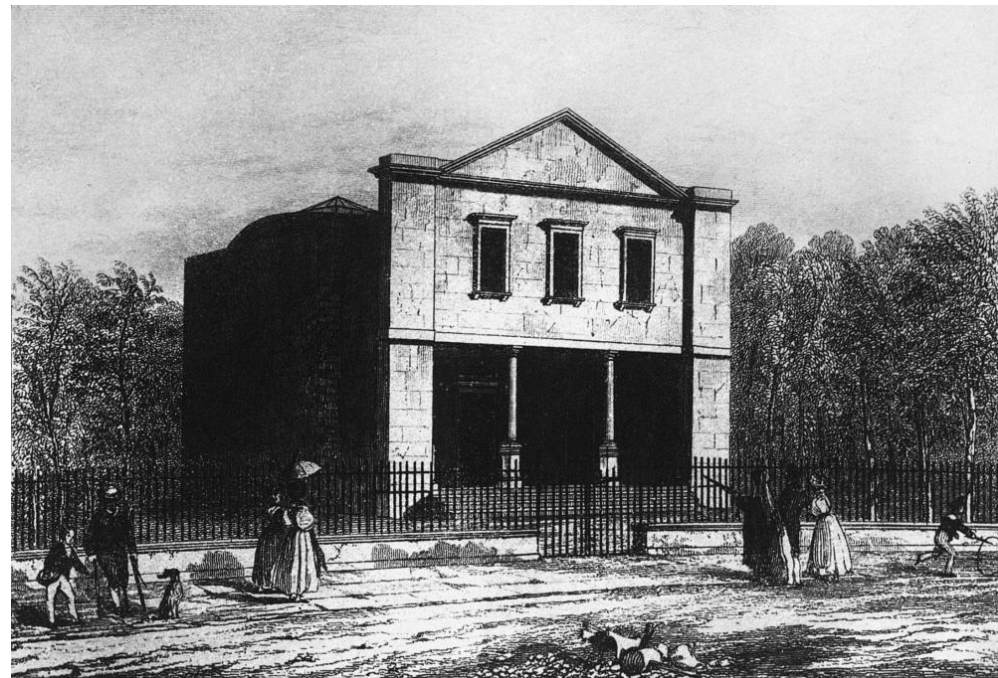
timbrellmichael@gmail.com

To access the complete database of graveyards in Cirencester the QR code will enable you to view all the records as best as can be reconciled as of early 2024. <https://www.sitechsurveying.co.uk/graveyards/index.html>



Independent Chapel, Sheep Street, Cirencester. GL7 1RQ

The Independent or Congregational Chapel in what was formerly known as Wharf Road, later renamed Sheep Street, opened on 13 June 1833 and used as a chapel until 1888. After the lapse of the lease to Earl Bathurst and the building of the new Congregational Church in Dyer Street, was turned to secular uses as Apsley Hall, and later, by Lord and Lady Bathurst's generous gift, became the X-Ray and Massage Department of the Cirencester Memorial Hospital. When converted to a Hospital Annex, the WW1 Memorial Tablets are fixed to its sides.



Congregational Church, Dyer Street, Cirencester. GL7 2PP

Before the Congregational Church was built in Dyer Street in 1887, there was a Pawn shop on the site owned by a man named Samuel Rudder, see below. The Congregational Church was constructed in 1887/88 to replace the old Chapel it had once occupied in Sheep Street on land which had been leased from the then Earl Bathurst. The lease had expired and the Earl didn't wish to renew it but he gave them time to move. At first, the Congregation found land at Watermoor Road but decided instead to spend £900 to build a spacious building in Dyer Street with seating for 430 with a vestry, a kitchen, assembly rooms and an Infants School. It remained there until it was demolished in 1972.

Samuel Rudder (c.1726 - 1801) was a Gloucestershire topographer, printer and antiquarian who wrote and published several works on the history of Gloucestershire. His main work was 'A New History of Gloucestershire' which took him twelve years to complete.



Oakley Hall Chapel, Highfield Lane, Cirencester. GL7 1FY

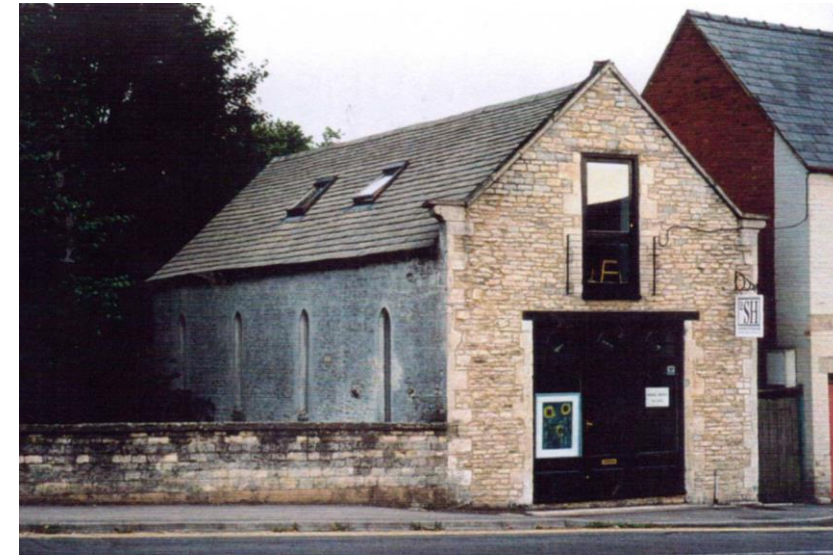
The original Oakley Hall was built around 1890 as a private residence for the Fifth Baron Grantley. Oakley Hall School was originally founded in Cheltenham by a man named Haskall. It then moved to Folkstone and was named Pelham House, but when Folkstone was bombed in 1917, it moved to Cirencester and became known as Oakley Hall.

The chapel is in the grounds of the former preparatory school which has now closed. The chapel was built in 1918 and finished in 1919 and is believed to be the first Memorial chapel to be completed after the First World War. The chapel was originally completed in memory of the 46 fallen former boys and the headmaster of the school that were killed in the conflict. All of the boys names are listed in a yellow band around the chapel. This remains as was since installation. The school closed in 1994. The chapel also had a plaque showing all of the fallen boys from the Second World War, but this was removed when the chapel was sold in 2011. There were also commemorations to those from the Korean War. The chapel also consists of several other plaques of friends of the school who passed away during the life of the prep a school. These also continue to remain in situ. Planning permission and listed building consent was granted for the chapel to be converted into apartments, though the memorial chapel remains a domestic property, maintaining all of the internal features of the chapel within the conversion.



Chapel of The Immaculate Conception, 14 London Road, Cirencester. GL7 1AE

The Chapel was the first Catholic building in Cirencester when Catholicism was re-legalised in 1832. The building sits next to the river Churn and is on the site of the old Roman Gates to Cirencester. The Cirencester Mission was founded in 1855 by Fr Anselm Glassbrook OSB, who came from Fairford and built and fitted up a small chapel in London Road, seating 100 and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (the dogma had been defined by Pope Pius IX in the previous year). It opened on 23 January 1855. This building, described variously as 'a neat little Gothic edifice' and 'very miserable, hardly to be called anything but a pigsty' (quoted in Harding) survives today in commercial use. By 1891 the mission had a resident priest (the Rev. J. A. Martin) and moves to build the present church began in St. Peter's Road.



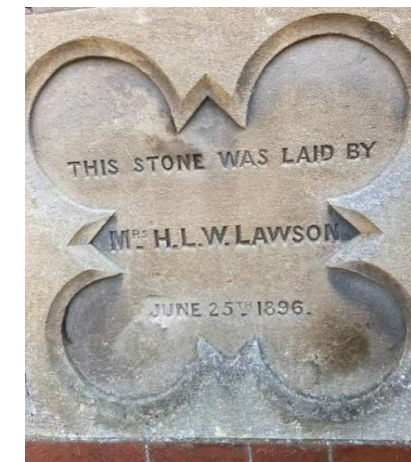
Methodist / Wesleyan Chapel, Gloucester Street, Cirencester GL7 2DJ

The first reference to a Wesleyan society is in 1791, with a dozen members plus four 'excluded' and one 'backslider'. By 1807 this had risen to 25 and the first chapel, in Gloucester Street, was built in 1808. It was recorded on the British Listed Buildings website, as a former chapel and schoolroom, of the early 19th century. With the development of the Ashcroft estate, this was replaced by more extensive premises in Ashcroft Road in 1896. Following Methodist Union, the Wesleyans moved from their Gloucester Street premises in 1934, which were used for youth activities until sold in 1937. It then became a general hall for hire and used for numerous activities. It then became Barton Hall Youth Centre. It was used as offices for a while before recently being bought and turned into a private residence.



Methodist /United Reformed Church, 21 Ashcroft Road, Cirencester. GL7 1RA

If you are in the vicinity of Ashcroft Rd this weekend, have a look at the foundation stone of Cirencester Ashcroft Church, which was laid on Friday 25th June 1896. Following Methodist Union, the Wesleyans moved from their Gloucester Street premises in 1934. The two branches of local Methodism had always enjoyed a good relationship and the work continued at Ashcroft Road, with major redevelopment of the premises in the 1980s and 1990s. Ashcroft Road became a united Methodist/URC congregation in 1998.



St. Peters RC Church, St Peter's Road, Cirencester. GL7 1RE

The Cirencester Mission was founded in 1855 by Fr Anselm Glassbrook OSB, who came from Fairford and built and fitted up a small chapel in London Road, seating 100 and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (the dogma had been defined by Pope Pius IX in the previous year). It opened on 23 January 1855. This building, described variously as 'a neat little Gothic edifice' and 'very miserable, hardly to be called anything but a pigsty' (quoted in Harding) survives today in commercial use. By 1891 the mission had a resident priest (the Rev. J. A. Martin) and moves to build the present church began. The present site, large enough for a church, presbytery and school (the last never built) was acquired in April 1892 for £500, provided by Canon John Mitchell of Taunton and the Chilean Garcia brothers (former students at the local Royal Agricultural College). The architect chosen was Canon A. J. C. Scoles of Yeovil and the builders Messrs Collins & Godfrey of Tewkesbury and Cheltenham. The foundation stone was laid by Bishop Brownlow on 20 June 1895, at which time construction was well advanced, and the opening took place on 13 February 1896. The cost of the church and linked presbytery, also designed by Scoles, was £2,197. In 1953 the adjacent parish hall was built under architects Eric Cole & Partners.



St Lawrence Church, Countess Liliās Road, Chesterton, Cirencester. GL7 1ST

The story of St Lawrence Church and Hall is a long one but an outline of it may be interesting. Originally a large Church Modern Senior School was to be built on the land adjoining it and it was intended that the large hall of the school should be used for occasional services, Sunday schools and as a social centre. When the war came and the cost of building the school became prohibitive, other plans had to be made. The PCC decided in September 1945 to purchase the site and after many unfortunate delays and changes of site, were able to start building in the October of that year.

In the September 1951 edition of the Cirencester Parish Magazine, it was suggested that the new church at Chesterton be named after St Lawrence. In the October, another suggestion was that as Cirencester was an old wool town we might adopt the Patron Saint of the wool-combers, St Blasius.

St Lawrence was built in 1951 in the midst of a new housing estate on (what was then) the edge of town



The Old Chapel, Watermoor House, Watermoor Road, Cirencester. GL7 1JR

The land now occupied by Watermoor House and St Michael's Park may once have been common land. But early large scale Ordnance Survey maps mark a much larger area, including that now occupied by the house and park, as a large nursery. It might have been owned at one time by Richard Gregory who was a Cirencester nurseryman in the 1790s. The business (and probably the land) passed into the hands of John Jefferies at least by the early 1800s, and it seems that Randolph Mullings, a local solicitor, bought a substantial piece of it in order to build a large house in its own grounds. The details remain unknown, but Gregory, Jefferies and Mullings were known to one another, and Jefferies worked as a manager for Gregory on the nurseries. Gregory lost much of his money by providing surety for a friend's loan, and Mullings advised Jefferies to continue managing the business and wait to see how things would work out. Having acquired part of the land, Mullings engaged the architect William Jay to design the building. Watermoor House was constructed to Jay's plan around 1827 in the Greek Revival style; and the garden and park were added to complete the property. The house is now grade II listed.

At some point Watermoor House became a private school until it closed in the 1950s or 60s. It may have had some other function following this, but today it is a residential care home.



The Royal Agricultural University Chapel, Stroud Road, Cirencester. GL7 6JS

The Chapel of St George the Martyr is situated in the Quad, opposite the entrance to the dining room. It is an ecumenical Christian chapel and is open to students for worship, music, reflection and meditation on a daily basis. Chapel. c1846-1850. By SW Daukes.

Chapel, Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, Gloucestershire. Looking across the quad towards the chapel of 1846, by S. W. Daukes. It was constructed shortly after the main college, following complaints from local parishioners that college were the pews in the parish church.



The Temperance Hall, 10 Thomas Street, Cirencester. GL7 2AX

The Temperance Hall in Thomas Street has a chequered history. In Cirencester, the temperance pioneers were all Quakers and when, in 1845, the opportunity arose to buy up a brewery opposite the Friends Meeting House, together with the nearby Hole in the Wall public house, Christopher Bowly, a prominent Quaker and local philanthropist, saw a way of demonstrating the victory of sobriety over intemperance, in bricks and mortar. He purchased the site and, at a cost of £2,126, constructed a Victorian Gothic building which was the first Temperance Hall in the West of England. With the exception of the Unitarians, many religious groups used the hall and there was always an overlap between temperance and (especially) nonconformist religion, which is reflected in the appearance of the hall. The Salvation Army's link with the Temperance Hall began on Sunday August 1881 when it was used for the first indoor meeting conducted by Salvationists from Stroud who helped to establish the corps. The Hall quickly became the Army's 'barracks'. In October, a mob of around four hundred attacked the Temperance Hall and for the next two or three years, scenes like this were a regular feature of Cirencester life.

By 1907, the corps was no longer operating officially until soon after the First World War, when initial meetings, again at the Temperance Hall in 1921, were well attended.



Activities became concentrated on the Watermoor end of the town and, initially, the New Town Hall, which stood opposite Watermoor School and had just been erected as a focal point for the area, was the official meeting place and was offered as a permanent 'barracks'. The most important ambition, however, was to find a permanent home for the corps, something which had been unable to achieve in its early years and which had, undoubtedly contributed to its difficulties. The Temperance Hall had always been rented and was not exclusively available at any time. The New Town Hall was only a temporary solution and a scheme had already been set up to develop a nearby site as a meeting place. By 1926, funds had been raised for the construction of the Army's first purpose built premises in Watermoor Road and Church Street. A 'temporary' structure in wood and asbestos, it served the corps for fifty years and stood until about 2023 when it was demolished for development.



The New Town Hall



The Salvation Army Hall in Watermoor Road

The 1914-18 war brought a change of use and for a while. The hall had a role as a military hospital but, despite a short term temperance revival in the 1920s, the future looked grim. The only local trustee in 1924 was J.A. Gillett of the Cirencester grocery firm and the Charity Commission was called in to create a new trust from elected councillors and the Free Churches, following an unsuccessful attempt to sell the property to the County Council. The new trustees had little more success in attracting users. The original restrictions still applied and when, in 1926, a request was made for the hall to be used by touring companies 'catering for a good class of people'. It was turned down, at the same time as clothing sales by a London firm were ended. Following temporary use as a sorting office during renovation of the Post Office in 1927, Miss Bailey opened a boys club, although the trustees were quick to ask for the 'removal of the lamp shades bearing a whisky advertisement'. In 1938 the County Council were using the hall for cookery classes when, on the outbreak of war again, it became an AM' command post but not before the iron railings, which had adorned the property since 1846, were removed for salvage. In the post-war years, pupils of Powell's School became familiar with the building as an assembly hall and a place to enjoy the delights of school dinners, a bridge over the stream at the back providing access. This was almost the sole use of the hall until, in 1975 the physical conditions had deteriorated so much that the County Council terminated the tenancy.

However, a better opportunity arose and, in 1977, the Army once again returned to the Temperance Hall, this time permanently, after purchasing the property from the Hall trustees when it fell into disrepair. This time, instead of being the cause of damage to the building, local Salvationists were able to ensure its survival and renovation. At the same time as keeping up with the needs and demands of modern society the Army in Cirencester is also aware of the considerable heritage of the town's history and it has been keen to respect the building which houses its activities and the purpose for which it was constructed in 1846. Structural changes to what is a listed building, have kept the essential character of the original and its place in one of Cirencester's most historic streets. The main hall has been preserved largely intact, while adapting the former caretaker's cottage for an office.