

## **Phillips Park Cemetery, Bradford**

### **Joan Gill**

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Phillips Park Cemetery, Bradford. Manchester was opened in July, 1866. It was the first municipal cemetery in Manchester, and is situated next to Phillips Park on land acquired from the estate of Lady Houghton. The cemetery has been at various times surrounded by, and in close proximity to the Rochdale Canal, the Ashton Canal, the River Medlock a chemical works, and an iron foundry. It has, or has had as a near neighbour Bradford colliery, Stuart Street power station, a gas works, Park railway station, a fire station and an abattoir, as well as Phillips Park with its boating lake and flower gardens.

At the present time, from the cemetery gates can be seen the National Cycling Arena-The Velodrome, and soon the Stadium for the Commonwealth Games will be located just across the road. The area of the cemetery including sections for the Church of England, the Nonconformists and the Roman Catholics, is 75 acres. When the cemetery opened there were three mortuary chapels on site, one for each denomination.

The first person to have the distinction of being buried in the Roman Catholic Section of the cemetery was an infant, five weeks old James Brereton of Cobden St. Deansgate. His name heads the list of entries that over the years grew by hundreds and thousands. Before the opening of Phillips Park many interments would have taken place at St Mary's RC Cemetery, Failsworth, which opened in 1858. However, from 1866 until St Joseph's Cemetery opened in Moston in 1875, Phillips Park RC section would be where very many of the Irish Catholics in Manchester would be buried. If any place in Manchester was a "Little Ireland" it was surely this one. It was almost ten years before the opening of Moston cemetery. and the first interment there on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1875. During that period 18,826 Catholics were buried in Phillips Park. The ten burial entries for the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1899 brought the total number of burials in the RC section of the cemetery since it opened to 48,653. This was in spite of the opening of Moston and in 1879 the opening of Southern Cemetery with its section for RC burials.

Because of the lack of census information relating to Chorlton-on-Medlock for the year 1851, and because of a thirty year gap in the Baptismal registers of St. Augustine's, RC Church, Granby Row, for the period 1826-1856 it was to the film of the cemetery registers that I had to turn in order to establish a list of people that might be related to my gt. grandfather, Thomas Gill. He stated on the 1871 census of Chorlton -on-Medlock that his place of birth was Tipperary, however he had died aged 42 and been laid to rest in Phillips Park cemetery before the 1881 census was taken.

Phillips Park was where most of the people who died in the Poorhouse would be buried. There are many poignant entries in the registers of the cemetery for women who had died in the Poorhouse, probably in childbirth, and these would be followed by an entry a few days later of the burial of her infant. The roads in the vicinity of the cemetery must have had an almost constant procession of funerals moving along them. There would be a sharp contrast between the funeral for a person from the Poorhouse and, the more lavish funeral of the better off. Private William Jones V.C a veteran of the Zulu Wars and the battle of Rourke's Drift is buried in the cemetery. Burials took place at the cemetery on most days of the week; however, no entries of burials are recorded on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> and

Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1872 because of torrential rain. The very heavy rainfall led to an event that is significant in the history of the cemetery, and this caused much distress to the relatives of the people who were buried in the RC section. This section of the cemetery is on low-lying ground and is skirted by the River Medlock. The Medlock is the river that gave it's name to the district of Chorlton-on-Medlock - which was previously known as Chorlton Row - although the river only runs along a very short stretch of the northern edge of the district before it enters Hulme, and shortly afterwards empties itself into the river Irwell. The Medlock - whose name means the river that runs through meadows - rises in the vicinity of Besom Hill above the town of Oldham and for some of its length of ten to eleven miles it meanders through the fields and cloughs taking in water from the small feeder streams along its course. From its upper reaches it winds down through Lees and Alt, past Park Bridge, and the Iron Works there, through Medlock Vale, past farms and through meadows, onto Clayton Vale, and Phillips Park. When it passes through the more populated areas of Ancoats, Ardwick and Chorlton-on-Medlock, its surroundings change, as tanneries, timber yards, dye works, mills and engineering works line its banks.

"The most disastrous flood which ever visited Manchester and neighbourhood occurred on July 13<sup>th</sup> 1872. The flood of 1866 along the banks of the Irwell inflicted probably as great a loss within the limits of its ravages, but on this occasion the inundation was more widely extended, and laid a vastly larger tract of country under water. The rainfall of the previous week was enormous and an ordinary months rain fell on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> alone. The Irwell, which is an unusually rapid river rose many yards above its ordinary level. Portions of Peel Park were flooded, and the racecourse near Throstle Nest, was also inundated, but no serious injury was done.

Far different was the state of affairs along the course of the Medlock, and it was on the banks of this river that the effects of the rainstorm were felt most disastrously. The water began to rise about eleven o'clock, but it was past twelve before it obtained the dimensions of an irresistible flood, and then it bore all before it. At Medlock Vale some three miles beyond Bradford-cum-Beswick the fields were covered on either side, and two bridges were washed away. At Messrs Taylor and Boyd's calico printworks, Clayton Bridge, the river rose twelve feet above its ordinary level, and one of the lodge embankments gave way. A weir at Lord's Brook, at the end of Green's Lane was washed down, and persons going along the lane were obliged to get over into the field, the ordinary road being quite impassable. Several tons of earth was washed onto the line of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, near Clayton Bridge Station, and for some hours the traffic had to be carried on by means of one line only. Beyond the bridge, near Messrs. Wood and Wright's Clayton Vale printworks, the river burst its banks, and the destruction caused at the works was terrific. Two bridges were destroyed, a weir partially washed away, the walls of the white-room, in which 20,000 pieces of calico were stored, fell, and the goods and machinery were carried into the water. Machinery was damaged, dyes destroyed, the boiler fires extinguished, and the whole place devastated. By the time the flood had reached the Manchester City Cemetery, near the Phillips Park, Bradford, it had grown in volume and power.

About noon it broke through a wall of stone which bounds the cemetery on one side, and rushed with tremendous force across the Roman Catholic portion of the graveyard. The result was indescribably distressing and ghastly. Coffins were washed out of the earth and dashed to pieces against the weir of the adjoining print-works, and the corpses were then washed down the stream. The number of bodies thus disturbed has not been accurately ascertained but more than 50 were recovered.

From Phillips Park to Fairfield Street the ravages of the flood continued, and at this point the inundation, besides injuring the works along the banks, penetrated the houses of the poorer people. Near Holt Town a row of cottages was undermined and the tenants had to fly to save their lives. In Ancoats, near Palmerston Street, where the river winds through a densely populated district the water rose to the bedrooms, and rafts had to be used to rescue the inmates. Similar scenes were witnessed in Ardwick, and in the streets in which the Mayfield Baths are situated. Great injury was inflicted upon the works in this neighbourhood. Along the entire course of the river through the city the damage done to machinery and other property was very considerable, and the scenes witnessed amongst the poor working classes residing on its banks were of a most distressing nature, many of the unfortunate denizens on its banks having to be rescued through their bedroom windows. In some of the manufactories the water rose to fifteen feet. At the junction of the Medlock with the Irwell, at Knott Mill, the water accumulated in large volumes. Much of it passed over the Bridgewater Canal, and so flooded the wharves that two barges laden with coal were lifted from the canal, and, when the water subsided, were deposited on the wharf near one of the goods warehouses. Only one life was, however, lost, but many hairbreadth escapes were encountered."

In 1860 my Irish gr gr grandparents Patrick and Bridget Tansey were living at 5, George Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock,. There were only six houses in the street, and their front door would be only a few feet away from the river Medlock as it swept over the weir just before it passed under the Brook Street and Charles Street bridges. When the river was in flood after a spell of heavy rain, the noise of the rushing water must have been terrifying. From their front bedroom window they would have been able to look down and observe the torrent of water. The Medlock flooded in 1851, 1860, 1866, and of course in 1872. Rail passengers today travelling between Oxford Road and Piccadilly Stations on the elevated line above the river will hardly be aware of the water many feet below them. Much work was done toward future flood prevention after the floods of 1872. The river is channelled through steep sided-bricked banks, trapped and tamed, its potential towards flooding almost non-existent.

The Manchester headquarters of the BBC and its car park today occupy the site in Chorlton-on-Medlock where my gt grandparents Thomas Gill and Ann nee Tansey and my gr gr grandparents Patrick Tansey and Bridget nee McCoy lived. They had lived variously in Charles Street, George Street, Pritchard Street, Sorton Street and Hesketh Street. All of these streets were only a few yards from the River Medlock.

Patrick Tansey died in February, 1874 and his son-in-law, Thomas Gill died in September 1875. They are both buried in the Roman Catholic section of Phillips Park Cemetery, only a few yards from the river that ran so close to their homes. © Joan Gill 5805

## **Sources**

Phillip's Park Cemetery Burials Mf. Manchester Central Library  
Phillip's Park Cemetery Grave Receipts Mf. Manchester Central Library  
Axon's Annals of Manchester