



Sheffield
General
Cemetery
Trust

George Sandford (1817 – 1898)



Rev. George Sandford and family outside Ecclesall Vicarage, Ringinglow Road, 1882.

Source: Picture Sheffield

George Sandford was the Anglican Chaplain at Sheffield General Cemetery for twenty-eight years from 1850 until 1878. At the time of his death at the age of 82 his obituaries described him as 'the oldest clergyman in Sheffield'. After a spell as Vice Principal of Sheffield Collegiate School he became Vicar of St Jude's, a poor parish where initially there was no church. Thanks to his energetic efforts and the hard

work of 'an admiring band of workers' a well-appointed church was secured. This achievement allowed Sandford to turn his attention to the provision of an elementary school at a cost of £2,500 (some £350,000 today). We read (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, October 1898) that 'in all his efforts the Vicar had the loyal support of his congregation, and a very successful bazaar relieved him of financial anxiety in regard to the school'.

This energy and commitment to doing whatever he could to make others' lives easier characterised Sandford's whole working life. For several decades he supported numerous initiatives, campaigns and good causes across Sheffield with his presence, and with donations where he could. Among the very many social events and gatherings where George Sandford's name is recorded as a speaker or an attendee were:

- the second meeting of the Sheffield School of Design,
- the inauguration of the Montgomery monument at the General Cemetery,
- one of several Christmas soirées at the Church of England Educational Institute where he 'reminded [the audience] that the object of the institution was to improve to the uttermost the human mind' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 22 January 1867),
- a meeting in aid of the Turkish Mission Society to hear about work among the 'Nestorians in Persia', which Sandford chaired.

One of these public meetings, held in the Music Hall, George Sandford was among 'a number of influential men of the town on the platform to 'receive information and adopt resolutions respecting the East Africa Slave Trade'. It was reported that 'they had fondly hoped that this accursed traffic would have been put an end to, [...] but they were horrified to find the slave traffic still went on'. George Sandford went on to say that 'he felt it an honour to have an opportunity of expressing his

sympathy for the down-trodden slave in whatever portion of the world he might be' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 1872).

Another needy cause, to which Sandford contributed £2 (worth around £200 today) was the Oaks Colliery Relief Fund. This disaster, in which 400 men and boys were killed, was caused by an explosion in the mine. The South Yorkshire Miners' Association which made the appeal asked for £8,000 to meet the expenses of the Death Fund: 'it is expected that a generous public will, on this as on all previous occasions, subscribe a fund for the purpose of making provision for the bereaved ones' (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 18 December 1866).

During the early years of Sheffield General Cemetery the first stone of a church was laid 'in that part of the ground which is to be devoted to interments according to the rites of the Church of England' (*Sheffield Independent*, 13 May 1848). This development had first been proposed in 1834 when a 'short and modest proposal' set out the intentions of the new Cemetery Company. The newspaper reporter took this opportunity to remind the reader that the large profits promised by the Cemetery Company at that time had not been realised, and that, in their view, the sums 'spent on building vaults, crypts [...] buildings, gates, palisading, etc' was at least twice what the income has justified. However in this period philanthropy of all kinds was a commonplace feature of middle and upper class life and one to which Sandford contributed frequently. Perhaps he was particularly eager in the early days of his tenure as Chaplain to add his own mark to the developing landscape of the Cemetery. Whatever the reason, in April 1853 he wrote to the Directors of the General Cemetery:

Gentlemen

I request the privilege of planting with beeches and limes the walk, intersecting the consecrated Cemetery ground and the walk leading from the Church towards it. Any one acquainted with the Norfolk Park or the approach of the

avenue from Ecclesall Road to the Botanical Gardens, would see the advantage accruing to the Cemetery ground from avenues of trees.

The trees are intended to be in pairs, and set out equal distance, about 5 yards apart, and to be tall and well-formed, from eight to ten feet in height.

I will gladly defray the expense, if you will give me leave to plant the trees.

I have the honour to be your obliging and faithful servant.

Clarendon Villas George Sandford, Chaplain

In turn the Directors resolved: that 'Mr Sandford be permitted at his own expense to plant trees in the consecrated part of the Cemetery, as requested by him in a letter'. While the original trees have now largely disappeared Sandford's Walk, as it was later termed, remains a pleasant path through the heart of the Cemetery.



Sandford's Walk, Sheffield General Cemetery. *Source: SGCT*

Sandford had reached his forties by the time he married Elizabeth, who was almost twenty years younger than him, at Christ Church in Pitsmoor in 1860. They had nine sons, six of whom survived into adulthood. The eldest, Folliot, became the Vicar of Sharrow. George Sandford continued to be very active in many areas of public life: in 1868 he was appointed as a trustee at the North of England Manufactory for the Blind, and in 1877 became a trustee of the Public Hospital and Dispensary in Sheffield. After 25 years at St Jude's a presentation was made to mark his promotion to Vicar of Ecclesall and 'to show appreciation of the valuable and noble work which Mr. and Mrs. Sandford had carried out in that parish' (*Sheffield Independent*, 10 November 1880).

And of course throughout all this time he was regularly officiating at funerals in the General Cemetery. One of the more notable funerals was that of Mrs Mary Firth, mother of the Sheffield steel magnate Mark Firth, who died in 1876. As was the usual practice a funeral cortege, consisting of the hearse and three mourning coaches, left the Firths' residence in Broomfield to travel to the General Cemetery.

As the newly appointed Vicar of Ecclesall in 1880 Sandford was already into his seventies and no longer Chaplain at the General Cemetery. Ecclesall, as a largely rural parish, was seen as a lighter task for Sandford who had 'begun to feel the burden of his years'. His obituaries record a man who was 'held in high regard by his parishioners [...] for his kindness and courtesy and his ever-ready sympathy for everyone in sorrow and affliction irrespective of creed or ritual'. George Sandford was buried in Ecclesall Cemetery.