

The Baptist Burial Ground at the bottom of Lyncombe Hill served the Somerset Street Baptist church. The church no longer exists in Somerset Street and its successor is the church in Manvers Street ([www.manversstreetbaptistchurch.org.uk](http://www.manversstreetbaptistchurch.org.uk)). It is unconnected with the Widcombe Baptist Church which is neither a member of the West of England Baptist Association nor the Baptist Union.

In *The Baptist Annual Register for 1798, 1799, 1800 and part of 1801* by John Ripon DD in its first article entitled *A List of the Particular Baptist Churches in England 1798* p30, the chapel at Bath was headed by John Paul Porter and "In Mr. Porter's congregation at Bath, public worship is well attended, and the church is happy. The deacons are Messrs. John Williams, James Evill, John Smith, and Opie Smith. About 132 members. They have conference meetings on a Monday, and prayer meetings on a Friday, which are evidently more blessed than the Monday services."



Location of the graveyard and general layout

The burial ground is on a site once known as 'The Croft', a close of 2 acres belonging to the Gibbs family who owned a mill nearby on the Avon. It then became the property of the Evill family and on the 1799 J Charlton map is indicated as being owned by John Evill. Just north of it, and intruding into Claverton Street, was a millpond which served the nearby mill. The brothers Opie Smith and John Smith were from an influential family of brewers. Opie Smith is mentioned in *Seamen's Missions – Their Origin and Early Growth* by Roald Kverndahl (William Carey Library, 1986) p118 in connection with George Charles Smith circa 1800 "Finding fellowship at nearby Somerset Street (Baptist) Chapel, he was befriended by a well-known merchant and deacon there, Opie Smith, of Westfield House." The first burial was in 1807 and the earliest date on a surviving memorial (see below) is 1813 and this around the time that Southcot Place was built. Relatives of Opie Smith were living in Southcot Place in the 1830s and 1840s.

Neither the burial registers for the Baptist chapel nor the associated sexton's register of plots and occupants have survived. As a result, it is impossible to give a definitive list of those buried. Nonetheless surveys of the surviving memorials have been carried out. About 100 names are mentioned on 50 memorials. Early memorials include: Benjamin Baily (1775-1813), Sophia Smith (1774-1814), wife of John Smith of the parish of Walcot, Martha Scrace (1766-1821), Richard Baker (1756-1824), Martha Ashley (1814-1826), Elizabeth Applegate (-1829), Mary Edwards (1776-1834), wife of Robert Edwards, surgeon of Keynsham, and John Hibbard (1800-1835). The occupations of those mentioned include artisans, trades people and the wealthy.



Northern side of the burial ground showing the row markers.

After the closure of the burial ground various alternative uses were sought. It was only because no proposal was forthcoming that it didn't suffer the fate of the St James' pauper's burial ground on Lyncombe Hill and be built on. The arched entrance in Gothic style, with an upper room for the sexton, was demolished in 1970 and replaced by grey wooden gates. Bath Preservation Trust ([www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk](http://www.bath-preservation-trust.org.uk)) acquired the site and its volunteers cleared it of the considerable amount of undergrowth. The burial ground can be seen through the cast-iron gates at the end of the passage leading from Lyncombe Hill.



*Iron entrance gates*

#### References

*The Baptists of Bath 1752-1851* by Kerry J Birch, 1986, Bath Central Library

Author: P J Bendall

Version: 1

Date: 15-Apr-2010