

London Necropolis Railway Station

The London Necropolis Railway opened in 1854 as a way of transporting the deceased from London, where the cemeteries were very overcrowded, to Brookwood - the newly built cemetery in Woking.

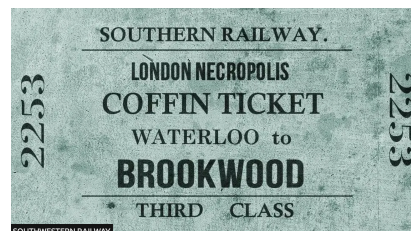
The first station was at Waterloo: the bodies were stored in the railway arches; there were private waiting rooms for mourners and hydraulic lifts to transport the coffins to platform level. By 1899, South West Rail wanted to expand Waterloo station and take over the area. The Necropolis Company were tough negotiators: they got the Railway company to provide the new station on Westminster Bridge Road to their specification at a token rent, to provide new rolling stock for the Necropolis Railway, and to remove limits on the number of bodies they could carry.

The Necropolis Station on Westminster Bridge Road opened in 1902. Its design and decor were in marked contrast to the usual stark, austere designs for funeral homes.

There were 3 classes of funeral:

First class funerals (cost from £2 10 shillings) had special facilities at the station, including entrance through the wrought iron gates on Westminster Bridge Road, a glass roofed corridor to luxurious waiting rooms and a chapel, and lifts to the platforms. Families could select a plot anywhere in the cemetery and could erect a permanent memorial.

Second class funerals cost £1 and gave some choice over burial location at Brookwood. However it cost an extra 10 shillings to erect a permanent memorial.



Third class funerals were essentially pauper funerals for those buried at parish expense in a designated area. The parish also paid for 2 mourners to attend the cemetery. Notably, even for this lowest class of funeral, Brookwood provided separate graves, other than for a next of kin. At the time, other cemeteries used mass graves for the poor.

Unusually, Brookwood was allowed to hold funerals on a Sunday. This was very popular with the poor because it meant they could attend the funeral without having to take a day off work. For the same reason it was also a popular burial place for actors, who had a dedicated section in the cemetery.

The area and the station suffered severe damage from a Second World War bombing raid on 16 April 1941. After the war ended, it was found that the cemetery had not become as busy as expected. With motorised road transport increasing, the level of use did not justify the costs of refurbishment to the station and branch line, so the NRC board decided to close the station and finish the service.

Here is a link to an illustrated BBC article on the railway: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-66507599>