

# THE CEMETERIES OF MULHOUSE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE PRESENT DAY

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Over the centuries, the cemeteries of Mulhouse have undergone numerous moves and transformations, starting in the heart of the city before progressively being moved out to its outskirts. The exceptional heritage value of this emblematic place is acknowledged by the authorities. The mission of the association « Mémoire Mulhousienne » is to preserve and revive this unique place as a major witness of the history of the city and its surroundings.

## From the Cemetery to the Parish Mulhouse Early Days



The cemetery behind the St. Stephen church

Most human communities used to foster a mythical story of its origins. Mulhouse is no exception to the rule with its legendary mill. From the 9th century onwards, human groups progressively gathered around a church and a cemetery all across Europe. In Mulhouse, a burial ground dated from that time was revealed in 1991 by archeological excavations on the current Place de la Réunion, providing evidence for a permanent human settlement. Around 940, a cemetery chapel was built inside the graveyard, sanctifying the burial ground which accommodated a mixed population of men, women and children.

## 14th and 15th Centuries - Competition between the Living and the Dead

The cemetery being located at the very heart of the city, it started to become an obstacle to its development as early as the 14th century. At those times, the growing prosperity and the increase of the population of the city involved a rearrangement of the central square, later known as Place de la Réunion. The parish church was enlarged and embellished, probably between 1325 and 1350, with a choir and an apse. These works impacted the cemetery whose size had to be reduced towards the east and north-east. This made up space for the future market hall. In order to still allow for enough burial ground, a second graveyard was opened in 1407 on what is now the Place Lambert. This part of the cemetery was completely discontinued only at the beginning of the 18th century and fully removed around 1769. This second cemetery had its own cemetery chapel called St.

Michael on the Ossuary, which indicates the presence of a charnel house. The numerous monastic orders within the city also had their own burial grounds.

## The 16th Century Transfer

The faith of the Middle Ages considered the cemetery a holy place, whose natural location should be as close as possible from the parish church. However, the coexistence of the living and the dead at the very heart of the city also created some issues.

The St. Stephens Square was used as a market place and its cemetery increasingly became an obstacle to commercial development and to the representative ambitions of the City Council. Between

1523 and 1529, the Reformation was adopted by the city, and protestant preachers denounced the old faith deemed as superstitious. Those combined factors led to the move of the burial ground from the parish church surroundings to the secularized Franciscan church, toward the city walls. This transfer took place from 1554 to 1559.

The parish church itself still saw burials in its side chapels until the 18th century, like those of some pastors.



The former St. Stephen church (mid 18th century)

## 1803: Move Outside the City Walls



The drawing by Henri Baudinot (1869-1926) shows the Bollwerk tower. On the left the palisade surrounding the cemetery ; on the right , the slaughterhouses

In 1746, the first cotton fabrics printing factory launched the industrial revolution in Mulhouse. Within one generation, around thirty factories were set up within the walls and attracted a mass of workers from abroad. From the mid-1760's on, the City Council issued concerns over the worsening health situation. Just as in other places across Europe, the Age of Enlightenment hygienic theories called for

separation of the living and the dead, which led to the decree of June 12, 1804, which laid the ground for new cemeteries outside the city walls. In Mulhouse, the decree was anticipated as in 1798 already, « a fairly large field located 300 steps from the walls » is acquired beyond the Bollwerk tower and its bastion. The cemetery was transferred there in 1803. In 1837, the Central School was built on the 35 acres of land that was the former Franciscan cemetery.

The new cemetery outside the walls had the shape of an almost perfect circle. It was bordered by poplars and a green hedge supposed to prevent damage from wild animals. Open to the public outside burial times, it became a funeral garden where the burial space was segregated from the walkways. The 1804 decree also introduced funeral concessions in exchange of a donation to the poor or to the city hospital, while wealthy families gradually took advantage of the possibility of building individualized monuments.

## The Expansion of the Salvator Cemetery



This watercolour by Rudolf Huber (1770-1884) depicts the quiet and romantic atmosphere of the Salvator park.

The transfer of the cemetery from the old city center to its new site outside the walls in 1803 was done in the context of hygienic concerns. Likewise, the city decided in 1825 to move the slaughterhouse which was located since 1660 in the heart of the old city, at the corner of the Rue des

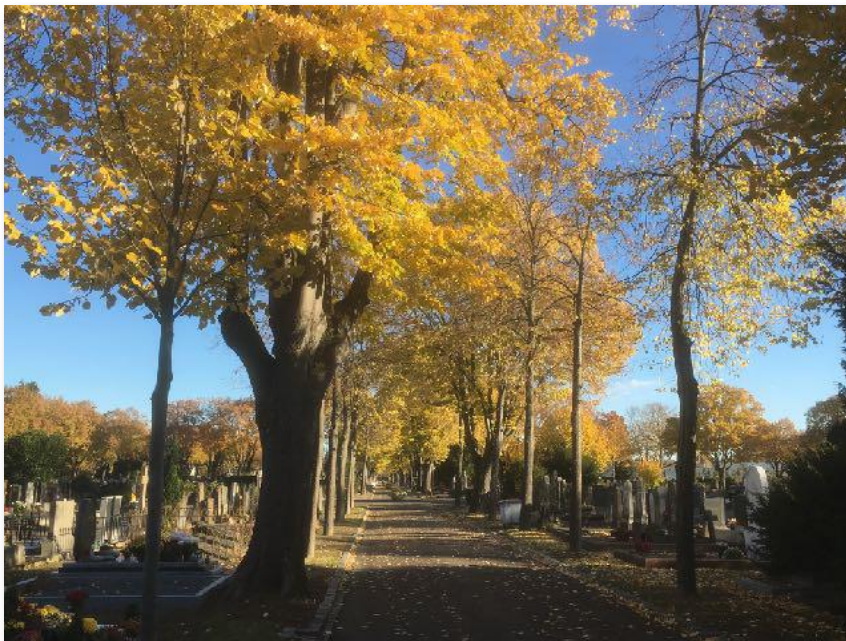
Bouchers and the Rue des Tanneurs. The new slaughterhouse and its livestock market opened in 1843 on the site of the current Lycée Montaigne, next to the cemetery. While the protestant part of the population became a minority within the city and the Jewish community strengthened, the catholic population exploded and made up the majority of Mulhouse's inhabitants by the middle of the 19th century. In 1826, the city purchased two additional hectares of land allowing the cemetery to be enlarged with a wide rectangular strip. In January 1831, a Jewish burial ground was opened at its eastern end. However, the steep population increase quickly led to a situation where the graveyard was overloaded. As a consequence, many free temporary graves had to be reopened after only five years to make up space for new burials. In 1853, all catholic graves had to be transferred beyond the Jewish part of the cemetery. Beside the religious segregation established by 1804 decree, the cemetery also displayed social segregation through the



different funeral concessions model. From 1827 on, wealthy families could acquire perpetual concessions which were separated from the other by the pathways. On the other side, the poorest part of the population, mostly catholic worker families, had to be buried on free burial spots or temporary concessions subject to regular renewal fees.

## 1869-1872: « The Last Move »

At the end of the Second French Empire, it was clear that even after two enlargements, the cemetery had become too small for the fast-growing city. The crowded graves on limited space gave the cemetery a sad and sometimes painful appearance. In 1869, a specific commission was created within the city council to resolve the issues of the cemetery, which was considered much too close to the city. The council members were especially keen to enable land development in the cemetery perimeter and to create new road connections between the Rue de Bâle to the south and the Rue d'Ilzach to the north.



It's autumn at Central cemetery : yellow foliage of veteran linden trees.

Finally, the city council voted in May 1870 the transfer of the cemetery to the north of the city, in a vicinity called Urhau. The new 12 hectares large cemetery opened in the spring of 1872. Perpetual funeral concessions could be transferred from the old to the new cemetery. This also included Jewish graves, and although Jewish religious laws forbid any exhumation, wealthy Jewish families accepted the transfer to Urhau, probably because of their good relationship

with the protestant elite of the city. They acquired two hectares of land next to the main cemetery and took over the construction of a fence and entrance gate. The Jewish community still manages its cemetery on its own. The transfer of perpetual funeral concessions for the rest of the cemetery was completed in 1882. The old protestant graveyard was rearranged into an English-style park, the first public park in Mulhouse (currently Parc Salvator), while the Sainte-Genève Church was built on the site of the old catholic cemetery.

