

Funeral of Lord Palmerston

Lord Palmerston died on 18 October 1865, whilst still serving as Prime Minister. In accordance with his wishes, he was to be buried in the new cemetery at Romsey. The arrangements were made to bring his body to Broadlands and the grave was dug in preparation.

However the Queen intervened and said that he was to be buried in Westminster Abbey. The townspeople of Romsey were mightily annoyed at this slur on the town, and Lady Palmerston was also somewhat put out. (In the end she was also buried in Westminster Abbey beside the Viscount.)

The town council recovered from the slight and commissioned a special train so that everyone who wanted to could attend the funeral in London. 21 estate tenants and servants joined the train as did 60 Romsey Volunteers, members of the Council and a number of other people, and they were given a place in the ceremonies.

Probably it was right to hold the event in London. The Times estimated that half a million people lined the streets, as Palmerston was very popular with ordinary people as a result of bringing the Crimean War to a satisfactory conclusion. The Government offices in Whitehall, along which the cortege passed, drew their blinds as a mark of respect and a flag was flown at half-mast on the Admiralty.

The pall was borne by ten Cabinet ministers and the Queen was represented by the Prince of Wales. In the 19th century, women did not attend funerals as it was thought their constitutions were too delicate to cope with the emotional stress. The hearse itself was drawn by six plumed horses flanked by out-riders. The press remarked on the length of the procession and the large number of coaches in it. Even the drivers of the General Omnibus Company had crape on their whips.

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