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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BECKETT STREET CEMETERY

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Name:	BECKETT STREET CEMETERY
District:	Leeds (Metropolitan Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 53.806852 Longitude: -1.5161072 National Grid Reference: SE 31964 34615 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001605 Date first listed: 17-Apr-2002

Details

Burmantofts or Beckett Street Cemetery, established in 1845, was one of the earliest publicly funded cemeteries in England.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

As the population of Leeds township trebled during the period 1801- 1851, disposal of the dead became a pressing issue with limited space in local churchyards. A large private cemetery, opened by the Leeds General Cemetery Company at St George's Field, Woodhouse in 1835, was unconsecrated and intended for use by Dissenters only. In an effort to provide a burial ground for all religions and classes, Leeds Corporation obtained the Leeds Burial Act in 1842, 'an Act of Parliament for Providing Additional Burial Ground in the Parish of Leeds in the West Riding of the county of York', allowing the Corporation to levy rates for interment of the dead, a pioneering venture in England (Burt and Grady 1994). The Corporation formed a Burial Grounds Committee and in 1842, 16 acres (c 6.5ha) of land situated on the outskirts of Leeds among fields and brick kilns was purchased from William Beckett Esq MP (Act ... Burial Grounds in Leeds, 1842). Three years later the cemetery, known as Burmantofts or Leeds Burial Ground, opened, divided into two roughly equal sections, one for Anglicans and one for Dissenters, each with its own entrance, lodge, and mortuary chapel. In 1849, 1600 victims of the cholera epidemic were buried in Beckett Street Cemetery; paupers from the nearby workhouse were buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves. 'Inscription' or 'guinea' graves were introduced in the 1850s to allow those who could afford the guinea to be buried in a shared marked grave, thus avoiding the shame of lying uncommemorated in a pauper's unmarked grave (guide leaflet). Over the next century and a half 180,000 people were interred at the cemetery in some 28,000 graves.

The two chapels were demolished in the 1960s and by 1984 the cemetery was under threat of clearance by the City Council. A management scheme involving low-key maintenance and encouragement of wildlife has now (late-C20) been adopted with support from the local Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery. The site is now (2001) closed to new burials and is in the ownership of Leeds City Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Beckett Street Cemetery is situated c 2km east-north-east of Leeds city centre on elevated ground. The c 6.5ha roughly square site is in an area of mixed use, bounded by a high stone wall along Beckett Street to the north-west, with the grounds of St James's Hospital and the Thackray Medical Museum opposite the cemetery. Stanley Road forms the north-east boundary, bounded by a high stone wall and a small lens of housing at the

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eastern end. Opposite the cemetery along this boundary are a mixture of commercial and residential properties and derelict land. The south-east boundary is defined by combined railings and wall running along Stoney Rock Lane where, opposite the cemetery, is a range of commercial businesses. A gentle ridge runs from south-west to north-east through the cemetery creating north-west- and south-east-facing slopes. This feature of the landform is most clearly visible in the high stepped boundary wall along Shakespeare Street, which forms the south-west boundary, with residential properties, including low-rise flats, opposite the cemetery. The height of the perimeter boundary walls along Stanley Road, Beckett Street, and Shakespeare Street ranges from 2.5m to 3m, emphasising the degree of enclosure within the cemetery. Views from the cemetery are limited by the high walls and obscured by the canopies of the mature trees growing within.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two separate entrances off Beckett Street giving access to each section of the cemetery: one situated 55m south-west of the junction of Beckett Street and Stanley Road giving access to the unconsecrated section where Nonconformists, Catholics, Jews, agnostics and others are buried, the second situated 155m south-west of the junction of Beckett Street and Stanley Road giving access to the consecrated, Anglican section. The identical entrances each have a central carriage entrance and pedestrian access to either side, four stone gate piers and three pairs of cast-iron gates. There is a narrow pedestrian entrance (C20) 45m north-east of the junction of Shakespeare Street and Stoney Rock Lane. Evidence of a former access point located 15m south-east of the junction of Beckett Street and Shakespeare Street (OS 1890) is visible in the boundary wall, now infilled with stone (2001).

OTHER LAND The cemetery consists of two sections, the Anglican to the south-west and the Nonconformist to the north-east, with entrances, lodges, chapels, and main circulation routes arranged symmetrically around the mid-line running through the site from north-west to south-east. Informality is introduced by secondary routes which, although often at right angles to main routes, follow more curving lines. The main walks and secondary routes have been given names (late-C20), such as Anglican Walk, which are used in this description. Mature plantings of deciduous trees are interspersed informally throughout the cemetery creating a pattern of enclosure and open glades. The recently (late-C20) adopted policy of management for nature conservation reinforces the tendency towards informality. The majority of monuments have been retained and remain undisturbed, often complete with grave surrounds and often in dense groupings. The guinea graves form distinct and singular groupings. Some parts of the cemetery are free of monuments possibly representing either pauper graves, the burial ground of cholera victims, or areas deliberately cleared of monuments.

Immediately south-west of the entrance to the consecrated section (referred to as the Anglican entrance) is a lodge, built of gritstone, with steep gabled roof and Tudor details. It was built in 1880 and is thought to have been one of the earliest commissions of W S Braithwaite of Leeds (Brooks 1989), who later became architect to the Leeds School Board. The main route from here proceeds south past outbuildings of the lodge and an informal sitting area (late-C20). A large open grassy space 40m south of the Anglican entrance is the former setting of the Anglican mortuary chapel, designed by local architects Chantrell and Shaw; the chapel was demolished in the 1960s. Immediately to the north-east, east, south, south-west, and west of the space are areas of burial plots with dense groupings of monuments and headstones, many with grave surrounds intact. At the junction of two narrow paths now referred to as Scripture Row and Glebe Walk, 100m south of the Anglican entrance, are four early guinea graves dating from 1856 to 1867. These are unusual with each burial individualised by its own Scriptural quotation, a feature not repeated on the guinea gravestones in other parts of the cemetery. Immediately south-east of the guinea graves runs the high stone boundary wall.

The main route, Anglican Walk, continues uphill with dense groupings of monuments, headstones, and grave surrounds on each side of the path, interspersed with dense informal groupings of deciduous mature trees and saplings. Some 120m south-south-east of the Anglican entrance, a path, Light Brigade Row, leads a short distance south-west to the monument to Sarah Kidney (listed grade II). This monument, a model of an industrial chimney, commemorates Sarah Kidney who died 1895, aged fifty-nine and Thomas Kidney, 'the oldest steeplejack in England', who died in 1914, aged eighty-two, as well as other family members. A few metres south-east of the Kidney monument is a memorial commemorating three generations of a soldiering family, including Frederick Short who survived the charge of the Light Brigade during the Battle of Balaclava in 1854.

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At its junction with Light Brigade Row, Anglican Walk reaches the crest of the ridge which runs across the cemetery, reflected in a path called Ridgeway which, from this point, extends north-eastwards across to the Nonconformist part of the cemetery. Anglican Walk continues downhill to the junction with Guinea Grave Row, 180m south-east of the Anglican entrance. The southern corner of the cemetery is well wooded with mature trees and open glades free of monuments. The use of railings and walls at the south-east boundary suggests that originally views could be afforded both from and towards the cemetery. Plans of the estate prior to the cemetery (Act ... Burial Grounds in Leeds, 1847; OS 1847) show a river called Stoney Rock Beck along the south-east boundary and open fields which by 1890 had been claimed by Stoney Rock Lane and adjacent brickworks (OS 1890). Several lines of guinea graves with identical headstones run in uniform rows parallel to the path 50m north-east along Guinea Grave Row from its junction with Anglican Walk, each stone inscribed on the back and front with the date of death, names, and ages of those commemorated. Many of those commemorated are children. In Beckett Street Cemetery such graves date from the 1850s to the 1930s. Some 140m east-south-east of the Anglican entrance, Guinea Grave Row meets with Tunnickliff Walk and the boundary between the consecrated and unconsecrated parts of the cemetery. The boundary is defined by a row of stone markers, which remains largely intact, running across the cemetery from north-west to south-east.

Guinea Grave Walk joins Dissenters Walk 200m east of the Anglican entrance. North of this junction is the Galli family memorial (c 1864, listed grade II), described as a 'polychromatic pinnacle' (Brooks 1989), an elaborate monument in Gothic style. The eastern corner of the cemetery is characterised by mature perimeter trees, amongst which are dense groups of headstones, and a large grass glade. Dissenters Walk continues uphill to the north-west, through groups of monuments and headstones interspersed with mature tree specimens and open glades. Near the junction of Barran Row, 140m east-north-east of the Anglican entrance, is the prominent grey granite monument commemorating Sir John Barran MP, JP, who pioneered wholesale ready-made clothing in Leeds and helped to purchase Roundhay Park (qv).

Dissenters Walk emerges from mature tree canopies 120m east-north-east of the Anglican entrance and approaches a level open grass area, formerly the setting for the Nonconformist chapel, also demolished in the 1960s. A war memorial in the form of a Cross of Sacrifice, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield (1856-1942), is situated 100m north-east of the Anglican entrance, along Memorial Way. On Stanley Approach, the extension of Dissenters Walk to the north-west, there are dense groupings of monuments framed by mature tree canopies, including an unusual monument to Thomas Newman (dated 1884), General Secretary of the Ancient Order of Romans Friendly Society. Further to the north-west, near to the lodge for the Nonconformist section, is an informal sitting area (late-C20), beyond which a path runs parallel and close to the north-west boundary wall linking to the Anglican entrance.

REFERENCES

Beckett Street Cemetery Trail, guide leaflet, (Leeds City Council, Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery, and Leeds Civic Trust 1986) Brooks C, *Mortal Remains* (1989), 138 Barnard S, *To prove I'm not forgot: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (1990) Burt & Grady, *Illustrated History of Leeds* (1994), 162-3

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1846 1938 edition OS 5' to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1847 OS 10' to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1890

Archival items An Act relating to Burial Grounds in Leeds: Royal Assent, 16 July 1842 [includes newspaper cuttings and Plan of an Estate situated at Burmantofts. The Property of Mr A Lupton Jr] (Local Studies Collection, Leeds Central Library) MS research notes, 2001 (Conservation Section, Dept of Planning and Environment, Leeds City Council)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Beckett Street Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * It is one of the earliest (1842-45) publicly-funded cemeteries in England and a key part of a group of cemeteries laid out by Leeds Corporation at the same time (qv Hunslet). * Becket Street is an early example of the grid pattern layout adopted by many later cemeteries, reflecting Loudon's ideas. * Local social interest expressed in burials including pauper graves (largely unmarked) and a rich variety of artistically notable C19 monuments reflecting many walks of life and many Leeds dignitaries. * It is an unusual and extensive group of 'guinea graves' with their headstones, each inscribed with the names of many unrelated occupants of the grave, reflecting an unusual aspect of social history. * Although its chapels have gone, the layout survives intact with elements including boundary wall, lodges and gateways, path system and monuments.

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Description written: October 2001 Amended: November 2001 Register Inspector: JS Edited: December 2009

Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.