

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CEMETERY, EXETER

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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**ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CEMETERY, EXETER**

Name: ST BARTHOLOMEW'S CEMETERY, EXETER

County: Devon

District: Exeter (District Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 50.722522  
Longitude: -3.5369581  
National Grid Reference: SX 91606 92560  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II\*  
List Entry Number: 1001582  
Date first listed: 16-Jan-2002

## Details

An early C19 cemetery laid out to the designs of Thomas Whitaker, Surveyor to the Exeter Improvement Commissioners.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the early C17 the burial ground in the Cathedral Yard at Exeter had become overcrowded, and in August 1637 a new cemetery, known originally as Bartholomew Yard, was consecrated by Bishop Hall (Hoskins 1960). This burial ground was situated at the south-west corner of the city, between Bartholomew Street West and the Roman and medieval city walls. In the late C18 properties on Bartholomew Street were rebuilt, reflecting the affluence of the area, and in the early C19 a church, All Hallows on the Walls, was constructed in the burial ground.

By the early C19 the new burial ground was in turn becoming over-used, a situation exacerbated by a serious cholera outbreak in 1832. This encouraged the Exeter Improvement Commissioners to investigate the provision of a new inter-denominational cemetery for the city. In 1835 therefore the Commissioners invited their Surveyor, Thomas Whitaker, to provide designs for laying out a steeply sloping site immediately north-west of the city walls and the early C17 burial ground. The site was shown as open ground with trees planted parallel to the north-west and south-east boundaries on J Roper's plan of Exeter published in 1805. Whitaker's designs, which included a range of catacombs in the novel Egyptian style, were accepted, and the site was laid out in 1836-37. As opened in 1837, the consecrated and unconsecrated sections of the cemetery were divided by a wall running down the slope from east to west; this division is similarly reflected in the design of the catacombs which were intended to receive up to 22,000 bodies (Brooks 1994).

The cemetery remained in use until 1874 when it was closed for new burials. Most interments were made in common graves, reflecting the changed social standing of the neighbourhood, while much of the space within the catacombs remained unused as fashions in burial changed. After the closure of the cemetery, many monuments were removed and the site was landscaped for use as a place of public recreation, with sloping gravel walks and ornamental tree and shrub planting. Today (2001) the site remains in municipal ownership as a public open space. Some funerary monuments survive on the terraces immediately below the catacombs.

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In the mid C20 All Hallows' church was demolished and the early C17 Bartholomew Yard or Frierenhay Burial Ground cleared of monuments. It retains some specimen trees and earthwork traces of walks corresponding to those shown on the late C19 OS map. Frierenhay Burial Ground is not included in the site here registered.

St Bartholomew's Cemetery appears to have been the first cemetery in England to be funded from public money (ibid), while the Egyptian-style catacombs and obelisk gate piers are the earliest known example of cemetery structures (other than monuments) designed in this style in England (ibid). The use of monumental ramps, viewing terraces, and catacombs set into the hillside may be related to similar features at the Anglican St James' Cemetery, Liverpool (qv), designed by John Foster in 1829.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** St Bartholomew's Cemetery is situated c 0.5km west of Exeter Cathedral, to the north-west of Bartholomew Street. The c 2.25ha site is bounded on each side by stone or brick walls which separate it from public roads and footpaths, while to the south-east it adjoins the C17 Frierenhay Burial Ground, formerly known as Bartholomew Yard (outside the site here registered), from which it is separated by the City Wall. To the north-east it is bounded by a brick wall separating it from Napier Terrace, a C19 terrace of artisan dwellings which overlooks the cemetery (Cherry and Pevsner 1989), while to the east it adjoins Bartholomew Street East. The southern boundary adjoins Barbican Steps, and to the west it is bounded by a low stone wall formerly supporting early C19 iron railings which separates it from Exe Street, where late C20 terraced houses overlook the site. The cemetery occupies a steep north-west-facing slope which descends from the Roman and medieval city wall (scheduled ancient monument) which forms the east and south-east boundary wall of the site; this slope is partly terraced to allow for burials. There are extensive views north, north-west, and west from both the viewing terrace above the catacombs and from the terraced walks within the cemetery. To the north the mid C19 church of St Michael and All Angels with its dramatic spire is prominent in views, while late C20 domestic properties on Exe Street and Dinham Crescent on the south-east-facing slope opposite the cemetery are seen to the north-west. There are views of the River Exe and open ground beyond to the west.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The principal entrance to the cemetery is situated on Bartholomew Street East, adjacent to its junction with Bartholomew Street West at the northern tip of the Frierenhay Burial Ground. The entrance comprises a pair of double gates, each supported by monumental granite piers in the form of obelisks; the gates are separated by a high stone wall. Stone steps descend from each entrance to a viewing terrace above the catacombs. As constructed, each entrance led respectively to the consecrated and unconsecrated sections of the cemetery, while the viewing terrace was divided by iron railings which extended from the boundary wall to a granite obelisk set at the centre of the terrace parapet railings. From the terrace a ramped walk, flanked to the north-west by a grass verge and early C19 spear-headed iron railings which terminate in a massive battered stone pier, and to the south-east by a rubble-stone wall (scheduled ancient monument) and a single row of late C20 limes, descends c 130m south-west to reach the upper terrace walk.

Three further entrances lead into the site from Exe Street to the north-west. Each entrance is of similar design and comprises a pair of early C19 spear-headed railed iron gates supported by a pair of monumental granite piers of obelisk form.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** St Bartholomew's Cemetery was designed without chapels, and none was constructed during its period of use. The principal structure to which the design relates is the range of catacombs (listed grade II) which abut the Roman and medieval city wall forming the eastern boundary of the site. The catacombs are symmetrical in plan with a pair of wide projecting bays being flanked on the outer sides by further narrower projecting bays. Each bay has battered walls and has on its north-west facade a monumental portal surmounted by an Egyptian-style entablature. The portals are closed by massive C20 metal gates, and formerly gave access to the burial chambers which are arranged on several levels within the structure. The interior of the structure is also reached by a pair of stone staircases which descend from the viewing terrace, each staircase giving access to either the consecrated or unconsecrated burial spaces. The recesses between each projecting bay shelter substantial early and mid C19 monuments, while at the mid-point of the north-west facade a short length of stone wall extending across the terrace wall is the remnant of the wall which formerly divided the Anglican and Nonconformist sections of the site.

**OTHER LAND** The steeply sloping site is laid out with a grass terrace walk which extends c 190m north-north-east from the south-west end of the ramped approach descending from the viewing terrace, to the north-east boundary of the site. This walk

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extends immediately below the catacombs, which are situated towards its central point, and provides access to the portals leading into the structure. A further grass terrace extends below, and parallel to, the upper terrace. From each end of this terrace walk, ramped grass walks descend north-north-east and south-south-west to reach the lower areas of the site adjacent to Exe Street. The ramped walks converge approximately below the central point of the catacomb range, adjacent to a narrow stone staircase which ascends from this point to reach the upper terrace walk. Several C19 monuments of various forms survive beneath the mixed mature specimen trees, yews, Irish yews, and evergreen shrubs which are planted quite densely adjacent to the formal walks and terraces. Below the terraces and ramped walks the north-west-facing slope levels out to form a wide lawn extending parallel to the Exe Street boundary of the site. This lawn is planted with scattered mature specimen trees, with further late C20 specimen trees adjacent to the north-west and north-east boundaries. A few C19 monuments remain set horizontally in the grass. The OS survey of 1888 (published 1890) indicates that the lower level of the cemetery had not then been entirely cleared and relandscaped. A central straight walk extended from south-west to north-east with further walks giving access to burial areas on the lower section of the sloping site. Faint traces of these walks remain in the grass (2001), but no evidence of a structure shown on the south-west side of a path junction c 120m north-east of the south-west entrance survives above ground. The layout of the ramped walks, terraces, catacombs, and ornamental planting remains substantially unchanged since the late C19 (OS).

#### REFERENCES

W G Hoskins, *Two Thousand Years in Exeter* (1960, reprinted 1974), p 140 C Brooks, *Mortal Remains* (1989), pp 62, 132-4 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Devon* (2nd edn 1989), pp 422-3 C Brooks, *English Historic Cemeteries*, (English Heritage theme study 1994), p 74

Maps J Roper, *Exeter, 1805* R Brown, *The City of Exeter, 1835* OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1876-78, published 1890 2nd edition published 1906 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1888, published 1890 2nd edition published 1905

Archival items Exeter Improvement Commissioners Minutes, 1834-38 (31/600), (Devon County Record Office, Exeter) Exeter Improvement Commissioners Day Book for Builders, 1835 (31/598), (Devon County Record Office, Exeter) Exeter Improvement Commissioners Maps and Plans (G1), (Devon County Record Office, Exeter) Exeter Improvement Commissioners General Proceedings, 1836-43 (31/581), (Devon County Record Office, Exeter)

**REASONS FOR DESIGNATION** St Bartholomew's Cemetery is designated at Grade II\* for the following principal reasons:

\* St Bartholomew's Cemetery is an early, perhaps the earliest, example of a cemetery laid out by the municipal authority (1835-7). \* The cemetery is a good example of an early 19th century cemetery. \* The cemetery contains important Egyptian-style catacombs which are an early example of the use of this architectural style in an English cemetery, particularly in a provincial city. \* The cemetery contains a good collection of funerary monuments which reflect the development and character of Exeter in the 19th century

Description written: October 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: April 2002 Upgraded: November 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.