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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST JOHN'S CEMETERY

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

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Name: ST JOHN'S CEMETERY

District: Newcastle upon Tyne (Metropolitan Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 54.967619
Longitude: -1.6503387
National Grid Reference: NZ 22484 63722
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1000761
Date first listed: 28-Jan-2003

Details

A public cemetery opened in 1857 with buildings by Johnstone and Knowles.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In June 1855 the Burial Board of St John's, Westgate and Elswick received fourteen entries for a competition to design two chapels, two entrance lodges, gates, fences etc, at a cost not exceeding £4000, for their proposed cemetery (The Builder, 16 June 1855). The first prize was awarded to Johnstone and Knowles and the second to R J Johnson (*ibid*, 23 June, 7 July 1855). In February 1856 the contract to purchase 20 acres (c 8ha) at £400 per acre from Richard Grainger was confirmed (Burial Board Minutes, February 1856). In March 1856 a Newcastle architect, John Johnstone wrote to the Burial Board offering his services and was appointed as architect for the new cemetery in the same month (Minutes, March 1856). Johnstone's payment for superintending the works was agreed to be 5% of the cost of the chapels and 2.5% for the remainder of the works including the cottages, gates, walls, fences, drains, and roads (*ibid*). It was agreed that the chapels should be at the centre of the site and that Johnstone should prepare a plan showing the consecrated and unconsecrated ground (*ibid*). It is highly probable that this Johnstone is the same person who entered the design competition in partnership with Knowles.

A tender from Scott and Reeds, in the sum of £2346 14s, was accepted in June 1856 for the chapels and the foundation stone was laid on 1 September 1856 (Minutes, June, September 1856). In August 1856 it was agreed that a part of the ground, not exceeding 400 square yards (c 334 sqm) should be sold for a Jewish burial ground (Minutes, August 1856). In regard to the appointment of a superintendent for the cemetery, the Burial Board determined that he should be a practical gardener, a neat writer, and conversant with accounts (Minutes, September 1856). The first burials took place in the cemetery in 1857.

In 1899 it was reported that the cemetery was fast filling up and that it was proposed to extend the burial ground by laying out an adjoining field to the west (Miscell Arts, 27 March 1899). This extension involved the negotiation with the trustees of the adjoining Wansbeck Home, a Female Penitentiary, whereby the trustees right to prevent burials within 100 yards (c 90m) of their buildings was exchanged for a 20 feet (c 6m) extension of their grounds to the south, the erection of a wall, and the planting of a belt of trees (*ibid*). From the proposed additional cemetery ground a quarter acre (c 0.1ha) was sold for £500 for an extension of the 1856 Jewish burial ground (*ibid*). In 1901 it was noted that the wall and fencing separating the main cemetery from the western extension ground was shortly to be removed (Miscell Arts, 27 July 1901). A chapel in the extended Jewish burial area indicated on the 1919 OS map no longer (2002) remains.

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St John's Cemetery remains (2002) in use and in the ownership of Newcastle upon Tyne City Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The c 8ha site is located at Elswick and is c 3km south-west of Newcastle upon Tyne city centre. The reversed L-shaped site adjoins Elswick Road to the north with the boundary marked by a c 0.5m high stone wall topped with c 1.2m high mid-C19 railings. To the east the cemetery is bounded by West View (formerly Gluehouse Lane), and to the south and west by St John's Road which follows an arc at the south-west corner of the cemetery. All of these boundaries are similarly marked by stone walls topped by C20 railings, but with a wall height of c 1.2-1.5m. On the east boundary the railings are divided by stone piers and on the south boundary the wall retains the cemetery ground. To the west a small rectangular Jewish burial ground (outside the area here registered) forms an inset from St John's Road into the cemetery, this being generally bounded by c 1.4m high stone walls. To the north-west the cemetery adjoins a late-C19/early-C20 extension of the burial area (outside the area here registered) laid out with four roughly rectangular burial areas.

The cemetery occupies rising ground on the north bank of the River Tyne, which runs from west to east c 0.5km to the south. In the south-west area of the cemetery is a small knoll, embanked to the south and south-west, named Miser Hill (OS 1861). Elsewhere the ground slopes down by c 20m from north to south. Throughout the cemetery there are southerly views across the river to the undulating line of hills c 4.5km to the south running from Chopwell in the west to Wrekenton to the east, with the head of Miser Hill forming a particular viewing point.

The immediate surrounding area is predominantly residential with late-C19/early-C20 housing to the east and north-west and late C20 housing elsewhere. The river bank to the south is occupied by industrial and commercial properties.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance (listed grade II) lies at the centre of the north boundary with Elswick Road and is flanked by quadrant set backs in the boundary wall topped by mid-C19 railings terminating at square stone piers. The entrance comprises a carriage entrance below a gabled Tudor-style arch flanked by tall octagonal piers with gabled pinnacles which are in turn flanked by pedestrian gates and square stone piers with gabled copings, all with mid-C19 cast-iron gates. The design dates from c 1856 and is by Johnstone and Knowles.

Immediately to east and west of the entrance are two stone lodges (together listed grade II) built on sloping ground with one storey to the north elevation, but with a half basement floor to the south. The lodges are largely symmetrical in random rubble-faced coursed stone with ashlar dressings below gabled roofs of blue slate. The eastern lodge has a late-C20 dormer to the south. The design dates from c 1856 and is by Johnstone and Knowles.

A further main entrance is from West View at the south-east corner of the cemetery. This is set back from the road in a similar manner to the principal entrance, but with a short splayed wall to the south. This entrance is marked by a carriage entrance flanked by two pedestrian entrances, all with C19 iron gates set between square stone piers with gabled stone caps. Immediately north-west of this entrance is a small, single-storey lodge. The gates, piers, and lodge are similar in style to those at the principal entrance.

A third entrance lies at the centre of the eastern, West View boundary and is marked by a carriage entrance with C19 iron gates between stone piers. The design is similar to that at the other two entrances. This entrance, while indicated on the 1919 OS map, is not shown on the 1861 edition and is thus likely to be a later C19 addition.

To the west a further carriage entrance gives access into the late-C19/early-C20 extension ground and a pedestrian gate access to the Jewish burial ground (both outside the area here registered) from St John's Road. From the Jewish burial ground two pedestrian entrances, with C19 iron gates, give access into the mid-C19 cemetery to the south and the later extension ground to the north.

The 1919 OS map indicates a further carriage entrance and lodge adjoining St John's Road, immediately south of the Jewish burial ground; this no longer (2002) remains. This entrance and lodge is not shown on the 1861 OS map.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS Two mortuary chapels linked by a high central tower (the whole listed grade II) are situated c 180m south-south-west of the principal entrance with the Church of England chapel to the west and the Nonconformist, of a matching, handed design, to the east. The symmetrical arrangement comprises an H-shaped plan with the two chapels linked by lower entrance wings flanking a tall porte-cochère, below a pinnacled gable, above which rises a three-stage octagonal tower

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surmounted by a spire. The Gothic-style buildings are in random-coursed pitch-faced stone with ashlar dressings and detailing below gabled roofs of Lakeland slate. The design dates from c 1856 and is by Johnstone and Knowles.

OTHER LAND From the principal entrance a tree-lined approach drive leads south for c 180m, following a shallow serpentine route down the slope to the mortuary chapels, forming an informal north/south axial route. Some 30m north of the chapels the drive straightens to create a more formal approach, axial with the porte-cochère. Some 15m north of the chapels a cross-axial path runs east and west to link with perimeter paths in the north of the cemetery thus forming a circuit. From the south-east corner of this circuit the eastern perimeter path continues south to the south-east cemetery entrance while at the south-west corner the cross-axial path leads west into the late-C19/early-C20 extension ground (outside the area here registered). The northern burial area is divided, c 105m south of the principal entrance, by a pair of serpentine paths which lead off to east and west of the approach drive to link with the perimeter paths. To the north of the chapels, and c 125m south of the principal entrance, a further path leads south-south-east off the approach drive to follow a shallow serpentine route towards the south-east entrance. From the south side of the porte-cochère a path leads southwards for c 25m before curving eastwards to lead to the south-east entrance. From south of the chapels two further paths lead off to east and west. The former of these winds gently to a junction with the shallow serpentine route leading towards the south-east entrance. The latter leads west for c 25m before dividing, with one arm leading west over the head of Miser Hill and one south-westwards to lead around the foot of this feature, the two rejoining to form a circuit c 170m to the west. To the south and south-west the slopes of Miser Hill are terraced with low stone walls retaining two level grassed burial areas and a third low stone wall at the foot of a steep grassed embankment below the head of the knoll. This terracing is indicated on the OS map of 1919 but not on that of 1861. Some 140m west-south-west of the chapels the three levels are linked by flights of stone steps, with two lower flights leading up to the north-west and a third flight leading north up to the head of the knoll between stone retaining walls. These flights are indicated on the 1919 OS map, together with two further flights to the west, linking the lower terraces, which do not now (2002) appear to remain.

Some 70m west-south-west of the chapels, on the rising eastern side of Miser Hill, is the Mather Tomb (listed grade II) of c 1870. The Gothic-style monument with an arcaded canopy in sandstone ashlar with pink and grey granite contains two chest tombs. The story of the Mathers, a poor family bequeathed the fortune of a stranger they had nursed to health, is outlined in a 1901 description of the memorials in a local newspaper (*Miscell Arts*, 20 June, 27 July 1901). The same article records a number of persons commemorated in the cemetery at that date including prominent local business people, many victims of shipwrecks, and members of the theatrical profession. A variety of larger monuments, including pillars, column tombs with urns, and an occasional Celtic cross are sited among generally more modest gravestones throughout the cemetery, but in greater concentration on the head of Miser Hill and adjacent to the chapels.

The buildings, layout, and features, including occasional trees lining paths, remain largely as indicated on the 1861 OS map with the exception only of the Miser Hill area which is very much as shown on the 1919 edition.

REFERENCES

The Builder, no 645 (16 June 1855), 286; no 646 (23 June 1855), 298; no 647 (7 July 1855), 317 Brooks C, *Mortal Remains* (1989), 52 Pevsner N and Richmond I, revised J Grundy et al, *The Buildings of England: Northumberland* (2nd edn 1992), 514 Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1864 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1861 3rd edition published 1919 Archival items St John's, Westgate and Elswick Burial Board Minutes, 1856-64 (BB/JWE/1/2) (Tyne and Wear Archive Service) Elswick, Arthurs Hill and Cruddas Park, *Miscellaneous Articles*, 1 (27 March 1899), 90; (20 June 1901, 27 July 1901), 98 (Newcastle Central Library Local Studies Collection)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION St John's Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * A complex early High Victorian (1857) public cemetery for a provincial city in formal and informal style by Johnstone and Knowles. * The conjoined Gothic chapels form a striking focal point in the design which makes dramatic use of a hillside overlooking the Tyne Valley. * Unusually, a Jewish section was included at the same time, set within its own railings. * It is one of the first four mid-C19 Burial Board cemeteries formed in Newcastle upon Tyne. The others are St Andrew's (qv) (Middleton & Pritchett 1855;7), All Saints', Jesmond (Benjamin and John Green 1857), and St Nicholas' (Archibald Dunn 1858). * Social interest is expressed in a variety of C19 monuments, including many Newcastle worthies, victims of shipwrecks, and members

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of the theatrical profession, most of which are relatively modest. One exception is the Mather Tomb c 1870, a Gothic-style monument with an arcaded canopy in sandstone ashlar with pink and grey granite containing two chest tombs. * The buildings and many monuments are in very poor condition, particularly in the Jewish section which has also lost its original gateway. However, the cemetery layout and most structures survive intact

Description written: December 2002 Amended: January 2003 Register Inspector: HMT 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.