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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

MANCHESTER GENERAL CEMETERY

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Name: MANCHESTER GENERAL CEMETERY

District: Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.506520
Longitude: -2.2202429
National Grid Reference: SD 85490 01115
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001664
Date first listed: 20-Nov-2002

Details

A public cemetery developed by a private company and opened in 1837.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The trustees of the Manchester General Cemetery were incorporated in May 1836 (Brooks 1989). The cemetery site chosen, the first in Manchester to provide burial space on a substantial scale (ibid), comprised 12 acres (c 4.9ha) to the north of the city centre adjoining the grounds of Hendham Hall (Deighton 1912). An open design competition for the entrance buildings was won by a Liverpool architect, Mr Moffatt who was also employed to supervise the works. These comprised a large central carriage entrance flanked by pedestrian entrances with, to the south, a Nonconformist mortuary chapel, and to the north, a similar building which was the combined registrar's house and company offices, the whole in Neoclassical style (ibid).

The cemetery was formerly opened on 1 September 1837 by a Mrs Walker of Whitehouses, Collyhurst and at that time the grounds contained a pond or reservoir and sixty-two catacombs (ibid). The first burials, of a still-born child and of Marian Segate Watt, aged nine, took place on 7 September 1837 (Axon 1886). An illustration of 1840 shows the catacombs and pond in the western section of the cemetery from where a central tree-lined path leads east to the principal entrance (Deighton 1912). The pond is also indicated on the 1848 OS map, together with a stream which meanders through the centre of the site. Catacombs were also subsequently constructed below the Nonconformist chapel, but these were never used (ibid). The Minutes of the General Cemetery Committee for 1839-40 report a gratifying increase in receipts and that 'the gracefully undulating surface interspersed with flower beds and serpentine walks' had elicited 'numerous and high encomiums' from visitors (ibid).

Hendham Hall and grounds were purchased by public subscription in 1844 for use as a public park from the then owner, Jonathan Andrew, a one-time Chairman of the General Cemetery Committee (ibid); the grounds opened in 1846 as Queen's Park (qv).

A part of the cemetery was consecrated for Church of England burials in 1848 by the Bishop of Manchester, the Right Reverend James Prince Lee and the first grave on the consecrated ground was dug on 7 December 1848 (ibid). In 1854 the catacombs in the western area of the cemetery, never having been used, were demolished and the pond was drained with both areas being levelled and used for burial (ibid). The stream indicated on the 1848 OS map was also possibly diverted or culverted at this time. In 1855 the Bishop also laid the foundation stone for St James's Chapel, a Gothic Revival-style Church of England mortuary chapel designed by Manchester architect, Frank Newby (ibid).

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The cemetery company also built six workmen's cottages, on land adjoining Boardman Street to the north, which were demolished in 1881 (ibid). The cemetery, including the various buildings, enclosures and laying out of the grounds cost £18,000 (ibid).

In 1872 there were negotiations with Manchester Corporation regarding the sale of the cemetery, but the company finally declined to sell (ibid). Manchester City Council acquired the cemetery in the 1950s (J Garvey pers comm, 2002) and all the buildings on the site were demolished in the early 1960s (Brooks 1989). It is probable that the fencing off of the western end of the cemetery also occurred in the 1960s and this area is now (2002) very densely overgrown. Manchester General Cemetery remains (2002) in occasional use and is in the ownership of Manchester City Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The c 3ha cemetery is situated in Harpurhey, c 2.3km to the north of Manchester city centre. To the east the roughly rectangular site is bounded by Rochdale Road. This boundary, set back from the public footpath beyond a c 3m wide grass verge, is marked by a late C20, low brick wall topped with railings. The boundary wall appears to be on a similar line to a stone boundary wall dating from 1837 and demolished in the early 1960s (OS 1848; early-C20 photograph in Deighton 1912). To the south the cemetery adjoins C19 villa properties, facing onto Rochdale Road, and Queen's Park. This boundary is marked for some 210m westwards from Rochdale Road by a C19 brick wall of between 1m and 1.6m in height. The remainder of the south boundary with Queen's Park is marked by late-C20 fencing below a low embankment. To the west the cemetery adjoins an area of land generally covered with high, dense undergrowth. This boundary is marked by a high hedge with evidence of former C20 fencing. To the north the cemetery is bounded in part by Hendham Vale which, to the east, becomes Camelia Road (formerly Cemetery Road) and, adjoining Rochdale Road, by four blocks of late-C20 flats, each of four storeys, built on ground which was formerly Boardman Street. The northern road boundary is marked by a c 1.2m high, C19 brick wall which on Hendham Vale is partly collapsed, while on Camelia Road the brickwork has been later raised to c 1.8m high. The remainder of the northern boundary, to the flats, is marked by late-C20 railings.

The burial ground is situated on an undulating plateau above a c 18m high, steep wooded embankment running from east to west in the north-west of the cemetery, immediately below which is the valley of the River Irk. From the north-west area of the burial ground there are long views out to the north and north-west across the valley towards Higher Crumpsall, Broughton Park and beyond. To the south there are occasional informal views out, through the tree-lined boundary, to Queen's Park.

An early-C20 plan (Deighton 1912) indicates that the overgrown land to the west of the cemetery (outside the area here registered) was formerly a part of the cemetery site and that the whole was generally bounded by a wall. Within the overgrown land no visual evidence appears (2002) to remain of any gravestones, monuments or plot layout. The remainder of the surrounding area is in mixed use with late-C20 housing to the west, north, and east and an industrial estate on lower ground to the north-west.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance lies at the centre of the east boundary with Rochdale Road and is marked by a vehicle entrance flanked by two pedestrian entrances, all with iron gates between brick piers and dating from the 1960s. This arrangement is in a similar location to the principal carriage entrance and pedestrian entrances serving the cemetery in 1837 (OS 1848; early C20 photograph in Deighton 1912). Immediately north and south of the principal entrance are two quadrant-shaped lawns each backed by a narrow curving belt of trees and shrubs. These open areas are, respectively, the sites of the former combined registrar's house and cemetery office and the Nonconformist chapel. The curving line of the lawns is similar to the curved line of a forecourt to the west of the buildings indicated on the 1893 OS map.

Some 190m west-north-west of the principal entrance a pedestrian entrance gives access from Camelia Road. This entrance is marked by late C20 railings and a single gate. Concrete kerbs indicate that this was formerly a vehicle entrance and a carriage entrance is indicated on the 1893 OS map. A third entrance is situated at the centre of the western boundary and is marked by the part remains of an iron kissing-gate.

OTHER LAND The cemetery comprises a roughly rectangular area to the east, c 83m in width from north to south, and a wider irregular area to the west. The eastern area of the cemetery is formal in character with a bisecting axial drive, lined with occasional mature trees, flanked by regular lines of gravestones which are punctuated by a variety of more substantial

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monuments in various styles. This area is enclosed on the south boundary by a narrow tree belt and towards the centre of the cemetery, east of the entrance from Camelia Road, by a group of mature trees. The irregular western area of the cemetery is largely informal in character with winding drives and, adjacent to the former chapel site, a variety of monuments situated below a canopy of mature trees. This western area is enclosed by boundary tree belts to north and south.

From the principal entrance a c 3m wide level axial drive leads directly west-north-west for some 20m, between the quadrant lawns, and then continues, gently downwards, for a further 190m, bisecting the burial areas in the east of the cemetery. To the east this axial drive is lined for some 60m with a high kerb of red brick with bull-nose coping with the burial areas to either side at a slightly higher level. This kerb-lined section corresponds with a length of solid path line indicated on the 1893 OS map. Some 185m westwards from the principal entrance a secondary drive leads off northwards, to the entrance from Camelia Road. From this junction the axial drive rises gently to the west for a further 55m. From this point the drive, now entering the irregular western area of the cemetery, leads south-westwards, curving gently upwards to the site of the former Anglican chapel, 280m west-north-west of the principal entrance.

The former chapel site is largely laid to grass with some burial plots adjacent to the drive. From the chapel the drive leads northwards for some 45m, to the head of the steep wooded embankment in the north-west of the cemetery, from where it returns east to the entrance from Camelia Road. To the west of the chapel site the level burial ground is laid out with grassed paths running east-north-east to west-south-west. The ground to the south of the chapel is similar but slopes down to the south and the boundary with Queen's Park. The drives and paths throughout the cemetery are as indicated on the 1893 OS map.

Among the many monuments to prominent local persons there are also a number to children. In the south-west of the cemetery these include one, in poor condition, with a small figure lying in an opening which is understood to commemorate a baby who died after being thrown into a fireplace (J Garvey pers comm, 2002). Also buried in the cemetery, in an unmarked grave, is Hannah Beswick who had stipulated that her body be mummified and not buried (Axon 1886). This duty she entrusted to Dr Charles White of Sale who, following her death in 1758, preserved the body with tar and kept it in a clockcase at his house (BBC factsheet, 2002). The body was later moved to the Manchester Natural History Museum and, with the permission of the Home Secretary, buried on 12 July 1868 (Axon 1886).

REFERENCES

Axon W E A (ed), *The Annals of Manchester: A chronological record from the earliest times to the end of 1885* (1886), pp 200, 315
Deighton W A, *The Manchester General Cemetery, Harpurhey from 1836 to 1911* (1912), pp 9-29
Brooks C, *Mortal Remains* (1989), pp 19, 50, 89

Maps W A Deighton, *Plan of the Cemetery, 1912* (in Deighton 1912)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1848 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1893 2nd edition published 1908 1931 edition

Additional information Verbal information given in October 2002 by Joe Garvey, stonemason. BBC Making History factsheet: Dr Charles White's Bridge at www.bbc.co.uk/education 24 October 2002.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Manchester General Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- * Manchester General Cemetery is an example of an early Victorian (1837) garden cemetery laid out by a joint stock company.
- * The cemetery was the first in Manchester to provide burial space on a substantial scale.
- * The cemetery contains monuments which reflect the social and economic development of Manchester during the C19.

Description written: October 2002 Amended: November 2002 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.