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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

WESTGATE HILL CEMETERY

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| Name: | WESTGATE HILL CEMETERY |
| District: | Newcastle upon Tyne (Metropolitan Authority) |
| Parish: | Non Civil Parish |
| label.localisation: | Latitude: 54.971509 Longitude: -1.6315281 National Grid Reference: NZ 23686 64161 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF) |
| label.overview: | Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001680 Date first listed: 05-Nov-2003 |

Details

A public cemetery developed by a private company and opened in 1829.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In June 1825 a meeting of 'protestant dissenters and other persons' was held in Newcastle upon Tyne and a committee appointed with the aim of forming a new cemetery ('Outline of a Plan', 1825). The meeting was addressed by John Fenwick on the benefits of a commercial cemetery which was not to be consecrated and the example of Chorlton Row Cemetery opened in Manchester in 1821 was cited (Green 2001). In September 1825 proposals for the new cemetery were published and included the purchase of a site of at least 3 acres (c 1.2ha), at an anticipated cost of £2000, as soon as there were sufficient subscribers to the scheme for which £10 shares were to be issued ('Outline of a Plan, 1825).

In December 1828 3 acres (c 1.2ha) were purchased at Arthur's Hill, Westgate for £1500 (Green 2001). The Westgate Hill Cemetery Company elected a Building Committee and appointed the architect John Green, who introduced a Gateshead nurseryman, William Falla to advise on landscaping (ibid). Masonry work was carried out by the firm of Cook and Robinson with wrought-iron palisades by Robert Wilson and cast-iron gates by Robert Elliot (ibid). Visiting the site when the boundary walls were nearing completion, Falla proposed that the ground should be trenched and 'considerable alterations made to the surface' and this work was subsequently carried out by a Mr Steavenson (ibid). Falla also advised on ornamental planting which was completed in the spring of 1830 (ibid).

The first burial took place in October 1829 when the cemetery was described as 'laid out in an ornamental manner, after the models of the celebrated Cimetière du pere la Chaise [sic] at Paris, and the lately formed cemeteries at Manchester and Liverpool' (Historical Register of Remarkable Events, 18 October 1829, quoted in Green 2001). Oliver's plan of 1830 indicates an entrance at the centre of the northern boundary with Arthur's Hill, with the chapel and lodge building immediately to the south-east. This plan also shows the triangular ground laid out with gently curving tree-lined paths with two main circuits intersecting in the south of the site. To the north-west of this junction was a steep semicircular embankment. The overall layout as indicated on the OS map of c 1861 is very little changed, although the embankment is not marked.

In the late 1920s the Elswick and Westgate Burial Boards raised concerns that no further burials should take place at the cemetery on health and sanitary grounds (Miscell Articles p 100, 10 February 1981). The last burial took place in 1957 (Register of Burials

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1829-1957) and the chapel was demolished in 1970 (Green 2001). In the early 1990s the cemetery was acquired by Newcastle City Council (Miscell Articles p 103, 3 February 1993). In 2002 the entrance gates and boundary railings no longer remain. Westgate Hill Cemetery remains (2002) in the ownership of Newcastle City Council and, no longer in use as a burial ground, is managed as an informal open space.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The c 1.2ha cemetery is situated c 1.5km to the west-south-west of Newcastle upon Tyne city centre. The triangular site is bounded to the north by Westgate Road (formerly Arthur's Hill and on the course of Hadrian's Wall), and to the south-east by Elswick Road (formerly Elswick Lane). To the south-west the boundary adjoins Back Elswick Street, now divided to provide access to late C20 flats. These boundaries are marked by sandstone ashlar walls (listed grade II with entrance piers) with curved junctions to the north-west and east corners of the site. The wall to Westgate Road is generally c 1.2m high with a chamfered coping and broken by tall square stone piers with plinth, banded cornice, and top pedestal with evidence of former railings, now (2002) removed. The boundary wall to Back Elswick Street is similar but without piers and topped by late C20 railings giving an overall height of c 3m, while the wall to Elswick Road, also without piers, is c 1.6m high. To north and south-east the boundary walls are partly retaining with, in the east of the site, the cemetery ground c 1m above the adjoining road levels. Some 90m west-south-west of the principal entrance a small stone drinking fountain with semicircular bowl (dated 1859, listed grade II) is set into the boundary wall fronting onto Elswick Road. The cemetery occupies gently sloping ground, rising to the west. Quarries are indicated to the west of the site on Oliver's 1830 plan and the 1864 OS map and the cemetery is possibly 'made' ground on the site of a former quarry (Miscell Articles p 100, 10 February 1981). Ground in the north-west of the cemetery slopes gently up to the north-west. Elsewhere the ground is gently undulating, rising to a low mound in the south of the site. This mound appears to be on the site of the embanked area indicated on Oliver's plan of 1830. The 1864 OS map indicates that the supposed line of the Roman vallum runs through this southern area of the site, c 80m south of and parallel to what is now Westgate Road.

The surrounding area is largely residential with mainly late C20 housing and blocks of flats on ground formerly occupied by quarries and housing in the C19 (OS 1864).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance (listed grade II with the boundary walls) lies at the centre of the northern boundary with Westgate Road and is set back c 5m from the road between convex quadrant returns in the boundary wall. It is marked by a carriage entrance with tall, square stone piers flanked by two pedestrian entrances and a pair of similar but lower piers, all without gates. The piers are of similar design to those set into the northern boundary wall and are to the 1825-9 design of John Green.

Immediately south and south-east of the entrance, two level areas without monuments mark the former sites of a carriage turn and the chapel respectively.

OTHER LAND The whole of the triangular site is generally laid to grass with a mixture of mature trees together with some younger trees and shrubs, these latter planted in the second half of the C20. A designed path layout is not now (2002) apparent, but it is possible that evidence may remain below the vegetation.

Ground in the east and south of the cemetery is raised above the adjoining road levels, thus forming a very gently sloping plateau above the more steeply sloping adjacent ground with the low mound in the south providing a focal point. This mound, now (2002) very probably diminished in height (Green 2001), may have formerly provided views out over lower ground to the south and east which are now obscured by planting within the cemetery and buildings in the surrounding area.

The cemetery contains a variety of C19 and early C20 monuments, many now (2002) damaged and in poor condition. Some 50m south-east of the principal entrance is the L'Anson Gothic-style tower tomb (listed grade II) of 1873 by C Burn of Newcastle and, c 150m west of the principal entrance, the c 1854 headstone signed Pearson of Gibson Street marking the Clennell family tomb (listed grade II). A newspaper article in 1901 (Miscell Articles p 98, 10 August 1901) recorded that many notable C19 Newcastle people were buried in the cemetery, including public benefactors, surgeons and academics, as well as the prominent manufacturers of brushes and wire rope.

REFERENCES

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Green F, *A Guide to the Historic Parks and Gardens of Tyne and Wear* (1995), 27 Green F, *Appraisal of Historic Landscape at Westgate Hill Cemetery*, (unpublished report for Newcastle City Council, 2001)

Maps Oliver T, *Plan of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne and the Borough of Gateshead with their respective suburbs*, 1830 (Tyne and Wear Archive Service)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1864 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published c 1861

Archival items Outline of a Plan for a New Burial Ground at Newcastle upon Tyne, 13 September 1825 (CE/Ba/32), (Tyne and Wear Archive Service) Westgate Hill Register of Burials, 1829-1957 (part CE/WGH), (Tyne and Wear Archive Service)

Elswick, Arthur's Hill and Cruddas Park Miscellaneous Articles, vol 1, pp 98-103 (Newcastle Central Library Local Studies Collection)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Westgate Hill Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * One of the earliest garden cemeteries in England (1829), opened in the earliest decade of cemetery design, and the earliest in the North-East. * The site survives with some neglect and damage (including the loss of the chapel), but reflects the original layout and design intentions. * Local social interest is expressed in the monuments and burials.

Description written: December 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.