

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

SAFFRON HILL CEMETERY

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Name:	SAFFRON HILL CEMETERY
District:	City of Leicester (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.592180 Longitude: -1.1311647 National Grid Reference: SP 58954 99730 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1001571 Date first listed: 17-Dec-2001

Details

An early C20 cemetery laid out to designs by Thomas Mawson and Edward Prentice Mawson, with buildings designed by E P Mawson.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In the years immediately following the First World War new housing estates were developed to the south of the city of Leicester in an improvement programme. As part of this programme, in December 1922 the Estates and Cemetery Committee of the City Corporation identified the need for an additional cemetery (Committee Minutes, 29 December 1922). By March 1923 the Corporation had entered into negotiations with the representative of Mrs Eyres Monsell of Dumbleton Hall, Evesham, for the purchase of an estate of c 169 acres (c 70ha), to be used partly for housing, and partly for a new cemetery. The purchase was completed for £22,350 in July 1924 (Minutes, 11 July 1922), and it was agreed that an architectural competition would be held for the design of the new cemetery, to be known as Saffron Hill Cemetery, with Mr H V Lanchester FRIBA of London acting as assessor (Minutes, 23 December 1925). Of the thirty-six schemes submitted for laying out the cemetery, that by the landscape architects Thomas Mawson & Son of Lancaster and Windermere was accepted by the Corporation on 15 September 1926 (Minutes). Work on the construction of the cemetery did not commence until April 1928 when paths and drives were laid out to Mawson's plan by the City Surveyor's staff (Minutes, 11 April 1928). The chapel was built in late 1929 by Messrs G Calverley of Leicester at a cost of £17,720 (Minutes, 11 September 1929), while tenders for planting the cemetery were invited in October 1929. The tender of J Coles & Sons of Thurnby, Leicester was accepted in preference to one received from Lakeland Nurseries, Windermere, Mawson's favoured contractor (Minutes, 9 October 1929, 8 January 1930). The planting itself was overseen for Mawson & Son by Capt Hudelart (Minutes, 14 May 1930), while in June 1930 the first Registrar, James Lofthouse, and the head gardener, Thomas Bell, were appointed (Minutes, 25 June 1930). Following the completion of the chapel and lodges in 1930-1, the Bishop of Leicester was invited to consecrate the eastern section of the site in September 1931 (Minutes, 23 September 1931). Saffron Hill Cemetery was formally opened by Cllr H Carver JP, Lord Mayor of Leicester, on 20 October 1931, using a key specially designed by E P Mawson (Minutes, 16 September 1931, 21 October 1931). Today (2001), the cemetery remains municipal property.

The design of Saffron Hill Cemetery was undertaken jointly by Thomas Mawson (1861-1933) and his eldest son, Edward Prentice Mawson, who from the mid 1920s was assuming control of his father's practice as Thomas Mawson increasingly

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suffered the effects of Parkinson's Disease. Extensive documentation in the firm's archive (Cumbria Record Office, Kendal) indicates that considerable care was taken over this commission, and that use was made of published reports and descriptions of contemporary cemetery design in the USA. In May 1927 Mawson produced a report for the Corporation on the development of the cemetery, indicating that it was conceived as a lawn cemetery (Minutes, 12 May 1927), while its geometric plan, with vistas and formal open spaces, reflected the influence of the *École des Beaux Arts*, Paris on both Thomas and E P Mawson (Mawson 1911). Writing to the City Surveyor in May 1930, E P Mawson indicated that he was 'most anxious that this Scheme should be the best of its kind in the country, which it certainly promises to be' (Minutes, 14 May 1930). Even before the cemetery opened in 1931, the Council retreated from Mawson's vision of a lawn cemetery, fearful that the necessary restrictions would prove unacceptable to ratepayers (Minutes, 17 June 1931). The buildings, path pattern, and structural planting, however, conform to the plans produced by T H Mawson & Son in 1926-27 (CRO), and are little changed from photographs of c 1930 (LRO).

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Saffron Hill Cemetery is situated c 1km south-south-east of the centre of the city of Leicester, to the south of the B5418, Stonesby Avenue. The c 9ha site is bordered to the north by Stonesby Avenue and to the east by the gardens of domestic properties in Glenborne Road. To the south the site adjoins playing fields, while to the south-west it is bordered by a mid C20 cemetery extension (outside the area here registered) which was developed in an area of early C20 woodland known as Diamond Jubilee Covert. The south, east, and west boundaries are closed by early C20 spiked metal railings; these were supplied by John Elwell of Birmingham in October 1929 at a cost of £375. The north-east and north-west boundaries are formed by low red-brick walls which are surmounted by tall wrought-iron railings supported by regularly spaced square brick piers. The walls were rebuilt to the early C20 plan c 1994; at the same time the wrought-iron railings supplied in 1930 by Thomas Blackburn & Sons of Preston (Minutes, 14 May 1930) were restored. The site is level, with few external views. Within the site there is a series of vistas and avenues aligned on the chapel, while there is a significant view south from the principal entrance which is closed by the north facade of the chapel.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES Saffron Hill Cemetery is approached from Stonesby Avenue to the north at a point c 240m west of its junction with Glenborne Road. The entrance is set back from the road with quadrant walls supporting wrought-iron railings standing behind quadrant panels of lawn and geometric flower beds, which are separated from the pavement on Stonesby Avenue by early C20 concrete bollards and chains. A symmetrical pair of carriage entrances is divided by a central, semicircular projecting bay enclosed by a low brick wall and wrought-iron railings supported by high brick piers. Each carriage entrance comprises a pair of ornamental wrought-iron gates and side panels which are supported by a pair of tall brick piers rising from stone bases and surmounted by stepped caps with cruciform ornaments in relief. The wrought-iron gates were supplied in 1930 by Thomas Blackburn & Sons of Preston, together with the associated gate piers, walls, and railings (Minutes, 14 May 1930). Early C20 photographs (LRO) indicate that the carriage gates and side screens have lost their original ornamental cresting. Each entrance is flanked on its outer side by a high wall in which is set an arched entrance closed by an elaborate wrought-iron door, beyond which stands a two-storey brick lodge. The two lodges are of identical design, except for a single-storey wing attached to the east side of the west lodge, which formerly housed the Registrar's office. The lodges are of simple Georgian style, with sash windows and pyramidal tiled roofs which rise to a central chimney stack. The entrance, gates, and lodges were designed by E P Mawson as part of the original scheme for the cemetery.

A further entrance c 80m east of the principal entrance leads south from Stonesby Avenue to an early C20 service yard. The entrance is closed by a pair of C20 timber gates supported by square-section brick piers. The entrance formed part of the early C20 scheme for the development of the site.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The chapel is situated c 160m south-south-west of the principal, or north entrance, and terminates the principal vista extending south from the entrance. The chapel is constructed from brick with stone dressings, in a Romanesque style. The chapel itself forms a western block extending from north to south with a tripartite window in the north facade and a cross finial. To the east the chapel is adjoined by a triple-arched arcade which links it to a tall campanile, below which is a monumental stone portal surmounted by stylised Romanesque carvings and an inscription: 'Non Omnis Moriar'. The campanile is adjoined to the east by a further triple-arched arcade. The south facade of the chapel is of similar design, with a canted apse

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to the chapel itself flanked to the east by further arcades. An arcade extending the length of the west facade of the chapel shelters two monumental arched doors leading into the building. Within, the chapel is plain with painted roughcast walls and a semicircular apse to the south. It retains original fittings including wrought-iron electric light fittings and timber pews supplied by J C Kellett & Son of Leicester in 1931 (Minutes, 8 January 1931). The chapel, with a tall campanile and attached service areas, was designed by E P Mawson as part of the original scheme for the development of the cemetery and was constructed in 1929 by Messrs G Calverley & Sons of Leicester (Minutes, 11 September 1929); it remains substantially unaltered today (2001). OTHER GROUND Saffron Hill Cemetery has a symmetrical plan, the central feature of which is a cruciform arrangement of wide avenues and vistas aligned on the chapel. Further avenues radiate south-east and south-west from the chapel, while the remainder of the site is divided into approximately square burial plots by a grid of straight paths.

Two broad tarmac drives extend south from the two carriage entrances from Stonesby Avenue enclosing a large rectangular lawn, at the southern end of which is a group of late C20 cremation plots. To the south of the lawn, and separated from it by a carriage turn, stands the chapel. At the northern end of the lawn, and separated from it by a tarmac walk, is an area of specimen trees underplanted with ornamental shrubs. This area was developed by Mawson from an existing spinney, and has been further developed in the late C20. The lawn and drives form a vista extending from the entrance to the chapel and are separated from the early C20 burial areas to east and west by mature pleached limes which are planted behind a deep grass verge in which are set geometric beds for seasonal planting.

The chapel stands at the centre of a circular carriage turn and is surrounded by lawns in which are set quadrant beds for roses; a mature oak immediately south of the chapel was retained by Mawson from trees existing on the site. To the south of the chapel a wide avenue of mature London planes extends c 130m to the southern boundary of the site. The avenue is partly enclosed by yews that survive from hedges which were partly destroyed by fire in the late C20. Tarmac drives enclose an elliptical-shaped panel of lawn which is being developed (2001) as a children's burial area. To the east and west of the chapel further panels of lawn surrounded by tarmac drives are enclosed within yew hedges. The east and west ends of each enclosure is semicircular on plan with an entrance leading through to the burial areas beyond. A single mature specimen conifer provides a terminal feature to each lawn. The north, south, east, and west lawns with their adjacent planting and hedges form the central cruciform motif of the cemetery plan. Further avenues radiate south-east and south-west from the chapel; each avenue is planted with alternate mature London planes and yews.

The burial areas are situated to the east and west of the north lawn and are divided into square plots by a grid pattern of tarmac walks. At the north-east and north-west corners of the site the junctions of walks are marked by rondpoints planted with mature specimen conifers, while curvilinear walks planted with mature ornamental shrubbery and specimen trees extend parallel to the north, east, and west boundaries. The boundaries of the site are planted with a belt of shrubs, conifers, and specimen trees 30' (c 9m) deep in accordance with Mawson's plan. The area to the south-east of the chapel forms a further burial area, while the area to the south-west remains lawn and forms the setting for a late C20 octagonal brick and corrugated-metal prayer hall for the use of the Muslim community. The burial areas are laid to grass with scattered specimen trees and conifers. The large number of mid and late C20 monuments contains none of individual merit. Mawson's scheme for the cemetery envisaged more expensive graves with monuments lining each walk, with areas of common graves covered by lawn at the centre of each square plot (Minutes, 12 May 1927). The Corporation's departure from Mawson's guidelines for the establishment of a lawn cemetery in 1931 and changes in burial practice have led to a departure in these areas from Mawson's vision for the cemetery.

Some 50m east of the principal entrance is an early C20 service yard and nursery. Enclosed to the south by a beech hedge, the service yard is entered from the cemetery through a pair of high timber gates supported by brick piers. A further entrance to the north leads directly to Stonesby Avenue. The yard is enclosed to the east by a one and two-storey range of sheds and stores. To the west of the yard a nursery is enclosed to the south by beech hedges and is separated from the garden of the east lodge by similar hedges to the west. The nursery is no longer in cultivation (2001). A range of brick bothies extends from east to west; this was formerly adjoined to the south by a glasshouse and a line of brick-built frames. A glasshouse was purchased for the cemetery in January 1930 from W Richardson & Co Ltd of Darlington (Minutes, 22 January 1930).

REFERENCES

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T H Mawson, *Civic Art* (1911), pp 31-50 T H Mawson, *The Life and Work of an English Landscape Architect* (1927), pp 241-5
Maps T H Mawson & Son, *Plans of Saffron Hill Cemetery, Leicester* including planting plans, detail plans of entrance, lodges,
chapel and nursery, 1926?7 (WDB/76/L120), (Cumbria Record Office, Kendal)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1930 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1930 edition 1938 edition

Archival items Minutes of the Corporation of Leicester Estates and Cemeteries Committee, 1921-31 (CM12/14-16),
(Leicestershire Record Office) T H Mawson & Son, Papers relating to the design of Saffron Hill Cemetery including material
relating to contemporary cemetery design in the USA (WDB/76/L120), (Cumbria Record Office, Kendal) T H Mawson & Son,
Photographs of Saffron Hill Cemetery including general views, entrance and chapel, c 1930 (DE2818/22-6), (Leicestershire
Record Office) T H Mawson & Son, Photographs of Saffron Hill Cemetery, c 1930 (WDB/76/L120), (Cumbria Record Office,
Kendal)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Saffron Hill Cemetery is designated at Grade II* for the following principal reasons:

* Saffron Hill is an early 20th century municipal cemetery (1926) designed by the notable practice of T H Mawson & Son
of Lancaster and is a good example of their 'civic design'. * Unusually, its design was influenced by a study of contemporary
American cemeteries * The layout of the cemetery by T H Mawson survives intact and in generally good condition. * The
structures within the cemetery are of a very high standard, and were designed by E P Mawson.

Description written: September 2001 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: JML Edited: October 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.