

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BROMPTON CEMETERY

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Name:	BROMPTON CEMETERY
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Kensington and Chelsea (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.484882 Longitude: -0.19079600 National Grid Reference: TQ 25719 77766 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000248 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Mid C19 public cemetery designed by architect Benjamin B Baud, previously assistant to Sir Jeffrey Wyattville. J C Loudon, author and landscape designer, was consulted regarding appropriate planting.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The West of London & Westminster Cemetery Company was formed in 1836 when an Act of Parliament was passed for establishing cemeteries for the 'Interment of the Dead, Northward, Southward and Eastward of the Metropolis'. The company was authorised to develop a c 16ha cemetery to the west of London. The site proposed for this cemetery was surrounded by fields and market gardens and was bordered to the west by the Kensington Canal. The majority of the land, which belonged to Lord Kensington, was acquired by August 1839. An additional c 2ha on the south side was bought from the Equitable Gas Company. The land, formerly the site of brickworks and market gardens, was flat and lacked the varied topography of Highgate (qv) and Nunhead (qv) Cemeteries. It was described as 'having no natural attraction whatever ... not a tree and scarcely a shrub adorn the place' (Collinson 1840). The cemetery company appointed Stephen Geary (1797-1854), designer of Highgate Cemetery and founder of the London Cemetery Company, as company architect in 1837. David Ramsay, a nurseryman and contractor who had worked for Geary at Highgate, was the landscape gardener. Together they submitted designs and tenders for the proposed cemetery but in 1838 the Board of Directors decided to hold a public competition. This was won by Benjamin Baud (1807-75), who had previously assisted Sir Jeffrey Wyattville (1766-1840) with improvements to Windsor Castle (qv) and had submitted unsuccessful designs for the new Houses of Parliament in 1835. To overcome the constraints of the site his scheme relied on architectural drama for its impact. Brompton was a classical conception with dramatic vistas and spaces, in a rural setting. In addition to Baud the company employed Issac Finnemore, a landscape gardener, and J C Loudon as a consultant for laying out the grounds; plants and trees were supplied by Smith's of Islington and Buchanan and Olroyd of Cambridge. Building work started in 1839 and the cemetery was consecrated in June 1840, the first burial taking place a few weeks later. The building works and the landscaping were far from complete however and the North Lodge had to be used as a temporary chapel, the Anglian Chapel being eventually completed in 1842. Baud's extravagant ideas and a slow initial uptake of burial plots appears

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
BROMPTON CEMETERY

to have led the directors into financial difficulties. Baud's designs were therefore altered, building specifications were skimped, and serious faults appeared in the catacombs; in 1843 Baud was dismissed.

Meanwhile the principle of commercial cemeteries was being debated by Parliament and in 1850 the Metropolitan Interments Act was passed granting the Government powers to purchase private cemeteries. Although the Act was repealed two years later, Brompton, at the insistence of the directors, was compulsorily purchased by the Board of Health at less than half the price asked for by the company. In 1854 the final meeting of the Board of Directors was held and the company was wound up.

By 1939 155,500 interments had taken place and closure of the cemetery was being considered. During the Second World War bombs damaged part of the western wall catacombs and the north-west area by West Brompton station. In 1970 the Department of the Environment took over the administration and maintenance of the site from the former Ministry of Works and by 1993 care had passed to the Royal Parks Agency. In 1986 the Friends of Brompton Cemetery was formed, aiming, among other things, to create a nature reserve and to provide for quiet recreation. The site remains (1999) open for burials and is administered by the Royal Parks Agency.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Brompton Cemetery is situated in west London, completely surrounded by the residential and commercial developments of West Brompton. Earls Court Exhibition Buildings are 100m to the north-west, South Kensington c 1km to the north-east, Chelsea 1km to the south-east, and Fulham Broadway c 500m to the south-west. The level rectangular site of c 16ha is enclosed within brick walls and is bounded to the north by Old Brompton Road (A3218) and to the east by the backs of houses in Finborough and Ifield Roads. (Originally Honey Lane provided the eastern boundary, this being closed in 1867 and replaced with residential housing.) The backs of houses in Fulham Road (A308) provide the boundary to the south-east. Stamford Bridge (Chelsea Football Club) Stadium looms over the south-west corner of the site while the District Line runs along the west boundary on the bed of the former canal which was drained by 1860.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the site is from Old Brompton Road to the north. A recessed entrance leads through a stone triumphal arch with engaged Doric columns. The brick boundary walls alongside the entrance have large segmental-headed openings filled in with wrought-iron railings. The North Lodge which accompanies the entrance was one of the first buildings finished and was used as a chapel until the Anglian Chapel was completed in 1842. A second entrance which lies to the south-east of the site was completed in 1844. The cemetery company had envisaged a long frontage onto Fulham Road but only a small section of the land was acquired giving the narrow southern entrance seen today. A path leads from Fulham Road into the grounds through impressive wrought-iron gates flanked by iron railings (listed grade II*), past to the south-west the stone-built, single-storey South Lodge which now (1999) houses a visitor centre.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The cemetery chapel (listed grade II*) stands at the south-east end of the central avenue. Built of Bath stone by Benjamin Baud, the octagonal Anglian Chapel has a lead dome and Roman Doric pilaster decoration and is loosely based on St Peter's in Rome. The porch which projects to the north-west has coupled columns. Single-storey wings, originally waiting rooms, project to the east and west and extend to the south. The Chapel is the focal point of an elaborate layout of stone arcading which makes up the Colonnades and the Great Circle. The building is still consecrated but no longer (1999) functions as a chapel; it was last used for its intended purpose in 1952. Today it houses the record room, the Cemetery Superintendent, and administrative staff.

OTHER LAND The path from the main entrance leads south-east onto a small tarmacked forecourt from which the central avenue extends c 400m south to the Chapel. Some 20m south of the North Lodge the path divides: branches, named as carriageways in 1837 (Plan, Baud 1837), run around the perimeter of the site, meeting to the south-east of the Chapel. A grid of footpaths and carriage drives which link with the main avenues is little altered from Baud's original concept. The paths divide the ground into blocks, and major intersections are identified by roundpoints which are marked with either examples of the larger monuments or ornamental planting. Burial practices divided the cemetery into zones, with common graves concentrated to the south-west and private graves to the north-east. An area dedicated to war graves was established to the south-west and a Garden of Remembrance against the west boundary wall. Two areas are reserved for dissenters, one to the north-east and the second to the south-west.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
BROMPTON CEMETERY

The spine of the designed landscape is the Ceremonial Way, comprising the main north-west/south-east axial alignment from North Lodge to the Chapel. The avenue, which runs south-east for c 375m, leads to the Colonnades, Catacombs, Great Circle, and Chapel. The avenue is lined with single lines of the original C19 lime trees.

The Colonnades (listed grade II*), two parallel ranges of arcades c 100m in length, expand to become the Great Circle (92m in diameter), then narrow to the south-east to shorter (c 50m) colonnades which terminate c 15m to the north-west of the Chapel. Designed by Baud and built with round-arched, rusticated sandstone arcades and brick backing, the Colonnades were originally intended for the display of memorial plaques. The arcades break forward at intervals with Doric columns below which are flights of steps leading down to the underlying catacombs. The way into the vaults is guarded by cast-iron gates with symbols of death prominently displayed. At the ends of the Colonnades are steps leading from ground level up to stone pavements which run along the arcades. Baud's design included a Dissenters' and a Roman Catholic Chapel (east and west of the Great Circle) and bell towers surmounting the northern Colonnades; only the western bell tower was built. A circular path inside the Great Circle is cut by the Ceremonial Way and has lesser paths radiating out to steps at the end of the Colonnades and down to the Catacombs. The area within the Circle is now filled with graves and monuments with little space for the shrubs illustrated in the mid C19 (Collinson 1840).

The Chapel is enclosed within a circular path, divided to the south by the perimeter carriage road running north-west/south-east; the south-east semicircle is filled with graves. Some 75m to the east of the Chapel the carriageway divides: one branch runs north-west for c 650m parallel to the north-east boundary wall before turning south-west when after a further c 75m it rejoins the central avenue in front of the main entrance. To the east of the carriageway, between it and the south-east boundary wall, is an elevated footpath which allows views over the rest of the cemetery from between a line of lime trees. The lime trees were presumably planted between 1869 and 1900 in an attempt to screen the houses in Finborough and Ifield Roads. The second branch, to the south-east, leads c 100m from the carriage drive to the southern entrance and the South Lodge, set in the narrow extension to the grounds. The area to the south-east of the Chapel has lost most of the C19 formal planting recorded on the OS 1st edition map of 1867 as lying alongside the carriageway, entrance path, and boundaries. The area is however noted for the concentration of evergreen trees especially in the south-west corner, but even these fail to screen the late C20 structure built as part of Chelsea Football Club's stadium. To the west of the Chapel the perimeter carriage drive leads c 100m to the entrance to the western catacombs built along the boundary wall. The intended raised walk was abandoned when the District Line was made on the bed of the drained Kensington Canal. An early but unrealised plan proposed a water gate in the western wall to allow canal-born funeral cortèges to enter. The perimeter carriage drive continues north-west past the area of common graves; after c 500m the boundary wall turns sharply to the east past an electricity sub-station. The Garden of Remembrance, a triangular area of lawn shaded by the neighbouring buildings, is set between the perimeter drive and the wall. The drive continues for c 100m before turning north-east to link up with the central avenue and the main entrance.

The Cemetery contains a number of fine monuments: for details of these see Meller (1981).

REFERENCES

Collinson, *Historic Times* (1840) J C Loudon, *On laying out, planting and managing cemeteries and improvement of churchyards* (1843) J S Curl, *A Celebration of Death* (1980), pp 240-83 H Meller, *London Cemeteries* (1981), pp 74-88 LCC, *Survey of London XLI*, (1983), pp 246-52 B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3 North West* (1991), p 470 *Brompton Cemetery, Feasibility Study for Landscape Restoration*, (Land Use Consultants 1998)

Maps Critchely, 1829 (in LUC 1998) Baud, *Plan of Brompton Cemetery, 1837* (in LUC 1998)

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1867 2nd edition published 1894

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Brompton Cemetery is designated at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

* One of the earliest cemeteries (1839-42) in London, one of the group of seven great cemeteries laid out beyond the city edges in the 1830s/early 1840s. * It is an outstanding and innovative monumental and formal design for this period by a nationally renowned architect, Benjamin Baud. * Baud designed an exceptional ensemble of buildings within the landscape to evoke great architectural drama including the circular chapel, the colonnades which flank the drive approaching it and open out into The Ring. * J C Loudon, author and landscape designer, was consulted regarding appropriate planting. * The cemetery contains a

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England
Inventory of Great Britain
BROMPTON CEMETERY

large number of C19 monuments reflecting a wide range of local and national interest and social groups, some of the monuments being of exceptional artistic quality. * The site survives complete

Description written: January 1999 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: January 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.