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Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

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

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Name:	BROOKWOOD CEMETERY
County:	Surrey
District:	Woking (District Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.294306 Longitude: -0.63348933 National Grid Reference: SU 95377 55906 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1001265 Date first listed: 25-Jan-1993

Details

The largest cemetery in England, founded in 1852 to house London's dead, serviced by its own railway line and laid out and planted to J C Loudon's principles.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the mid C19 the burial of London's dead had become a serious problem and J C Loudon (1783-1843) and others suggested the establishment of a large cemetery outside the city. In 1852 the London Necropolis and National Mausoleum Company was established and an Act of Parliament was passed which allowed them to purchase 2268 acres (c 945ha) of heathland near Woking from Lord Onslow for the purpose of providing a cemetery. Work began immediately on an area of c 350 acres (145ha) at Brookwood on the western extremity of the parish. There was no settlement at that time in the area, which was on the least desirable land, and it was not until the 1880s that the village of Brookwood developed. The 1852 Act required the Company to enclose the site. At first it was defined by a wooden fence, from 1902 by the 2.5m high brick wall which survives today.

The design was the work of the Company's architect, Henry Abraham. Chapels and stations were designed by Sydney Smirke, who took over as architect in 1853. Smirke was apparently also responsible, with William Broderick Thomas, for the detailed landscaping and extensive evergreen planting scheme which was carried out by the local nurseryman Robert Donald, of Goldsworth, an associate of Loudon (Crosby 1982). Work started immediately and the southern half of the cemetery, known initially as Woking Necropolis, was consecrated on 7 November 1854 by the Bishop of Winchester, the first burial taking place on 13 November. Towards the end of the century, the cemetery was being referred to variously as the Brookwood Necropolis, Brookwood Cemetery, or Necropolis Cemetery, but by the early C20 the name Brookwood Cemetery was established. It was a commercial enterprise, by far the most ambitious of the joint stock cemeteries and one of the last, as public cemeteries funded by public money started to appear soon after its inception. The cemetery was divided by paths and avenues into separate 'grounds' which were allotted to different London parishes, and to various religious denominations, as it catered for all classes and faiths. Accommodating the dead from south and central London, it was initially heavily used, its peak year being 1866 when 3842 burials took place. After 1880, however, as other cemeteries opened nearer London, the numbers began to fall. The rise in popularity of cremation after 1914 further reduced demand, although Woking's own crematorium had been established in 1889.

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By the end of 1939, there had been 201,883 burials; the number is now (2009) over c 233,300. In 1950 an area known as the Glades of Remembrance was opened to receive cremated remains. The site remains (2009) in use as a working cemetery.

In 1917 a large new military cemetery was laid out north of Cemetery Pales, on vacant land on the west boundary of the site; this was later extended to cater for Second World War dead. The Military Cemetery is owned by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which took it over after the Second World War from the Imperial War Graves Commission which acquired the land c.1919. It is now closed for burials and administered from a building situated on the western edge of the site.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Brookwood Cemetery lies c 6km west of Woking town centre, south of the village of Brookwood and to the east of Pirbright village. The irregular-shaped site is relatively flat, rising slightly in the north up to the railway line, and was previously sandy heathland. The northern boundary of the 145ha site is defined by the main London to Basingstoke railway line, from which it is separated by a wire fence, and where the branch line left the track, by a set of iron gates. The Bagshot Road marks the east side, and a fence divides the site from a golf course to the south-east and the remains of the common land to the west. The original intention was that the cemetery would occupy all of the land as far as the Basingstoke Canal, c 250m to the north, but in the event it extended only as far as the LSWR main line. The Company had ambitious plans for altering the road structure and for closing all rights of way across the Common. The only new routes actually constructed however were the road along the southern edge of the heath, from Wych Street to Blackhorse Road (now Hook Heath Road), and the road from Hook Heath Bridge and Mayford (Pond Road). The Knaphill to Pirbright track which cut through the site from north-east to south-west was retained, straightened, walled on either side and named Cemetery Pales. The walls of 1902, capped by tiles and with roughcast panels between brick piers, are still a feature of the site, flanking both Cemetery Pales and most of the west side of Bagshot Road. The Military Cemetery is fenced off from the remainder of the site here registered.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The primary access to the site until the mid C20 was by rail. A branch line was constructed into the site from the nearby LSWR main line in 1854, with two stations within the cemetery itself. A small station was established on the main line at Brookwood in 1864, just to the east of Necropolis Junction, the land having been donated by the Necropolis Company. A special station was built at Westminster Bridge Road, near Waterloo, to handle the shipment of corpses and the funeral parties. The trains could carry up to 67 (in 1864) funeral parties per journey, and did one return trip daily. This service continued until 1941, although by then it was running only twice per week, at which date the train and station were destroyed during an air raid. The track was dismantled after the war.

Today (1999) the main vehicular entrances to both the northern and southern sections of the cemetery are located c 400m south-west along Cemetery Pales from its junction with Bagshot Road. The entrances are at the point where the railway line crossed Cemetery Pales into the southern section. The north entrance has a semicircular lay-by, on the east side of which is a two-storey building built by Smirke as a parsonage house in 1854, and from c.1885 used as the cemetery superintendent's office. It was sold as a private residence after 1976. A large headquarters office block has recently (1999) been constructed to the east. The southern entrance is less well defined, but an L-shaped single-storey building of c.1905 on the east, was then the stone masons' yard. Further south-west along Cemetery Pales a semi-circular entrance (mid C20), with a house to the west, leads into the Glades of Remembrance. A further gate into the site on the west side of Bagshot Road, opposite Worplesdon Hill, is no longer (1999) in use.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The most notable building within the cemetery is the American Military Chapel (listed grade II) in the north-west corner of the site. Completed, like the surrounding cemetery, in 1929 in Greek Revival style to a design by Egerton Swartwout, John R. Pope and Harry B. Cresswell, the square chapel has a portico of fluted Doric columns reached by a flight of five steps. The chapel is approached via a long lawn to the south with a flagpole and entrance walls constructed in 1930 (all listed grade II).

A number of chapels are located around the cemetery but most are now derelict. They include a Roman Catholic one (completed 1899, by C.B. Tubbs) in the northern half c 250m north-west of the main entrance, and two Anglican ones to the west of the former South Station, c 450m south-east of the main entrance. The Anglican and Nonconformist chapels were designed by

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Sydney Smirke; the former is now owned by the St. Edward Brotherhood. The second and larger Anglican chapel nearby (now the St. Edward the Martyr Orthodox Church) was designed by Cyril Tubbs and Arthur Messer and completed c.1909.

To the north and south respectively of the main entrances on Cemetery Pales lay the Superintendent's Office and the stone masons' yard.

The cemetery was served by two stations, both designed by Sydney Smirke. These were located c 200m north-north-west and c 450m south-east of the main entrances on Cemetery Pales. Both stations were built of white-painted wood on a courtyard plan; one was demolished in the 1950s and the other was destroyed by vandals in 1972.

OTHER LAND Brookwood Cemetery, which is laid out partly on a grid pattern and partly with a series of curving concentric circles, is split into two unequal halves by Cemetery Pales, the public road which crosses the site from south-west to north-east. To the north are the Catholic (1859), Parsee (1862), Swedish (1857), Foresters' (1863), Oddfellows' (1859), Actors' (1858), Corps of Commissionaires' (c.1860) and Latvian (1952) burial grounds. There are several Muslim community grounds in this area as well. To the south is the Anglican section. The smaller, northern half is roughly triangular in shape and was designated as the Dissenters or unconsecrated ground when the site was first laid out. It is more open than the southern half, with less evergreen planting. In the north-west corner of the site lies the Parsee chapel which opened in 1862 and is unique in Britain (Cemetery leaflet). This area contains some of the finest mausolea on the site. The neighbouring Muslim grounds were opened in the 1890s and were the first in Britain (ibid).

The Military Cemetery of c 35 acres (14.5ha) lies to the south of the Parsee chapel. This was created in 1917 on a vacant area of land that has only partially been laid out in the original scheme. The military section (the largest war cemetery in the UK with the remains of c.7,000 personnel from both world wars) is sub-divided into several national zones, including British, Canadian, Turkish, Dutch, Belgian, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Free French, and American (which last is maintained by the American Battle Monuments Commission and contains 468 burials). The area is dominated by the American Memorial Chapel with its long lawns bordered by evergreens. Also of note is Beaver House, the reception and records building in the Canadian Military Cemetery, built to the designs of Sir Edward Maufe (1883-1974) in 1947, and memorials to war dead who have no known grave. To the south of the Military Cemetery is a private enclosure which surrounds a residential property, The Cottage. The western half of the northern area of the main cemetery is divided by Long Avenue, which runs parallel to Cemetery Pales and is flanked by mature Wellingtonia. The principal Roman Catholic burial ground lies immediately to the west of the site of the North Station on the old railway line. Approached off Long Avenue, the chapel stands within the oval Oak Avenue. The route of the railway line, flanked by a Wellingtonia avenue, still survives beside the platform which gave access to the Refreshment Rooms. A perimeter path, Eastern Avenue, encircles the area to the east of the station, with the Nonconformist chapel at the west end.

The Superintendent's Office lay to the north of the main entrance, with an extensive range of glasshouses behind (Cemetery plan). Opposite the Superintendent's Office, on the south side of Cemetery Pales, lay the stone masons' yard. The railway line, now marked by an avenue of Redwoods, curved south-east, then east through the southern half of the site, terminating at South Station close to Bagshot Road. To the south was a formal garden and to the north, a hemispherical lawn protected by a crescent of shrubbery. Under the original scheme the southern area was laid out as consecrated ground; in the 1980s the area around the entrance was laid out as a burial ground by the Ismaili community. There is also a recent (1999) enclosure for Serbian burials. The area north of the branch line was laid out informally with tree-lined paths leading through glades planted with evergreen trees and shrubs.

Immediately to the west of the station lay a small Anglican chapel, with a second, larger one further to the west. A path leads from the chapels to the main area of the cemetery which lies to the south. This is laid out with a series of roughly concentric paths, within which is a columbarium. Around the outer ring, St George's Avenue, lies a series of enclosures (which also occur elsewhere in the cemetery) set aside for particular London parishes. In one of the southern ones lies a later (post 1870s) chapel. A series of avenues radiate out from The Ring in the centre, including St Mark's Avenue which extends south-west roughly parallel to Cemetery Pales road. This cuts the southern section of the cemetery into two, roughly equal parts. Off the north side of the south-west end of the avenue is a further mid C19 Anglican chapel. The area north of the avenue is laid out with an

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extensive grid pattern. To the north- west lies the fenced enclosure known as the Glades of Remembrance, opened in 1950 to receive cremated remains. The rest of the southern half of the cemetery was never formally laid out and remains as heathland sprinkled sparsely with gravestones, with a few tracks through it.

Brookwood Cemetery reflects the development of the idea of 'appropriate' planting for cemeteries as expounded by J C Loudon in 1843. This included the use of dark-foliaged evergreens, weeping and fastigate trees, and a move away from the flower beds and 'pleasure-ground' type planting seen in some of the earlier public cemeteries. The site is planted with a huge number of trees, including Redwoods, Monkey Puzzles, Wellingtonia and a wide variety of conifers. The original planting has been supplemented by individual trees and shrubs planted by particular families. Later, parts of the cemetery were planted more in the style of the American rural cemetery movement with less emphasis on formal landscaping and greater use of deciduous trees and flower beds. The Glades of Remembrance saw the introduction of the 'forest cemetery', with low density burials in a mature woodland setting, while the military cemeteries introduced the concept of the lawn cemetery. Pevsner described the site as being 'A sombre complex landscape unlike anything anywhere else in the country' (Pevsner et al 1971). Native heathland plants still predominate, and some parts of the southern area have reverted to woodland.

REFERENCES

J C Loudon, *On the Laying out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries and on the Improvement of Churchyards* (1843) Illustrated London News (1852) G Dewar, *Dent's County Guides: Surrey* (1901), p 251 N Pevsner et al, *The Buildings of England: Surrey* (1971), pp 66, 120 G Payne, *Surrey Industrial Archaeology* (1977), pp 18-19 A Crosby, *A History of Woking* (1982), pp 104-7 *Garden History* 11, no 2 (1983), pp 133-56 C Brooks, *Mortal Remains* (1989), pp 47, 58-9, 81 E Willson, *Nurserymen to the World* (1989), p 39 Surrey Industrial History Group, *Newsletter* 77, (1994), pp 11-12 Brookwood Cemetery, Information leaflet, (nd)

Maps Cemetery plan, c 1920

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1870-1, published 1873 2nd edition published 1897 3rd edition published 1920 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1869-71, published 1873 3rd edition published 1915-16

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Brookwood Cemetery is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade I for the following principal reasons: * An early High Victorian cemetery (1852-54) intended to serve, but detached from, the metropolis * Its design harks back to the designs of the commercial cemetery of the 1830s and 1840s and represents the apogee of this type. * Renowned designers created the most extensive layout in Britain, using formal and informal features in a unique manner. They included the architect Sidney Smirke who designed the picturesque chapels and stations, and the landscape designer Robert Marnock who laid out the site apparently following the cemetery designer and author J.C. Loudon's principles and planted by the local nurseryman Robert Donald. Other notable architects contributed later structures including Cyril Tubbs, the practice Tubbs & Messer & Edward Maufe. * The unique integral railway, which was the principal method which served the site, largely influenced the design of the site and allowed the choice of its position remote from the population which it served, adjacent to a main railway line. * An extensive and internationally notable variety of social and religious interest is expressed in the interments with an extensive pauper ground (largely unmarked by monuments) and an artistically notable collection of monuments including many late C19 and C20 mausolea. * Extensive evergreen planting following Loudon's principles, including perhaps the most extensive group of C19 Wellingtonias in the country, planted in lines, also in single and double avenues and as specimens and groups. * Extensive and high quality C20 military section unique on this scale in Britain and with a unique variety of national sections represented. * The third major section is the Glades of Remembrance (1945-50s) designed by the notable designer Edward White who specialised in such sites. * The cemetery layout survives relatively intact despite the loss of a chapel and the stations and permanent way (although the course of the railway survives open) and some neglect.

Description written: January 2000 Register Inspector: BJL Edited: July 2002 Upgraded: 2009

Legal

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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.