

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY

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Name:	GERMAN MILITARY CEMETERY
County:	Staffordshire
District:	Stafford (District Authority)
Parish:	Brocton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 52.739854 Longitude: -2.0224562 National Grid Reference: SJ 98581 15803 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1001674 Date first listed: 17-Sep-2002

Details

A mid C20 military cemetery laid out to the design of Diez Brandi with buildings designed by Harold Doffmann.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

On 16 October 1959, a treaty was concluded between the British government and the government of the Federal Republic of Germany which provided for the establishment of a cemetery to which the remains of most of the German nationals who died in Britain during the First and Second World Wars would be transferred. The site selected for the new cemetery was c 400m north-east of an existing Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery which contains the bodies of 285 German dead from both World Wars, while the heathland and pine forests of Cannock Chase may have been felt to be reminiscent of the German landscape. The site of the cemetery was formally ceded by Staffordshire County Council to the Federal Republic of Germany. The new Military Cemetery was designed by Diez Brandi on behalf of the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfursorge (German War Graves Commission), with buildings designed by the Stafford architect Harold Doffmann (Pevsner 1974). The bodies of 4939 war dead were transferred to Cannock, where they were interred in identically marked graves set in a shallow wooded valley. The majority of those commemorated in the cemetery died in Prisoner of War or internment camps, while the crew members of four Zeppelins shot down over England during the First World War, the crew of the only First World War aircraft shot down over England, airmen from the Second World War, and the bodies of sailors washed ashore on English coasts were also re-interred in the new cemetery. The cemetery was opened to the public on 10 June 1967 (Information sheet).

The German Military Cemetery continues (2003) to be maintained by the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfursorge, with day-to-day management being vested in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The German Military Cemetery is situated in Cannock Chase Forest, to the north of a track which leads east from a minor road, Broadhurst Green, c 180m north-north-west of the junction of Broadhurst Green and another minor road, Broadhurst Green Road. The c 2.75ha site is enclosed by mid C20 metal fences which are set at an angle above ha-ha-type ditches, thus allowing the landscape within the cemetery to merge seamlessly with that of the surrounding forest. The cemetery occupies a shallow valley which extends from north-west to east, with the buildings

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grouped to the south of the declivity. There are significant views east and north-east from the cemetery to the surrounding forest and heathland.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The German Military Cemetery is approached from the track extending north-east from Broadhurst Green, the entrance situated c 450m north-east of the junction of the track and Broadhurst Green. An area of car park is located to the north of the track c 20m west of the entrance to the cemetery. This entrance comprises a broad stone-flagged walk leading c 10m north from the track, with a deep border of mixed shrubs and ground-cover plants to the west screening the blind brick wall of the caretaker's house, and an area of mown grass and a group of specimen silver birch to the east. The flagged walk leads directly to a simple, stone-framed portal set in the otherwise blind south facade of the cemetery buildings. A simple inscribed stone c 5m south of the cemetery buildings and immediately east of the flagged walk proclaims that this cemetery contains the bodies of Germans who died in England during the First and Second World Wars.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING The complex of structures associated with the cemetery, comprising the entrance hall, Record Room, Hall of Honour, office and caretaker's house, are situated to the south of the shallow valley which extends through the site. The buildings are constructed in hand-made buff-coloured brick and comprise a single-storey with flat roofs concealed behind a parapet. Double timber doors set in the entrance portal recall the entrance to a mausoleum, and lead to an entrance hall which leads west to the office and caretaker's house, and east to the Record Room. This simply furnished room formerly contained the burial records (removed for security), which could be related to the surviving grave-plan of the cemetery which is etched on a panel of glass. From the Record Room, steps descend north to a covered paved walk. Flanked by low shrubs and enclosed to the east and west by brick walls, the covered walk frames a vista from the Record Room to the Hall of Honour, while a subsidiary walk leads west from the covered walk to a doorway which allows access to a terrace on the south side of the cemetery. The Hall of Honour comprises a square, brick-walled enclosure which is paved with hexagonal tiles. With the exception of a narrow outer margin which is left open to the sky, the majority of this enclosure is covered by a concrete vaulted roof supported on square-section concrete pillars. At the centre of this covered area, a recumbent bronze sculpture, *The Fallen Warrior* (Evang Weinner), is aligned from west to east on a low stone plinth. A doorway in the west wall of the enclosure allows access to the cemetery terrace, while a doorway set opposite in the east wall allows access to a smaller terrace to the east of the Hall of Honour. The powerfully simple design of the Hall of Honour provides an evocative link with, and contrast to, the concept of Valhalla in German mythology.

The cemetery buildings were designed in 1959-67 by the Stafford architect, Harold Doffmann for the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfursorge as an integral part of the development of the cemetery.

OTHER LAND The cemetery occupies a shallow valley which extends from north-west to east through the site. The dead of the First World War are buried on the south-west-facing slope of the valley, while those who died in the Second World War are buried on the slope facing north-north-east and on level ground to the west of the valley.

From the Hall of Honour a doorway in the east wall leads to a small terrace which is enclosed by low brick parapets affording views across the surrounding woodland. The terrace is laid to lawn, with four horizontal stone memorials recording the names of the crews of four Zeppelins shot down over England during the First World War. A further stone set against the east wall of the terrace bears an inscription in German and English:

Side by side with their comrades, the crews of four zeppelins shot down over England during the First World War found their eternal resting place. The fallen were brought here from their original burial places at Potters Bar, Great Burstead and Therberton. The members of each crew are buried in caskets in one grave.

A flight of stone steps descends west from this terrace, behind the Hall of Honour, to reach the main cemetery.

The doorway opposite that leading to the Zeppelin Terrace leads from the Hall of Honour to a terrace paved with stone sets at the southern corner of the cemetery. This terrace is also approached by a doorway leading from the covered walk south of the Hall of Honour. A group of mature silver birches stands towards the centre of the terrace, while a broad flight of stone steps descends north to reach the level of the cemetery itself. Below the steps, a broad walk, paved with widely spaced stone flags with grass growing between, leads east to the steps which ascend to the Zeppelin Terrace, and west to the Second World War burial areas north-west of the cemetery buildings. Further multi-stemmed silver birches grow at irregular intervals within

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the walk. Opposite the steps, a simple stone records, in German and English, that the cemetery contains the bodies of 2143 Germans who died during the First World War, and 2796 who died during the Second World War. From the foot of the steps, a further walk paved with widely spaced stone flags follows a gently curving course north across the valley to reach a stark, monumental concrete cross which stands immediately below the south-west-facing slope on the far side of the valley. The cross forms the visual focal point of the cemetery design.

The burial plots on each side of the valley are similarly arranged, with simple rectangular headstones of slate-coloured Belgian granite placed at regular intervals in narrow beds of clipped heather which extend in parallel rows from south-west to north-east. Typically each headstone records, where known, the names and dates of birth and death of two servicemen, prisoners of war, or internees. Both faces of the stone are inscribed, and each stone thus commemorates four dead. The rows of graves are separated by mown grass paths.

The floor of the valley and the head of the valley adjacent to the north-west boundary of the cemetery remain open areas of mown grass with scattered multi-stemmed silver birch and specimen Scots pines. Similar trees grow throughout the site, with trees and groups of rhododendrons adjacent to the boundaries providing a visual link between the cemetery and the surrounding forest. A group of five immature oak trees c 120m north-east of the cemetery buildings commemorates twenty-five years of friendship between Staffordshire and Bremen (inscription); an adjacent stone unveiled by HRH the Duke of Kent in July 1987 is carved with a commemorative inscription.

The cemetery was laid out to the design of Diez Brandt from 1959. The landscape scheme is both powerful and subtle in its apparent simplicity. The planting scheme, relying principally on heather, multi-stemmed silver birch, and Scots pines underplanted with spring bulbs, ensures the continuity of the cemetery with its surroundings. The site today (2003) remains substantially unchanged since it was first laid out, with the exception of the increased width of the grass walks separating the rows of graves (Mr Lee pers comm, 2003).

REFERENCES

N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Staffordshire* (1974), p 94 Cannock Chase, Grossbritannien, German guide leaflet, (1993) Cannock Chase final resting place for nearly 5000 German dead of both World Wars, Information sheet, (nd)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION The German Military Cemetery is designated at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

* The German Military Cemetery is a rare and important example of a post-War cemetery, opened in 1967. * The cemetery has an accomplished and highly effective landscape design, deliberately recalling the forests and heaths of northern Europe. * The structures associated with the cemetery are of a very high standard and complement the landscape design. * The cemetery is the resting place of nearly 5,000 Germans who died in England during the First and Second World Wars. * The cemetery survives in excellent condition.

Description written: March 2003 Register Inspector: JML Edited: April 2004 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.