

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

Compton Cemetery (also known as Watts Cemetery)

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Name:	Compton Cemetery (also known as Watts Cemetery)
County:	Surrey
District:	Guildford (District Authority)
Parish:	Compton
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.217582 Longitude: -0.63183855 National Grid Reference: SU9565147376 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II* List Entry Number: 1417498 Date first listed: 05-Mar-2014 Statutory Address 1: Down Lane, Compton, Guildford, Surrey

Historique de la conservation

The issue of a new cemetery for Compton had already been discussed at a meeting in the parish church of St Nicholas in 1888, when it was noted that the old graveyard was almost full to capacity. The Local Authority Act of 1894 gave local parishes responsibility for creating (and maintaining) cemeteries and at a meeting of Compton Parish Council in 1894 it was proposed that it should purchase land from the Loseley estate for a new cemetery. It was agreed that a sum not exceeding £300 should be raised from the poor rate of the parish for the purpose of 'providing and laying out a Burial ground and building the necessary Chapel or Chapels thereon'.

The artist George Frederick Watts (1817-1904) and his wife Mary (1849-1938) moved to Compton in 1891 and commissioned architect Sir Ernest George (1839-1922) to build them a house, which they named Limnerslease (listed Grade II). George Watts became, by the last two decades of his long life, one of the most famous painters in the world holding the newly instituted Order of Merit. He was a friend of John Ruskin. The Wattses were followers of the Home Arts and Industries Association, raising funds to train handicraft teachers inspired by Ruskin's social ideas and alternatives to mass-production; Mary wanted to start her own Home Arts class to train local uneducated artisans to professional standards. A seam of Gault clay was found in the grounds of Limnerslease and Mary set up clay modelling evening classes in 1895 where over 40 volunteers from the village began to model in terracotta. Mary wrote to the parish council in 1895 offering to build a cemetery chapel, with her husband's financial help and inspiration.

The parish council minutes offer a chronology of the cemetery's development. In March 1895 the ground was staked out and iron fencing, manufactured by the Wolverhampton firm Bayliss Jones and Bayliss, was ordered. In March 1896 Mary was given permission 'to sink a well for the purposes of the proposed Chapel Buildings' and a large elm was taken down to 'make room for the Chapel'. The Watts Memorial Chapel was designed by Mary and built in 1896 with terracotta decoration by Mary and the volunteers of the village. Mary's craftsmanship is evident in her chapel decoration and her influence and artistic ideals are also reflected in her design of the other cemetery buildings such as the cloister, added in 1907, and the many ornate terracotta graves. Mary's involvement in the layout of the cemetery is confirmed by the fact that, from September 1896, she sat on the

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parish council sub-committee responsible for the burial ground, along with the rector of St Nicholas, H H Gillett, the Loseley landowner William More-Molyneux and Mr Andrews, estate steward at Limnerslease. In 1897 a Mr J Lake was instructed to prepare a plan of the cemetery showing the number of grave spaces on the same scale as that of Shalford, a nearby village. In the spring of 1898 the sub-committee oversaw the forming of paths 'for the division of the grounds'. Mary planted Irish yews flanking the paths; a photograph of c 1900 shows the tiny yews recently planted. The chapel and burial ground were consecrated by the Bishop of Winchester on 1 July 1898.

Mary's class exhibited at the Home Arts exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall from 1896 and they turned professional becoming the Compton Potters' Arts Guild. They made terracotta gravestones and garden ornaments and a new pottery was built. Her training of the artisans of the Potters' Arts Guild follows her Arts and Crafts ideals. The Guild went on to win medals at the Chelsea Flower Show and was recommended to Edwin Lutyens by Gertrude Jekyll (also based nearby in Surrey) to design clay pots for Queen Mary's Dolls House. Mary Watts engaged a Compton architect Christopher Turnor to design the Watts Gallery (listed Grade II* and situated some 350m east of the cemetery) as a permanent space for George's paintings and a hostel for apprentice potters which was opened in 1904. She published a study of his life and works and decorated another chapel at the Cambridge Military Hospital at Aldershot. The pottery closed in 1956.

The cemetery was extended in 1950 with the addition of an acre of land 'adjoining on the Southern boundary of the existing Cemetery'. This land was consecrated by the Bishop of Guildford on 28 January 1950 and layout plans for the extension were prepared by the Council Architect Mr F J Hodgson in 1952. In 1959 a garden of remembrance was introduced to accommodate those who favoured cremation. The cemetery is still owned and managed by the parish council.

Details

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Compton Cemetery is situated on the north-east side of Compton village on the north-west side of Budburrow Hill. The c 0.75ha site is formed of two terraced strip fields, remnants of the medieval field system.

The site is bounded by modern low red-brick walls topped with railings to the north; these may have replaced the panels referred to in the parish council minutes of 1957. The original iron railings bound the site to the west but to the east side they have been replaced by modern chain link fencing.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The cemetery is approached from Down Lane and the entrance is marked by a lychgate erected by the Watts in 1897. The lychgate is of oak with decorative ironwork, a tiled roof and brick floor.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS The Watts Memorial Chapel of 1896 is listed Grade I. Built and decorated by Mary Watts and the villagers of Compton, highly original in concept, form and decoration, the chapel is a fine example of an Arts and Crafts building. Of red brick with exterior terracotta friezes and mouldings combining intertwining Celtic ribbonwork and Art Nouveau tendrils, and the interior richly painted gesso panels, the chapel has a vivid dramatic decoration symbolising her husband's concept of the House of Life. The altar is inscribed 'This chapel designed by Mrs Watts, wife of G F Watts OMRA, was built in 1896 by her and the people of Compton. It is dedicated to the memory of all who rest near its walls'.

Mary also designed a red brick Italianate Watts Memorial Cloister (listed Grade II) which was completed in 1907 on the top of the hill to house a memorial to her husband. It has been likened to the Loggia in Postman's Park, a small memorial garden in the City of London, which was designed by George Watts in 1887. Unlike the shelter at Postman's Park, however, the cloister is both an ambulatory and a place of contemplation, with views south-west across to Compton village and the surrounding countryside. Its style is Italianate and reminiscent of Catholic processional covered ways.

CEMETERY Compton Cemetery is an exceptional and unusual site comprising an holistic scheme of buildings and gravestones of notable quality in the Arts and Crafts style. The cemetery conveys a freedom of spirit and a distinct character largely the conception of its creator Mary Watts and the villagers of Compton. In addition to the principal buildings are an imposing and extensive group of terracotta graves (two Grade-II listed) and a well head (listed Grade II) many made by the Potters' Arts Guild of Compton.

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The cemetery is divided by Bargate stone paths which lead up the slope. The main north-south path curves around the site up to the chapel and then continues onto the cloister. Another path runs up the east side of the site to the cloister. The Bargate stones are laid flat except on the slope where they are pitched in order to prevent slipping. A sinuous east-west Bargate stone path joins the north-south ones to aid circulation around the site. Another Bargate stone path leads to the cemetery lodge (outside the registered area), and is probably a more recent addition, as is a gravel path joining the two main Bargate stone north-south paths. At the top of the hill the 1950s extension is clearly marked as the Bargate stone path abuts a gravel path and this continues south down the hill slope.

Many Potters' Arts Guild terracotta crosses, headstones and kerbstones can be seen in the cemetery reflecting Mary's artistic influence. Two are listed Grade II: one to Margery Gillett, wife of H H Gillett, rector of Compton; and one to Julian Russell Sturgis (1848-1904), novelist. Mary and George Watts' graves are included in the cloister List entry. Other monuments made in Mary's Potters' Arts Guild in the cemetery include that to H H Gillett (1836-1915), who was rector when the cemetery was conceived. The ashes of the writer Aldous Leonard Huxley (1894-1963), who wrote 'Brave New World' in 1932, are interred in his parents' grave. An ornamented terracotta well head (listed Grade II) was designed by Mary in 1906 and is inscribed on the top sides with 'the lord god planted a garden eastward in eden and a river went out of eden to water the garden'. The ornamental cast-iron bucket apparatus stands next to the well as seen in a photograph of 1906. The well is surrounded by an arc-shaped yew hedge.

The use of local materials, Bargate stone and clay, lend unity to the design as does the use of red bricks and tiles made locally in Guildford and Puttenham, ironwork by the Compton blacksmith, and Mary's Potters' Arts Guild terracotta decorations and gravestones, all of which follow Arts and Crafts ideals and traditions.

Particular attention was given to appropriate planting such as dark-foliaged evergreens including cedar and yew to evoke mourning and contemplation; the fastigate Irish yews Mary also planted for practical reasons along the paths as they do not spread out much as they grow. An English rural churchyard with meandering paths and native trees is invoked by the large deciduous trees which lend Compton the air of an ancient churchyard. Two large cedar of Lebanon trees stand by the north boundary wall and there are several mature beech trees on the east boundary and one stands beside the chapel. Elsewhere the planting is mainly of smaller semi-mature holly and yew with some cherry trees.

With serpentine paths, the hillside site offers a variety of views and a quietness of tone is invoked by the overall conception of the design and with the cemetery on its own in rural surroundings.

Summary

An Arts and Crafts cemetery laid out by Compton Parish Council and Mary Watts in 1895-8 and extended in 1950-2.

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.

Reasons for Designation

Compton Cemetery (also known as Watts Cemetery), laid out by Compton Parish Council and Mary Watts in 1895-8, is registered at Grade II* for the following principal reasons: * Design quality: an innovative and visionary cemetery for this period with the dramatic use of the hillside site with its focal point, the Watts Memorial Chapel (listed Grade I), an outstanding example of the work of Mary Watts; * Architectural quality: as an ensemble of cemetery buildings of exceptional architectural quality including the chapel, cloister (listed Grade II), terracotta graves (two listed Grade II) and well head (listed Grade II);

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* Notable people: because of the involvement of designer Mary Watts with the financial help and inspiration of her husband, George Watts, the eminent painter, in the cemetery design; * Intactness: the layout survives intact with a variety of quality elements, such as the Bargate stone paths and lychgate, designed and produced to form an integral part of the overall scheme; * Distinctive character: the employment of local materials, local craftspeople and Mary's Potters' Arts Guild (which was to become of national repute) give the cemetery its distinctive character in an Arts and Crafts tradition; * Landscaping: the overall effect of the landscaping using evergreens such as cedars and yews to create ornamentation and structural planting appropriate for the cemetery; * Group value: the cemetery and its chapel are an important part of the Arts and Crafts assets and associations at Compton including the famous Grade-II* listed Watts Gallery.

Bibliographie

Books and journals

Gould, VF, Watts Chapel; an Arts and Crafts Memorial, (1993)