

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY

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Name: AMERICAN MILITARY CEMETERY

County: Cambridgeshire

District: South Cambridgeshire (District Authority)

Parish: Madingley

label.localisation: Latitude: 52.216989
Longitude: 0.055288082
National Grid Reference: TL 40507 59632
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: I
List Entry Number: 1001573
Date first listed: 03-Jan-2002

Details

The only permanent American Second World War cemetery in Britain, designed by Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean, Architects and Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects and dedicated in 1956.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The American Cemetery is one of twenty four permanent American Second World War cemeteries erected on foreign soil by the American Battle Monuments Commission. It was established as a temporary military cemetery in 1943 on land donated in perpetuity by the University of Cambridge and was later selected as the only permanent American Second World War military cemetery in the British Isles. Following this decision, the architects Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean of Boston, Massachusetts, were commissioned to design the built elements of the cemetery, which were set within a landscape laid out by Olmsted Brothers, landscape architects of Brookline, Massachusetts. The site was dedicated in July 1956 and some forty-two per cent of those temporarily interred in England and Northern Ireland were reinterred at Cambridge. The cemetery holds many of the American servicemen and women who were crew members of American aircraft during the Second World War, together with those who died in the invasions of North Africa and France, the remains of in all 3812 individuals. The site remains (2001) in the ownership and management of the American Battle Monuments Commission.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The American Cemetery is situated c 8km to the west of Cambridge, on the north side of the A1303 St Neots Road. The c 12.5ha site is bounded to the north by Cambridge Road, which links the villages of Coton and Madingley, to the west by a track beside Madingley Wood, to the east by farmland, and to the south by the A1303. The cemetery occupies a rural position on the north slope of a hill which gives extensive views northwards over the surrounding countryside and towards Ely cathedral, some 22km away, which can be seen on clear days.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the cemetery lies in the south-west corner, beside the Visitors' Centre which is set back off the A1303. Beside the main gates, a vehicular access drive leads into the boundary woodland to a parking area. In the north-west corner of the site stand the lower gates to the cemetery, reached from Cambridge Road. From these gates, steps lead up to the north end of the West Mall.

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PRINCIPAL BUILDING The main building on the site is the tall, rectangular Memorial chapel and museum room (listed grade II*) situated towards the south-east corner of the site. It is constructed of Portland stone of extremely high quality and has simple lines. The tall, teakwood doorway faces west over the reflective pool gardens (also listed grade II*) and has a gable above with a commemorative inscription. The north wall has five projecting stone piers the full height of the wall, each inscribed with one of the years from 1941 to 1945, while the south wall carries an inscription and map of the United Kingdom. The Memorial and its facing garden were designed by Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean between 1952 and 1954, using Hughes and Bicknell of Cambridge as the local architects executing the project.

OTHER LAND The main entrance beside the Visitors' Centre in the south-west corner gives onto a wide gravel walk leading to the c 30m tall flagpole, surrounded by clipped hedges. The flagpole stands on a raised platform with an inscription around its base and forms the termination of the Mall and Memorial to the east, and the West Mall to the north. From the platform there are good views north-east over the field of headstones. The West Mall is a wide tarmac walk connecting the flagpole to a curved viewing bastion in the north-west corner of the site. It is lined by an avenue of *Sophora japonica*, the Japanese pagoda tree, and is bordered to the west by an oak grove which runs along the western boundary of the cemetery, screening service buildings and offices.

On the main axis to the east of the flagpole lies the Court of Honour. This area is reached by wide steps which descend from the platform into a garden area enclosed by low Portland stone walls to the north and the high Wall of the Missing to the south, which is inscribed with the names of those lost while serving in Britain during the Second World War. Between the south side of the Wall and the south boundary is an oak grove which contains areas for parking. Within the garden itself are three long rectangular reflection pools, bordered by rose beds, which stretch between the flagpole area and the Memorial at the eastern end; along the low northern boundary wall is a line of hawthorns. The Memorial chapel looks west and behind it, below its eastern facade, is a small enclosed garden area.

Between the West Mall and the Memorial chapel are the plots of headstones, which stretch between the two in a wide arc. From the northern end of the West Mall a gravel path runs east and south-east to the Memorial. It follows the curve of the boundary wall, along which is planted a deep shrub border. Below the boundary wall, to the north and north-east is a plot of land at a lower level, currently (2001) laid to grass with some shrub areas, which is used for additional parking. The grave plots are arranged in parallel, curved lines interspersed by gravel paths lined with box hedges occupying the sector between the two.

REFERENCES

Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial, Visitors' handbook, (American Battle Monuments Commission nd) N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Cambridgeshire* (1970), p 437

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

* A unique example of a Post-War Military Cemetery (mid-1950s) of the highest design quality and social importance. * It commemorates the lives of all US servicemen who perished in Britain in World War II and contains the remains of over 3800 war dead. * The landscape design was by Olmsted Brothers, an internationally renowned landscape firm which created a striking and moving formal design applied to a commemorative landscape, dominated by monumental architecture including a chapel, wall of remembrance and flagpole. * The uniformity of the individual headstones and their formal arrangement in a regular pattern across a large area set on lawn contributes an exceptional character, equalled in England by the military cemetery at Brookwood. * The cemetery survives in excellent condition with components including a variety of high quality structures and a memorial chapel.

Description written: October 2001 Amended: March 2002 Register Inspector: EMP Edited: September 2002 Upgraded: November 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.