

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

READING CEMETERY

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

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Name:	READING CEMETERY
District:	Reading (Unitary Authority)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.453102 Longitude: -0.94555291 National Grid Reference: SU 73365 73207 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001641 Date first listed: 14-Aug-2002

Details

A mid-C19 cemetery, laid out 1842-3 in formal and informal style for a private cemetery company, with planting by nurserymen Sutton and Son of Reading.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

An Act for 'establishing a General Cemetery for the Interment of the Dead in the Parish of Sonning' was passed in 1842, resulting from the formation of the Reading Cemetery Company earlier that year. The cemetery was required to meet the needs of the town due to the economic prosperity which was engulfing it: Reading was expanding steadily as a result of the newly arrived Great Western Railway, its population of 19,000 having more than doubled since 1800 (Brooks 1989). Land for the purpose was bought from Francis Cholmeley Esq. The Act described the boundary to the north as London Road, that to the south as Wokingham Road, and the land to the east as in the ownership of Cholmeley, the boundaries to be enclosed by walls or fences. The consecrated ground was to be separated from the unconsecrated, and chapels were to be provided for the Established Church and for Dissenters, with part of both sections put aside for burials of the poor by their parishes (Act, 1842).

As a result, in 1842-3 Reading Cemetery was laid out over c 4ha at the east edge of the town. The principal architect was Nathaniel Briant (1813-49) who worked in Reading during the 1830s and early 1840s (Berkshire Chronicle, 5 February 1842; Gold 1999). Briant seems to have been responsible for the layout of the grounds which, according to the Chronicle, were intended 'to be ornamentally laid out and planted [to] afford to survivors a solemn and pleasing remembrance of their departed friends'. The Reading Mercury in October 1842 reported the laying of the foundation stone for the 'Episcopal [Anglican] Chapel', the architect of which was given as William Brown (1809-65, fl 1840s-60s), a Reading architect. The Mercury also reported that Messrs Sutton and Son, of the Market-place, Reading, had received 'the contract for planting the ground with suitable shrubs and plants'. Suttons was a well-known seed and nursery firm, established in 1806 by John Sutton (1777-1863) whose extensive trial grounds lay close by to the north of the cemetery (Harvey, 1974; OS 1883). The cemetery was laid out contemporaneously with various items published by J C Loudon on cemetery design and planting, including his detailed and influential *On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries* (1843).

By the 1870s (OS 25") the cemetery was extensively planted with trees, a significant proportion being coniferous, with a specimen planted at the centre of each of the roundels which punctuate the path system. By the 1890s (OS 25") the cemetery

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had been extended to the east by a further 1ha, apparently in conjunction with the development of terraced houses in St Bartholomew's Road which enclosed the extension to the north, east, and south.

The Cemetery Company continued to operate the site until c 1950s, when it passed to Reading Council, in whose ownership it remains (2002). There are now no new grave spaces available, but burials occasionally take place in existing family plots.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Reading Cemetery lies to the east of the centre of Reading, occupying level land to the west of St Bartholomew's Road, beyond which, to the east, lies the late-C19 Palmer Park. The c 5.5ha triangular site is enclosed on two sides by mid-C19 stone walls, separating it from London Road to the north, and Wokingham Road to the south. London Road was formerly the main road from London to Wales. The walls drop down to about half their height at regular intervals, these sections having formerly supported iron railings to afford views into and out of the cemetery. To the east the site is bounded by a red-brick wall, dating from the late C19 extension of the cemetery and erection of the houses in St Bartholomew's Road. The setting is largely urban, with Palmer Park to the east. The late-C19 area of artisans' housing immediately to the north, known as New Town, partly covers an extensive former nursery ground (OS 1883, 1913), and to the east of this, until the mid-C20, lay Suttons Seeds' Trial Ground. The main view out of the site is westwards from the central axial drive, through the gatehouse and along London Road towards the centre of the town.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the cemetery lies at the west corner of the site, at the point where London Road is joined by Wokingham Road. The entrance, aligned on London Road to the west, is marked by a two-storey, Bath stone carriage arch flanked by two lodges to form a Classical-style gateway (William Brown 1842, listed grade II).

From the gateway the axial main drive leads east through the centre of the site for c 280m, rising up a gentle slope to the elevated site of the former Anglican mortuary chapel. The drive divides 50m west of the site of the chapel, with two branches leading north-east and south-east, curving round to meet the end of the main drive at the site of the former west entrance to the chapel. A further branch leads off the main drive 50m east of the entrance gateway, leading south-east in serpentine fashion to the site of the former Dissenters' chapel, arriving at the north side of the remaining platform of the chapel. From here the drive extends around the site of the chapel in a circle, with a spur leading north-west from the west side of the circle to rejoin the serpentine branch 25m north-west of the site of the former chapel.

A service gateway flanked by stone piers provides access at the south-east corner of the site from Wokingham Road.

The drives were laid out as part of the 1842 scheme and remain unaltered (C19 plans).

OTHER LAND The cemetery is divided into two main halves, that for Dissenters to the west and that for Anglicans to the east, the division being marked by a low brick wall with a rounded brick coping running axially from north to south. The wall is broken in the centre by the main drive and again close to the north and south boundaries to allow the perimeter path enclosing the site to pass unimpeded. Each half of the site is enclosed by the boundary path which curves gently in serpentine fashion.

The late-C19 extension, to the east of the Anglican half of the original area, is laid out in grid pattern with, to the south, a C20 Garden of Remembrance enclosed by clipped yew hedges.

The former Anglican chapel (William Brown 1842, demolished mid C20) was prominently sited, aligned west to east, and served as the main focus of the site; its principal entrance lay on the west side. It stood at the east end of the eastern, Anglican half of the site, aligned with the entrance gateway and main drive, and was probably Classical in style. The elevated site overlooks the rest of the site; it is now open and used as a car park. The site of the former Dissenters' chapel (demolished late-C20), 130m south-east of the entrance, now (2002) an open, paved platform, occupies a much less prominent position than that of the former Anglican chapel. Built c 1842 of Bath stone, it was designed either by William Brown or Nathaniel Briant as a small tetrastyle Doric temple with a portico at the north, entrance side. Formerly a weeping elm stood to the south (no longer present) (C20 photograph at Henley Road Cemetery, Reading).

From the perimeter paths enclosing the four quarters of the cemetery design, straight and winding paths lead into the quarters, to give access to, and enclose, oval and circular panels containing graves. As first planted (OS), at the centre of each panel stood a specimen tree, and some of these remain. Several of these panels are also surrounded by the remains of circular plantings.

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The cemetery is planted with a wide range of mature specimen trees, some of which are very fine; many date from the mid C19, possibly being part of Suttons' planting. Specimens include a monkey puzzle, exotic oaks, cut-leafed, weeping, copper and other beeches, cedars in variety including weeping specimens, a Wellingtonia, and limes especially along the north and south boundaries. The west half contains fewer mature trees than the east half, and those present date mostly from the mid C19. The extension contains few trees. The OS map (1883) suggests that the site was generously planted with specimen trees, the majority in the Dissenters' section being coniferous and those in the Anglican section being roughly half broadleaved and half coniferous. The boundaries to north and south were each planted with a line of trees but the boundary between the Anglican and Dissenters' halves was not so marked, apparently being left open on either side of the low wall.

There are several monuments of quality in the cemetery to leading C19 Reading citizens; there are also monuments to members of the Sutton family (seedsmen and nurserymen) and Simmonds family (local brewers). To the east and west of the site of the north entrance to the former Dissenters' chapel stand the family vault monuments to James Andrewes (d 1841) and George Barrett (d 1858) (listed grade II) who were prominent local ironmasters. The monuments take the form of cast-iron urns with flame-capped lids standing on cylindrical drums flanking the site of the former portico of the chapel (that to the east having lost its flame, 2002). Within the cemetery there are some areas without monuments, possibly because these areas were occupied by common graves. Opposite the former Dissenters' chapel, on the north side of the axial drive, lies an area of open, elevated undulating ground without monuments, with to the east a circular stone shelter or hut (present by the early-C20, OS); a second slightly raised area, also without monuments, lies c 70m south-west of the site of the former Anglican chapel.

REFERENCES

'An Act for establishing a General Cemetery for the Interment of the Dead in the Parish of Sonning ...' (1842) [copy at Henley Road Cemetery, Reading] Reading Mercury, 1 January 1842, 3; 29 October 1842, 2 Berkshire Chronicle, 5 February 1842, 2 Loudon J C, On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries (1843) Harvey J , Early Nurserymen (1974), 100 Brooks C, Mortal Remains (1989), 26 Brooks C, English Historic Cemeteries, (English Heritage theme study 1994) Gold S, Biographical Dictionary of Architects at Reading (1999), 22-4, 26-7

Maps Book of plans of Reading Cemetery Burial Plots, nd (c 1842), (Henley Road Cemetery, Reading) Plan of Reading Cemetery, nd (C19), (Henley Road Cemetery, Reading)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1872-7, published 1883 3rd edition surveyed 1910, published 1913 1938 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1872-7, published 1883 2nd edition surveyed 1898, published 1899 3rd edition surveyed 1910, published 1912 1934 edition

Archival items C20 photographs (Henley Road Cemetery, Reading)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Reading Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * An early garden cemetery (1842-43) of the third decade of garden cemetery design, for a provincial town. * The site survives largely complete although with the loss of its two chapels and has suffered some neglect. * Elements of C19 planting remain, perhaps from the scheme by Suttons, local nurserymen of national renown. * Local and national social interest is expressed in the monuments, some of which are of high quality.

Description written: August 2002 Amended: September 2002 Register Inspector: SR Edited: December 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.