

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

KENSAL GREEN (ALL SOULS) CEMETERY

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

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**KENSAL GREEN (ALL SOULS) CEMETERY**

Name: KENSAL GREEN (ALL SOULS) CEMETERY

County: Greater London Authority

District: Brent (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

County: Greater London Authority

District: Hammersmith and Fulham (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

County: Greater London Authority

District: Kensington and Chelsea (London Borough)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.528382  
Longitude: -0.22403259  
National Grid Reference: TQ 23294 82547  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: I  
List Entry Number: 1000817  
Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

## Details

Opened in 1833, Kensal Green was the first of London's C19 commercial public cemeteries to be established, to a design by Richard Forrest.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

In 1830 the General Cemetery Company was formed. The Company lobbied Parliament for an Act to license a new, non-denominational burial ground for London. In July of 1832 the Act of Parliament was passed, its progress no doubt assisted by a cholera epidemic. The Company selected a site on Harrow Road to the west of London, then open farmland. The Company initially purchased 22ha, of which 19ha were consecrated for the use of Anglicans and 3ha left as unconsecrated ground, primarily for the use of dissenters.

A competition was held to design the layout of the new cemetery, Henry Edward Kendall winning first prize for his Gothic design and second prize for an Italian one. Despite winning though, he was overlooked in favour of a now little-known architect named John Griffith (1796-1888), of Finsbury, who drew up an initial plan for the cemetery and its buildings. The principal

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buildings were the entrance gate, the Doric Anglican chapel at the end of the main avenue, the Ionic chapel for dissenters at the eastern end of the site, and the range of colonnades and catacombs to the north.

Edward Liddell, a pupil of John Nash, offered the Committee his involvement but again Griffith was preferred and was asked to produce a working plan. The trees were to be supplied by Hugh Ronalds of Brentford. It was this connection with Ronalds that led to the discovery of a new landscape designer, Richard Forrest, who for the previous five years had been head gardener at Syon Park (qv). Forrest's ideas for improving Griffith's plans met with criticism from the Committee, but a sub-committee, made up of Griffith and the architect A C Pugin, met with him and a modified plan was agreed. The result was an informal landscape park with a number of formal features. An article in the *Gardeners' Chronicle* in 1848 remarked that 'you perceive that as in Birkenhead Park [qv], the curve is the principal in the picture, while the straight line still appears in due relief' (Elliot 1996). The cemetery was consecrated on 24 January 1833 and the first burial took place seven days later. Four years later the cemetery received the remains of Augustus Frederick, Duke of Sussex, the sixth son of George III. Two other members of the aristocracy chose Kensal Green as their last resting place: Princess Sophia, the fifth daughter of George III who died in 1848, and the Duke of Cambridge (d 1904).

In 1862 a glasshouse was built to provide flowers for the graves. This was added to in 1866 and thirty years later the original glasshouse was rebuilt and used as an ornamental display house, with plants supplied by Frederick Sanders, the St Albans orchid nurseryman. This glasshouse fell into neglect in the late C20 and was finally demolished in 1994.

In 1939 a crematorium and memorial garden were developed in the south-west section of the site. During the second half of the C20 the site was subjected to vandalism and theft. Pressure on space in the 1980s led the Company to begin filling portions of the Circle Avenue with new graves. The official launch of the 'Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery' on 6 July 1991 marked the start of a programme of restoration works.

The site remains (2000) in private ownership and is managed as a working cemetery.

#### DESCRIPTION

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** The 25ha site is situated in the west London suburb of Kensal Green, c 2km to the south-west of Kilburn, 1km north of North Kensington, and 1.5km south-east of Harlesden. The site, which is roughly rectangular with a narrow curving tail of land to the east, is bounded to the north by Harrow Road (A404) and the backs of the buildings of College Park which straddle the railway line that runs between Kensal Green and Willesdon Junction. Ladbroke Grove provides the east boundary, and the Paddington branch of the Grand Union Canal the boundary to the south. The Roman Catholic Cemetery of St Mary's lies adjacent to the west, separated from Kensal Green Cemetery by a brick wall. The boundary to the north and east is defined by high brick walls while the canal is separated from the site partly by ivy-covered walls and partly by iron railings through which the canal, neighbouring gas works, superstore, and other industrial developments to the south can be seen.

The low-lying level site slopes gently from north-west to south-east and is traversed by tarmac, gravel, and grass paths, many surviving from the mid C19 design.

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance to Kensal Green Cemetery is towards the eastern end of the site where the drive enters from Harrow Road, under a simple classical archway hung with tall double cast-iron gates (listed grade II\*). Built of Portland stone, the archway, designed by John Griffith, is flanked by Doric columns with an early C20 neo-classical single-storey office on the west side. The semicircular brick-paved forecourt to the north is flanked by low evergreen hedges. A lesser entrance stands c 800m further to the west along Harrow Road. From here a tarmacked road leads south for 20m then divides, the western branch leading between lawns to the crematorium, the main drive continuing south through early C19 cast-iron gates hung from Portland stone piers (listed grade II) into the burial ground.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The Anglican chapel (listed grade II\*) situated in the centre of the site is aligned on the Centre Avenue which extends eastwards from it. Designed in 1833 by John Griffith, the chapel, built of Portland stone and stucco in Greek Doric style with a tetrastyle portico, was completed by 1837. The flanking loggias have columns in antis between piers. A memorial chamber and catacombs are situated to the west of the loggias. There are corner and end pavilions, the latter

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containing memorial sculptures. The chapel was fitted with a hydraulic lift which lowered coffins directly from the chapel to the catacombs below.

John Griffith also provided the design for the dissenters' mortuary chapel (built by 1834, listed grade II\*) situated at the eastern tip of the site. The giant tetrastyle pedimented Ionic portico is divided into three bays and is flanked by curved quadrant wings. In 1997 the then ruinous building was the subject of an award-winning restoration and now (2000) houses a visitors' centre and the offices of the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery.

**GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS** The basic design of the cemetery is as an informal landscape park with a number of formal features. From the main entrance the drive, bordered by wide grass verges decorated with cut beds, leads south for c 20m before dividing. The gravel path to the east encircles the dissenters' division of the cemetery, the non-conformist chapel lying at the south-east corner of the area. The entrance to the chapel, which is now enclosed within C20 iron railings, is from Ladbrooke Grove to the east. From the chapel the path continues west for c 150m before dividing, a branch running west to follow the raised north bank of the canal and the main path returning north to meet with the pathway emitting from the main entrance. From this point a network of avenues and paths spread across the cemetery before linking up with the Terrace Avenue, which runs north/south to the east of the Anglican chapel. The paths include the North and South Avenues, which are set parallel to their respective boundaries, and the Centre Avenue which runs in an almost straight line from the main entrance for c 500m to the west, providing the main vista from the Anglican chapel. The Centre Avenue was originally (1832) planted with cedars of Lebanon but by 1834 these were already failing, probably due to the waterlogged condition of the ground, and the last of them died in 1838. Robert Maconochie, the cemetery's gardener had begun replacing them with silver firs, but in 1842 it was decided to abandon conifers and replant the avenue with horse chestnuts and other deciduous trees. Many of these have been replanted in the late C20. Not easily discernible now (2000) from the Terrace Avenue because of the large number of monuments, is Circle Avenue. Situated c 20m to the east of the Anglican chapel and made as part of the original design, the circle of ground within the Avenue is bisected from north to south by Centre Avenue and from east to west by Junction Avenue, the latter providing a link between the North and South Avenues. The major avenues, the clear lines of which have become blurred as pressure for space has led to burials encroaching into the paths, are also linked by many lesser gravel or grass paths.

Some 150m north of the Anglican chapel stand the Colonnade with its underlying catacombs (listed grade II). Built against the northern boundary wall as part of the original, 1833, design, the Colonnade is c 75m long with five bays and Greek Doric columns. The centre and ends are advanced.

To the west of the chapel, the West Centre Avenue leads 400m to the West London Crematorium. Added in 1939 by G Berkeley Willis the crematorium is built in cream brick in a classical idiom. To the south of the paved terrace and fountain court, which lie to the south of the crematorium building, is the memorial garden. Made in two levels connected by a paved central path, the garden is laid mainly to grass with standard rose trees and memorial plaques. In the southern area, to the west of the central path and running parallel to it, is an avenue of young trees. The memorial garden was designed in 1939 by Edward White of the firm of Milner White and Son and was one of the first public gardens to be planted with Russell lupins which had been introduced commercially in 1938.

The monuments erected at Kensal Green Cemetery form a collection spanning the whole range of Victorian taste; they are rich in symbolism, diverse geologically, and distinguished in their architecture and sculptors. For details of individual tombs and monuments see Meller (1991).

#### REFERENCES

B Cherry and N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: London 3 North West* (1991), pp 468-70 LCC, Survey of London XXXVII, (1973), pp 335-9 J S Curl, *A Celebration of Death* (1980), pp 214-23 H Meller, *London Cemeteries* (1981), pp 181-200 Landscape Design, (October 1989), pp 13-14 Kensal Green Cemetery, *A Concise Introductory Guide and Select List of Notable Monuments*, (Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery 1994) B Elliot, *Kensal Green Cemetery*, (Introduction prepared for visit by English Heritage Gardens Committee, June 1996) [copy on EH file]

Maps Plan of All Souls Cemetery, 1833 (Kensington Library)

OS 6" to 1 mile: 3rd edition published 1916 OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1867 2nd edition published 1897

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#### REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Kensal Green Cemetery is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade I for the following principal reasons: \* The cemetery is an early and influential example of a cemetery laid out in the garden or pleasure ground style (1833). \* The cemetery was the first to be established to serve London. \* The cemetery has an extensive and complex layout designed by Richard Forrest (fl 1820s & 1840s) which survives intact. \* The cemetery contains a significant group of associated structures designed by John Griffith (1796-1888). \* The cemetery contains an outstanding collection of funerary monuments and mausolea which reflects the development of London during the 19th century. \* The site includes a crematorium (1939) by G Berekley Willis with a contemporary memorial garden designed by Edward White (1873-1952) of Milner White and Son. Description written: July 2000 Register Inspector: LCH Edited: January 2002 Upgraded: 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.