

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

OVERLEIGH ROAD CEMETERY

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

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Name: OVERLEIGH ROAD CEMETERY

District: Cheshire West and Chester (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 53.181837
Longitude: -2.8949266
National Grid Reference: SJ 40290 65345
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden
Grade: II
List Entry Number: 1001607
Date first listed: 09-May-2002

Details

A public cemetery developed by a private company and opened in 1850.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The cemetery was initiated in 1847 by Canon Bloomfield of Chester who suggested the site at Overleigh, then outside the town (Civic Trust 1994), and on 18 February 1848 the city surveyor, Mr Whalley, held a public enquiry to discuss the necessity of a cemetery (Swift 1996). The site was owned by the Marquis of Westminster who exchanged it for a shareholding in the new Chester General Cemetery Company, formed by an Act of Parliament dated 22 July 1848. Other shareholders included solicitors Walker and Potts and the Dean of the Cathedral. The cost of the cemetery exceeded the estimate of £5000 and in 1849 work was halted for seven months while additional shareholders were sought.

The cemetery opened on 12 November 1850 with the consecration of the Church of England burial ground by the Bishop of Chester Diocese. The first burial, of a Mr Ayrton, took place on the afternoon of the same day. The chapels and entrances were designed by architect Thomas Mainwaring Penson but the Chester Chronicle reported that Mr Lister prepared the cemetery plans and laid out the grounds (Civic Trust 1994). The 1875 OS map shows the site laid out with a great many trees, serpentine paths, a lake with three small islands, two mortuary chapels, two lodges, and a chaplain's house.

In 1879 the cemetery was extended on land beyond Overleigh Road to the south (outside the area here registered) and in August 1904 a new mortuary chapel, constructed on the extension land, was consecrated. The whole of the cemetery was conveyed to Chester City Council in 1933 and during the C20 was further extended to the south.

All the buildings in the 1850 cemetery have now been demolished and the lake infilled. Overleigh Cemetery remains (2001) in use and in the ownership of Chester City Council.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING The cemetery is located 1km south-west of Chester city centre on the south bank of the River Dee. The roughly rectangular site is c 4.5ha in area. To the west the cemetery is bounded by Grosvenor Road, to the south by Overleigh Road, and to the east by River Lane. The north boundary adjoins a footpath at the head of the river bank and is marked by a low red sandstone wall and a hedge within the cemetery. The east boundary is similar. The south boundary is marked by a low sandstone wall topped by c 0.9m high C20 railings and is set at the top of a steep embankment within the cemetery. The west boundary is similar but with a flat concrete coping. At the north-west corner

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the cemetery adjoins a curving stepped buttress of the Grosvenor Bridge (listed grade I), designed by Harrison and completed in 1833 (Pevsner and Hubbard 1971).

To the south the cemetery is laid out on level ground below steep embankments adjoining the south and west boundaries, rising to an entrance at the south-east corner. In the north-west corner of the site the ground rises, with steep embankments surrounding an irregular undulating plateau running c 75m north-east from the principal entrance. South-east of the plateau lower embankments, some with low stone retaining walls, partially encircle a roughly oval level area. To the east the oval area is enclosed by an outcrop of red sandstone, which appears to be a natural feature. From the north boundary there are occasional views out over the river to the north from the low-lying ground which is c 14m below the road level of the Grosvenor Bridge to the north-west.

The surrounding area, to the south of the river, is largely residential with a further c 3ha of burial grounds in the extension area of the cemetery to the south of Overleigh Road. The extension area (outside the area here registered) contains a lodge and two chapels (one listed grade II) dating from c 1904, and is laid out formally with paths. The Dingle, an informal public open space laid out in the early-C20, lies to the west of Grosvenor Road. The gates and lodge marking the Chester Approach to Eaton Hall, the Cheshire seat of the Grosvenor family, are situated to the south-west of the cemetery. On the north bank of the river, Chester racecourse lies to the north-west and the Little Roodee car park and County Hall to the north.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The principal entrance (listed grade II) lies flush with the west boundary 60m south of the Grosvenor Bridge. It is marked by a carriage entrance flanked by two pedestrian entrances, all with C19 cast-iron gates, set between sandstone piers and flanked with low stone walls with railings terminating at similar piers. The design of 1848-50 is by Penson. The 1875 OS map indicates the entrance slightly set back from the boundary between flanking piers. The present position of the entrance is indicated on the 1911 OS map and it appears that the west boundary has been altered to accommodate a widening of Grosvenor Road.

A second entrance, from River Lane to the east, is set back from the road and marked by a carriage entrance, with C20 iron gates set between sandstone piers flanked by low curving sandstone walls. The piers are in similar style to those at the principal entrance.

A third entrance, from Overleigh Road, lies at the south-east corner of the site and is marked by a carriage entrance flanked by two pedestrian entrances, all with C20 iron gates, set between sandstone piers in similar style to those at the principal entrance. To the east the entrance is adjoined by a low sandstone wall topped with C20 railings, curving northwards at the junction with River Lane to terminate at a further sandstone pier. The 1875 OS map indicates this entrance set at an angle between River Lane and Overleigh Road. The present position of the entrance is as indicated on the 1899 OS map.

OTHER LAND From the principal entrance the main drive slopes down for 40m to the east before turning south to follow a serpentine route to the south-east entrance. The drive divides around a large triangular bed 110m south-east of the principal entrance and from here a path leads off to the east entrance from River Lane. The triangular bed contains the 1852 cenotaph of William Makepeace Thackeray and two adjoining Thackeray and Jones tombs (the group listed grade II) which form a central focal point in the cemetery.

Immediately north-east of the principal entrance, on the irregular plateau, lies an oval grassed area with a similar area 40m to the east-north-east. The 1875 OS map indicates that these were the sites of a lodge and mortuary chapel, with a chaplain's house on low ground to the north-west of the plateau. From the entrance drive a winding path leads north-east to the 1857 canopied table tomb monument to Henry Raikes (listed grade II) designed by Penson which is situated at the centre of the plateau, 65m north-east of the principal entrance. Nearby to the east is situated the Classical-style Turner monument with tiered circular cap supported on short pillars above a square base. An 1858 engraving (Roberts 1858) shows this monument as much taller. Former views out from the plateau over the river to the north are now masked by trees and shrubbery.

From the Raikes monument a path with two short flights of steps leads 20m south-east, down the embankment, to join a roughly oval circuit path. This circuit path follows an undulating route enclosing the level oval area in the north of the cemetery with the Thackeray cenotaph to the south.

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To the north the circuit path is partly grassed and to the south-west incorporates a part of the main serpentine drive. Some 100m east-north-east of the principal entrance the circuit path passes over a rustic sandstone bridge (listed grade II), with the c 1850 obelisk monument to Samuel Venables (listed grade II) adjoining the path immediately to the south-west of the bridge. The bridge dates from c 1848 and was designed by Penson. A mid C19 engraving (Roberts 1858) shows a small lake immediately to the south of the bridge but this may be artistic licence as the 1875 OS map indicates a path, to the west of a small irregular lake, passing below the bridge towards the north boundary. The lake is now (2001) infilled and the exact layout is no longer discernible. The centre of the oval area, 90m east-south-east of the principal entrance, has been laid out in 2001 with gravel paths and yew hedging in a pattern of concentric circles around a mature tree. To the west of this feature, a beech hedge encloses a horseshoe-shaped level area. This area, which is open to the west to the serpentine drive, is laid out with formal paths and planting beds. Adjoining the hedged area and within the circuit path to the north and south-west the sloping ground contains a dense array of C19 memorials. These include, 50m east-south-east and 95m south-east of the principal entrance respectively, the c 1852 obelisk to William Brown (listed grade II) and the c 1866 monument to Bishop John Graham (listed grade II). The 1875 OS map indicates a mortuary chapel for Dissenters situated on high ground within the circuit path to the east; both this and a lodge which stood at the east entrance have been demolished.

On the main drive, 14m and 20m south-south-east of the Thackeray cenotaph, are situated the 1863 monument to U Larsing and the c 1857 monument to Richard Knill (each listed grade II). Two winding paths lead off south-west from the main serpentine drive 45m south and 90m south-south-east of the Thackeray cenotaph. The second of these forms a circuit path in the south-west corner of the cemetery, returning north to rejoin the main drive 55m south-east of the principal entrance. A c 85m section of this path, which runs north from a point 140m south-south-east of the principal entrance, is lined with yews planted at close centres. This formal planting is in contrast to the less formal belts of mature deciduous and evergreen trees which are a particular feature within the cemetery. The plateau and ivy-covered embankments to the west and south boundaries are also planted with dense belts of trees and with an area of woodland to the south-west corner. There are occasional glimpsed views out from the cemetery across Overleigh Road to the south. For c 20m to the west from the south-east entrance there are rockworks to the boundary embankment, planted with conifers and ferns.

Overleigh Cemetery also contains the graves of the architects Thomas Lockwood and John Douglas, of Edward Langtry, the husband of actress Lily Langtry, and of Mary Jonas who died in 1899 and was reputed to have given birth to thirty-three children.

REFERENCES

Chester Chronicle, 16 November 1850, 3; 20 August 1904, 3 Hughes T, *The Stranger's Handbook to Chester* (1856), 70-1 Roberts' *Guidebook to Chester* (1858), 34-5 White F, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Cheshire* (1860), 102-3 Williams J, *The Story of Chester* (1907), 288 N Pevsner and E Hubbard, *The Buildings of England: Cheshire* (1971), 159-60, 174 Chester Cemetery, Overleigh, leaflet, (Chester Civic Trust 1994) English Heritage Register Review: Cheshire (1995) Swift R (ed), *Victorian Chester, Essays in Social History 1830-1900* (1996), 141 Chester Evening Leader, 12 January 2000, 4 Chester Civic Trust, Newsletter (Autumn and Winter 2000) [at www.chestercivictrust.org.uk]

Maps OS 6" to 1 mile: 1913 edition OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition published 1875 2nd edition published 1899 3rd edition published 1911 OS 1:500: 1st edition published 1875

Archival items Chester General Cemetery Regulations and Charges as revised February 1898; typed notes on history and graves (nd); archivist's handwritten notes (nd) are all held at the Chester Heritage Centre (CR 655/31).

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION Overleigh Cemetery is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: * The site is a good example of an early High Victorian cemetery laid out in the garden style. * The design of the cemetery is complex and contained unusual features including a small lake. * The cemetery contains a good collection of funerary monuments which reflects the development of Chester during the C19. * The structural planting and layout of the cemetery survive essentially intact.

Description written: September 2001 Amended: October 2001 Register Inspector: HMT Edited: December 2009

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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.