

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Eton (St John) Cemetery

July 2020



Roland
Callingham
Foundation







INTRODUCTION

Background to the Project

This site dossier has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not definitive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained by BGT in appraising designed landscapes.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework and including an overview.
- A description, derived from documentary research and site visits, based on the format of Historic England's *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.
- A map showing principal views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was funded by BGT, with significant grants from the Finnis Scott Foundation, the Roland Callingham Foundation, BCC (since April 2020 part of Buckinghamshire Council) and various private donors. Buckinghamshire Council also provided significant funding, and help in kind including current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record. The project is supported by The Gardens Trust.

The Trust thanks the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk

COUNTY:	HISTORIC BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	ETON (ST JOHN) CEMETERY
DISTRICT:	Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	
PARISH:	ETON	
OS REF.:	SU 963 780	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

An Anglican cemetery for Eton College, one of the oldest and most prestigious schools, which was also used for the town community. The original acre (0.4 ha., extended to 0.6 ha. in the later C19) is an early garden cemetery and also an early and rare school cemetery. It predates the Burial Acts (1847-57) which regulated cemetery provision and resulted in a flood of municipal cemeteries. It was designed c.1844 by London architect James Deason just before he began work on restoration of the C15 school chapel. This was only a year after the author and designer JC Loudon (d.1843) published his influential guidance on cemetery design and Eton may have been influenced by this, particularly his 'Design for a Cemetery of Moderate Extent, on Level Ground' at Cambridge. Loudon was the most influential person on mid-late C19 cemetery design. Eton cemetery embodies some of Loudon's most important ideas on cemetery design as expressed at Cambridge, and is an early example of the geometric approach adopted for many later cemeteries. His Cambridge Cemetery (1843) was well-known in the 1840s and influential and it is possible that it influenced Eton, particularly given the strong connection between the College and Cambridge via King's College. The date suggests that this could be the earliest identified example of the adoption of Loudon's recommendations as a model by other designers.

The buildings comprise a chapel and lych gate in Early English style and a brick and flint boundary wall, and an extensive collection of C19/C20 memorials set in a grid pattern layout, which survive intact, some being of artistic interest. The cemetery is set towards the edge of the C19 extension of the College westwards, and enclosed by College buildings and their grounds, beyond which is Eton Common. The contemporary Burnham Thorpe, marking the west boundary, also by Deason, is a College house in Picturesque Tudor style designed as part of the cemetery scene. It makes a strong contribution to the views and character.

Archaeological interest

A typical example of successive burials since the 1840s, including College members and staff and war dead. Further archaeological potential arises from evidence relating to former agricultural uses, but this is unlikely given the high subsequent level of disturbance.

Architectural interest

An intact ensemble of early cemetery buildings and structures by a London-based architect comprising an Anglican chapel and lych gate in Early English style as the focal features, together with the roadside wall. The buildings are united by the use of flint, and Gothic/Tudor style, including for Burnham Thorpe adjacent. The collection of varied

memorials survives largely intact. Some are of considerable quality, and reflect both College and town associations. Deason worked on Seer Green Church at the same time, also closely connected with the College which had the Patronage of the Living, and which closely resembles this chapel. The lych gate is very similar to the porch of Seer Green church.

Artistic interest

The design is an early garden cemetery, focussed on the Early English-style chapel. It echoes the rational design for a small cemetery published by JC Loudon in 1843 for the Cambridge Cemetery, with a central chapel in a narrow rectangular site, and an axial path from the lodge building at the entrance. The layout survives intact with many memorials, some of artistic interest in their own right, and the extension and its planting respected this pattern. Little or no C19 planting survives and the original scheme is unclear but probably included Irish yew and other evergreens along the main routes as advocated by Loudon. The C19 outer College setting, distant from the town, has largely survived but with recent large residential College buildings in the grounds of a boarding house to the rear/north. The Tudor-style east elevation of Deason's contemporary Burnham Thorpe house makes a major contribution to the Picturesque cemetery scene particularly along the chapel path.

Historic interest

There are strong associations between the cemetery and the history of Eton College and its community including notable staff such as M.R. James (1862-1936), Provost 1918-36, and author as well as town residents including the postmaster and inn-keepers. It is a rare, possibly unique, example of a school burial ground of this period, and predates the Burial Acts. The cemetery provides an important link with the past and a place for contemplation by the local community.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

By the early C19 the site was in agricultural use as part of a paddock in a rural area between Eton High Street and College to the east and Eton Common to the west (OSD, 1811), with the road from Eton to Dorney linking the two to the south of the paddock. The parish was never subject to a parliamentary enclosure act.

In the mid-1840s, c.1844, London architect James Deason was employed by Eton College to design buildings for a new cemetery of an acre in a paddock at the west edge of the outer College buildings. The Provost was the reforming Francis Hodgson (1781-1852) and it is possible that he took an interest in this project. The commission comprised a substantial chapel and lych gate in Early English style, and alongside this a house in its own grounds called Burnham Thorpe for a member of staff formed a part of the Picturesque ensemble. The origin of the reference to the Norfolk estate which belonged to Lord Nelson is unclear.

The rectangular site, 100m x 45m, an acre in size, was laid out in a grid pattern. A receipt for work on Eton Cemetery dated 1845 survives (Bursar's In-Letters, Eton College Archive COLL B 01 02 22/11). This early garden cemetery was designed a decade before the flood of municipal cemeteries prompted by the Burial Acts of 1847-57, and at that time was unusual,

probably unique, for its commission by a school. The layout closely resembles that published by the designer and writer JC Loudon in 1843, 'Design for a Cemetery of Moderate Extent, on Level Ground' at Cambridge. The design at Eton may have been influenced by this. Loudon's Cambridge cemetery was about 3 acres, three times the size of Eton.

The cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Lincoln (the Visitor) in April 1846 (Eton College Archive COLL LIV ETON 35; *Reading Mercury*) and Seer Green Church was consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford in October of that year (*Bucks Herald*) in the presence of the Vice Provost and several Fellows and clergy of the College. Austen-Leigh (2008 revision) notes that it was consecrated by 'the Visitor',¹ and the adjoining house was built for a 'Conduct'.² The first burial was 06 January 1847 (Shepherd).

The axial path led from the lych gate to the south door of the chapel and divided around it towards the back (north) of the site. To the west Burnham Thorpe was set in its own productive garden with fruit trees (OS, 1878). To the east was a further productive garden with a tennis court (?Eton Fives) building adjacent to the cemetery. To the north a boarding house stood in spacious landscaped grounds (OS 1868). This was all College property.

By 1897 (OS) the cemetery had been extended by half an acre to 1.5 acres at the north-west corner, by incorporating the north end of Burnham Thorpe garden. Shepherd notes that the extension was given by the College in 1898. A red brick wall was built between the extension and the remains of the garden. A villa and smaller houses had been built east of the cemetery. In 1900 after the death of churchwarden JP Carter a processional cross was presented to the cemetery chapel and a churchyard cross presented by the parishioners and friends and erected between the old and new parts of the cemetery (Shepherd). The chapel was used for the younger boys at the College during the week (Maxwell Lyte).

The cemetery is closed for burials but contains many graves and memorials of past Eton figures. The chapel is a store for the College library, and the grounds are managed the town council.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Eton lies on the flat river plain of the River Thames, in rural land between Slough to the north and Windsor south of the river. The 0.6ha. site lies 370m west of Eton High Street and the C15 centre of the College including the College Chapel, at the western extremity of the

¹ The Visitor's role is to ensure the correct conduct of the religious life of the College. Eton College is a peculiar, by which it is not subject to the Archdeacon. Although the College was freed from archidiaconal supervision it remained subject to episcopal oversight. At the foundation Eton was in the diocese of Lincoln, and the Bishop of Lincoln was therefore appointed the Visitor.

² Conduct is the name given to the School Chaplain. There were such chaplains from the earliest days of the College, although their role was not to minister to the boys but to take part in the round of services prescribed by the Founder's statutes. In modern time the title of Conduct has been reserved for the senior chaplain. Until the parish of Eton was separated from the College and provided with its own Vicar in 1875 the Conducts had day to day responsibility for the parishioners, the Provost being the Rector. They did not necessarily teach the boys, but now they are part of the Divinity department.

College campus, near the east edge of Eton Common. The western approach from Dorney village and Eton Wick across the open rural Eton Common contrasts with the densely built eastern approach from Eton High Street between the imposing College buildings.

The level cemetery is surrounded to the west, north and east by the grounds of other College properties and bounded by Eton Wick Road to the south. The 45m long low roadside wall is of flint with a stone coping; outside it is a row of mid-C20 lime trees alongside the footpath. At the west end the wall returns northward as part of the garden boundary with Burnham Thorpe. At the east end it returns north alongside the adjacent property. The west boundary is dominated by the Picturesque flint east elevation of the house with its gables, roofscape and stone chimneys. North of this a red brick wall encloses the garden from the cemetery. The north cemetery boundary is enclosed by a red brick wall.

The views are largely contained within the cemetery boundary by buildings and trees, focussed on the chapel and lych gate. Burnham Thorpe house makes a major feature in the view from the path to the chapel. The immediate setting of College buildings in their own landscaped grounds remains similar but with the addition of two large modern residential buildings to the north in the late C20 in the grounds of a former C19 College house.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The main entrance is at the centre of the south, roadside boundary via the Early English-style lych gate (listed Grade II, 1844-46). This was by Deason as part of the ensemble with the Early English-style chapel, Tudor-style Burnham Thorpe house, and roadside wall, all built in flint with Bath stone dressings. The lych gate has a steeply-pitched clay tile roof with stone coped gable ends with gabled kneelers, and apexes with iron crosses. The large pointed arches give access and frame the view from the road of the chapel entrance. The side walls are pierced by trefoil lights and the interior has side benches. The lych gate supports wooden lattice gates inscribed 'In memory of the Eton CLB [Church Lads Brigade] Club old members club who fell in the Great War 1914-18. 2nd WW 1939 1945'.

From the lych gate a gravel path leads 20m north to the main, south doorway of the chapel (the west door in liturgical orientation). A mature false acacia (mid-C20) stands just outside the door, east of the path. The Picturesque façade of Burnham Thorpe is a major feature.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The main building is the Anglican chapel (1844-46, listed Grade II) by architect James Deason. It is the focal point of the cemetery design and was intended for religious ceremonies before the interment. It terminates the central north-south axial path from the lych gate and Eton Wick Road in a similar position to that in Loudon's 1843 Cambridge Cemetery design. The chapel stands in the centre of the south half of the cemetery and is orientated with its entrance at the south side and altar to the north. It is built of flint with Bath stone dressings, and a steeply-pitched clay tile roof with stone coped gable ends in Victorian Early English style similar to that Deason used for the lych gate. The nave and chancel are under one roof, with a bellcote over the doorway and a vestry on the west side. The chapel, owned by the College, has been restored and is now a store for the College

Library and Archives. In the late C19 the Lower School, i.e. all the boys below the Fourth Form, attended divine service on weekdays in the 'Chapel on the Dorney Road' (Maxwell Lyte, 543).

At the same time, Deason designed a church for Seer Green near Beaconsfield, the living of which was in the gift of the College. It cost £1,700 (Pevsner). The cemetery chapel and parish church are very similar except that the church additionally had a separate chancel. The church porch is very similar to the lych gate in the cemetery. Deason reprised this design for two other churches for the Duke of Northumberland in that county: St John the Divine Acklington, 1860, & South Charlton Eglinton, 1862 (Listed Building Descriptions). Deason was selected in 1845 to restore the C15 College chapel (corresp. in Eton College archive COLL CHA 03 02; Maxwell Lyte, 470).

20m west of the chapel is Burnham Thorpe (1844-46, listed Grade II), also part of the ensemble by Deason. It is a house for a senior member of College set in a walled garden. The entrance front faces west over the garden but the flint east elevation is closely related to the cemetery scene, and is Picturesquely varied with gables, multiple roofs and stone chimneys, dominating the path to the chapel.

OTHER LAND

The cemetery is laid out in a geometric plan with the Anglican chapel as the focus and particularly prominent at the entrance. The ensemble by James Deason remains intact. The layout reflects Loudon's design for Cambridge Cemetery published in 1843.

The paths that define the 1840s 1 acre rectangular layout are integral to the design as was the planting of trees, with conifers and deciduous trees (1877 OS 25"). This character was followed when the extension was added in the 1890s to the north-west. Some mature trees are present including Irish yew, also self-sown sycamore on the north side. They all appear to be of C20 origin.

The extensive collection of memorials survives largely intact. It includes many kerbs, a once common feature elsewhere, now rare as they have often been removed for ease of maintenance, and a dense collection of crosses in the south-west corner. Many of the most notable memorials are found in the areas around the chapel and some have ornamental iron railings (e.g. William Smithers by Burnham Thorpe). Henry Elford Luxmoore (c.1926), a Senior Assistant Master at the College, is buried beside the west side of the path to the chapel and has a C17 style headstone and footer with a passage inscribed in Latin. Towards the back of the cemetery, on the boundary with the extension, a churchyard cross on a tall slender column on an octagonal plinth was given by parishioners in 1900 (Shepherd). Adjacent is the headstone to Henry Babington Smith (1863-1923), Fellow of the College, and his wife Elizabeth, erected by their nine children, with a fine relief of vines, with doves supporting a chalice. One of the town inhabitants with an ornamental head stone is Richard Goddard, c.1879, Landlord of the New Inn, Eton, against the west wall. The writer and former Provost MR James (1862-1936) is buried towards the back, near the north wall. There

are Commonwealth War Graves for 10 casualties, from both World Wars. Most had connections with the College, such as being service staff or sons of service staff.

REFERENCES

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Reading Mercury (25 April 1846).

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Brooks, C, *Mortal Remains* (1989), 38-50. (Section on development of cemeteries in the 1840s, Loudon and Cambridge Cemetery, & the Burial Acts)

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Loudon, J.C., *On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries ...* (1843), 52-66.

Maxwell Lyte, H. C., *A history of Eton College, 1440–1910* (4th edn 1911), 470, 474, 543.

Pevsner, N. & Williamson, E. *The Buildings of England, Buckinghamshire*. (1994), 319.

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Rutherford, Sarah. *The Victorian Cemetery* (2008), 25.

Shepherd, Rev. John, *Old Days of Eton Parish* (1908), 67, 81.

<http://edithsstreets.blogspot.com/2016/09/riverside-west-of-tower-north-bank-eton.html>

<http://www.pardoes.info/roanddarroll/ThumbnailsEton.html>

MAPS

1812, Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, 2" scale (BL).

1839 Plan of the Parish of Eton, copy online at

<http://www.etonwickhistory.co.uk/search/label/Rev%20John%20Shepard>

OS 6" and 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition, 1877.

2nd edition, 1897.

Revised 1923

ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

ETON COLLEGE ARCHIVE

COLL B 05 31 03 Burnham Thorpe and Cemetery File 1875 - 1914

FDA-P.488-2013 Painting by Rupert Shephard, 1965

COLL B 01 02 22 Bursars' In-Letters File 1845

13 items including receipt to work on Eton Cemetery (/11)

FDA-A.405:1-2014 Photographs of stained glass

COLL LIV ETON 28 Monumental inscriptions St John's Church/ Eton Cemetery [1990s]

Photocopy of typed list of monumental inscriptions in St John the Evangelist, High Street, Eton. With diagram of Cemetery layout

COLL LIV ETON 35 Petition to the Bishop of Lincoln to consecrate additional ground for a cemetery File [1846] Draft and fair copy of a petition to the Bishop of Lincoln requesting him to consecrate additional ground for a cemetery

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF BRITISH ARCHITECTS

Material by James Deason (unrelated to this site) and a biographical file.

Britain from Above Aerial Photographs, 1920, 1921, 1928 and later

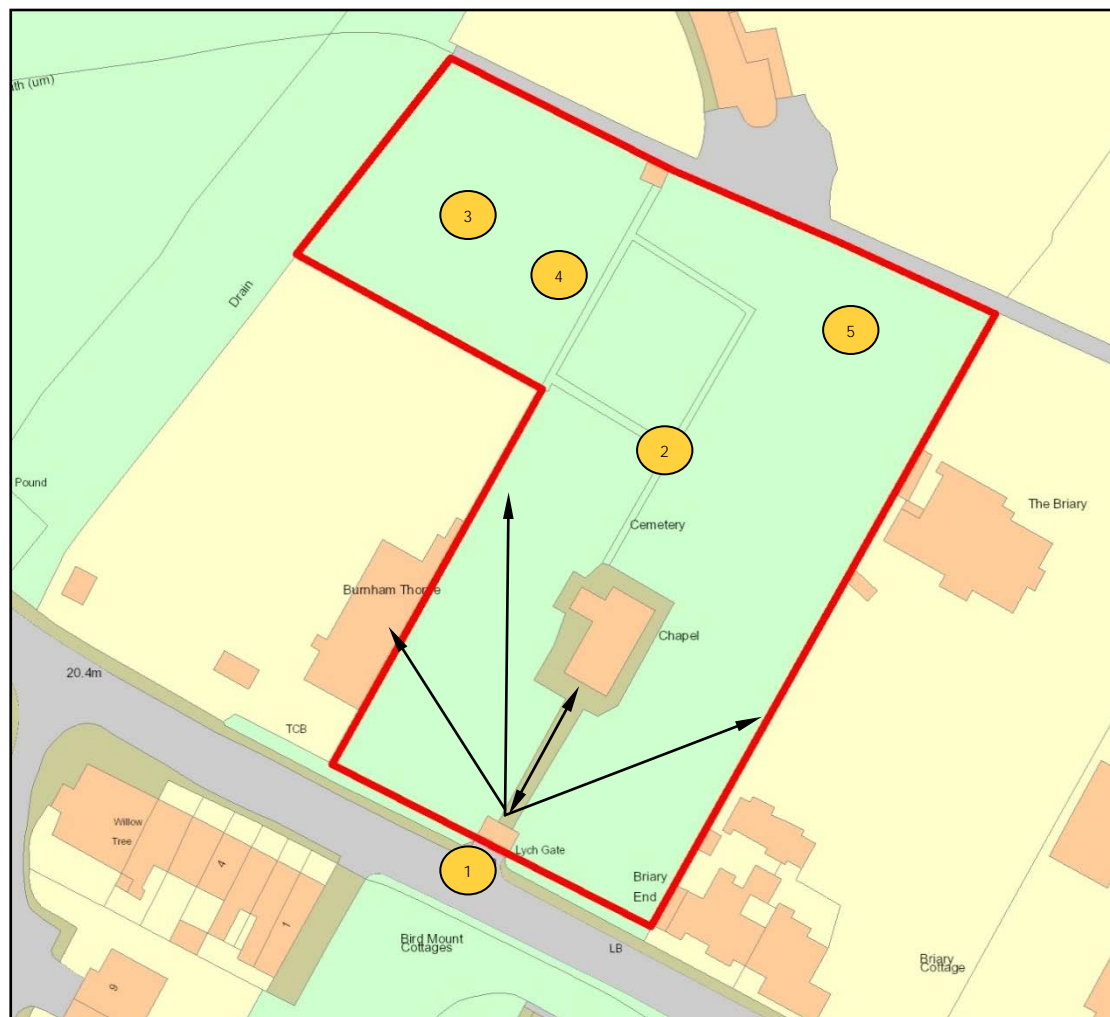
<https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=eton&country=global&year=all>

Acknowledgement

Bucks Gardens Trust is most grateful for information supplied by Eleanor Hoare, College Archivist, Eton College, and Dr Brent Elliott.

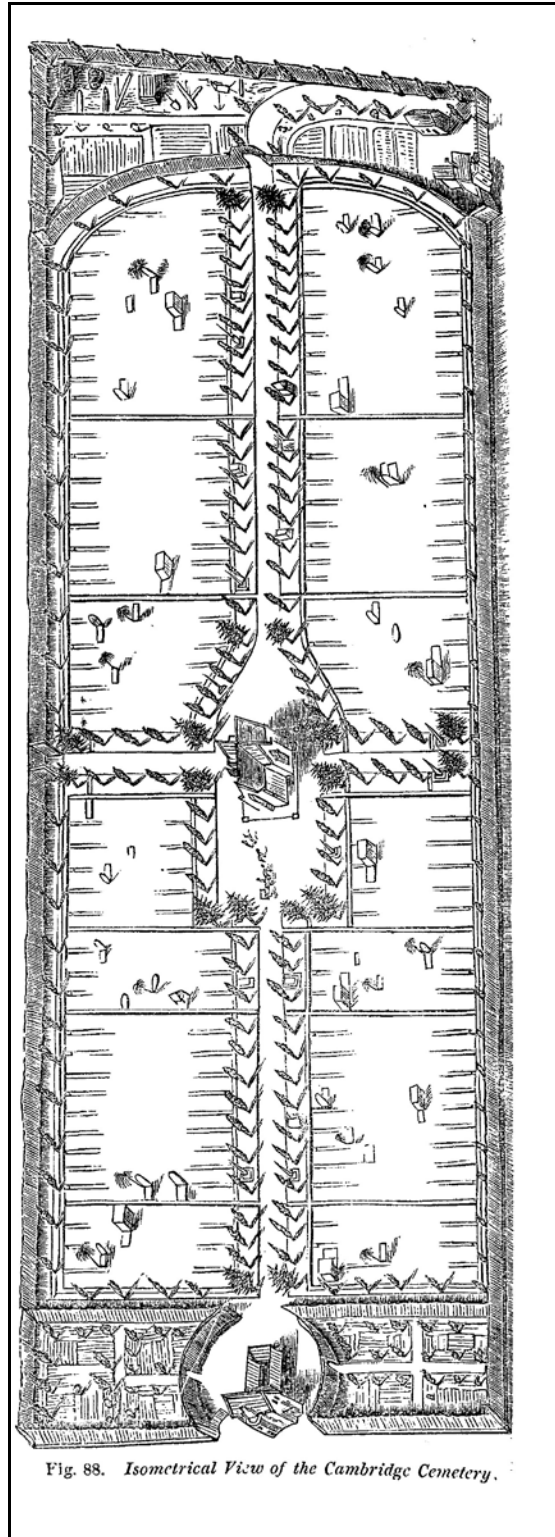
SR, June 2020.

KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES



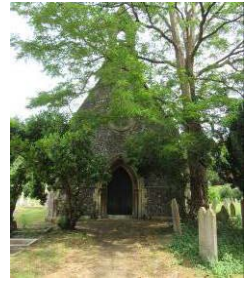
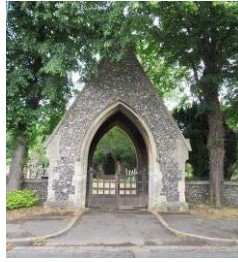
Key to numbered features

1.	Entrance	2.	1844 area
3.	Extension	4.	Memorial cross
5.	MR James memorial		



JC Loudon's design for 'Design for a Cemetery of Moderate Extent, on Level Ground' at Cambridge published with a description in *On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries ...* (1843). The layout is comparable with Eton Cemetery (design c.1844).

CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS



Roadside boundary, lych gate and path to chapel.



Lych gate; views west from chapel path to Burnham Thorpe.



Burnham Thorpe, gateways and roadside frontage.



Chapel: south elevation and doorway



Chapel, west, north and east elevations.



Lych gate and roadside wall; brick garden wall to Burnham Thorpe, with inn keeper's headstone (right); west side of cemetery, view south with chapel and Burnham Thorpe.



North wall of Burnham Thorpe garden; cemetery north wall and school residence beyond; Henry Babington Smith headstone.



Henry Babington Smith relief on headstone; churchyard cross, 1900.



Memorials in front (south) section: Angel; Henry Luxmoore; William Smithers.



Henry Turner, Postmaster of Eton;

Henry Harding, 44 years Landlord of the Crown & Cushion Inn

George Wilson, 'for many years Butler and Confidential Servant in Mr Tarver's House'.



Memorials at rear of cemetery: MR James, College Provost & author (d.1936); 2 unusual headstones:

Alfred Edward Conybeare (d.1952), served Eton for 55 years including as Vice Provost; Rosemary Peterson (d.1947?).



Kathleen Alington (d.1938).