

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



Chesham Cemetery

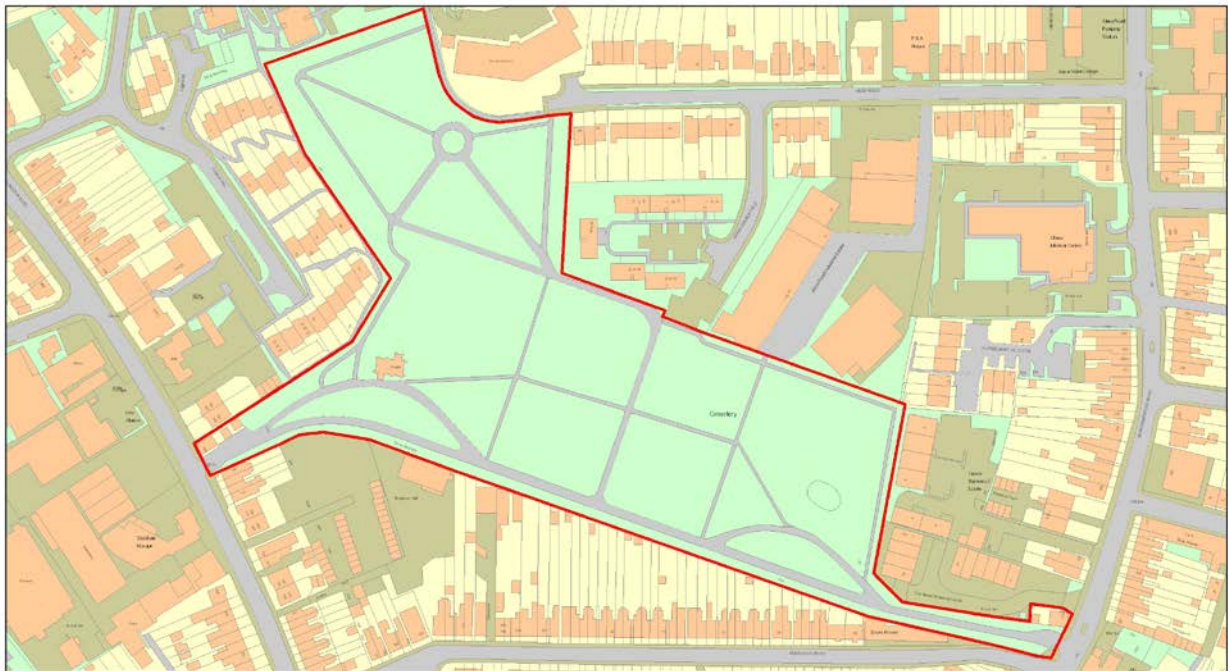
October 2020



Roland
Callingham
Foundation



HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



Scale: 1:1,873 at A4

Chesham Cemetery: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the Council Archaeology Service
October 2020

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Scale: 1:1,874 at A4

Chesham Cemetery: 2016 aerial photograph

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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:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	CHESHAM CEMETERY BCC HER 0651700000
AREA:	CHILTERN	
PARISH:	CHESHAM	
OS REF.:	SP 960 024	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

A Burial Board cemetery for a Chiltern market town (1857-58), which is one of the more significant cemeteries in historic Bucks, particularly given the number of buildings that were erected as part of the ensemble. The 2.4 ha. cemetery was designed by local architect W Andrews of Chesham and extended to 3.4 ha. in the early C20. Andrews focussed on two chapels, each at the centre of its respective consecrated and unconsecrated burial areas., which form part of a largely intact group of contemporary buildings and modest C19/C20 memorials set in a grid pattern layout that makes good use of the Chiltern hillside location and setting. The layout has been modified on the site of the non-conformist chapel with a garden of remembrance and there are some mature trees, although probably not of the original planting.

Archaeological interest

A typical example of successive burials of a rural town since the 1850s, including war dead. The potential for lost cemetery features is greatest around the site of the lost non-conformist chapel in the east half. Further archaeological potential largely arises from evidence relating to former agricultural uses, but this is unlikely given the high subsequent level of disturbance.

Architectural interest

A largely intact ensemble of typical mid-C19 burial board cemetery buildings and structures by a local architect comprising two chapels in local materials as the focal features of the initial layout and extension, one of which has gone but its site remains open. The surviving ensemble includes the Gothic-style Anglican chapel, and in loose Tudor style two matching ornamental flint lodges, ancillary structures including sheds and a ?hearse house or mortuary; and the red brick boundary wall, but the original gateways have been replaced. The buildings are united by the use of flint, and stone dressings, and Gothic/Tudor style. A collection of modest memorials survives. Little is known of Andrews as an architect and his other commissions are unclear at present.

Artistic interest

The design is a typical mid-nineteenth-century pattern, focussed on two Gothic-style chapels and originally ornamented with many deciduous and evergreen trees. The design survives largely intact, and later phases and their planting respected this pattern and include pleached lime trees and Irish yew avenues along the drive and paths. The original rural valley setting at a distance from the town has been replaced by the piecemeal late C19 and C20 residential and industrial development of the New Town, but more distant views survive from the upper slopes of the historic centre of Chesham and the wooded rim of hills around the top of the valley.

Historic interest

There are strong associations between the cemetery and the history of the town and its community as well as memorials to those who died in various wars, particularly British and Polish services. 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, lying in a rural area of the Chess Valley between the Bellingdon and Berkhamsted Roads, with Higham Mead Pond to the south (OSD).

With the advent of the Burial Acts in the 1850s in response to the general lack of decent burial space, the Chesham Burial Board was set up. A rural site was acquired away from the town centre within the manor of Chesham Higham in which to locate a new cemetery, in the hamlet of Bellingdon. In 1857 the Burial Board conveyed parcels of land referred to as Honeysuckle Field and Babcroft (otherwise Asprey's Orchard), parcels numbered 1534 and 1551 on the Chesham tithe apportionment and map (1842 & 1843). The 6 acre Honeysuckle Field was bought from farmers William Field of Hawridge Court and Joseph Field of The Vale in the parish of Chesham for £600. Part of Babcroft meadow was bought from John Garrett of Chesham, John Morland of Croydon and William Andrew of Chesham for £87.10s. This narrow parcel of 70 perches (c.1770 sq m.) linked Honeysuckle Field with Berkhamsted Road. The deeds (22 November 1858) note that the Burial Board had recently erected a lodge with outbuildings on this land by this point. (Friends of Chesham Cemetery, etc, 2008).

The Board commissioned local architect William Andrews, whose office was in Church Street, to design a new cemetery to succeed the parish churchyard (*Bucks Herald* 1857-58). Andrews was probably responsible for the layout as well as the design of the two chapels, the ornamental gates and brick walls, two lodges and the mortuary and hearse house which were in medieval/Tudor style and used local flint, brick and terra-cotta tiles in an ornamental manner. The cemetery was designed in conventional style, in grid pattern, divided into two equal halves by an axial path marking the boundary between consecrated and unconsecrated ground to west and east respectively. Each half focused on its respective associated chapel, one for Anglicans and the other for non-conformists. Paths were laid out and ornamental trees planted, with a mix of conifers and deciduous trees (OS, 1878).

In early May 1857 tenders were invited by the Chesham Burial Board for building the cemetery boundary wall. Plans and specification were available at Andrews' office. A separate tender in mid-May covered the erection of 'two chapels, hearse and dead house and two lodges', the details again being lodged at Andrews' office. In July 1857 the estimated cost of the cemetery was £4,000 when it was agreed to proceed on this basis, despite some objections to the amount. By December 1858 the cemetery was complete, or nearly so, and the Bishop of Oxford consecrated the Anglican half of the cemetery with in attendance local notables including William Lowndes, and a large crowd (*Bucks Herald*, 02 & 30 May, 04 July, 1857; 25 Dec. 1858).

Before the cemetery began to fill with burials the grass was sold as a hay crop for which in 1860 a Mr Chalk paid £6. The lodge-keeper was paid 15s a week, rent-free (*Bucks Herald*, 23 Jun. 1860; 23 Dec. 1865).

Sheahan noted it in 1862, along with other recent cemeteries in Bucks, as a civic amenity. 'The Cemetery was opened in 1858, and consists of six acres, equally apportioned to the church people and dissenters. The grounds are tastily [sic] laid out. The total cost ... including the erection of two neat Chapels is about £4,500.'

By 1877 (OS) Chesham New Town had been begun to the east of Berkhamsted Road, but the 6 acre cemetery to the west still lay in fields. The tree-lined drive linked the two roads across the cemetery from west to east, each entrance marked by a similar lodge and gateway. The rectangular body of the site was dominated at each end by one of the chapels, each chapel reached via a dedicated curved carriage sweep looping north of the main drive. The grid-pattern paths were lined by trees with further trees around the boundary. Conifers marked the centre of each main grid square and were planted on the slopes below the chapels.

The earliest burials occurred in the two central squares flanking the axial path marking the boundary between consecrated and unconsecrated ground (Grid Squares A, Chesham Town Council Burial Registers online at <https://cemeterysearcher.co.uk/search/chesham>).

By 1897 (OS) the New Town was developing in the surrounding area in a piecemeal way. Artisans dwelling and factories were beginning to encircle the environs of the cemetery. In 1921 2.5 acres (1 ha.) of land was bought for £515 for an extension beyond the top of the cemetery to the north-west towards Alma Road, reaching its fullest extent at 8.5 acres, and was now largely enclosed by the encroaching buildings of the New Town (Friends of Chesham Cemetery, etc, 2008). At this time 'the increase in population brought about by the establishment of large factories had caused the town to extend northwards along the hill on the Berkhamsted road, and this colony of artisans' dwellings and business works is known as the New Town, a straggling and rather uninteresting quarter. The waterworks and reservoir and the cemetery with its two mortuary chapels, opened in 1858, are placed here.' (VCH).

The non-conformist chapel was demolished in 1966 and in 1987 the site was marked by a hedged garden of remembrance. In 1967 an area was allocated for Muslim burials in the extension. An Avenue of Remembrance was created along the path towards Berkhamsted Road in 2002. Since 2000, when a Friends group was set up, improvements have included rebuilding the boundary walls, part restoration of the chapel, resurfacing of paths (Friends of Chesham Cemetery, etc, 2008). The cemetery is managed by Chesham Town Council.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING

Chesham lies in a picturesque situation c.110m AOD on the southern slope of the chalky range of the Chiltern Hills. The Metropolitan railway throws out from Chalfont and Latimer station a branch line to the town centre.

The cemetery as laid out in 1857 covered 2.4ha. and was extended in the early C20 so that it now covers 3.4ha. The cemetery is located in the New Town district developed in the later C19 and C20 half a mile north of the historic centre of Chesham, between the Bellingdon Road to the west and Berkhamsted Road to the east.

Red brick boundary walls with rounded cappings enclose most of the site, much of their length apparently dating from 1857, except to the north-west where the site was extended and an 80m stretch of the wall removed. The walls are of varying height between 1-2m and sections have been rebuilt.

The ground within the cemetery slopes northwards up from the main drive. The views from the drive along the lower level are limited, being largely contained within the boundaries and mainly focussed on the main 1850s axis and associated buildings, particularly the chapels. The upper slopes enjoy panoramic views southwards over the town roofscape of the rim of wooded hills surrounding the town.

When it was laid out, the cemetery was surrounded by agricultural land, but with the growth of Chesham in the later C19 and C20 it is now enclosed within the urban setting of New Town with a mix of light industrial, residential, service, and school premises.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

Two principal entrances give access through mid-C20 gateways adjoining the lodges, and each is in similar style, material and arrangement to the other. The lodges and associated structures are by William Andrews, designed in 1857.

The west entrance off Bellingdon Road serves the Anglican chapel and consecrated half of the cemetery directly. The substantial Tudor-style lodge stands north of the entrance, 85m south-west of the Anglican chapel. It is of two storeys, built of flint with stone quoins and detailing of windows and doors, and brick banding marking the divide between the two floors. The central chimney stack on the wider south elevation is prominent at the entrance and in the approach from the town centre. The steeped gabled roof has red terra cotta tiles with fish scale ornamentation and projecting first floor window gables. The chimney top has been replaced. Beyond the lodge the flint garden wall to the east joins a small flint building with ornamented tiled roof. Adjacent to the east is the former hearse house, with a large arched doorway and louvered vent in the gable above. It is in similar ornamental style to the lodge but the roofing tiles have been replaced. It housed the Chesham Bier until 1970 used to carry the coffin from the horse-drawn hearse to the grave-side. It is now at Chiltern Open Air Museum (Friends of Chesham Cemetery, etc, 2008).

The east entrance off Berkhamsted Road serves the unconsecrated half of the cemetery and formerly the non-conformist chapel. It lies 120m south-east of the site of the former chapel. The arrangement of buildings mirrors that of the west entrance, but without the hearse house.

From each entrance the drive runs along the lowest point of the cemetery, alongside the south boundary, joining the two entrances, with the two loops off this as carriage sweeps respectively to each chapel above.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

The main building is the Anglican chapel by the Chesham architect William Andrews (1857). This is one of a pair of symmetrically sited chapels which dominated his design, each being served by the main drive and forming the focal points of the two sections of the cemetery: Anglican and non-conformist. The chapels were of similar style and construction, their plan form mirrored. The chapels were the focal points of Andrews' design for the cemetery in 1857.

The surviving Anglican chapel is consecrated and remains in its intended use. Set into the slope rising to the north, it is orientated west-east; the west and south elevations are presented in the view from the Bellingdon road gateway, 85m to the south-west. The east elevation has a large window which is visible from much of the cemetery to the east. The chapel is built in medieval style in similar materials to the lodges, of flint with stone quoins and dressings and red brick banding under a red tile roof with fish scale banding. The porch on the south side overlooks the carriage sweep, with a sculpture of a praying angel in the gable above the arched doorway, and on the north side a robing room with chimney.

The non-conformist chapel stood 175m south-east of the Anglican chapel, again set into the hillside which is less steep than that on which the Anglican chapel stands. The layout mirrored the other chapel, with the entrance porch at the east end, nearest to the Berkhamsted Road approach. The chapel was demolished in the later C20. The site remains open and is now a hedged garden of remembrance.

Little is known about Andrews' other commissions, but he was a surveyor in Chesham in 1836 (CBS [D 227/5/1](#)), had his office in Church Street in the 1850s when he was designing the cemetery (*Bucks Herald*), and was apparently still working in c.1888 (RIBA).

OTHER LAND

The cemetery is laid out in a grid plan with the 1857-58 chapels intended to be the two foci, at either end of the site. These were intended for religious ceremonies before the interment, but only the Anglican chapel survives, at the west end. The cemetery was constructed so it would be regarded with civic pride and therefore care was taken over the design; the ensemble by William Andrews remains intact. The paths that define the grid layout are integral to the design as was the planting of trees, as shown on the 1877 OS 25", with a combination of conifers and deciduous trees in a distinctive pattern. Conifers were used in front of the chapels and marked the centres of the main grid squares. This character was followed when the extension was added in the early C20 to the north-west. Little if any of the mid-C19 planting survives, but later Irish yew and lime trees flank the main drives and the lines of the paths which cross them. A mature blue Atlantic cedar stands next to the site of the former non-conformist chapel. The early C20 extension to the north-west is laid out with a pattern of paths radiating from a central roundel and a boundary path linking them.

There is a collection of modest memorials; the most notable are found in the areas around the chapels and some have ornamental iron railings. There are Commonwealth War Graves for 35 casualties, from both World Wars including 18 from World War I.

REFERENCES

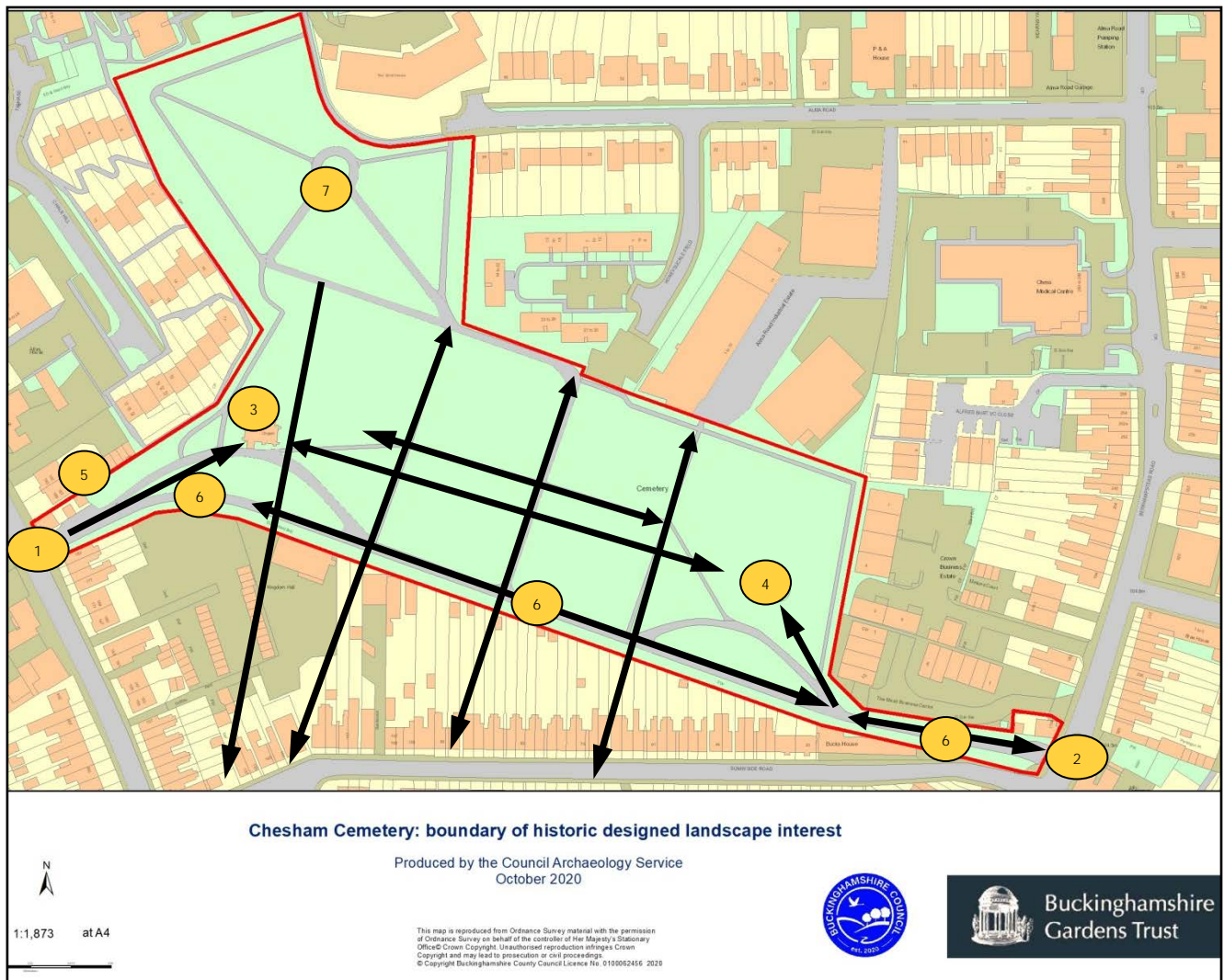
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MAPS

- 1812, Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, 2" scale (BL).
OS 6" and 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition, 1877.
2nd edition, 1897.
Revised 1923

SR, October 2020.

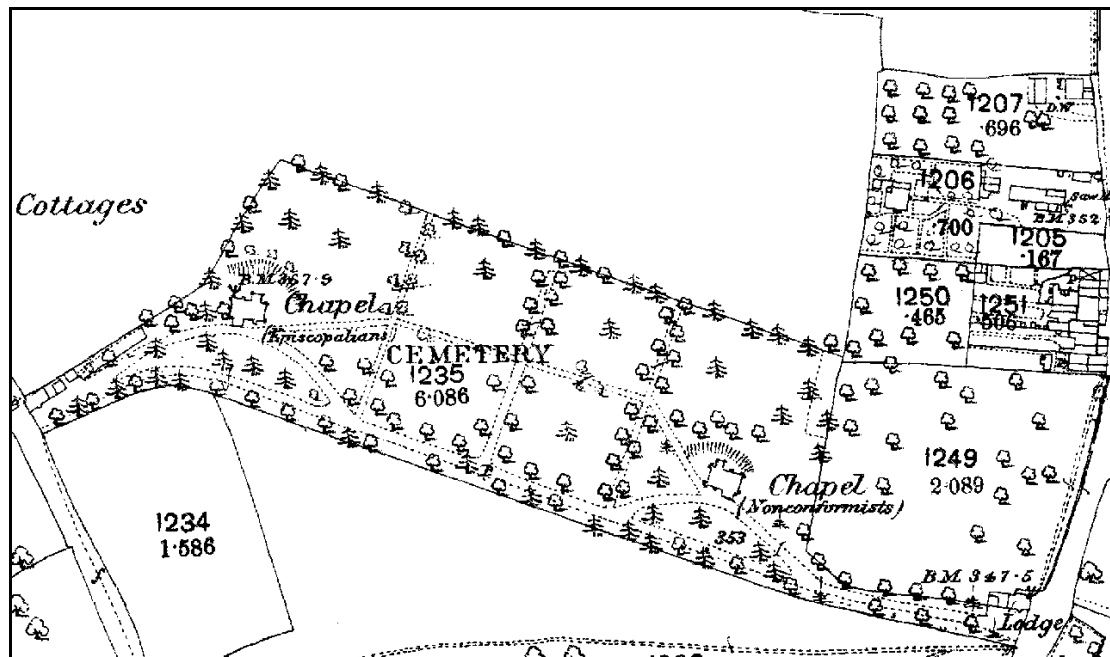
KEY HISTORIC VIEWS & FEATURES



Key to numbered features

1. Entrance off Bellingdon Road, with lodge and gateway	2. Entrance off Berkhamsted Road, with lodge and gateway
3. Anglican chapel	4. Site of non-conformist chapel
5. Mortuary or hearse house	6. Main drive
7. C20 extension	

HISTORIC MAP

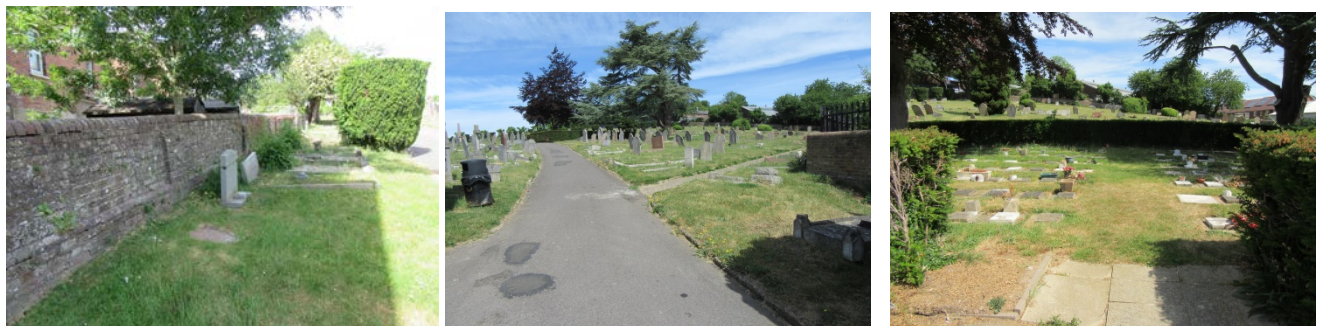


1878 Ordnance Survey 25" scale showing original planting of cemetery with mixed conifers and deciduous trees.
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CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS



East gateway off Berkhamsted Road, including lodge, south wall and storage shed.



South boundary wall (left); carriage sweep to site of former non-conformist chapel (centre);
site of chapel, now garden of remembrance (right).



Central path/drive, view south over main drive (left); path facing south (centre); east elevation of chapel (right).



Carriage sweep to Anglican chapel (left); Anglican chapel, south elevation from main drive (right).



Panorama from east to west: view south from west half of cemetery over Chesham.



West entrance off Bellingdon Road, with storage shed and mortuary or hearse house.