

**BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**TL 821 306**

**HALSTEAD CEMETERY**

Mid C19 public cemetery set up by Halstead Burial Board and opened in 1856. Initial plan probably by S L Surridge of Halstead, buildings by Phipson of Ipswich and landscaped by Davidson.

### **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

Halstead Cemetery was set up in conformity with the Metropolitan and Provincial Burial Acts of 1854. Five acres of farmland on the Colchester Road to the east of the town were initially purchased, and an advertisement in *The Builder* and in local papers in May 1855 led to forty expressions of interest in doing the work. Mr Phipson, architect of Ipswich, was awarded a contract to provide plans and specifications for a lodge, a 'dead house' (mortuary) and entrance gates and fence. The boundary walls were the subject of a separate tender, prepared by Mr Sewell and won by Mr Rayner. The main building work meanwhile had been awarded to Mr Sudbury for a total of £560. A clerk of works, Mr Leach, was appointed to oversee the works, which began early in September 1855.

The ground was divided equally into consecrated (Anglican) and unconsecrated (Non-Conformist), the former to the west, the latter to the east. In October 1855 the question of the landscaping and laying out of the site was brought before the Board by Mr Davidson, a landscape gardener. He proposed a plan, provided estimates for laying out and planting the ground and offered to prepare a design and specification, conduct correspondence, attend meetings and superintend the work for £25 (excluding planting and advertising). The estimate for planting and roadmaking came to £362. Approximately half the site was to be laid out initially, the rest 'to be for future consideration'. It was decided that a sum not exceeding £40 was to be spent on trees and shrubs from a list drawn up by Davidson. On 26 May 1856 the cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester.

There have been several extensions to the cemetery. The northern part was completed c 1884, and is shown on the OS map of 1898 as a nearly exact mirror of the original part. Additional land was conveyed to Braintree District Council in 1919 (Diocesan Registry) for an extension to the east, and this land is shown as plot 109 (2.414 acres on the New Series OS map 1922). Another conveyance dated 1962 records the acquisition of more land by Halstead Urban District Council and the Parish Council, shown as allotments on the 1922 New Series OS. This extension was consecrated in 1992, in two successive parts.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING**

Halstead Cemetery, covering some 3.8ha (9.5 acres), is located on the eastern side of Halstead in an area that is now largely residential. It is bounded by Colne Road to the north and the Colchester Road to the south, with playing fields of Halstead Grammar School to the east and houses and gardens to the west. The cemetery is laid out on a gentle slope that rises from the main entrance, on the southern boundary, towards the north-east, and it is enclosed by a wall of flint and brick, supplemented by hedging and railings.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The main entrance to the cemetery is on the Colchester Road, to the south, with secondary entrances at its opposite end, on Colne Road to the north. The front wall to the south, gate piers, wrought iron gates and lodge, designed by Mr Phipson in 1855, are statutorily listed together, grade II.

### **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

The lodge is a two-storey building, with a short side wing. This wing is adjoined by a two-storey porch with corner buttress, facing the cemetery entrance. Walls are flint with ashlar dressings; the roof is tiled; a single red brick chimney has white brick quoins and two tall stone flues on top. The gable end of the side wing contains a two-storey ashlar bay window. Conspicuous gothic stone-mullioned three-light windows in this bay and in other walls. Details of the lodge are recorded in the Burial Board minutes, including 'the kitchen and two other rooms to have Caen stone chimney pieces; 2 inch Portland stone hearths'.

The only other building on the site is a mortuary chapel, originally called the 'Dead House', also designed by Phipson and built by Sudbury. This is one-storey, with walls of flint with ashlar dressings, exposed to the front and largely covered with concrete render on the other walls, with a high tiled hipped roof. The front contains a single central door and a side window, the latter a recent insertion possibly replacing an earlier smaller window. The side walls each contain a pair of small trefoil windows. The door furniture is original: wrought-iron hinges 'to cost 20 shillings each hinge' (Burial Board minutes) with handles and escutcheon to match.

Although there had been some discussion by the Burial Board over the building of a chapel the Vestry rejected the idea at an early stage, mainly for financial reasons – an omission that was already regretted by 1886: 'a great want is often felt for the need of a chapel, where the service might be conducted and the mourners shelter from inclement weather' (Evans 1886).

### **LAYOUT AND PLANTING**

The original layout, presumably by Mr Surridge, a member of the Burial Board, comprised a fairly broad central drive leading roughly north-eastwards from the main gate, lined originally on both sides by a strained wire (ERO: D/CC 7/7). Boldly curving paths lead to either side,

going out to the perimeter of the site and then returning to the central axis, where they meet in a *rond point*. This layout is almost exactly duplicated in the first extension of the cemetery further to the north, c 1884.

Despite the loss of the railings originally on the front wall and a relatively narrow frontage on the Colchester Road, the entrance is impressive, its appearance being enhanced by the slope of the ground up from road level. Mature beeches stand at each corner, to west and east, and a large, very fine cedar overlooks the entrance to the main avenue. From the point where the side paths diverge to left and right the avenue and much of the cemetery can be seen extending ahead, with a well balanced mixture of trees, shrubs and monuments. The ivy-covered walls along the boundary of the cemetery at this, its narrowest point, give a sense of both enclosure and direction. Little or no difference can be detected in layout and planting between the original southern and the later northern parts of the cemetery. Monuments are set out radially with respect to the curving side roads, which adds to the unregimented and flowing sense of progression through space. A variety of species of specimen trees and shrubs, mainly evergreen and some deciduous, are set out fairly liberally. They include cedar of Lebanon, cypress, beech, Wellingtonia (in the later half), Scots pine, Austrian pine, Western White pine and silver birch, with arbutus, holly, laurel, laurustinus, rhododendron and white lilac among the smaller trees and shrubs. Clipped yews in the form of urns, flaring out above narrow bases, and cones, the contrary shape, are dotted about, and in the southern half of the original cemetery they are set out roughly in a line alternating with clipped box.

To the rear of the later part, on Colne Road, the wall is backed by once-pollarded limes, and a row of evergreen shrubs to screen the cemetery: viburnum, cherry laurel, Portuguese laurel; the gate itself is flanked symmetrically by yews and several variegated hollies. The former northern boundary of the cemetery is marked by a low privet hedge and the traces of a hedge-bank. The wall on Colne Road, however, continues to the east, with another gate giving on to the 1919 extension of the cemetery, the latter gate being better preserved than that to the west, on the main avenue. Paths in this extension here follows a rectilinear pattern, with more monuments, set out square to the paths, and fewer trees and shrubs. The line of separation from the original two-part cemetery is marked, among other things, by a long compartment enclosed by low privet hedges, containing memorials and rose beds: elsewhere this original boundary is marked by a line of pines and also the 'dead house', which is partially masked by white lilac, laurel, holly and rhododendron bushes. A series of large cedars dominate the centre-line of the later, eastern addition, with the two paths running down this space terminating to the south under two horse chestnuts. Further to the east is another extension, dating to the 1960s, behind a hedge-bank now planted with Leyland cypress, privet and spruce. This space is also long and narrow, and contains two paths, one surfaced with tar and chips, and the other of concrete paving slabs leading to an area for cremation memorials, behind low beech hedges.

**REFERENCES**

Evans, William James, *Old and New Halstead*, 1886

Kelly's Directory 1862, p 90

**Maps**

OS 25" to one mile scale                      first edition 1877

OS    second edition 1898

OS New Series                                      third edition 1922

**Archive items**

Diocese of Chelmsford (Registry): Plan for consecration 1992 (cemeteries)

ERO: Plan of Halstead Cemetery 1856, D/CC 7/7

Halstead & District Local History Society (archive): Halstead Burial Board minutes 1858-94

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