

MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL
LONDON ROAD, MALDON

MALDON CEMETERY

TL 584 207

A mid C19 cemetery with some original planting, and a caretaker's house designed by P. C. Beaumont, a Maldon architect. The C20 extensions clearly reflect the change in funeral practices which occurred during that century, from formal grave plots to woodland burial.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The first attempt to establish a town cemetery was in April 1850. A committee was established and a site of just over 2 acres near the Fambridge Road was offered by Messrs Harridance & Wright at £260; this was to be financed with a loan from the Church Commissioners, with a penny in the pound rate to cover the interest and repayment. The cost of a chapel was to be defrayed by public subscription, and consecration would require another £25 to £35. However the Commissioners refused to offer a loan, on the grounds that the committee intended to lease to half the site to trustees for non-conformist burials. The Recorder of Maldon also ruled that it would be irregular to raise a rate to purchase land, one half of which was to be vested in trust for the use of dissenters. After these decisions, the committee ceased to meet.

The Burial Act of 1853 permitted the financing of cemeteries through the rates, and this enabled the two Maldon parishes to establish a joint burial board in October 1854. Advertisements inviting sealed tenders for land were placed in Essex newspapers. The lowest tender came from Rev R Burls who offered a field of just over 4 acres adjoining the London Road for £450. The board agreed to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to raise a loan of £1000, to be repaid with interest over £20 years by a charge on the poor rate of both parishes. An official from the Office of the Inspector of Burial Grounds visited the site; he considered it suitable but too large and advised that 2 acres should be disposed of. The burial board was busy during the first months of 1855 in securing the loan, laying out, draining and planting the cemetery, and building boundary walls and an entrance gate. Plans for a four roomed cottage (with wash house) for the sexton were abandoned as too expensive but two waiting rooms, one on each side of the entrance gate, were agreed. Mr. George Coote of Witham was appointed surveyor by one vote over his rival Mr. Frederick Chancellor of Chelmsford. Subsequently, after seeking the approval of the Bishop of Rochester, these were to be built as chapels. The bishop, however, insisted that canon 85 required the provision of a substantial wall or fence between the consecrated and unconsecrated areas 'to protect officiating clergy from disturbances proceeding from the unconsecrated portion of the cemetery' as well as 'to keep out pigs and dogs'. The Burial Board were clearly not happy with what appeared to be an unusual requirement and, in conjunction with several other boards, sought counsel's opinion. His view was that the bishop had a discretionary right to require a separating fence. It was then agreed that the main approach drive would be lined with a 4 foot wide border planted with shrubs on each side, with an iron fence behind each. The provision of cast iron grave plot markers was agreed. Meanwhile the cemetery had been enclosed on all sides with a brick wall, and Mr. Coote's design for the chapels, at over £600, had proved too expensive. Mr. May, one of the board members, produced a sketch of a plain brick chapel with two Gothic windows on

each side and two Gothic doors, and these were built at a little over half the cost of Mr. Coote's design. White brick dressings and a moulded cornice were added later at the suggestion of the builder. By July, the estimated cost of the whole project had risen to nearly £1500, and the board was obliged to seek authorisation for an additional £500 loan to cover the overspend. The cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Rochester on 27 September 1855.

By March 1856, most of the work on the new cemetery was complete, and the committee was busy with finishing the chapel and agreeing the opening times. They were also discussing the need for a cottage for a caretaker, for which Mr. Webber was asked to prepare working drawings. In the meantime, the police were to be responsible for locking and unlocking the cemetery gates, for which responsibility they received a small payment. The cottage cost more than planned, in spite of economies such as the substitution of plain sash windows for the iron Gothic casements originally intended. It was ready for occupation in October 1856, and the caretaker then assumed responsibility for opening and closing the gates, as well as tidying the paths and beds, and keeping the grounds clear of children and disorderly persons. The cottage was built against the cemetery wall and, judging by the frequent need for repairs, was a rather inadequate structure. It was replaced in 1901-2 by a lodge further to the west, designed by a local architect, Percy Munro Beaumont (1861-1918).

Little can be deduced from the burial board minutes about the original landscaping, apart from the shrub lined central avenue leading from the entrance; £30 was spent on shrubs but there was no specific reference to the planting of trees. There were gates on stone gate piers, part of the cemetery was walled (and required repair within a few years) with the remainder enclosed with an 'iron fence'. The paths were gravelled and there is a reference to 'beds', presumably flower beds. The grass was cut once a year for hay by the highest bidder, and shrubs were planted to replace those which had died. Apart from the cottage, there were various minor structures in the cemetery, such as a privy, a brick and cement water tank (capable of holding about 500 gallons of rainwater) and a hut (with a brick base) for tools. Evidence from C19 maps shows a central drive (with a midway turning circle) which divided the Church of England section (on the west) from the non-conformist part. The two chapels faced each other across the drive and a simple dog-leg path ran back from each chapel and then turned 90° to run parallel with the central drive. The boundary of the cemetery appeared to be planted with a line of trees. This layout was retained after a series of small extensions to the west and southwest in 1881, 1911, and 1925; after which the cemetery approximately covered the original 4 acre plot bought in 1855, part of which the Burial Board had been obliged to sell off. At each extension the outer boundary was enclosed with a brick wall and oak fence.

In 1931 a mortgage was obtained on the general rate to provide drainage, drives and fencing for a new extension to the cemetery and this was consecrated by the Bishop of Barking in April 1932. The Maldon Iron Works supplied grave numbering pegs.

During World War II, iron railings were requisitioned (in spite of the Burial Board's opposition) and two bombs, which failed to explode, landed near the railway bridge. This led, after the war, to lengthy negotiations with the War Damage Commission about compensation for damage to one of the chapels. However the Commission eventually concluded that settlement, rather than earth shock from the bombs, was responsible for the damage. There was discussion about repair, and even building a

new chapel (at an estimated cost of £3000) but it would seem that, in the end, it was decided to demolish the worst affected chapel and to retain the other.

In 1958, with the rising popularity of cremation, a Garden of Remembrance for the burial of ashes was laid out. In 1966 the Burial Board was planning a further extension. After this date, Maldon Borough Council assumed responsibility for this cemetery, and were responsible for the next major extension – and the provision for woodland burial on the site – in 1996.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, BOUNDARIES, AREA, LANDFORM & SETTING

The cemetery is bounded to the east by the cutting of the Maldon bypass (formerly the branch railway from Wickford) and open farmland, to the south and west by open farmland, and to the north by the old London Road. The old cemetery is relatively flat, but the new extension rises to the west and falls to the south. The site is distinguishable in the landscape from some distance by its mature C19 coniferous planting. The total cemetery area is about 6 hectares.

ENTRANCES & APPROACHES

The entrance to the old cemetery is just beyond the bridge over the Maldon bypass. Wrought iron gates on substantial panelled brick piers with stone cappings are set back from the road by segmental wing walls. The main avenue runs south from this gate and now ends in a modern turning circle beyond the mortuary chapel. The avenue originally continued the rear of the site where it was terminated by a specimen *cupressus sp.* Further west along the London Road is a newer second entrance accessing the cemetery extension, built in the same style as the original, though with less ornate piers and gates. The London Road side of the cemetery has a brick wall along its full length; just east of the old cemetery entrance, this wall has been heightened to accommodate the lean-to cottage inside the cemetery. There are traces of a brick wall (in very poor repair) along part of the very overgrown east boundary, but no trace of the original wall on the south or west boundaries of the original plot.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Of the original two mortuary chapels only the non-conformist one has survived. It is built of red brick with gault brick dressings to window and door openings and piers, with a slate roof. It has two Gothic iron framed windows on each side, a door opening off the main avenue, and, at the opposite end, another door of uncertain purpose, the sill of which is several feet above ground level. There are no traces of external steps. As would be expected on a non-conformist chapel, there is no evidence of a belfry. Recent temporary WC provision adjacent to the chapel considerably detracts from its setting. Just east of the entrance to the old cemetery, adjacent to the boundary wall, is the original caretaker's lean-to single storey cottage in red brick in Flemish bond, with a slate roof. There is no surviving chimney. It has two simple sash windows and a door at the end and is in poor repair. A large green lorry container has been placed between the cottage and the gates.

In the north west corner of the old cemetery (east of the new cemetery entrance) is the replacement caretaker's house of 1902, designed by P. M. Beaumont. It is of two storeys, in red brick with a timber framed jetty on the first floor frontage, with pebbledash infill, and a red tile roof. It has a small garden, separated from the cemetery partly by a brick wall and partly by a fence. This was the western limit of the cemetery after the 1925 extension.

There is a modern timber gazebo in the new cemetery.

CEMETERY GROUNDS

The east end of the cemetery (formerly the non-conformist part) contains graves, but it has reverted to dense secondary woodland with no surviving evidence of its original layout. A number of Irish and English yews can be seen in the undergrowth (probably marking the line of the original path), as well as some coniferous planting. A partially collapsed brick wall marks the east boundary. Apart from a few visible gravestones in the undergrowth, this area now resembles a nature reserve. The small number of gravestones might be the result of collapse or vandalism, from the Victorian burial board's refusal to allow permanent memorials on any plot not bought in perpetuity or from non-conformist tradition.

The avenue leading to the remaining mortuary chapel is lined with *Viburnum sp.* and continues in a straight line past the chapel to the rear of the site. Planting in this area includes a fine Wellingtonia, a variety of hollies and many Irish yews, as well as a variety of conifers. There is a turning circle half way along the avenue, beyond which it is very overgrown. It terminates in a substantial *Cupressus sp.* specimen tree at the southern boundary and then turns west where its line can still be discerned in the undergrowth.

To the west of the surviving chapel is a modern garden of remembrance, a brick paved semi-circular pergola on brick piers, with an extension to the south leading to a square garden enclosed with a yew hedge and containing a central circular rose garden. The pergola is covered in wisteria and an ornamental vine. Part of this area was formerly occupied by the Church of England chapel.

Further west, near the original boundary of the cemetery, there is another north south path, bordered with numbered cast iron plot markers (the manufacturer's name is illegible). Part of the original boundary is marked by a hedge containing hawthorn, blackthorn and field maple. West of this is the large C20 cemetery extension, reflecting contemporary aspirations. It is much more open; the older part has similar cast iron plot markers, and the newer section further west area is densely packed with gravestones and the sparse planting is mainly broadleaf. There are several separate zones in the cemetery extension, such as the open parkland memorial garden. There is a further extension dating from 1996, which is entered between the memorial walls, two segmental brick walls with piers and ball cappings facing a small obelisk set in a circular bed of low-growing conifers. West of this is an area set aside for woodland burials.

REFERENCES

Bettley, J. & Pevsner, N., 2007 *Buildings of England: Essex*, Yale UP

Maps and Images

1922 OS 25" New Series

Archive Items

1850-4 burial board minutes ERO D/DCf B905

1854-5 burial board minutes ERO D/B 3/19/1

1856-68 burial board minutes ERO D/DCf B906

1881 cemetery extension ERO D/C/C33/6

1901 dwgs for cemetery lodge ERO D/B 3/22/4

1911 consecration of extension ERO D/C/C62/6

1925 consecration of extension ERO D/C/C76/4

1927-40 burial board minutes EROD/B 3/19/8

1931 mortgage to fund extension ERO D/DCf B 39/8a

1940-69 burial board minutes ERO D/B 3/19/9

Research, and site visit on 17 October 2007, by Michael Leach.