

**CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL  
CHELMSFORD**

**NON CONFORMIST CEMETERY**

**TL703 060**

A good example of a small mid-nineteenth century burial ground with grass paths, evergreen trees and shrubs and ornate memorials of leading figures from Chelmsford.

**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Non-Conformist cemetery in New London Road was established under a Trust Deed enrolled in Her Majesties High Court of Chancery. The first meeting of the Trustees was held in the British School Room, Chelmsford on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April 1846. John Copland took the Chair and the Trustees unanimously agreed to accept the offer from Messrs. Wells and Perry to sell, for the purposes of a cemetery, their field in the North London Road containing two acres for £476. The offer was considered very liberal and the land was highly eligible for the burial of Dissenters in the Town and Neighbourhood.

The terms agreed were that a committee of thirteen of the largest contributors to the funds be requested to prepare such regulations, rules and estimates as may appear necessary for the governance of the Association. These regulations included the minimum depth of the grave, which was to be five feet, and that the depth of the coffin to be within three feet of the surface. Also, no funerals were to take place at night or on a Sunday without written consent of three Trustees. All graves stones, tombs, monuments, railings or inclosures were to be kept in order by the relatives or friends of the deceased. At the end of the regulations it stated that 'The poor, dying within three miles of the Shire Hall, may have free burials in plain graves, by payment of the Sexton's charge, on production of a printed order from the Clerk and a certificate signed by the Minister'. At the following meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, the subscribers' list showed that £630 had so far been promised. At the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1846 meeting it was agreed that the first Trustees consist of the fifteen largest subscribers together with two others.

James Fenton (1805-1875), architect, surveyor and engineer, was responsible for laying out New London Road and its cemetery. The non-conformist cemetery was laid out in 1846 along with a chapel and lodge, since demolished. In July 1846 Mr. Fenton was asked to prepare plans for the erection of a sexton's and receiving house, entrance walls and gate. Mr. Fenton's plans were accepted at an estimated cost of £200. Mr. Fenton designed the gates and a Mr. Hart was employed to make them. Mr. Copland had offered for sale some benches and these were purchased from him. Mr. Fenton was also asked to plan a building for storing tools, plants, etc. In December 1846 the Trustees agreed to have the laurels removed in front of the cemetery. James Fenton was one of the Trustees and his fourteen year old son, James Lionel, was the first burial on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1846. James Fenton, senior, died in 1875 and, although he lived in Brixton, is buried in the cemetery he designed.

By 1871 the Trustees agreed to take down the current receiving house and cottage and to re-erect the cottage at the north east end of the ground, with an entrance near it and an exit beyond the centre of the boundary wall against the road. The new chapel was to be rebuilt on the front of the centre plot, and a wall or iron fence was to be built next to the road. Mr. Charles Pertwee was to carry out these alterations at a cost not exceeding £500. The Clerk was requested to solicit subscriptions to meet the cost.

In 1883 it was agreed to continue the wall on the south border in a straight line with the current one, removing trees and shrubs and altering pathways. In 1895 the final part of the wall to complete the enclosure of the cemetery had been erected.

The cemetery contains many very large and ornate memorials to leading figures of Chelmsford. The cemetery was open to any dissenter and there is evidence of Congregationalists, Methodists, Wesleyans, Roman Catholics and Salvation Army. Additionally many burials were from people who resided outside of the Chelmsford area with a significant number from Springfield and Writtle.

London Road Cemetery was taken over by Chelmsford Borough Council under the Open Spaces Act 1906 in 1950. They will maintain it for seventy years after which they are free to lay out the land as recreation ground.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

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

The Non-Conformist Cemetery is situated off the B1007, the New London Road, which runs parallel with the old road to London, Moulsham Street. The many houses in North London Road are in either private or commercial hands. The cemetery sits between turnings Southborough Road and Queen Street with the cemetery entrance immediately off the New London Road.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The cemetery is accessed through a pair of wooden gates flanked by yellow stock brick walls. Immediately adjacent the Nonconformist Cemetery is New London Road's oldest business, Lucking & Sons, funeral directors.

### **CEMETERY**

The lodge and chapel, as shown on the 25" 1874 ordnance survey map, have been demolished and there are now no buildings in the cemetery. A wide grass path leads round all four sides of the cemetery, as on the 1874 ordnance survey map, with gravestones on both sides. The area in the centre of the cemetery has no defined paths although there are many graves in this area. The cemetery has been well planted with many yew trees, hollies, laurels and some specimen trees: most of which have grown to a good height. Many of the graves have imposing monuments, some gravestones are in a state of disrepair, and some are covered with ivy or overgrown bushes.

Monuments in the cemetery include memorials to Joseph Brittain Pash (died 1926), founder of Essex Industrial School; Ralph Luckin Smith (died 1902) with portrait photograph set into headstone; William Tanner (died 1850) who served for 56 years in office of Clerk of the Peace; Joseph Freeman (died 1875) 'once a slave in New Orleans...who escaped to England' He was employed at the London Road Iron Works.

## REFERENCES

### Books and Articles

Jones, David 2003 *Chelmsford A History* Phillimore, Chichester West Sussex

### Maps and Images

1874 25" first edition ordnance survey map sheet 52.8

### Archival Items

1846 Minutes of the Trustees of the Non-conformist Cemetery 17 April to 9 February 1943 ERO D/Z 61/3

1994 Monumental inscriptions at Nonconformist Cemetery, Chelmsford ERO T/Z 151/41

2006 Chelmsford Borough Council *Heritage information* James Fenton July

### Websites

[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) 23 March 2011

Researcher: Jill Plater

Site Visit: 4 March 2012 Jill Plater