

**UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL
SAFFRON WALDEN**

SAFFRON WALDEN CEMETERY

TL 547 384

Public cemetery created by Saffron Walden Burial Board, opened 1857, with listed lodge, front railings and gates, and chapel (all grade II), architect George Pritchett. Landscaped by William Chater.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Saffron Walden Vestry instituted a Burial Board in 1855, pursuant to the Burial Act 1854, to create a new public cemetery and thus end burial in the parish church and churchyard. The Board bought land on the south side of Sewers (sic) End Road (later Swards End Road, now Radwinter Road), amounting to about 5¼ acres (2.88ha), most of it for £800 from Lord Braybrooke. This was on chalk and suitably free-draining. After advertising for designs for a lodge, two chapels and other structures, those of Messrs Middleton and Pritchett of Darlington were chosen. In fact it was George Pritchett who drew up the plans and supervised the work, the construction to cost no more than £1,400. Messrs Thomas Wright and Alfred Grainger, presumably local, won the tender for construction (£995 4s 6d), with masonry by George William Chinnock of Soham (£493 5s 6d).

Plans for 'the Walls, Iron Fencing, Entrance Gates, Roads and Drains' were approved in December 1855, the Board making a journey to Soham to see how the cemetery there had been laid out. A strip of land on the north side of the main road was also bought, to widen the approach to the cemetery, and the road surface was raised, at a cost of £125. Kentish rag was approved for the chapels and lodge instead of red brick, at an extra cost of £100. Fencing and other ironwork, such as a vane on the chapels, was to cost £239 18s, and the front wall £180. Chapel vestries were dropped from the plans, however, and bells were also ruled out. The front wall had to be rebuilt twice within a few years, Portland stone being substituted for Ketton stone, among other alterations, and an iron cross on the spire of the episcopal chapel had to be taken down, as unsafe, and was replaced with a vane.

A contract was awarded to Mr. Chater, of Saffron Walden Nursery, for the design and planting of the cemetery, including roads and paths, at a cost of £207 5s. The Bishop of Rochester consecrated the episcopal part of the cemetery on 17 December 1856, and the first interment was made in January 1857. William Chater, although particularly known as a breeder and hybridiser of hollyhocks, is also associated with Bridge End gardens (possibly supplying planting suggestions) in the 1840's as well as the design of part of the gardens at Shortgrove, where he was Head Gardener.

The mortuary was approved by the Town Council in 1874, 'the building being covered with the same material as the Chapels and Lodge and, if practicable, built to correspond therewith.' A single mortuary building is shown on the 1877 Ordnance Survey plan, and two buildings, presumably those now extant, on the plan revised in 1919. The railway was built to the south of the cemetery in 1863–66, and presumably the intervening land turned over to, or bought for, cemetery use soon thereafter. The 'top

piece of ground', forming the southern third of the original cemetery, was prepared for use in 1878, the consecrated side of the existing cemetery being nearly full by then. This area was thereupon 'divided by a gravel path' (described below). The cemetery had subsequently to be enlarged to the east, the adjoining land covering somewhat more than 3 acres (1.74ha) being bought in 1900 for £250 and consecrated for burials in 1909. The new cemetery was laid out to a design by A G Edward. About two-fifths of this area, to the north, was within 100 yards of the nearest existing dwelling and legal objections were made to its use for burials. Consequently a hay crop was raised on this part of the extension and later it was used for allotments until houses were built on it in 1952 (construction of new houses so near a cemetery being legally unobjectionable). The area further to the south, next to the railway line, was partially consecrated in 1954, and a large extension to the west was added at some later time, before about 1970.

SITE DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM AND SETTING

Situated on the south side of Radwinter Road (formerly Swards End Road), about 0.5km to the east of the centre of the town. This is the main road running east out of Saffron Walden, along a shallow valley formed by a small tributary of the River Cam or Granta, flowing from east to west. The cemetery is laid out on the southern side of this valley, where the ground slopes fairly gently up from north to south, bounded to the north by the main road, and to the west by houses of c 1900 fronting on to the road and by late 20th-century houses to their south. To the east are allotments and, to their south, factory sheds. The southern boundary was formed by a railway line, built by 1866 and dismantled in the late 1960s, to be replaced partly by houses and partly by factory buildings.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The cemetery has two entrances on the north from the main road, each originally connected to one of the two chapels, a Church of England chapel to the east and a Nonconformist chapel to the west, the latter demolished at some time probably soon after 1990. The road frontage is defined by a dwarf wall with piers at intervals, all of Kentish ragstone with carefully squared quoins, carrying wrought-iron railings between the piers (listed grade II). The diamond-section railing bars are topped with spear heads, larger bars at intervals are surmounted by fleurs-de-lys, and more recent steel braces are bolted to the rear. Many layers of paint are discernible on the railings, all green or dark green. The two-leaf wrought-iron gates contain railings and are simple in design, without decoration (listed grade II). From each gate a slightly curvilinear road rises southwards to the chapel, or site of a chapel.

Two side-walls run from the road up the west and east sides, but not as far as the chapels. These side-walls are fairly low, of yellow or white brick with flint rubble panels and, at intervals, piers also of brick and flint. A small gate through the west wall leads to a yard and sheds, which may be linked with the neighbouring allotments. The boundary of the cemetery extension to the south-east is marked by iron railings topped with narrow spear-heads, while the southern boundary has railings with plain points. The latest extension to the south-west is bounded by posts and close-boarded fencing, and posts and wire fencing.

PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS

Between the two entrance gates, set back slightly from the street front, is a lodge (listed grade II), two storeys, built of ragstone with limestone dressings, in Gothic style, tall slated pitched roofs. This is L-shaped in plan, with a front door facing the street and two secondary doors to west and east.

The surviving chapel, to the east (listed grade II), originally the Church of England chapel, is a single-celled building with a porch under a small bell tower and spire projecting to the north. There are two windows in the north wall, three in the south wall, and one larger window in the east wall. It was built of ragstone, in Gothic style, with a high, slated pitched roof, aligned from west to east. The site of the Nonconformist chapel is marked by a clear area without burials or plants, except grass. The latter chapel is shown on maps as aligned from north to south, both chapels being almost identical in size and form, except that the Nonconformist porch lacked a spire and bell.

A mortuary and another smaller building in line with it (not listed) are situated on the original eastern edge of the cemetery, near its south-east corner. Both are of almost identical construction, yellow or white brick walls with panels of flint rubble, brick dentilled gables and tiled roofs.

A small building housing a public WC is situated at the north-west corner of the eastern extension, near the surviving chapel. This has been constructed relatively recently (1990s?) using yellow or white bricks and flint rubble in keeping with the mortuary and includes a timber-framed and roofed porch.

LAYOUT AND PLANTING

A large-scale Ordnance Survey plan of 1877 shows the original layout divided roughly into three parts, from north to south. To the north, all the roads are sinuous. Both chapels were on the right-hand side of their respective approach roads; each road continues by sweeping round to the left to rejoin the approach and return to the entrance gate. Side-roads branch off just inside each of the entrances to run slightly sinuously along the western and eastern boundaries, while other side-roads encircle each chapel. Just to the south of the chapels these roads link with a road running from west to east straight across the cemetery. The central part of the cemetery lies between this straight west–east road and another, similar road to the south. These parallel west–east roads are connected by two straight roads running from north to south, and also by the sinuous western and eastern boundary roads. Further to the south no more roads are marked, this last part of the cemetery presumably being reserved for future use. When this came into use, after 1878, a single central road ran further to the south, ending in a turning circle. This road is flanked by the only avenue planted as such, of young silver birch trees. Between 1900 and 1909 the eastern extension was laid out as a large rectangle, with a road running from the mortuary buildings around its four sides and back towards the eastern chapel. The land added to the south, between the original cemetery and the railway line, had no roads. The western extension was served by a series of rectilinear roads continuing the line of the original west–east roads.

At first the cemetery was also divided into consecrated and unconsecrated areas, which lay to the east and west respectively of an iron fence running, until at least the end of the 19th century, just west of the lodge. The consecrated area, served by the Church of England chapel, was slightly larger in area than the unconsecrated area, served by the Nonconformist chapel, but otherwise the planting and

layout of the cemetery seems to have sought to minimise the distinction between these areas. Both entrance gates are flanked by large yews, and the area between the main road and the chapels is characterised by well distributed specimen trees. The more conspicuous individuals, such as two Wellingtonias, or a Catalpa and a Weeping Ash, and a Corsican pine and Blue or Atlas cedar, balancing each other to west and east. The verge between the boundary walls and, further to the south, hedge banks to west and east, and the curvilinear boundary roads is of varying width and is planted mainly with yew, holly and box, interspersed with lime, beech, larch and horse chestnut. More mature specimen trees are scattered across the northern and central parts of the original layout, such as Scots pine, cedar, cypress and beech, mixed with occasional small shrubby clumps of box, yew and holly. The southern and eastern boundaries of the early 20th-century extensions have been planted with a line of mixed Scots pine, lime, box, hawthorn, larch, horse chestnut and holly. The railings and wire fence around the southern boundary are masked by a new hedge of cherry laurel.

By contrast the southernmost part of the original layout has little planting except occasional shrubby box and yew, and an isolated, large flowering cherry near the mortuary. The more recent extensions to the west are relatively open and bare. Memorials in the areas north of the chapel(s) are generally widely spaced or in small groups, probably because of selective retention, and they are relatively varied in form, with headstones, now combined with their associated footstones, occasional rectangular marked plots, urns, obelisks, crosses, etc. To the south and east the burials are mainly marked by flat kerb stones and headstones, aligned from west to east, and quite densely and regularly laid out. These are dated from the 1930s to the 1960s. To the extreme south-east are three rows of WWII war graves, separated from the rest of the cemetery by a clipped, low box hedge: the headstones, those in each row being connected by a bed containing rose bushes, face a memorial 'sword of sacrifice', unincised, in the eastern boundary, which is flanked and backed by tall box bushes. The extension to the west contains rows of headstones generally back to back, dating from the 1970s onwards. Although labelled a lawn cemetery, kerb stones and individual planting and memorials in the plots prevents easy mowing. Small rectangular areas enclosed by low box hedges in both the latter extensions contain memorial plaques and plants, and to the west a line of memorial trees has been planted since the 1980s. The lodge is surrounded by a trellis fence and overgrown bushes of Portugal laurel, the older parts of the cemetery and their monuments are overgrown with ivy and the boundary side-roads are covered with moss, giving the cemetery an appearance of neglect.

REFERENCES

Entries describing the consecration in *The Chelmsford Chronicle* and *The Essex Standard*, 19 December 1856.

Stacey, H C., 1974 'Saffron Walden Borough Cemetery', in *Saffron Walden History*, ii, no. 1, 4–15

Maps

OS 125" to 1 mile, 1877, sheets 9.6.1 and 9.6.21

OS 25" to 1 mile, 1897 (revised 1896), sheets ix.2 and ix.6

OS 25" to 1 mile, 1921 (revised 1919), sheet vii.16

Essex County Council, 1976 Development plan, 1:5000, Saffron Walden [Ordnance Survey 1921 with modern land uses delimited]

Archives

ERO: D/ C/ C7/ 11 (1856)

ERO: Q/ RUm 2/ 143 (1862)

ERO: D/ C/ C60/ 7 (1909)

ERO: D/ C/ C 105/ 6 (1954)

Researchers: Sarah Green and Andrew Westman