

## Heritage Statement: Rectory Lane Cemetery

The Cemetery was opened in 1842 as a detached churchyard to St Peter's Church, using land to the rear of Egerton House (where the Rex now stands) given by Charlotte Catharine Anne, Countess of Bridgewater (1763-1849) the wife of 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bridgewater (her 'approbation' for the erection of the famous Ashridge Monument is acknowledged on the brass plate on the column).

The Cemetery was further extended in 1894 and 1921 and now covers 3.275 acres. The first extension was closed in 1976, although a new civic cemetery had already been opened at Kingshill in the 1940's. The lower extension is managed by Dacorum Borough Council, the Parochial Church Council remaining responsible for the 2 extensions. The Town Council also retains a keen interest in the Cemetery, The churchyard is effectively full, although family graves are occasionally reopened for additional interments of bodies or cremated remains. The whole cemetery remains under the control of the incumbent of St Peter's subject to the overriding control of the bishop's consistory court.

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The following highlight the principal points of significance:

- 1) Rectory Lane Cemetery is a good example of a relatively well-preserved 'landscape of remembrance'.
- 2) The combination of below-ground human remains and above-ground surviving features constitute a significant material collection of historical and human interest. However, there are not thought to be earlier archaeological sites or remains within the boundaries of the Cemetery. The remains of Cowpers Well (a grating on the side of Rectory Lane forming the western boundary strip adjacent to the Cemetery wall) demonstrates that the Rectory was established on its current site well before the foundation of the Cemetery, and that the Cemetery site had a close relationship with views from and landscape connections to the Rectory.
- 3) This is an early example of a detached burial ground (outside London).
- 4) The Cemetery accommodated uninterrupted burials between 1842 and c.1945. Although some headstones have been lost, the ordered sequence of some 7,500 burials can be 'read' or reconstructed in the surviving landscape
- 5) Prior to the Burial Acts of the 1850's, and unlike other cemeteries of the period, it was not intended to serve other faiths and did not employ the commercial or civic mechanisms used to create and manage the majority of other cemeteries at that time.
- 6) The Foundation Stone instead relates that the land was donated by the Countess of Bridgewater, the town's major local landowner, and at the period, thought to be the wealthiest female in England, so linking the Cemetery with nearby Ashridge House, assisted by additional key fundraising by the Rector.
- 7) The original design may have been influenced by the Countess of Bridgewater - certainly the bricks came from her Slapton brickworks. The Monks Garden at Ashridge, complete with artificial graves, was designed by Repton. Clear design principles can be 'read' from the surviving archaeology, backed by archival research.
- 8) The design also pre-empted by a year many of Loudon's published principles for cemetery design on a modest scale. Loudon himself was a fan of Repton and had visited Ashridge in the 1820's. The Cemetery exhibited an efficient layout, encouraging promenading with the axial pathway leading directly up to the Foundation Stone and the terraced avenue passing it.
- 9) Deliberate planting of yew tree walks to define pathways as well clusters of pleasant trees, including wych elm and some exotic species (Monkey Puzzle and American Cypress) are recorded when the Cemetery was opened in 1842.
- 10) The Rectory Lane Cemetery constitutes an archive in its own right charting the development and story of the town from c.1760 to c.1945. Some key people are buried here – particularly of military eminence, and memorials to personalities who shaped the growth of Berkhamsted and other well-known people with London and global connections. Major players jostle for position around the Yew Tree Walk, including a large monument to many members of the

Cooper family, including William, who pioneered the use of sheep-dip in the family's extensive chemical works in the town, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, Richard Powell Cooper and Richard Ashmole Cooper who set up the Cooper Research laboratory; the Smith-Dorriens (particularly Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, who led the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Ypres) and Sir Richard Mildmay Foot with his Seat of Remembrance. All those buried here will have made some contribution to moulding the town of Berkhamsted. including William Claridge (1796-1876), the town's first photographer; the Revd JW Cobb (1829-1883) author of *History and Antiquities of Berkhamsted*; William Costin (1849-1910) a prolific boatbuilder and Henry Stainsby (1859-1925) who devoted forty-five years of his life to the cause and care of blind people, in 1909 becoming Secretary General of the organisation that became the National Institute for the Blind.

- 11) The whole cemetery demonstrates continuity, with the two extensions being created without the need for a Burial Board, through public subscription and with land being donated again by the Countess of Bridgewater's descendants and the Rector.
- 12) The modest investments through public subscription have meant that structures have been restricted to the walls, entrance gates (the ones to Rectory Lane are almost certainly re-used), a pleasant memorial arch and a sexton's hut. Apart from the walls, these structures are Locally Listed and recognized in the Berkhamsted Conservation Appraisal (2015) as being at risk.
- 13) The extensions and their memorials headstones reflect changing burial practices. There are over 1000 memorials, in a range of imported materials and many with leaded lettering. There are some graceful monuments, tombs and chests in the Lower Cemetery with a notable cluster of early memorials towards the eastern side of the site – including a fine chest tomb to Mrs Hewson. Scattered across the Lower Cemetery, there are examples of table top, coffin, chest, bodystone, pyramid, altar, obelisk. coped and raised cruciform tombs, some with railings. Some standing crosses survive and there are examples of a recumbent Cross and a Propped Book. An eclectic cluster of headstones occurs on the Terrace. The Cooper family vault dominates, sited close to the Memorial Arch. Other types encountered include standing crosses, boulders with plaques (part of the cluster of Smith-Dorrien graves and including that of General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien with a large cross that used to bear a metal sword of sacrifice); the Wagstaff memorial with deep relief sculpted figures and the Foot grave includes the Seat of Remembrance, now restored. Memorials become gradually squatter and more restrained in the extension (the carved white marble headstone to the Loveless family is an exception). CWGC graves, reminders of Inns of Court OTC ('The Devils Own') and others 'touched' by the Wars are liberally sprinkled across the area. The Cemetery also reflects the growing recognition of, and compartmentalization of children's graves and the location of unmarked pauper's graves have also been traced.
- 14) Cowper was born at the Old Rectory. J.M Barrie stayed at Egerton House, the children providing inspiration for *Peter Pan*. Graham Greene grew up in Berkhamsted and would have visited the Cemetery. Other literary connections include Edward Mawley, who co-authored a book on roses with Gertrude Jekyll, and William Longman, founder of the publishing firm, is buried next to the Foundation stone
- 15) Some later interventions such as the three metal benches, all in the lower cemetery, are negative features. Apart from these, the creation of a new municipal cemetery at Kingshill which opened c.1947 has largely been responsible for the Rectory Lane Cemetery surviving intact – the comparative lack of neglect the Cemetery has suffered since it was last used for burials means that there have been no incongruous intrusions in that period; however, a spate of clearing some monuments and trees in the Lower Cemetery in the last two decades of the C20th has meant that certain features have been lost.
- 16) The cemetery has remained an open site where various ecological habitats have established themselves over the years – these in particular include many of the trees which have been deliberately planted over the years. The 1842 Burial Ground has a pleasant, mature parkland feel which has evolved over the years. In the upper sections, graves have been used as 'gardens', thus introducing new plants into that part of the site over the years - the southern top end is particularly rich in spring flowers. There are also well-established anthills in the

upper section below the top terrace. A good selection of birds, bats, mammals and butterflies reflect the ecological importance of the site.

- 17) Rectory Lane Cemetery is surely the only burial ground in England to have been served by a gravedigger named Mr Ghost!
- 18) The Cemetery remains significant to genealogists and for those with relatives buried there throughout the world; it is a heritage asset for the town to cherish and be proud of, with all key local and regional organisations in support; it is a place for visitors to enjoy and learn from. From visitor surveys, some 30,000 trips a year are made through the Cemetery, reflecting its significance as a place of health and well-being
- 19) 'Landscapes of Remembrance' (English Heritage 2013) points out that 'A high proportion of earlier burial grounds have been built over, which adds to the significance of those which remain.' (p.8).
- 20) The setting of the Cemetery, on the southern valley slope of the town, is a crucial element in the town's topography and evolution. Once positioned at the edge of town, it is now engulfed by housing, but retains important views over to the Common on the northern slopes, and equally appears as a well-treed, green lung when viewed from the opposite side of the valley.
- 21) The current story of preservation has some significance in that it is being carried out by a volunteer group under the Parks for People Scheme (which tends to favour Local Authority led projects). The aim is to make the place sustainable and thus provide a model for other cemeteries to follow.
- 22) The sum significance of a Cemetery, if it is reasonably intact, will always be greater than its constituent parts, mainly because there is so much 'hidden' history in terms of the people buried there. This is the case at Rectory Lane Cemetery, where on entering the space, one is only aware of the standing headstones – over 1,000 of them, whilst the other 6,500 buried there have appeared to have left very little trace.
- 23) Elements of discovery and significance are being, and remain still to be teased out, for future generations to continue to unravel. A part of the original Yew Tree Walk in the east part of the original cemetery was recognized only recently as a result of analyzing aerial photographs and field-walking.

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The condition of the Cemetery had been allowed to deteriorate. This situation changed completely in 2013 when responsibility for the care of the cemetery was delegated by the PCC and DBC to the Friends of St Peter's, an independent charitable trust whose objectives include the care of St Peter's churchyards. The Friends have worked hard to recover the cemetery from its overgrown condition and have undertaken research into the historical associations of the people buried there and into the flora, fauna and history of the site.

The Friends are now in the process of securing a Heritage Lottery Fund grant which will enable them to undertake work to maximise the benefits that can be gained from the use and improvement of the cemetery, both for the families whose family members are buried there and for the wider community.

The work proposed to fulfil these needs is outlined here:

- Creation of a comprehensive register and plan of burials
- Conservation of monuments
- Upkeep of the historic buildings and boundary walls
- Reinstatement of the principal entrances
- Introduction of improved signage and interpretation
- Improving access through, e.g. the reinstatement and improvement of paths and steps
- Creation of a Garden of Remembrance and Memorial Wall
- Management of existing trees
- Planting of trees

- Creation of wildlife reserve
- Introduction of appropriate seating
- Introduction of water supply and electricity

The main specific works for which Planning Permission is being sought are:

- a) Re-instatement of paths: the historical and archaeological evidence is clear that the paths being proposed for re-surfacing  
See attached Addaset resin bound NBS specification, color TBC and is proposed as a condition of the planning award.
- b) Lighting. The lighting is intended to enhance features in the Cemetery – the entrance gates, Memorial arch and
- c) Information Signage.

See the Design and Access Statement for a full list.

**Site name:** Rectory Lane Cemetery (also Three Close Lane Cemetery)  
**County or Unitary Authority:** Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire

## **Location**

National Grid Reference: 994075

### **1.1 Guidance**

We have followed the guidance below:

*Conservation Plan Semple Kerr* 7th Edition 2013,  
*Conservation Plan Guidance* HLF 2012  
*Conservation Principles Policies and Guidance* 2008 (HE)

### **1.2 Designations, Listings, Statements**

#### **1.2.1 Designation**

No items or elements in the Cemetery are statutorily designated.

#### **The following items are locally listed:**

1. Cemetery Piers and Gates (Northwest), Cemetery, Rectory Lane
2. Brick decorative arch, Cemetery, Rectory Lane
3. Cemetery piers and building (east), Cemetery, Three Close Lane

#### **The descriptions are:**

##### **Cemetery piers and gates (northwest), Cemetery, Rectory Lane**

Three tall finely jointed brick octagonal piers with moulded plinths and stone at the base, at mid-level to the rear faces and to the moulded cappings. 1842. Pedestrian gate to left and wider carriage entrance to right. Single gate to pedestrian gate, double gates to carriage entrance. Original gates were hung on pintles (which survive to pedestrian gate) on inner faces but now moved to lateral face for pedestrian gate and outer faces for carriage gates. Gates have mid-rail with alternating full-height and mid height barley-sugar twist uprights. Alternating scrolled and 'claw' heads to full uprights. All full uprights have alternate lower and upper tier with scrolled motif; each alternate uprights has upper and lower scrolled motif.

The piers and gates form an imposing entrance off Rectory Lane to the cemetery but are in poor condition.

This new cemetery was opened in 1842 on a ground behind the Elizabethan manor, Egerton House (now the site of the Rex Cinema), by Charlotte Catherine Anne, Countess of Bridgewater and widow of John Egerton, 7th Earl of Bridgewater. The cemetery, situated between Three Close Lane and the old St Peter's rectory, was extended in 1921.

##### **Brick decorative arch, Cemetery, Rectory Lane**

Free standing arch, c.1842 brick with moulded brick to the arch and stone dressings. Unrendered buff brick with red brick dressings. Arch has pediment with moulded stone capping and elliptical brick arch with double moulded brick surround with stepped stone offsets to each side. Finial has been removed. Inscriptions to the pediment in three narrow stone bands, very weathered on

south side. Weathered south side inscription ... Labour ...Love/Then Enter Into This House. Crisper inscription on north side 'There/Remaineth Therefore/A Rest ToThe People of God'.

This new cemetery was opened in 1842 on a ground behind the Elizabethan manor, Egerton House (now the site of the Rex Cinema), by Charlotte Catherine Anne, Countess of Bridgewater and widow of John Egerton, 7th Earl of Bridgewater. The cemetery, situated between Three Close Lane and the old St Peter's rectory, was extended in 1894 and 1921.

### **Cemetery piers and building (east), Cemetery, Three Close Lane**

Ensemble of piers and caretaker building to Cemetery. Late C19th. Caretaker's building backs onto Three Close Lane, the gable forming an integral part of the boundary wall to left and against which the left hand gatepier abuts. Unrendered dark purple and some buff brickwork with red dressings and stone cappings to the piers and half-round blue capping bricks to the boundary wall. Gatepier to right side has lost stone capping, left side has moulded base, quatrefoil decoration to front and chamfered top brought to an octagonal point. The original gates have been removed and replaced with an indented concave wall.

The small caretaker's building has corrugated iron roof. Capped stack to road end. Plain bargeboards to cemetery. Gable end facing onto cemetery has blocked doorway with integral side window under cambered brick arch.

The cemetery was originally opened in 1842 on a ground behind the Elizabethan manor, Egerton House (now the site of the Rex Cinema), by Charlotte Catherine Anne, Countess of Bridgewater and widow of John Egerton, 7th Earl of Bridgewater. The cemetery, situated between Three Close Lane and the old St Peter's Rectory, was extended in 1894 and 1921.

#### **1.2.2 Statements**

*Existing Statements of Significance (EH/ CADW/Other)*

The Statement of Significance used for faculty submissions is:

There is a detached churchyard occupying about 1.3 ha on the opposite side of the High Street to the church, between Rectory Lane and Three Close Lane. The lower part of this burial ground, originally consecrated in 1842 is closed. The upper part remains open although it was already full in the 1950s and burials since then have been restricted to existing family graves.

The burials in the churchyards represent a wealth of historical interest for the wider community and include the graves of individuals of national importance. In addition, the detached churchyard is a major green open space within the built-up area at the eastern of the town.

Prepared by Christopher Green  
Chairman  
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May 2016

#### **1.3 Changes and Uses:**

##### **1.3.1 Evolution and Change**

Ostensibly, Rectory Lane Cemetery was a straightforward response to cater for the burial needs of an expanding market town. As a result, it exhibits a relatively simple evolution as a burial ground from its foundation in 1842 through the additional land acquisition in 1894 and 1903, and then abandonment as a place of burial in c. 1945 when the new Municipal Cemetery at Kingshill

was opened.

In its first phase, elements of the Cemetery were altered. For example, the original wooden gates were replaced with (re-used) gates & piers in the 1870s – it may well have been felt that a more dignified entrance was required.

The original burial ground was partly modified as a result of the 1894 extension (for example most of the south wall was demolished); but the extension was constructed as a single addition, the upper part being grazed until consecrated in 1921. The extension brought with it, for the first time, a building for use by the Sexton, a new entrance off Three Close Lane and a Memorial Arch to mark the transition between the old and new sections. A final extension, which was planned but not executed, accounts for why the upper section of the east and west walls stop short of the top of the Cemetery (they would have allowed for an access road to be constructed across the top of the site to service the new extension to the west).

The walls of the Cemetery reflect changes to the Cemetery - parts have been demolished, including the lower section of the eastern wall which was rebuilt on a slightly different alignment to accommodate the widening of Three Close Lane, and are topped by railings, some of the walls have been raised or rebuilt. Collapses in 2012 (in the lower Cemetery, west wall) and 2016 (upper section, west wall), reflect tree growth on the borders of the Cemetery, as well as the fact that, because of surrounding development, some of the walls are now acting as retaining walls

The three principal components that form the basis of the Rectory Lane Cemetery layout are the memorials, plots and graves it contains. The Project has advanced its understanding of the first two components, and over the Delivery Phase is assembling further information to deepen its understanding of the third.

The process of filling up the graveyard can be 'read' and reconstructed from the Burial Books. The headstones accordingly reflect different artistic styles and preferences as one progresses up the Cemetery from north to south.

The Cemetery was essentially planned in two main cycles. (A third planning cycle in the 1920s – to extend the Cemetery westwards – never materialised). The first prior to 1842 resulted in a rectangular space providing approximately **1424** plots. The second phase prior to the 1894 expansion added a further **2318** plots. Assuming 2 burials in each plot, this meant that the whole Cemetery could accommodate around **7500** burials.

The survival, distribution and style, of headstones, together with the information contained on them contribute to the most striking visual and precious legacy of the Cemetery.

The majority of memorials consist of headstones. Many have kerbs, although some of these have been removed in the Lower Cemetery. There are also a variety of tomb memorials – coffin, chest, table top, obelisk, coped - concentrated in the Lower Cemetery and on the Terrace. Indeed, there are no tombs in the post 1894 concentration.

The layout tells us about society – a more hierarchical arrangement in the 1842 section with the finer monuments towards the east and also clustering around the axial path and Yew Tree walk. Spaces where there are no headstones also may indicate where paupers are buried – for example in the middle of the two main compartments. With the transition to plainer, squatter memorials in C20th, the social distinctions are less pronounced, although there is still a preference for burial either close to the axial path or against the west wall. By this time also, a distinct area for children has been set aside, unlike in the original cemetery where children are buried amongst, or in, the adult graves.

Trees have always helped to define routes and pathways, as well as populating the

compartments in the lower cemetery. However, some of the pairs of the Yews to the Terrace have been lost, whilst all have been stripped out each side of the main axial path. The upper cemetery was intended to be relatively devoid of tree cover, although the stumps of some of the pre-existing parkland trees do still survive.

An unfortunate change in the upper Cemetery (probably occurring in the 1960s?) was the infilling of the main gates from Three Close Lane and the blocking up of the hearse turning circle with a Gas Governor building.

Because of the use of the Cemetery as a cut-through, a new diagonal path has been created across the site, leading from the Three Close Lane agricultural gates down to the Rectory Lane gates. None of the formal surfaced paths have survived.

Shifting burials to the Municipal Cemetery at Kingshill led to a 50 year period of mainly benign neglect, with responsibility for the management of the Cemetery becoming blurred after the Lower Cemetery had been subject to a Closure Order in 1976. This sparked a period of dispute, the 1980s and 1990s probably being the nadir in the history of the Cemetery - some monuments in the Lower Cemetery were removed under faculty; and some trees removed. Graffiti and anti-social behavior became a problem, a change from the Victorian days when the burial ground would have been a venue for perambulation. A particularly poor choice was the installation of three benches, which were cast-offs from the Railway Station.

### ***1.3.2 Surviving and Current Use(s)***

The burial ground has been used for burials sporadically since 1945, but probably only once since 2000. However, in 2014, the Friends of St Peters arranged for the ashes of Amy Chown to be buried in her grandparents grave. There is one grave that has been regularly tended by the family, and another where the family have repaired the monument (a wooden cross) themselves; otherwise there is no individual input into tending the graves.

Until recently, the Cemetery has been used primarily as a cut-through and for dog-walking. Interest in forming a group to tackle the lack of care and declining state of the Cemetery dates back to 2010. In 2013, the Friends of St Peters was formed and the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project was launched in January 2014. Work parties have regularly met to manage the site, clear scrub and maintain the current habitats. A bee-hive has been introduced. A handful of monuments, and the Seat of Remembrance have been repaired or restored. Major events were held on Heritage Open Days in 2014 and 2016; trialling a variety of interpretational methods such as guided tours, musical performances, commissioned playlet, workshops etc. Genealogical enquiries responded to. Much exploratory work and research has been undertaken in support of the Lottery Application.

### ***1.3.3 Survival and Intactness***

Much of the Cemetery survives – the layout and all the key features – the Foundation Stone, sexton's hut, gatepiers and Memorial Arch are intact, though all in need of repair. The Three Close Lane entrance and Rector's gate have been bricked up; there has been some loss of headstones; As noted above, sections of wall have been lost, re-built or adapted over the years; although in the 1894 extension, the walls are almost fully intact, apart from a section of the west wall which has recently collapsed and the curved wall on the south side of the 'agricultural gates' which was rebuilt c.2006. Trees have been lost – particularly those lining the axial path, and former parkland trees in the 1894 extension.

### ***1.4 Community***

The community sees the Cemetery as a green space to be 're-gained'. Surveys of community



interest and awareness of the Cemetery have been carried out in 2010, 2014 and 2016.

## 2014

The 2014 survey process established that currently there is in the region of 30,000 trips through the cemetery each year. Many of these were repeat uses, suggesting that between 1000-1500 (or 6%-9% of Berkhamsted's total population) use the cemetery on an irregular basis.

The two dominant uses of the Cemetery were as a cut-through into Town and as a place to walk dogs. However, the Cemetery's ecology and to a lesser extent, history (including ancestors buried there) were also important attractors.

The consultation demonstrated that there is a sincere, shared concern about the cemetery's neglected condition, which is seen as disrespectful to the 'tenants' and a poor reflection on Berkhamsted given the relative wealth of the town.

The community considered the following to be the significant aspects of the Cemetery to like:

- Peace (in a busy town)
- Space (vastness!)
- Trees (shade) 'Trees, peaceful and shady in middle of town'
- Wildlife (squirrels, foxes, woodpeckers)
- Sense of history (graves): 'Old, history, precious to the town'; 'I explore the old headstones sometimes, I like the war graves and the Bridgewater arch.'

The main dislikes included:

- Untidiness (litter, dog mess, overgrown)
- Broken headstones
- Seating

'Quiet', 'peace', 'meditation' ('the atmosphere, a good place to reflect on what's happening through my day'), 'oasis', 'calm' were important components of many visits. More purposeful visits to the Cemetery do feature, and a few respondents did come to the Cemetery on a regular or semi-regular basis as a result of its specific function as a burial ground. However in only one case did this appear to involve a purposeful action of 'clearing graves', and, as noted above, the former responsibility for individual families to look after or tend their ancestor's graves appears to have been largely abandoned. In a broader sense, though, the people buried in the cemetery were a 'draw' in that some visitors were attracted by the opportunities to carry out genealogical research, or simply to read and reflect on the inscriptions on the headstone: eg 'Visiting grandparents and Aunts grave grandfather buried 1992.'

However, some visits were wrapped up in more complex motivational patterns:

'quiet time; showing my baby trees and birds, taking a pleasant shortcut';

'Walking through to town. Quiet time watching wildlife. Reading gravestones'

'shortcut, read stones, sometimes sit, eat chocolate and reflect about graves I had read.' 'I enjoy the peace and quiet you often find in cemeteries and the sense of history you can experience reading the tombstones.'

## 2016

This survey was primarily a Consensus check, but individual comments included:

'Great work so far' and 'Great use of public space'

'Land for remains will be limited in the future. Please save this special place for people'

'The Cemetery is a lovely place and it's great it is being restored'

'Glad the space has been made accessible and publicized'

'The Friends are doing excellent work to rejuvenate the cemetery'

The surveys included neighbours, who are viewed as key stakeholders (one neighbour has been collecting data on birds and wildlife for 3 years). As one neighbour commented:

'We enjoy it as a green backdrop to our house. We like seeing the squirrels jumping through the branches. We like the oasis of calm away from traffic of the town'.

Other constituents, demonstrating that the Cemetery's significance is appealing to a growing community, include:

- The growing number of volunteers who support the project and derive benefit from health and wellbeing opportunities
- Those with relatives buried there – many enquiries have been answered, with the result that information is reciprocated and included as biographies on the FoSP website
- Statutory organisations such as the Parochial Church Council (who own the site), Berkhamsted Town Council, Dacorum Borough Council (Bereavement Officer/Conservation Officer) and Hertfordshire County Council all support the project.
- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust have participated at events and are carrying out ecological surveys
- Amenity societies such as Berkhamsted Citizens Association and other groups who take an interest in the heritage, such as the Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society, British Legion, Rotary etc.
- Local Businesses and retailers such as Tescos (who have financed the restoration of the Seat of Remembrance), Waitrose, local funeral directors , IT businesses (such as the Design House Studio).

## **1.5 Relative values:**

### *1.5.1 Historical*

The cemetery is an early example of a detached church cemetery, founded in 1842. The parish church stands at a focal point on the corner of the High Street of Berkhamsted and Castle Street, leading as its name suggests to the motte and bailey Castle. Between 1538 (when burial registers were first established) and 1855 there were in excess of 7,500 burials here, accounting for the obvious rise in the ground. So the growing national concern that churchyards were unsanitary and presented major health hazards, was felt particularly acutely in Berkhamsted The impressive Foundation Stone on the south wall of the Cemetery records how it was established by the land (1.357 acres) being donated by the Countess of Bridgewater, (the widow of John William, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bridgewater, and owner at the time of Ashridge and the vast estate attached to it) and the walls being erected with contributions by the Rector and other dignitaries such as the Rt Hon Mark Lord Somerville, The Hon<sup>ble</sup> W Booth Grey, The Hon Harriot Grimston as well as the local railway and canal companies.

Opened in 1842, the Cemetery therefore was built prior to the Burial Acts, pre-dating the spate of civic cemeteries (although Dacorum only had its first one in 1878 at Heath Lane, Hemel Hempstead) and also not typical of other cemeteries being founded before or at this time either by other faiths, by private or joint-stock companies, or by the Established Church on the back of parish rates; rather, Rectory Lane Cemetery was the product of philanthropic and voluntary contributions, bypassing the need to raise public funding through an imposed rate.

The Cemetery was extended to the south in 1894 and again in 1921, and in each case there was continuity with the original foundation because the land was donated (either by subsequent owners of Ashridge or the Rector) and infrastructure works were paid for by public subscriptions rather than via the parish rate.

The original plot off the High Street appears to have formed part of one of the three closes that gave the lane on the eastern boundary its name. The western boundary is contiguous to this carriageway and part of the grounds of the Rectory. In the generous verge on the east side of the carriageway is located Cowper's Well. Cowper (1731–1800) was an English poet and hymnodist. One of the most popular poets of his time, Cowper changed the direction of 18th century nature poetry by writing of everyday life and scenes of the English countryside. In many ways, he was one of the forerunners of Romantic poetry. The well, in the Rectory garden where Cowper spent his early childhood, was covered by a substantial structure which housed the winch-gear and was a former 'tourist' attraction. The Cemetery bounded the rear garden of Egerton House (demolished in the 1930s and now the site of the listed Rex Cinema) where J.M Barrie used to stay.

With the opening of a new civic cemetery c.1946 at Kingshill – on the very southern edge of the town – the Rectory Lane Cemetery site became neglected; with the transfer of the original section following Closure to Dacorum Borough Council, some maintenance was carried out but also some unsightly interventions such as the three metal benches were introduced; in 1991 some monuments were removed by faculty; fortunately the cemetery escaped the spate of topple-testing carried out in some of the local authority's cemeteries to meet Health and Safety requirements.

### *Monuments*

The cemetery has over 1,000 memorials and there are examples of funerary art ranging from early Victorian classical designs, through high Victorian splendour to those which reflect a less affluent 20th century.

The largest memorial - Coopers Vault is situated in the middle of the site, on the Terrace close to the Memorial Arch consisting of a large square pillar on two plinths, surmounted by a stone cross. 16 members of the family are recorded on the four faces of the pillar.

The earliest surviving gravestone is thought to be that of Richard Burn, 32 years butler to James Smith Esq of Ashlyns, died 28<sup>th</sup> November 1842 aged 63 (No 300). James Smith, a member of the banking family that established Smith's Bank, built the hall c. 1800. It was the birthplace of his son, Augustus Smith, Member of Parliament for Truro. The last burial in the Cemetery was probably that of Bruce Burge in 1992, when he joined his wife (who died 1990) and his daughter (1931-8). Ironically, these two gravestones – earliest and last – are almost next to each other on the Terrace!

252 monuments survive in the lower Cemetery, and as they date from the mid to the later C19th, reflect a stylistic change from Classical to Gothic forms. The types of

headstones are described briefly in the FHS Volume. There is a notable cluster of early memorials towards the eastern side of the site – including a fine chest tomb to Mrs Hewson,(169), table tomb to George Barton (187), and coffin tombs to Foster (183), Hurst (170), Pethybridge (147), Barnes (150) Skinner (167) and Lane (247). There is also a truncated pyramid monument (Parkin (190). Elsewhere, there is a large altar Tomb (Unwin (82)) located at the junction where the axial path meets the diagonal path. A chest Tomb (Hedges (88)) is located on the west side of the axial path.

Scattered across the rest of the Lower Cemetery, there are examples of coped slabs (Whateley, (15); West (23), Gambier (107), Matthews (135), Harvey (172), Bunn (191), Mims (233), Hilder (84), Breckon (86). At the top of the axial path there are obelisks to Holloway (61) and Potter (59a). Some standing crosses still survive – to Johnson (54),Yule (98), Pearce (217) and Bartrum (95). There is also an example of a recumbent Cross (Lloyd (79)) and a Propped Book (203) along the northern boundary wall. A couple of the tombs have railings (241; 82).

An eclectic cluster of headstones –reflecting the long period over which they appeared - occurs on the Terrace. The Cooper family vault dominates, sited close to the Memorial Arch. There are a number of examples of standing crosses, but most have been felled, particularly to the eastern half on the south side. Other types encountered include boulders with plaques (part of the cluster of Smith-Dorrien graves and including that of General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien with a large cross that used to bear a metal sword of sacrifice); the Wagstaff memorial (262) with deep relief sculpted figures; examples of coped (278, 293, 313, 344), raised cruciform (314) and chest tombs (Keyser (284 & 285) and Leaper (295). There is also a large slab with railings (346), bodystone (347), the Atkinson WGC headstone (366) and an ‘elaborate’ tomb (Spengler (326)).The Foot grave (365) includes the Seat of Remembrance, now restored.

In the post 1894 extensions, kerbed surrounds with stumpier – or in many cases, no - headstones become the favoured design. Many of the graves in the lower half have felled crosses. There are no memorial tombs above the Terrace. This reflects the rise of the concept as ‘Grave as Garden’, where the kerbs might contain an area which could either be fully planted, or might have some treatment (crazy paving, slab, coloured chippings), often providing an urn with a platform to stand on. There are some nice surviving examples of robust standing crosses along the Rectory Wall boundary, and particularly striking is the sculpted marble headstone to the Loveless family (1009) facing the Agricultural Gates entrance.

The breakdown of materials used for memorials is as follows:

	Lower Cemetery	Terrace	Extension up to Top Terrace	Upper Terrace	Total
Cast Concrete	0	0	0	4	4
Granite	7	19	98	22	146
Granite/Slate	0	1	1	0	2
Granite/Yorkstone	3	3	0	0	6
Granite/Marble	0	1	0	1	2
Granite/Bronze	0	0	1	0	1
Limestone	32	13	15	10	70
Limestone/Bronze	0	1	0	0	1
Limestone/Cast Concrete	0	0	1	0	1

Limestone/Marble	0	0	4	1	5
Limestone/Metallic Sections	0	1	0	0	1
Limestone/Slate	0	0	1	0	1
Limestone/Yorkstone	9	6	1	0	16
Limestone/Yorkstone/Ferrous Items	3	1	0	0	4
Portland Limestone	1	2	7	0	10
Portland/Yorkstone	0	0	1	0	1
Marble	20	35	427	91	573
Marble/Concrete	0	0	1	0	1
Marble/Plaster	0	0	1	0	1
Marble/Slab Slate	0	0	1	0	1
Timber/Bronze	0	0	1	0	1
Yorkstone	71	6	44	1	122
Yorkstone Bronze	1	0	0	0	1
Yorkstone/Marble	2	2	4	0	8
Yorkstone/Limestone/Serpentine Marble/Limewash	0	1	0	0	1
Total	149	92	609	130	980

Throughout, headstones are therefore constructed using a range of geological types of stone. The table indicates that marble is the most commonly encountered material, followed by granite, then Yorkstone and limestone, with various combinations in addition. Hardly any slate is used. Over time there is a distinct decline in the use of Yorkstone, with the preference for the harder weathering materials increasing – marble is relatively scarce in the Lower Cemetery, but increases in popularity as one moves up the Cemetery. Early photos show how the Cemetery gleamed white in the first half century after the extension had been built.

Most are simply carved. Lead lettering is the most commonly encountered other form of inscription method – particularly found on kerbstones,- a vulnerable survival. Some of these are painted, as are some of the carved inscriptions – another significant legacy. Black cement is used later as a surrogate in the upper terrace.

	Lower Cemetery	Terrace	Extension up to Top Terrace	Top Terrace	Totals
Lead	0	0	18	1	19
Pressed Lead	17	53	382	57	509
Pressed Lead & Painted	1	1	34	11	47
Black Cement	0	2	0	6	8
Black Cement and pressed lead	0	0	0	1	1
Cement	0	0	1	0	1
Carved, pressed lead	0	0	2	0	2
Carved & Painted	16	4	8	11	39
Carved and painted, pressed lead	0	0	0	1	1

Bronze	0	1	1	0	2
Pressed Lead/Bronze	0	0	1	0	1
Painted Lead	0	0	1	0	1
Raised Carving	0	3	0	0	3
Totals	34	64	448	88	634

Yorkstone and limestone tend to be carved, while granite and marble tend to have pressed lead lettering.

### *War Memorials*

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) records 27 war graves at the cemetery, with the WW1 war graves (See Publication 4: *Commemorating the World War I Fallen*) all being dispersed across the first extension (there is one adjacent to the Memorial Arch), and all the WWII graves scattered across the second extension. The 14 WW1 memorials include Captain Rupert Atkinson who received the M.C in 1917 for a daring aerial attack in France on enemy observation balloons; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut Geoffrey Wynne Bavin, who died in 1916, when testing a new plane at Upavon; Private Ludlow, who poignantly died on Armistice Day; Corporal Reynolds who took part in the Battle of the Somme; Charles Elliott who was a deserter from the Navy before the war but re-joined the Royal Naval Reserves; Private Short who had emigrated to Canada but ended up on the front line in France; and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Simpson who joined the Inns of Court Officer Training Corps (the 'Devils Own' being based in Berkhamsted during the majority of the War) but never saw active service having contracted influenza and bronchitis in early 1915.

There is also a late C20th War Memorial maintained by the British Legion at the northern end of the original cemetery, just inside the Cemetery gates.

Besides the CWGC memorials there are memorials to many who played key roles in the South African (1879-1915) Egyptian (1882) and both World Wars. Near the Memorial Arch is the grave of General Sir Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien (1858-1930) who distinguished himself in the Boer War, and in WW1, commanded the British II Corps at the Battle on Mons and the battle of Le Cateau. In the Spring of 1915 he commanded the British Second Army at the second battle of Ypres. Other family members with adjacent headstones and distinguished military careers include Rear Admiral Arthur Smith-Dorrien (1856-1933) and Lieut. Commander Henry Theophilus Smith-Dorrien (1850-1931) who disguised himself as an Arab in 1882 during the War in Egypt.

However, it should also be recognised that many casualties of war are also buried in the Cemetery – outnumbering the War Graves Commission headstones. The inscriptions are invaluable for providing some background details. There are an additional 17 monuments to those who died during the First World War.

Similarly, for the Second World War: there are non CWGC monuments recording deaths of soldiers such as Pte Leslie Goss, whilst a Japanese POW, 1944, and others lost in action. Some died later as a result of wounds received during the war (eg Osborne who 'died 9<sup>th</sup> March 1924 through serving in the Great War'.

Finally, of course, there were many who had fought in the wars but had survived - for example, the Smith-Dorrien family, Henry Lane, Lt. Col. Indian Army; Hutchins, Col.

Indian Army; Lieut. Col. Arthur Campbell-Walker; Henry Echalaz, former Captain 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen Royals; Alexander Renny; Bengal Lancers; Major Grimsley; Hon Capt Edward Ballam; Col Wm Sutton and Major General Alexander Sutton; Major George Chennels and Colonel Arthur Barrett.

Next to the Memorial Arch is the Foot Seat of Remembrance - this was erected in 1934 to the front of the grave of Brig-Gen Richard Mildmay Foot (1865-1933) by Lucy, his wife. Foot also had a distinguished military career, serving firstly in Zululand, from 1887-1888 and then in the South African War 1889 -1902. With the outbreak of the First World War he returned to the army, was again wounded and received a DSO and other decorations. A keen interest of his, which explains why the bench ends of the Seat of Remembrance have carved dog's heads, was breeding Irish Setters.

Equally there are many residents buried in the Cemetery whose lives were affected by the war eg Horace Allen who died in 1929 having never recovered from a fatal head wound during the First World War and whose grave is marked by a simple wooden cross made by his grandson at the time of his death; Hannah Cottingham, matron at "The Beeches" V.A.D Hospital, who died in the flue epidemic of 1918 and whose monument was erected by the Inns of Court O.T.C.; Frank Blicow the stationmaster who dealt with thousands of troops passing through the town to various theatres of war and Charlie Brewer, who died 'of an overloaded stomach' during a Tug-of-War, having eaten a large lunch, whilst on a Territorial Army Camp in 1913.

Evidence has also come to light that a 'War Shrine' was constructed on the brick plinth (which survives) in front of the Foundation Stone. It is shown on the only plan in the Burial Books, covering the Terrace Area. A photograph is yet to be found to show what this looked like. It is not known how long the Shrine lasted, although certainly it was within living memory.

### *Plots*

Whereas the headstones present a somewhat haphazard, jumbled appearance in the Lower Cemetery, a structured grid was nevertheless adopted for how the plots were laid out. The plots were distributed around certain defining features, either in the form of boundary walls and fences (which 'contain' the entire Cemetery) or paths. Trees defined and bordered some of the original paths, so 'spaces' were left between plots to accommodate them.

The overall distribution of plots is as follows:

#### *The Lower Cemetery*

Originally there 16 rows to the west of the path and 12 to the east. The row next to the axial path added an additional row to the west side. With a total of 29 rows across the site, running from east to west, it is estimated a row may have contained an average of 46 plots, yielding a total of c. **1334** plots.

#### *The Terrace*

Total Terrace: **98** plots

#### *Extension: Lower Half*

A total of 16 rows across the site, but with some children's graves inserted between two of the rows, yielding **977** plots

#### *Extension: Upper Half*

Above the Three Close Lane Entry path, the rows continue in the same manner with 6 to the west, and 9 to the east. Giving a total of **1084** plots

*Upper Terrace*

The total for the terrace is **249**

This analysis therefore suggests there is a maximum possible total of **3742** plots in the Cemetery as a whole.

The burial books in fact account for **3282** of these plots being filled. Adjusting the Rows to the Phases (which involves an adjustment of the number of plots on the west side between the TCL Entrance path and the Agricultural Gates), the total numbers are as follows:

	Monuments	Plots	%
Phase 1 1842-1894	287	1091	26
Phase 2 Up to Agricultural Gates	542	1757	31
Phase 3 Agricultural Gates to Top	183	434	42
	<b>1012</b>	<b>3282</b>	

The tables indicate how the number of surviving monuments per plot diminishes as one travels down the site from south to north, with the exception of the original Terrace/Yew Tree Walk where there appears to be almost complete survival of monuments.

The burial books mentions only 1 vault (Claridge) in the original cemetery, but it is highly likely more exist here. Unsurprisingly, the Terrace was the most popular place to locate vaults, including Coopers (364); Watson (188); Longman (350); John Lane (270) and Keyser (284/285). In the post 1894 extension, there are vaults under the West Wall to Ferdinando Ripley (412) and Jane Wilson (418); on the east side of path to Mrs Prudames (808) and on the west side of path to William Keen (664) - And William Dickman (690) - west side of axial path. One vault (to David Catterall) is unlocated.

*Adults and Children*

The Cemetery exhibits an interesting change in the perception of children.

There are some separate children's graves in the Lower Cemetery, but also it was common to record children being buried in the 'family' plot. In the lower part of the 1894 extension, rows of children's graves are somewhat awkwardly interspersed among the main rows. In the 1920's upper section, there is a row by the East Wall which is specifically dedicated to them. However, children's memorials are relatively scarce. The Burial Records revealed there was an entire outer row of children's burials– mainly stillbirths.

*Paupers*



Some plots were clearly set aside for 'Parish' burials – inhabitants of the workhouse and those unable to afford a private burial and receiving parochial aid. Inevitably there are no headstones to commemorate this large element of the population. The burial books do not record all parish plots, but make it clear that usually two individuals were buried together – sometimes male/female, or same sex. There are 133 'parish' graves recorded in the original cemetery and 60 in the extension.

In the post 1894 extension, the concentration of paupers is most marked in the eastern half, increasing the closer one gets to the eastern wall. There are none in the upper row marks the two rows each side of the main axial path. The western half has some parish burial plots towards the centre, but the well defined western path running up between the two right end rows in the Extension line also has only 1 parish burial recorded beside it.

In the original Cemetery, a different pattern exists, with the number of pauper burials increasing in number towards the centre of each of the eastern and western compartments (again the 'nil' entries mark the rows each side of the central path, with 16 rows to the left and 13 rows to the right). This reflects the manner in which higher status burials were jostling for position beside the main access paths.

### *History and Local History*

Some of these higher status burials in the Cemetery include nationally-important figures such as General Smith-Dorrien and others represented by 27 private or CWGC wartime memorials; members of the Cooper family including William who pioneered the manufacture of agricultural chemicals, and his nephew Sir Richard, a notable livestock breeder and many residents who built, serviced and lived in the town.

Many other residents who played a significant role in the town are buried in the Cemetery – some are featured in the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project's Publication: *Personalities from the Past (1)*: including William Claridge (1796-1876), the town's first photographer (the attached photographs feature his wonderful portrait of the aptly named John Ghost the Berkhamsted grave-digger); the Revd JW Cobb (1829-1883) author of *History and Antiquities of Berkhamsted*; Edward Mawley (1842-1916) who published *Roses for English Gardens* with Gertrude Jekyll; William Costin (1849-1910) a prolific boatbuilder and Henry Stainsby (1859-1925) who devoted forty-five years of his life to the cause and care of blind people, in 1909 becoming Secretary General of the organisation that became the National Institute for the Blind. On the yew tree-walk is a large monument to many members of the Cooper family, including William, who pioneered the use of sheep-dip in the family's extensive chemical works in the town, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet, Richard Powell Cooper and Richard Ashmole Cooper who set up the Cooper Research laboratory.

The legacies of key individuals buried here remain in the town – for example. in street and place names (Bridgewater Road and Brownlow Hill, Cobb Road, Cooper Way, Costins Walk, Cowper Road, Dorriens Croft, Egerton Road, Finch Road, Nash Close), in the foundation stone of the Civic Centre (Walter Pitkin), and in their provision for other memorials and monuments in the town such as the Smith-Dorrien memorial cross in St Peter's Churchyard.

The Cemetery is a tangible record, on our doorstep of people who have shaped Berkhamsted between the late eighteenth and early twentieth century.

### *1.5.2 Archaeological*

The earliest map shows the Cemetery to occupy pasture land, and it is not thought therefore that significant archaeological remains pre-dating the formation of the burial ground would be found. The north wall however may contain earlier brickwork from when this served as a rear garden wall to Egerton House, and some earlier parkland trees may have been incorporated in the new cemetery landscape

The remains of Cowpers Well, by the road leading up the Rectory and outside the Cemetery proper, are of interest.

The Cemetery layout is still visible in the landscape, with its ordered layout of paths plots and memorials, and contrived terracing at the top of both the original cemetery and the extension. The surviving archaeology helps in defining and underscores the character zones of 1842, 1894 and 1921.

Evidence for former openings from Three Close Lane, via the main turning circle or up steps for Highfield or through the Rector's Gate onto the Yew Tree Walk have all left clear traces in the walling, which provides an interesting narrative of changes that have occurred in the Cemetery since 1842. All the principal structures – the gates and gatepiers, sexton's hut and Memorial arch all survive, and exhibit changes over time – for example, the replacement of the Rectory Lane gates in the 1870's demonstrate that the original wooden gates were probably considered to be insufficiently imposing. The gatepiers are covered in graffiti inscriptions. The Sexton's Hut has a fireplace and noggings for shelving and ladders.

Some monuments have been removed in the Lower Cemetery by faculty, walls altered, but essentially the archaeology of the Cemetery can be relatively easily traced in the surviving historic fabric

The brick base of the WW1 timber war memorial survives, set in front of the Foundation Stone.

### *1.5.3 Architectural*

A compact, virtually rectangular space, the original cemetery was fully walled, save for the single canted entrance off Rectory Lane: 'The Bricks to be Slapton Bricks as offered to be supplied from the Countess of Bridgewater's Brick-ground at Slapton at 35/- per Thousand.' The yard on the Buckinghamshire/Bedfordshire border produced the distinctive yellow/brown bricks used for the earlier Duke's canals and many of the estate's buildings.

### *Design*

Having both donated the land as well as providing the bricks for the enclosure walls, it would seem likely that the Countess of Bridgewater – who worked with Humphrey Repton (1752-1818) from 1813 on the Ashridge House garden designs may have played a role in at least sanctioning the design of the Cemetery, as well as possibly lending the experience of her own gardeners and specimens to the planting scheme. It is worth noting that Repton's plans at Ashridge were not to be fully realised as laid out in the Red Book but were to be adapted by Wyattville under the instructions of the Countess of Bridgewater (Thompson p.30) JC Loudon visited Ashridge in 1822 and 1825, also visiting the kitchen garden at Frithsden. (Thompson p.39-40).

At Ashridge, Repton had rejected 'the meagre serpentine taste of modern intervention' in its attempt to imitate nature, instead opting for a more formal layout of

fifteen smaller gardens close to the main house. For one of these, the Monks Garden, Repton proposed an enclosed garden with two rows of narrow flowerbeds, each with a full headstone to represent the graves of the monks of earlier times. The Rectory Lane Cemetery, for all intents and purposes, could be seen as following in that tradition – a ‘detached example’ of one of Ashridge’s small gardens. Its original form and location could in fact have easily been mistaken by any casual visitor walking up Rectory Lane as a kitchen garden attached to and serving the Rectory.

Internally, the layout adopted seven clear design principles:

(1) adapting the slightly sloping hill to good effect, a banked terrace was created parallel with the top, southern boundary wall. This was planted with 15 pairs of Irish Yews (13 trees survive) to create a pleasant east-west walk from one side of the cemetery to the other. This elevated bank lent itself as the burial place for the socially elevated elite of Berkhamsted, so enshrining the social hierarchy of the town. (The elite continued to jostle for position here even after the two extensions were added). Before the boundary trees had matured, it also would have provided views across the town which the burial ground served, and beyond that to the rural landscape of the Ashridge estate.

(2) below the terrace, the rectangular space was divided almost into two halves by an axial pathway (originally also planted with 9 pairs of trees (ie exactly half the number lining the main terrace – only two remain) running north-south. The graves of prominent personalities again lined each side of the path; the 1878 1<sup>st</sup> edition map shows a small ‘bulb’ in the path towards the northern end which was probably intended as a gathering space.

(3) rather than running the full length of the cemetery, this axial path stops some 15 metres short of the northern boundary, and bifurcates to create a pathway running east and west to each side of the cemetery; running west this path kinks and drops to the north-west corner of the Cemetery where the principal entrance gates off Rectory Lane are situated; going east it links to a curved, and again yew lined walkway running up to join the axial path just before it hits the terrace.

(4) the configuration of graves pressing hard up to the paths that border the two halves of the cemetery create central, less densely populated areas in each half; planting of trees here to create shady oases may have been an intentional part of the original design; in the western section are now found specimens of Yew, Wych Elm, an American Cypress and a Monkey Puzzle tree, the one to the east has Yews, Oak, Black Ash, Holly, Cypress and Sycamore – perhaps some of these were sourced from the Ashridge estate. The overall effect of the planting is to create an intimate parkland feel to this section of the Cemetery, quite different to the more open aspect of the two later extensions.

(5) the lower pathway is angled slightly to the northern boundary wall of the Cemetery, thus creating a wedge of land which incorporates the northern boundary of the Cemetery which is lined with 9 mature yews; this area underneath and in front of the trees appears to have been kept clear of memorials until the very last, perhaps partly as a reflection of the residual resistance to ‘north’ side burials, partly to maintain a buffer with the domestic garden of Egerton House to the north.

(6) the distribution of paths efficiently allowed access to the maximum number of graves but would also have allowed for a pleasant perambulation or circuit of the majority of the cemetery. The positioning of graves on the western boundary suggests there may not have been a formal equivalent north-south path on this side

of the Cemetery; instead headstones back onto the wall – the lack of a path here may be related to the next principle.

(7) the alignment of the two main paths – the terraced Yew Tree Walk and axial north-south path – clearly played a key role in ensuring that the large and impressive Foundation stone acted as a key focal point in the whole layout. The north-south axial path, originally with its defined avenue of trees, is in fact slightly angled to hit the raised east-west avenue precisely in front of the Foundation Stone which pays homage – in large type – to the generosity of the Countess in particular and to the dignitaries who also contributed to the project. So whether approaching from the north up the axial path, or promenading along the Yew walk, one could not have missed the visual ‘handshake’ with those who had shaped the Cemetery.

JC Loudon’s book *On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries* appeared, of course, a year after the Cemetery at Berkhamsted was opened, but, given his familiarity with Ashridge House and the Countess, it is possible he may have been acquainted with the site. No direct claim can be made here, but it has to be said that the Cemetery’s design principles are echoed in Loudon’s recommendations for smaller cemeteries which ideally should be:

- located on relatively level sites on the edge of a town
- but easily accessible from the church and
- discrete and well enclosed,
- laid out in a restrained manner with straight paths
- lined with pairs of trees,
- providing access to the various sections of the cemetery
- with specimen, ornamental trees planted in key areas
- incorporating where appropriate a terrace or terraces, which could provide vantage points with views across the neighbouring urban and rural landscapes.

The layout and early development of the Cemetery may therefore owe more than just a passing debt to the influences of both Humphrey Repton and John Claudius Loudon, Repton being responsible for the early C19th garden layout at Ashridge and Loudon paying tribute to Repton’s influence on his own approach to cemetery design, as well as visiting the Ashridge gardens at least twice in the 1820s.

#### *Later Development*

The original cemetery has undergone later changes, although the design principles can still be ‘read’ in the layout. One key change was the re-modelling of the single original entrance to the Cemetery, (c.1871/2 from the Vestry Minutes) when a further subscription was raised towards ‘New Gates to the Cemetery’. The ‘New’ entrance replaced wooden gates with a pedestrian and pair of main gates, flanked by elegantly octagonal piers constructed of finely jointed brickwork and stone caps. ‘New’ uses apostrophes as the piers show clear signs of re-use; research is ongoing to try to identify their original location; it is highly possible they in fact were moved only a few metres having served as the entrance gates and gatepiers to the Rectory - a formal gateway is certainly shown across the Lane immediately to the south of the Cemetery entrance on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS Map.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the original Cemetery was deemed to be full and additional land was acquired in 1894, with a further addition in 1921, bringing the total area covered to 3.275 acres. As noted, both of these extensions were made possible through donations of land by the Rector and Brownlow family (descendants of the Bridgewaters, the countess having died in 1849), with voluntary subscriptions

being raised (in the latter case through street-by-street house collections) for the infrastructure. The original cemetery appears to have had no structures or facilities within the enclosed walls (there may have been a storage building just outside the entrance gates and forming part of a rear entrance drive to Egerton house); situated close to St Peters and forming a detached churchyard to it, there was no requirement for the usual Cemetery lodge or mortuary chapel(s).

However, as part of the 1894 extension, a modest brick and tiled sexton's hut, complete with fireplace, was built. This sits adjacent to the new entrance off Three Close Lane, with stone capped gatepiers to each side of the former gateway (now blocked) and curved, flanking walls designed so as to provide a turning circle (now occupied by an unsightly gas governor building) for the hearse. The entrance and sexton's hut were an integral part of the long boundary walls built of engineering bricks which step up both east and west sides of the Cemetery. These contrast to the free-standing memorial arch of red brick with stone dressings which was built at the bottom of the new main spine road running north-south up the centre of the plot (and continued later in 1921 up to the very top of the site). The stonework in the apex of the arch on both sides is inscribed with appropriate verses.

The whole of the upper area of the Cemetery, including both the 1894 and 1921 extensions, is sited on more steeply sloping ground without significant tree cover (the exception is the row of silver birches bounding the northern edge of the top terrace) and reflects the early C20th move towards a more formal grid system of burials and use of simpler, squatter headstones. Nevertheless, with the upper terrace, main axial path and side paths, and the more affluent headstones still flanking them, the layout still echoes that of the original Cemetery. It is apparent therefore that care was employed in adding the two extensions, ensuring both old and new were 'stitched' together in a complementary fashion. Indeed, part of the interest of the site is the way in which the transition from 1842 to 1946 is handled from north to south up the sloping site, creating 3 different but complementary areas.

The later history of the Cemetery – particularly the period of comparative neglect from c.1945 to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, means here are no outlandish intrusions in the landscape. Overall, the individual structures and considerable range of materials used in the gravestones and kerbings provide pleasing visual variety, and yet this is contained in and unified by the relatively simple, harmonious and orderly cemetery layout.

#### 1.5.4 Artistic

The changing styles of monuments over the period 1842-1946 are reflected in the various phases of the cemetery, including restrained Classical, High Victorian Gothic, Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Art Deco designs. There are several interesting Victorian monuments, some are sarcophagi and include brick vaults; the different types of tombs, memorials and headstones are all represented. One wooden cross as noted previously survives in the top extension. The symbolism of the grave features e.g. anchors, embracing hands, ivy and lilies, Celtic crosses, urns crosses, sunflowers, doves and angels etc. has been explored in the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project's Publication 3: *Memorial Symbolism*. As Loudon commented 'Cemeteries can help improve taste' (Lp.12).

There are literary links with William Cowper the poet, through Cowper's Well and the Rectory; J.M Barrie stayed at Egerton House (owned by the Bridgewaters and demolished in the 1930s) whose garden backed onto the Cemetery – his host's

children were the inspiration for *Peter Pan*. A number of people mentioned in *A Sort of Life* are buried here - Graham Greene, who was born at St Johns House in Chesham Lane, grew up at Berkhamsted School overlooking St Peters Churchyard. William Longman, the publisher, is buried near the Foundation Stone.

The Cemetery has inspired other literary outputs such as the following poem by Mary Waegner: (Platform Four at Berkhamsted Station *and other poems* (p.88))

#### Berkhamsted Cemetery in October

The gravestones crooked  
And the grass unmown.  
Only a few could boast  
A wilting wreath.  
Neglect had spread  
Its mantle on the dead.  
Somewhere, I knew,  
My grandfather lay buried;  
A faded yellow memory  
Of my mother, me in tow,  
Standing in silence  
By a crooked stone.  
Rain had obliterated  
Names and dates.  
I didn't find him,  
But I watched  
The trees rain leaves  
Upon the dead  
And knew that  
Those who rested here  
Were in a place of peace.

*Written in the train between Furth and Wurzburg  
November 6<sup>th</sup> 2003*

The cemetery setting has provided inspiration to local artists such as Adrian Davies, Mary Casserley and Maureen Hallahan

The project has already drawn on the skills of professional photographers such as David Levenson and Andy Spain.

The Cemetery is in close proximity to the Rex Cinema, another important heritage asset in the town and re-vitalised as a key film venue.

The Cemetery has been used as a venue for music, including a New Orleans Jazz procession, at the 2014 and 2016 events.

#### *1.5.5 Technical*

As noted above the burial ground technically demonstrates design principles espoused by Loudon, and in being an early example of a detached burial ground paid for by voluntary subscriptions, appears, for a small market town, to be an innovative solution to overcrowding in church burial grounds.

Survey work has begun to map some of the significant ecological features, and it would appear that some of the original planting (carried out by Lane's Nurseries of Berkhamsted) survives in the Burial Ground.

The lower Cemetery has significantly more trees of value than the upper two sections. It is divided into two main burial compartments, with ornamental trees planted in the centre of each, with a further formal avenue of yews at the top terrace end and a curved yew-tree lined walkway in the eastern compartment. A further line of yews are planted along the northern boundary. This is largely a mown area with a parkland setting. The Middle Cemetery has a more formal, open layout with little significant tree cover (stumps of some of the former parkland/pasture trees survive). The upper area is steeper and has a lower tree density. There is a row of 11 mature silver birches lining the boundary to the upper terrace. This more secluded area at the top of the site is rich in wildlife and habitats and there is a nice explosion of small woodland plants in Spring.

There are a few bird boxes located around the Cemetery and 43 birds have been recorded in the Cemetery 2014-16.

Some plants appear seasonally on some of the graves, clearly legacies of interventions by families tending individual graves as 'gardens'. Many cut flowers were clearly brought into the Cemetery on this basis too as evidenced by the numerous vases in the top two areas.

#### *1.5.6 Educational*

Apart from the connections with the schools in Berkhamsted (a number of former masters, teachers and staff are buried here), many relatives visit the Cemetery either to remember their ancestors or for genealogical interest. The inscriptions on the headstones provide insights into key individuals and families of the town. The individual stories of the 7500 people buried here are still emerging, but collectively they give a critical insight into an evolving market town with strong connections to London and the military as well as to the organisations, institutions, and individuals who shaped Berkhamsted between the late C18th and mid C20th.

The Cemetery's ecology has been a source of learning for one neighbour who has been recording birds visiting the site for three years.

The archival material collected to date provides a powerful narrative for understanding the Cemetery; four publications have sought to highlight the educational potential of studying the history and symbolism of the Cemetery, as well as some of the personalities of the town and individuals who died during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.

#### *1.5.7 Recreational*

The Cemetery pathways are laid out to allow perambulations around the site – this would have been a popular site to visit in the Victorian and Edwardian period with inhabitants and visitors paying respects to relatives buried in the Cemetery.

We know that Sunday School picnics were once held in the Cemetery. One user, who lived in Victoria Road, used to climb over fence on eastern side and played at bottom of lower part of cemetery, which was then much more heavily treed – she used to make camps in the woods there with her friends.

### 1.5.8 Cultural, Commemorative, Spiritual

The War memorial, created in 2006 and sitting, somewhat incongruously, in the Lower Cemetery, records the CWGC graves, but does not include many of those noted above who died serving or in action during the two World Wars, or those who played key roles but survived.

The Cemetery is a place that commemorates the majority of the inhabitants of Berkhamsted who died between 1842 and c.1946 as well as some individuals who had moved away but wished to return here after death. Those graves with headstones physically memorialise these lives – sometimes with an acute personal touch – while the burial records also capture the names of the many more who no longer have, or never had, stones erected in their memory.

The Cemetery was once a place of pilgrimage for those who wanted to remember and commemorate their ancestors. In 1936, a young man who had lost his mother when he was 12, wrote to his father: *Will you go up to the Cemetery on Thursday? Perhaps you will get some flowers for us both & put them on Mummie's grave. It is rather a beautiful place where she lies. There is such a fine view over the town up the Common. But still I do think that there is a lot in Old John Trask's belief that his wife will be best near to him, in the house where they lived together than away among innumerable cold mounds of earth, which after all, enclose the body & no more. I wish I could be with you on Thursday.*

The Cemetery still provides some views out to the surrounding countryside, but it also sits as a cultural landmark in the midst of housing that now looks into or over the Cemetery. The incremental building of houses and flats around and close to the Cemetery boundary - to the point where it has become almost completely overlooked – has impacted on the sense of separation that in the C19th placed the Cemetery on the edge of the town.

Despite this gradual encroachment, the Cemetery remains a place of retreat and contemplation. Olive Batchelor b.1912 and interviewed 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 1998 provided a fascinating insight into how superstitions surrounded the cemetery well into the C20th.

*My old mum she said to me if you want to enjoy yourself, she said you ought to go up into the churchyard but it must be on a moonlight night. And she said if you go round by this grave and you run round it three times and shout your name the person in that grave will answer it. So a gang of us from George Street went up to this thing – and we had to – the Ritz (Rex) wasn't there – and up Rectory Lane they had a big gate which they used to close – a big iron gate – they used to open it at sunrise and close it at sunset. Well there was about twenty of us went up but we couldn't get in so we went up Three Close Lane and got over the wall and lo and behold there was one of those graves like this – come up like this – a big thing what they call them – a big thing like a casket thing stuck on top. So we all danced round – and lo and behold it did answer but it was the echo ...my mum used to do it when she was a girl. So we all danced round more.*

*Well there was a Mr Porritt. Do you remember him? Like a verger at St Peter's Church – he used to walk about with a long cassock and a velvet collar. He looked like the old devil himself. Any way he come up and he said –we was playing – and there's a big line of yew trees go up there – up this here cemetery – and out of this thing we saw him coming. And we run – well we got over the wall – but one boy he*



*never got over – old Kim Arthur. So anyway on come the next morning we went to school at the Victoria School – God weren't we for the high jump! The head teacher said – I want all the children in George Street and Ellesmere Road, she said, to come out, she said, and the boys were there and all. And she said \_ Now, what did you do last night? Stopped in miss and read a book – No you didn't, no you didn't. So then she said "I'll have you". So she had us all one by one. And the old Rector he come. Did we get in a row? Well we didn't do nothing really, did we when you think about it. And we must have been kicking up hell's delight though because we were dancing round this thing and shouting our name – well it was up there that it did answer you – I should love to go again and see if it would answer me.*

### *Sculpture and Design*

The cultural legacy of the cemetery is expressed in the style and inscriptions of the memorials reflecting clear changes in societal attitudes to death and mourning from the Early Victorian Period through to the Second World War. These cultural expressions exert influences on and help shape the evolving funeral landscape of the Cemetery, adopting different designs in the three sections (from informal to grid patterns) and reflected in the changing symbols used on gravestones and monuments. As an ensemble, they chart changing attitudes to death from the 1840s to the immediate postwar period.

The changes are almost stratified as one moves up the hill. At the bottom, we have the Cemetery as Garden, and by the time we get to the top, the emphasis has moved to the Grave as Garden. The focus has shifted from an ordered, hierarchical view of society, to one based more on individualism but restrained by municipal regulations and wider, more humanist approaches to memorial design.

Phase 1: The *rus in urbes* sense of the Cemetery is expressed as an ordered landscape. The structured layout still allows room for individual expression in the monuments (but behind each monument is a subtle statement of that individual's (or families') position in Society, in terms of its scale, design and positioning.

Phase 2: By the later C19th, a more formal mood (influenced by the Gothic movement), is expressed in the 1894 extension and 'insertions' in the 1842 landscape. The extension adopts a very different approach with a more open landscape, a change reflected in burial and mourning practices, where gravestones tend to become less flamboyant. Crosses on bases are prevalent.

Phase 3: However, by the first half of C20th, as the country is absorbing the impact of war, the Cemetery reflects the search for a simple, unified expression of dignified memorialisation which emerges through the treatment of headstone provision through the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Many individuals touched by the war, however, were not eligible for such treatment.

Phase 4: is characterised by late C20th neglect, a symbol perhaps of a society actually turning its back on and almost forgetting the past, exacerbated in Rectory Lane Cemetery's case by the transfer of burials to Kingshill, as well as the increasing resort to cremation. The Cemetery becomes more of a 'playground with an edge', providing a resource for vandalism, drug taking and alcohol consumption.

Phase 5: from c. 2010 develops out of a strong reaction to the preceding phase, appreciating the Cemetery as a green space and place of contemplation, as well as seeking to understand the history of the town both in a general sense and also by responding to a significant trend to investigate individual genealogies.

So the Cemetery has a place in wider history, beginning more as an imposed and ordered idea of what a country churchyard should look like, then becoming more formalised as a cultural expression of the Victorian cult of death and mourning, and then steadily reflecting a reaction which set in the early C20th and which resulted in a different approach to mourning – expressive in a more ephemeral manner by adopting the planting of flowers. The neglect of the late C20th has then been followed by a revival, but more secular in its interest.

## **1.6 Relationship and Associations, Context, Comparators**

### *1.6.1 Relationships: Between identified heritage values and the fabric of the place*

In terms of heritage values, the Cemetery provides abundant evidential value in the form of burial practices, human remains, ways of memorialisation, and information relating to the development of Berkhamsted, from the late C18th through to the mid twentieth century. The Cemetery has considerable historic value in connecting those buried here with evidence of material life in the town and beyond on a national and international scale in relation to major social, economic, political and cultural events. The natural heritage of the Cemetery is tied into the design approach adopted for the three zones. The Cemetery's aesthetic values are also enshrined in its consciously designed layout, placing of structures and changing style of memorials. The Cemetery has communal value as a place of commemoration but also as a place for recreational health and wellbeing, as a place for stimulating genealogical and historical research and other types of informal learning and as a place for holding events where the community can explore these multi-faceted aspects.

### *1.6.2 Associations: Contribution of associated objects and collections*

The Cemetery and the individuals buried there all have links to the town – its buildings, institutions, spaces, key events etc. Through migration and national and international events, these links spread out to many parts of the world. The memorials to key individuals record their contribution in shaping both. The Foundation Stone identifies the key connection of the Cemetery with the estate, gardens and stately home of Ashridge. Gravestones are sometimes marked with the names of the masons who carved them, while records identify the many individuals and institutions who or which have been involved in building, repairing and managing the Cemetery or shaping the course of its life. The blocked Rector's gateway is a reminder that the Rectors of Berkhamsted took a personal interest in the Cemetery, and the Sexton's Hut sheds light on the spartan life of the men who curated the space. Graffiti on the gatepiers record the names and initials of inhabitants of the town.

### *1.6.3 Context: Contribution made by Setting and Context*

Once located on the edge of town, the Cemetery has emerged as an important, large green space in an increasingly built-up area. There are still fine views to the Common across the valley, and vice versa. The Cemetery represents one link in the chain of burial grounds – the Churchyard, other burial sites in the town, Rectory Lane Cemetery and Kingshill Cemetery – where the presence of 'the dead' in the town has been increasingly marginalised and their memory diluted.

#### *1.6.4 Comparators: Other places sharing similar values*

There are some 30,000 Cemeteries in England, so Rectory Lane Cemetery shares characteristics with all of these – however, in being an early example of a detached burial ground in a small market town, where the original and subsequent phases were paid for by public subscription is believed to make Rectory Lane Cemetery a rare survival.

#### **1.7 Rarity Survival and Intactness**

Burial grounds (graveyards without a principal place of worship) had emerged in the later seventeenth century, but these were deliberately separate enclaves for the burial of the dead from minority faiths such as Quakers, Jews and Moravians which did not belong to the Church of England. These early burial grounds tend to be small, functional, urban enclosures in which landscaping and planting were generally minimal, and stones modestly reflecting sepulchral humility.

What is generally reckoned the first non-denominational cemetery in England is The Rosary, Norwich, (registered Grade II\*), founded in 1819. It was to be a cemetery where people were free to be buried with the religious service of their choice, or none at all. Over the next decade, several further non-denominational cemeteries were founded by Nonconformists in English towns and cities but these differ in that they were non-denominational burial grounds.

New cemeteries were opened in the last years of the Georgian epoch in the 1820s and 1830s as a result of the need for more burial space in towns and cities where much-increased populations overwhelmed the existing churchyards giving rise to much publicised health fears.

However, In England the general model was for cemeteries to be constructed by private joint stock companies, as in the case of St. James's Cemetery, Liverpool, opened 1829 (registered Grade I) and what is perhaps the best-known example, Kensal Green, London, opened 1833 (registered Grade I). The Neoclassical character of these early foundations was joined from the later 1830s onwards by stylistic eclecticism, with the provision of Gothic and Egyptian structures and a proliferation of diverse, privately-erected, monuments. Lay-out combined formal axial routes with meandering or serpentine pathways, often with separate zones for Anglicans (with a chapel in the Gothic style) and Nonconformists (whose chapel was typically Neoclassical).

As noted above, what appears to set Rectory Lane burial ground apart was the fact that it was a) established as a Church of England detached burial ground b) before the Public Health Act of 1848 and yet c) was sustained by Public subscription.

It is worth noting that Cemeteries included on the EH Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in the East of England, apart from The Rosary include:

Histon Road Cemetery in Cambridge opened in 1843 and Mill Road Cemetery was opened in 1848, both later than Rectory Lane Cemetery.

#### **Threat**

In many churchyards, the complexity of the Victorian landscape has regrettably disappeared as a consequence of successive clearance programmes, which have in particular targeted the levelling of body mounds and removal of kerbsets. Clearance

has been considered as a strategy by the PCC but the visitor surveys revealed considerable resistance to this by the community.

The Cemetery lies within Berkhamsted Conservation Area, and the gatepiers and memorial arch, which are locally listed, were identified as being 'At Risk' in the 2012 Conservation Area Appraisal. (p.152, 8.83) Many of the remaining monuments have been damaged; some such as the Foot Seat of Remembrance had collapsed, and more are in danger of being lost. Little maintenance work to the sexton's hut, memorial arch, boundary walls, gatepiers, paths and steps has been done and in some places they are dangerous. Incongruous interventions such as metal benches have been introduced – and subsequently vandalised. Some unfortunate planning permissions – including two recent houses off Rectory Lane – have created visual intrusions on the perimeters of the Cemetery, threatening its sense of detachment and enclosure.

### **1.8 Summary of Significance, Local, National, International Context**

The Rectory Lane Cemetery is significant at an international level to those with relatives buried there. On a national scale, it is unclear how many detached burial grounds exist, but few appear to date from before the Burial Acts. The Cemetery was designed according to Loudon's principles and has connections with the Ashridge estate and Bridgewater family. The Cemetery is unusual in that its foundation and extensions were paid for by public subscription. There are 27 CWGC graves in the Cemetery. With 7500 burials and over 1,000 memorials, the Cemetery is a key heritage asset at a local level, with ecological significance, and tells the story of the development of Berkhamsted from the late C18th through to the mid C20th.

In the following table, the ratings are selected from a full range consisting of:

- Exceptional
- High
- Medium
- Low
- Negative or intrusive features

<i>Resume of Significance</i>		Rating
The Cemetery	Evolution over 100+ years with assembly of features and changing burial practices	Medium
The 1842 Burial Ground	Bridgewater Foundation, design,	High
The Walls	Egerton House	Medium
	1842 – Slapton Bricks	Medium
	Post 1894 extension	Medium
	East wall – road widening & plaque	Low
Entrance Gates	Rectory Lane	High
	Three Close Lane: Main	Medium
	Three Close Lane: Agricultural Gates	Medium
	Former Rector's Gate	Medium

Foundation Stone	Bridgewater connection	High
Memorial Arch	Key central location, represents 1894 extension, focal point (logo)	Medium
Sexton's Hut	Functional building, integral to operation of the Cemetery	Medium
Terrace	Connectivity, social status and cluster of features, yew trees	Medium
Memorials	Significant People	High
	CWGC Graves	Medium
	Group – War Memorial (2006)	Low
	Others	Medium
Seating	Seat of Remembrance	Medium
Seating	Metal benches	Negative
Trees	Yew Tree Walks	High
	1842 Planting	High
	Post 1894 planting	Low
Ecology	Lichen	Medium
Relative Values		
	Historical	High
	Archaeological	Medium
	Architectural	High
	Artistic	Medium
	Technical	Medium
	Educational	Medium
	Recreational	Medium
	Cultural, Commemorative, Spiritual	High
	Relationships	Place and heritage values
Associations	Individuals etc	Medium
Context	Vital green space/views	Medium

JM 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017