

Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England

by Alan Lee

For the last year one of our members, Mr Martyn Webster, has been attempting to have the four cemeteries at Copt Hill, Old Charlton Road included on the above register. In January this year he received the news that the application had been turned down. The Heritage Protection Co-ordinator, South Team, Dolores Keane, replied, *"The Register is a selective list of designed ornamental landscapes which are considered to be of 'special historic interest' in the national context, and is compiled with reference to exacting criteria. We have considered all representations made, and completed the assessment of the site, English Heritage has decided that the site falls short of being of national importance and does not merit inclusion on the Register."*

With the Burials Act of 1853 and the population of Dover over 20,000 the Burial Board of St James's Parish, in 1854, decided to build a new cemetery at Copt Hill. At the cost of £1,200, six acres of Crown lands were purchased and two receiving chapels and a superintendent's lodge were erected. All are now demolished. The cemetery opened on 29th January 1855; later, special sections were set

aside for military burials and for Roman Catholics.

The Hebrew Congregation of Dover, though counting amongst the earliest in the United Kingdom did not have a burial ground in Dover until 1868. Donated by the Wardens of Dover Harbour Board it is set in a walled enclosure south-west of St James's Cemetery. The ohel (prayer hall at burial ground) burnt down sometime after 1937.

Ten acres of land, to the south-west, purchased at a cost of about £2,000, opened on 21st May 1870 to become the new St Mary's Cemetery. This had separate Anglican and Nonconformist mortuary chapels, both later demolished, a lodge and entrance gates by Stacey and Sons of Dover.

Charlton Cemetery located on the opposite side of Old Charlton Road opened on 10th October 1872 on ten acres of land purchased from the Crown for £2500. This included twin Mortuary Chapels designed by T Talbot Bury of Dover, now a private residence (Grade II), a lodge and ornamental iron gates, by Mr R W Pierce.



St James is laid out with curved paths and has mature trees including Douglas firs, Irish yews and Copper Beeches. The memorials are typical examples of monumental masons' craft and include several to notable Dovorians. There is a memorial to those who died in the Zeebrugge Raid of 1917 and an individual memorial to Sir Roger Keyes, later Lord Keyes, 1872-1945, who led the raid and chose to be buried with his men. There is a Portland stone catafalque-shaped Dunkirk Memorial and rows of memorials to men who perished in the Dunkirk landing. Other war graves of the First and Second World Wars are located in spaces throughout the cemetery.

The rectangular Jewish Cemetery is bounded by a six feet high stone wall and entered through gate piers and

iron railings by way of Old Charlton Road. Most of the marked graves are at the top of the hill. There is a memorial to six victims of the sinking of the Netherlands American Steam Nav. Co. ss W. A. Scholten in 1887. This disaster produced the largest burial of shipwreck victims in Dover in peacetime by that date, many of the victims emigrant Jews bound from Eastern Europe to America. Wall tablets, re-located from the Dover Synagogue and attached to the west wall, include one to the Rev Raphael I Cohen, Minister to the Dover Synagogue and founder circa 1848 of Sussex House, a Jewish Boarding School in Dover. A single chest tomb in the centre of the site is to Blooma Cohen, wife of the Rev. Cohen.

At St Mary's the lodge survives. The cemetery is set with undulating paths,



circular plateaus mark the sites of the two mortuary chapels and there are some attractive mature trees. The memorials are typical of the monumental masons' craft from the 1870s. There is an unusual memorial, erected in 1916 by the P&O line, and partly inscribed in Arabic to twenty-two Lascar Seamen who lost their lives in the sinking of the 12,000-ton liner *Maloja* while on its way from Gravesend to Bombay. In total 155 lives were lost of which 58 bodies were brought ashore at Dover.

Charlton Cemetery is entered through elaborate Gothic style brick and stone piers and iron gates at the foot of the hill. Behind is the original brick cemetery lodge. There are specimens of mature trees but generally the memorials are typical and representative of their date. Re-sited here from the old St Martin's churchyard in York Street is the memorial to the poet Charles Churchill (1732-1764). The cemetery also contains the Cross of Sacrifice, usually present in Commonwealth

war cemeteries containing 40 or more graves, although most graves are in St James' Cemetery. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield it is a simple four point Latin cross mounted on an octagonal base. On the face of the cross is embedded a bronze sword, blade down, to represent the military character of the cemetery.

The cross represents the faith of the majority of the dead.

English Heritage has identified over 100 cemeteries thought to include the majority of the key examples of cemetery design. The Copt Hill assessment carried out against the six criteria for cemeteries laid out between 1852 and 1914 threw up the following points:

The first of the criteria is that the landscape should be of particular historic interest in its own right. A number of earlier examples than Copt Hill exist of Loudon's garden type landscapes, for example, Old Southampton Cemetery of 1843.

The second is that the layout offers a good example of the work of a designer of national renown. There is no record of the designer of any of the Copt Hill Cemeteries.

The third is that the site includes a pioneering example of a landscape feature particularly associated with cemeteries. Copt Hill does not have claims to such a landscape feature.

The fourth is that the cemetery has structural planting of exceptional quality. Copt Hill contains a number of good quality mature trees, and is located in an attractive downland setting with borrowed views but overall is not of exceptional quality.

The fifth is that there is strong social context of particular value which is reflected in the landscape. Certainly there is a local social context as many of Dover's citizens after 1855 were buried in these cemeteries. However, many other cemeteries of the period survive where the memorials are of finer quality or which contain more memorials to the deceased who are of national importance.

The sixth is that the structural elements such as chapel(s), lodge(s), means of enclosure, are, as a group, of exceptional quality (these usually being Listed as buildings of special architectural or historic interest, with the main elements

Listed at Grade I). Here both St James's Cemetery and St Mary's Cemetery have lost their cemetery chapels and the Jewish Cemetery has lost its ohel. The conjoined pair of Church of England and Nonconformist Mortuary Chapels at Charlton Cemetery are now converted into a Grade II listed residence.

Conclusion

The Copt Hill Cemeteries, Dover, comprising St James's Cemetery opened in 1855, the Jewish Cemetery opened in 1868, St Mary's Cemetery opened in 1870 and Charlton Cemetery opened in 1872 are not recommended for designation. However, although they do not meet the national standards for registration, individual cemetery structures and memorials may qualify for statutory designation and the cemeteries may be suitable for the Local Planning Authority to consider as a Conservation Area.

Case UID: 165657

