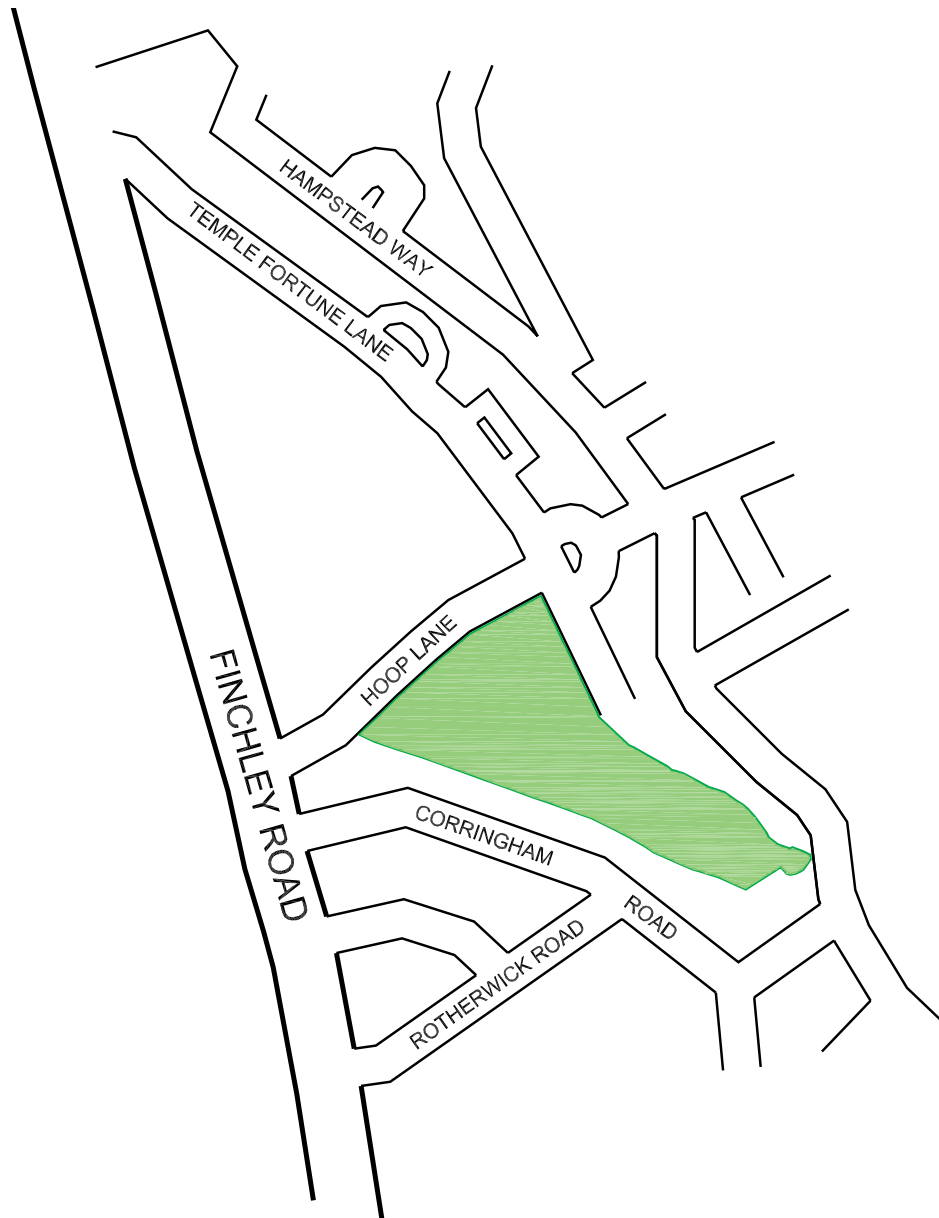


Hampstead Garden Suburb

Golders Green Crematorium – Area C

Character Appraisal



BARNET
LONDON BOROUGH

~HAMPSTEAD - GARDEN - SUBURB - TRUST~

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Character appraisal

Section 1 Background historical and architectural information

1.1 Location and topography

The Crematorium and grounds lie to the west of the Suburb at the bottom of the Meadway, creating a break between the housing and the retail centre of Golders Green. The Crematorium is included within the Conservation Area because it is not merely a space or “buffer” at the edge of the Garden Suburb, but is in itself an area of special architectural and historic interest, being registered as a Grade I listed garden on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. This special interest is described in more detail below, but the buildings are ranged along the Hoop Lane frontage, with the land sloping gently away from the road. The land is wedge-shaped in plan with a wide lawn, and more formal gardens to the south.

1.2 Development dates

The Jewish community in the east end was established in the 18th century around Spitalfields, just outside the City walls. The community spread, with Synagogues and burial grounds at Bow and Stepney. In the 19th century, with land becoming scarce, it was decided that a new burial ground was needed and land was purchased on Hoop Lane just west of the hamlet of Golders Green.

This was before the Northern Line, the Station and the expansion of Golders Green. In fact, the Jewish burial ground (divided in two, the eastern half for Shephardi Jews with flat memorial stones and the west for members of the West London Synagogue with standing gravestones) was established before the first Jewish people moved out and established themselves as such an important part of the new and thriving community.

At about the same time, a very different group were looking for land. The Crematorium Society was founded in 1874. The background was that in 1872, two Italians, Gorini and Polli separately published results of experiments with modern cremation furnaces. Sir Henry Thompson, Surgeon to Queen Victoria, was at a conference the following year, where Professor Brunetti of Padua spoke about the advantages and practicalities of cremation. In January 1874, Sir Henry published an article recommending cremation and there followed the famous meeting and declaration where the signatories stated that they:

“disapprove the present custom of burying the dead, and we desire to substitute some mode which shall rapidly resolve the body into its component elements, by a process which cannot offend the living, and shall render the remains perfectly innocuous. Until some better method is devised, we desire to adopt that usually known as cremation.”

The 16 people who signed the declaration were members of the medical profession, artists and writers and clergymen, as well as businessmen and social reformers. It was a curious mix of establishment and rebel figures with some famous names such as Millais, Tenniel and Trollope.

The early years of the Cremation Society were difficult. There was a struggle to find a suitable site for a Crematorium and, because of public opposition, they failed to secure land on the north side of London as had been hoped. In the end an acre of land was purchased in Woking. The next problem was that the Government declared, in 1879, that cremation was illegal, though in 1882 neither the Government nor the Courts took action against individuals who had carried out cremations. Based on the Court decision, the Society made a public appeal and a Chapel and Crematorium were built at Woking, the first service taking place in 1885.

In the following few years, 5 Crematoria were opened; in Manchester (1892), Glasgow (1895), Liverpool (1896) Darlington and Hull (1901). Then finally, the Cremation Society was able to purchase a North London site as they had always wanted. The 12 acres of land south of Hoop Lane was bought in 1901. The London Crematorium Company had been set up by the Society to erect the buildings and a decision was made in 1903 that the Company should also take over the running of Woking. The Society transferred ownership in 1933 in exchange for shares in the Company. The relationship between the two organisations remains close with the Society now a majority shareholder..

1.3 Originating architects and planners

The London Crematorium Company considered asking Voysey (whose father was a Director) to design the new buildings but, in 1901, they decided to invite Ernest George and his partner Alfred Yeates and it is their buildings that were the original structures on the site and it was they who created the distinctive style that was used by later architects – such as Mitchell and Bridgewater. Other architects were responsible for Mausoleums and Memorials, including Sir Edward Maufe, Edwin Luytens and Lutyens' former assistant Paul Phipps.

1.4 Intended purpose of original development

As described above, the Crematorium was founded in 1903. It was only the seventh in the country and the second to come under the control of the London Crematorium Company – the other being Woking. The use and ownership of the Crematorium remain unchanged.

1.5 Density and nature of the buildings

The buildings are arranged in a narrow strip along the Hoop Lane frontage, the whole of the rest of the 12 acre site being laid out as open landscaped areas although there are a limited number of Mausoleums and Memorials within the grounds as described below.

Section 2 Overall character of the area

The long range of buildings present a somewhat blank, wall-like elevation to Hoop Lane. This is relieved by the massing of the various elements; Chapels, Crematorium, Columbariums and so on. On the garden side, the building opens up with the long cloister-like arcade linking the various buildings ([Photograph 1](#)).



1.

All of the buildings are in a north Italian, Lombardy style with red brick walls and pantiled roofs. The impression is almost monastic and this is emphasised by the rather forbidding road frontage and the



2.

much more welcoming (south) Garden front ([Photograph 2](#)). The original Architects showed considerable skill in taking the strange, alien forms of chimneys and Columbariums, and turning them into a picturesque and convincing ensemble.

The lawns to the south are generous and they provide a beautiful and tranquil setting for the buildings ([Photograph 3 - see overleaf](#)). Despite the proximity of housing in Corringham Road and Wild Hatch, the Gardens are a place of quiet, isolated from the noise and bustle of

everyday life. This is partly because of the long back gardens to the houses adjoining and partly because of the boundary landscaping and tree planting.



The buildings and grounds are described in more detail below – together with the Mausoleums and other notable structures.

2.1 Principal positive features

- the tranquillity of the setting is important for those using the Crematorium as a place of remembrance and quiet reflection
- the quality of the architecture and the skill with which the various parts are designed and then given a visual unity
- the landscaping of the main garden area with its extensive lawn and planting beds and trees around the edges
- the standard of care in terms of the maintenance of the grounds and the buildings is exemplary and adds to the quality of the place.

2.2 Principal negative features

- because of the layout, there is much hardstanding around the buildings to provide for car parking and pedestrian access
- the site is very constrained and, at the south-east and along the edges, there is an awareness of adjacent development
- the state of repair of the two main Mausoleums is a matter of concern given the serious structural problems that have occurred
- the awkwardly located Tennis Courts and Hall adjacent to the gardens in the south-east corner detracts from the overall character.

Section 3 The different parts of the main area in greater detail

Although the complex appears as one building, it is in fact an assemblage of different structures built at different times. The earliest part is at the western end where the group of buildings consisting of the Chapel, Crematorium and Columbarium were built in 1901-3, together with the Staff rooms. As noted, the architects were George and Yeates who set the template architecturally for all the later buildings.

Of this first group, the Western Columbarium is square in plan and has four storeys accessed from an attached stair tower. Galleries run round each floor giving access to the niches for the storage of urns and for plaques. These early memorials tend to be simply designed in line of the general aims of the Cremation Society to do away with the need for gravestones and religious memorials. Externally the building is in brick and, although originally designed as a polygonal tower, it was changed to a square building with pyramidal roof. It is of red brick with diaper patterning in blue brick to the 1st and 2nd storeys and arched openings to top storey. It is a remarkable structure and the first of its kind in this country.

The Reception Block is part of the original composition although extended and now located in the middle of the car parking area. It is of plain red brick with blue brick banding up to the ground floor window head level. The 1st floor windows are square, with larger rectangular windows within recessed arches. There is a hipped roof with a large stack centred on the end of the ridge towards the road. The lower flat roofed section on the west side dates from the 1930s. It is plainer and not particularly sympathetic to the main building. It features a curious tile creasing parapet detail with brick on edge to the corners

The House and Café, on the western boundary, consist of a low, single storey range and two storey block. These buildings are not listed but do visually close the group, using the same materials. The house fronting onto Hoop Lane has the same rounded arch openings as the Reception Block (see above). It has four tall chimney stacks in modelled brick rising from the hipped pantiled roof. The Café is a simple lean-to roofed building with small triangular dormer vent. Although altered these buildings are part of the overall complex and make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area.

The Western Chapel is a simple but elegant Italian Lombardy design, the gable having a marked dentil course and north elevation having twinned arched openings to the ground floor with a rose window above, all contained within a slightly recessed arch. The sides of the Chapel are blank at ground floor level with an arcade of windows and blank arches above. The piers continue down to the plinth. There is a heavily detailed frieze above the arches. The whole building is in red brick with blue brick banding – a subdued version of Butterfield's work at Rugby or Keble.

To the west of the Chapel is the porte cochere; a simple brick structure with large open arches and a pyramidal roof. Inside, the Chapel is fairly plain with fair faced brickwork and panelling to the lower parts of the walls. There is an open truss roof. The only major decorative feature is the catafalque which projects from the eastern side wall and has a marble receiving portal with columns and open pediment.

The adjoining Crematorium consists of a series of small scale buildings, the exception being of course the chimney. This is treated as a campanile. It is a simple red brick structure designed carefully to look ecclesiastical, the round headed openings at high level even having bells hung in them although they are in fact (louvred) vents. The chimney was carefully designed with a small upper furnace in the tower to avoid the emission of smoke. Technically and architecturally it is a well considered tower alongside the tall main chapel.

Attached to the lower Crematorium buildings is the later Eastern Chapel by Mitchell and Bridgewater (1938-9). Built in the same style as the earlier Ernest George buildings, and using the same palette of materials, it is a simple rectangular building with a deeply recessed arched window to the Hoop Lane (entrance) front. This entrance is a strange design with lean-to roof set within a taller arched opening. The side elevations have simple paired windows. The building is less accomplished than those by Ernest George but is a dignified essay in the style of the earlier buildings. It is one of the more dominant buildings because of its proximity to the road, and lower buildings around it.

The Cloister was added later, linking this original block of buildings together in 1913. It consists of 21 bays; the central one having a small gable to indicate the route from the entrance to the garden. Each bay of the Cloister is separated by buttresses with commemorative plaques on the walls. The arrangement of plaques could have been visually chaotic but some order is given by each bay having an alternating pattern of a central round and two six sided main ceramic plaques and then one six sided and two round plaques. There are also round plaques on the columns alternating with six sided ones.

Lanterns hang from the king post trusses and there are large benches every third bay. Among the memorials, are two large stone plaques with engraved names erected either side of the main Chapel door. There is a simple plaque to the architect Ernest George (1839-1922) and, while most are unassuming, the Wills Watkins memorial has swopping angels draped over urns in an Art Nouveau manner. The Cloister works as a commemorative Stoa but it is also important architecturally as a unifying element on the Garden frontage

An arch marks the way through to the Gardens (coinciding with the axial entrance of the Jewish cemetery opposite). Beyond the arch is the West Columbarium. This is a five storey structure. It is a very simple square brick tower with windows in recessed vertical slots with arcaded windows to the top storey above a projecting brick band. There is a pyramidal roof with deep overhanging eaves. Inside, the space is extraordinary with arcaded galleries around a dramatically vertical central area. The galleries are lined with tablets and memorials reflecting the changing tastes – with more expensive materials (stone and marble) and decorative designs including metal screens, and busts on the lower floor.

Attached to the West Columbarium (on the hoop lane side) is the Bedford Chapel. Designed by Ernest George, this is an unassuming single storey building with hipped roof. Completed in 1911 it has a gabled porch on the Hoop Lane frontage. It acts as a base to the West Columbarium reducing the sheer vertical scale of the five story tower.

The next building to the east is the (somewhat confusingly named) Ernest George Columbarium. This was built in 1922-28 to the designs of Alfred Yeates after Ernest George's death. While retaining the style and materials of the earlier buildings, this Columbarium is very much an individual complex, arranged around a courtyard with an arched screen on the garden side. The building has two square towers with flat brick pilasters. The lower range, between, has an apse with diaper pattern brickwork and metal roof with diving bell type roof dormers. The two wings projecting towards the Garden are of the same, lower, height with dramatic rose windows in the gable ends.



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The axial approach to the building is most impressive with a tall, boldly arched doorway (Photograph 4). Internally, the building has galleries running to left and right. The apse is directly ahead and has a richly coloured turquoise and gold mosaic. The square towers have a balcony level around a tall space serving as a pivot point directing the visitor round into the side wings. The walls have plaques and there are busts including the memorials to Freud and Anna Pavlova – the former moved from the West Columbarium, the latter dramatically not moved back to her native Russia.

The last group of buildings, at the eastern end of the site, are the Chapel of Memory and Columbarium (1938-8) by Mitchell and Bridgewater who became the main architects after Yeate's retirement in 1935. These

buildings are designed to fit, in terms of materials but are plainer, with less decorated brickwork and with metal windows under concrete lintels. The Chapel is a straightforward rectangular building, one space but appearing as two storey externally. The adjacent Columbarium is three storey and again, in keeping with the times, is a more utilitarian structure both internally and externally. The Chapel is a large airy space with a clerestory creating the two storeys seen externally, and the Columbarium is a larger space with simple glazed balconies on three levels.



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To the west of the Chapel is an open courtyard with a vast stone memorial on the end wall. The Cloister is picked up again along the garden front of this courtyard and the Chapel and Columbarium. The Cloister steps up (3 steps at a time) as the ground rises at the eastern end. There are nice individual chairs by the columns of the arcade. The last bay has a vaulted ceiling and classical columns and pilasters, forming the base for the Chapel. Beyond is a semi-circular sheltered seat giving a long vista right back down the cloister towards the original

1903 buildings. To the east of the main range of buildings lies the Smith Mausoleum (Photograph 5), built in 1904-5 to the design of Paul Phipps. It is a sturdy brick building with Portland stone banding in

a somewhat Baroque Classical style. There is an arched doorway and the building is square in plan. There are four pediments and exaggerated flat canopies to the corner piers. It is a well resolved and confident composition, despite obvious structural problems. Inside, there is a vaulted ceiling, with ribs of stone blocks dramatically shaped to take the narrow bricks of the curved surfaces. There are busts on pedestals and caskets within stone framed brick arched niches along the walls. The Mausoleum is Grade II Listed.

Around the Mausoleum, the boundary wall curves around the corner onto Wild Hatch. It is plain red brick to the road with flat buttresses and alternating courses of headers and stretchers. Internally it is divided into bays, some arched, for plaques to be attached facing onto the gardens. There are some 35 bays each about 10m long after the curving section. Among the hundreds of memorials are a charming bronze Mother and Child in a swirling mobile composition for Enid Bloom, Sculptor (d1996) and, near the end of the wall, a simple plaque to Claude Grahame-White (d1959); the larger than life aviation pioneer who founded Hendon Aerodrome. All the plaques, and those in the Cloister, are included in the Listing.

To the south of the end of the wall lies the Philipson Mausoleum (1914-16) one of the most important buildings on the site ([Photograph 6](#)). It was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1914-16 and is Grade II* Listed. The Mausoleum is reminiscent of Lutyens' work in New Delhi with its simplified Classical style and pure geometric shapes. A circular domed drum is encircled by a stone trellis wall; the idea being that roses would grow between the two, emerging through the outside lattice ([Photograph 7](#)). Unfortunately this appears to have been impractical and we are left with the much purer architectural forms.



The doors are of stone with massive bronze hinges and the interior has a dished floor – originally the oculus was unglazed and rainwater had to be drained away. Around the edge is a simple bench seat and two urns are placed on a high shelf opposite the door. All four elements (earth, wind, fire and water) are therefore present in this simple, enigmatic and sophisticated design. To add to the effect, the acoustics are eerie –like an echo-chamber around the edges and absolutely still in the middle.

Just to the south is the wonderful bronze sculpture by Henry Pegram (1924) presented by the RA in 1937 to commemorate the Artist's death. It is called "In to the Silent Land" and has a swirling angel bearing a young girl from this earth while amorphous figures writhe beneath their feet. The sculpture dates back stylistically to the Victorian era and has something of Gilbert's Art Nouveau fluidity. It is a major work and is Grade II Listed.

Other memorials in the Garden are less remarkable. They include that to the Boswells, a square marble faced column with curved bronzed motif and to Sausmaraz, Painter (d1961). On the other, eastern side, there is a red granite monument with attached corner columns and shallow stepped pyramidal roof. Bronze plaques to Maud Godfrey and Mary Jane Edgar are affixed. At the Children's Garden of Remembrance, there is a little monument; a vase atop a square column – in memory of the Leffman family who gave this piece of land.

Facing the lawn is the statue to Ghannshyamdas Birla. It has a certain, still calmness, but the plinth is unfortunate; the red granite and gilt lettering at odds with more unassuming memorials. The very stillness of the sculpture fails in a way to convey emotion though, when seen close up, the work is clearly accomplished. Nearby, a domed plinth has the name Dresden (d1911), the daughter of W.R. Coleridge. Fluted columns with Egyptian capitals and classical frieze to the square canopy.

These, less remarkable Garden memorials are not Listed, but the boundary wall then starts again with attached plaques leading back to the original buildings

Two final developments need to be mentioned at this east end of the complex. The Memorial Court, designed in 1926 by Alfred Yeates whose plan included a formal lily pond on the garden side of the West Columbarium with the courtyard for tablets alongside it. These elements are oddly formal in relation to the more incremental architectural development and Robinson's more relaxed layout (see below). The Court is a simple square space, open, but with high walls, niches and arches. Plaques to many of the famous figures from the arts world – particularly musicians – are found here; from Bud Flanagan, Larry Adler and Ray Ellington to Keith Moon and Mark Bolan. The Lily pond is an attractive but oddly out-of-place feature within the Gardens.



8.

This disjointedness is emphasised by the War Memorial of 1949. It is a stone structure with four Ionic columns carrying an entablature and low segmental pediment (Photograph 8). Although Listed, it is not an entirely satisfactory composition and there appears to have been an element of compromise, with Edward Maufe's first design being referred back to obtain something more sympathetic to the existing buildings. This does not appear to have been entirely successful, and Maufe's "Design C" lacks the sureness of the Smith Mausoleum that it faces at the other end of the long range of buildings.

The Gardens themselves are generally fairly simple. The large grassed lawn (with crocuses in spring) acts as a scattering ground. A broad pathway is kept mown on the axis between the Crematorium and the East Columbarium. The lawn is edged with flower beds which are fairly formal and rectangular, with roses, along the path running beside the buildings; less formal, with shrubs and trees along the sides of the lawn.

The landscaping scheme was designed by William Robinson (a founding Director of the London Crematorium Company). Robinson was one of the leading figures in horticulture and landscape design, and was a friend of Gertrude Jekyll. His layout follows the ideas and designs he advanced in books such as "God's Acre Beautiful; or the Cemeteries of the Future" published in 1880. As well as there being several group tree protection orders, the importance of the landscaping is recognised by its inclusion on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The southern end was laid out later (in 1939) to the design of Edward White. This part of the garden is more obviously and consciously designed and the landscaping and planting tends to be obtrusive rather than being a quiet back-ground. There is a copse, willow trees, two ponds and a rather intriguing "Chinese pattern" bridge with alpine rock garden.

The buildings and grounds co-relate in a way that makes this a place of peace and remembrance. Whilst this area is important as a green space between the Suburb and Golders Green, the Crematorium is also of architectural and historic importance in its own right – an important complex of structures within a memorable landscape setting.

