

Equitable Gas Light Company confidently expected the Cemetery Company to purchase the whole of their holding, but the asking price of £5000 was considered extortionate. By 1842 the price had come down to £4000, but the Cemetery Company refused it and even rejected the gas company's offer to sell a small part to provide a central entrance from Fulham Road.

J C Loudon, one of the most influential garden designers of his day and a noted writer on cemetery design, was consulted about the Cemetery at the end of 1839. The minute books confirm an intention that the Cemetery should be admired for its choice and disposition of plants, in line with Loudon's writings. However, the planting of the central avenue with limes in 1840, confirmed by tree-ring analysis, shows an early and fundamental shift away from the upright and evergreen trees promoted by Loudon to enhance air movement and minimise the effects of fallen leaves in winter.

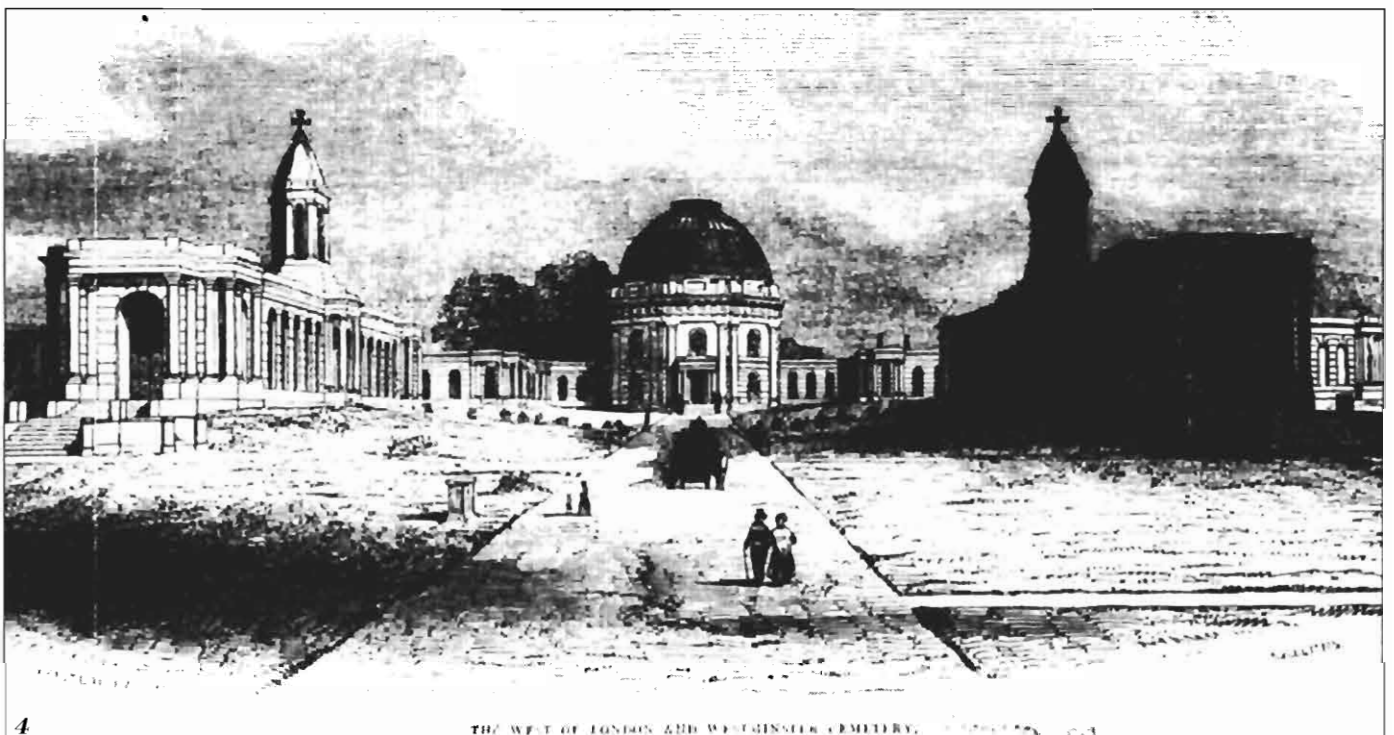
Tenders for the remaining buildings were accepted in phases over the next two years amid financial anxiety, and the buildings we see today – an unfinished scheme – were completed by June 1842 with the help of a loan of £5,000 from John Gunter. It was Gunter who helped create the Fulham Road entrance by buying two plots from the gas company at auction in February 1843 and selling them to the Cemetery. Having declined to buy land from the gas company for several thousand pounds, the Cemetery thus obtained an adequate if off-centre



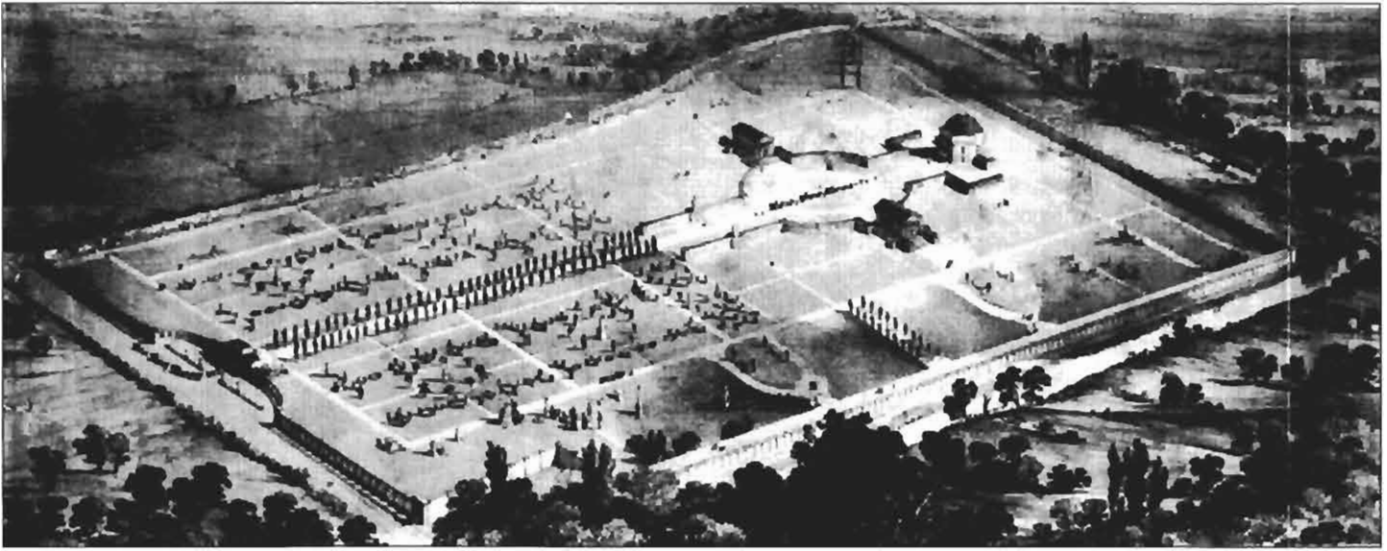
access to Fulham Road from one of the gas company's directors for £475. By this time Baud and the Cemetery Company were in dispute over fees and the quality of work, and when Baud in 1844 complained that his existing designs for the Fulham Road entrance were in turn passed over, he was dismissed.

The Company's finances remained precarious. £147,685 7s 2d had been spent on laying-out the Cemetery (more than double that at Nunhead, the next most expensive London Cemetery for which figures are available) and income had been depressed as a result of all the delays. In 1845, with liabilities nearing £22,000, a further share issue was authorised which with an improvement in income allowed a small dividend to be declared for the first time in 1847.

- 1 *Extract from 1890 Ordnance Survey*
- 2 *Extract from 1865 Ordnance Survey*
- 3 *The North Gate still carries the name of the founding company and the date (1839) of the earliest buildings*
- 4 *General view of chapel and arcades 1843*



THE WEST OF LONDON AND WESTMINSTER CEMETERY. 1843



*Above: The lithograph by
Hawkins prepared to publicise
Baud's axial layout*

*Below: Brompton Cemetery from
the air in 1987*



THE GOVERNMENT PURCHASES BROMPTON CEMETERY

London suffered a major cholera epidemic in 1849 and Edwin Chadwick, secretary to the Poor Law Commission, produced a report accusing the cemetery companies of failing to tackle the problems they had been set. Entombment of bodies in catacombs and mausoleums rather than interment did not alleviate the health risks, while the charging mechanism put cemeteries out of the reach of the poor. As a result, the Metropolitan Interments Act 1850 gave the Board of Health wide powers to provide new burial grounds, to close down those that were insanitary and overcrowded, and to purchase existing cemetery companies. Only two purchase notices were ever issued under this legislation, and one of these was for Brompton Cemetery. The Cemetery Company requested £168,762 as compensation, including the cost of buildings and lost interest: the Board of Health offered £43,836. Arbitration took place in July 1851 and the resulting award of £74,921 was announced in October that year.

The Government began to have doubts about the wisdom of the course of action it had initiated, took steps to revise the legislation, and instructed the Board of Health to withdraw from the two purchases if all parties agreed. At a special general meeting held in January 1852, the chairman and the directors recommended that the sale of Brompton Cemetery be abandoned, but the shareholders voted by 122 to 54 to enforce the award. Brompton Cemetery thus became the only London cemetery to be bought by the Government: it was conveyed to the Commissioners of Works and Public

Buildings on 5 November 1852.

LATER HISTORY

Over 155,000 interments had been made by 1889: the number had risen to nearly 200,000 by the 1920s. As the only 'national' cemetery, Brompton Cemetery provided an official burial location for minor royalty, colonial governors and members of other national churches with no London graveyard. Between 1854 and 1939, it was the London District Military Burial Ground in succession to St Johns, Smith Square. The evocative Chelsea Pensioners monument commemorates 7625 pensioners of the Royal Hospital buried nearby between 1855 and 1893. Another memorial erected in 1889 commemorates the Brigade of Guards. There are now 224 identified war graves in the Cemetery, and regular inspections are made by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Cemetery was closed from 1952 to 1966, with only a few burials taking place in family plots. The Cemetery is again open, though a large proportion of burials are still for families which own rights to plots. No new headstones are allowed, to help retain the current appearance of the Cemetery. Bomb damage and inherent structural problems have taken their toll on the western catacombs, while many individual monuments have suffered the ill effects of erosion, pollution, vandalism and theft.

The Cemetery is currently owned by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and is managed by The Royal Parks.

1 *The Chelsea Pensioners' monument*

2 *Continuing burials as a family plot: the memorials to George Washington Lambert, George W T Lambert, the composer Constant Lambert and his wife, and of Amelia Beatrice Lambert*



'PENCILINGS IN THE SURBURBAN CEMETERIES'

FROM 'THE FAMILY ECONOMIST' 21 APRIL 1860 pp 251-2

Past the pleasant district of old Brompton, in the midst of market gardens and rural scenery, about twenty years ago, the Brompton Cemetery was enclosed and planted. Since then several thousand bodies have been interred, and yet, so great is the space, that the ground does not seem so thickly covered with memorials as in several of the other of the surburban burial places. This large plot of ground is of oblong form, and with excellent taste it has been laid out in avenues, which stretch in long perspective, with a solemn effect; and this has been added to by rows of Polish pines, and other dark-coloured trees. The walls of the enclosure have been covered with ivy; and the cypress and other tall trees, in their arrangement amongst the white tombs, reminds one of the picturesque burial places in Turkey and Syria. On one side a terrace has been raised, and at the end of the long avenue is the chapel and a circular arcade, below which are vaults. These buildings, designed in imitation of famous Roman structures, have an admirable effect, excelling anything of the kind in the vicinity of the metropolis.

The soil here is particularly adapted to the purpose of interment, being dry and porous, and a rapid stream runs past one margin to the Thames.

Passing from the Abney Park Cemetery to that of Brompton, the visitor will be struck with the difference in the style and taste of the monuments, those in the latter place being much more refined and appropriate...

Conspicuous amongst the smaller tombs are some mausoleums, of large size, of Egyptian design, formed of massive polished granite; one of these cost upwards of £7,000. The Duke of Grafton, and several of the nobility, have burial places here, which are marked by imposing monuments. Many graves are without stones, but are carefully planted with flowers, which, in the winter, show promise of beauty in the approaching spring. Several graves, on which are stones inscribed with foreign names, are particularly attended to in this respect.

Few will pass by without notice a finely designed tomb; this consists of a base, on which is lying a sleeping lion; at each end, with heads bent down, is a gladiator, holding in one hand a funeral wreath, on which is inscribed strength, valour, humanity, etc. This is to the memory of John Jackson, once famous in the prize-ring. It is a question worthy of consideration, how it is that in several instances the memorials raised in honour of prize-fighters are of a better and more fitting design than many of those erected in honour of philosophers ...

The interior of the chapel, particularly the dome, is chastely ornamented, and the general effect excellent; much better than many of the ill-finished and imperfect imitations of the Gothic style which are in some places to be met with.

Since the Polish pine trees, of which mention has been already made, have been planted, the growth has been considerable, and in future years there will be here noble trees, which will throw out long arms and produce a shade over the graves; looking from the chapel down the long vista, the effect is so good (and each year will improve) that it ought, in other instances, to be an encouragement to arrange flat spaces in long, straight lines; the horizon of the sea and extensive plains convey ideas of grandeur as impressive as lofty mountains and the most elevated buildings; it is this principle which gives effect to the straight avenues which are made at Brompton, better than would have been the case if the paths had been made circuitous ...

South entrance, probably from Wolfords 'Old & New London'



With thanks to Mrs Susie Dawson for making this extract available.

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The architectural legacy of the Cemetery

Whatever the actual provenance of the Cemetery designs and the involvement of Wyattville, the scheme remains unfinished and the cost of building and of subsequent disputes contributed both to the failure to complete the scheme and to the continuous financial problems faced by the Cemetery Company during its short life. Furthermore, structural problems became apparent in the western catacombs relatively soon after their completion and have given cause for concern ever since.

EAST AND SOUTH BOUNDARY WALLS

The earliest structures on site are the Cemetery walls on the east and south sides, begun in August 1839. The east wall still makes a powerful impression even though Honey Lane has been replaced by the back gardens of houses on the west side of Ifield Road. Thick stock brick walls over three metres in height are topped by a solid triangular coping and punctuated by substantial piers with pyramidal caps. The effect on Honey Lane and the empty fields to the east must at first have been very striking. The treatment of the wall and piers next to the Fulham Road entrance with flashings associated with number 306B adjacent is most regrettable.

THE NORTHERN FRONTAGE AND MAIN ENTRANCE

The 210 metre north frontage to what is now Old Brompton Road, listed Grade II*, was started at about the same time. The centrepiece is an entry in the style of a triumphal arch with engaged Roman Doric columns set between offices of ashlar with a channelled lower storey. It is a more spreading and comfortable design than its austere Greek Doric cousin at Kensal Green. Flanking it on either side are pedestrian gates in channelled stonework which match the substantial channelled stone piers at the ends of the semi-elliptical entrance court and at the extreme ends of the whole

frontage. Between the stone entrance and the flanking pedestrian gates are single storey office bays in stock brick. Segmental headed arches in stock brickwork with modern though very acceptable railings fill the rest of the frontage. This plain brickwork contrasts with the fine channelled stonework, while the piers sit on the continuous stone plinth of the Cemetery wall rather than rise through it. While the arcaded wall is clearly seen on the idealised aerial view of the intended scheme for the Cemetery, what we see today may not be what was originally intended. Perhaps the stone elements were first designed to be linked by continuous railings, like at the southern entrance, where the masonry piers achieve greater magnificence in relative isolation. Alternatively, the intention may have been to face the flanking offices and the frontage arcades in stone, the brick representing an economy for the hard-pressed Company. It has also been pointed out that while the street face of the North Lodge is faced in Aislaby sandstone from Whitby, the cemetery side is finished in Bath stone with a pronouncedly warmer and blander colour. The change may have been made for reasons of aesthetics or workability, although it is also likely that cost constraints again played their part: availability of Aislaby stone does not seem to have been a problem during the nineteenth century.

THE WESTERN CATACOMBS

The western catacombs appear to have been part of the original concept. The Company records show that they were not part of the original programme, being completed eight years after the original western boundary wall, the top of which was modified to allow a more elegant balustrade to the terrace walk thus created. Less than half of the western catacombs and boundary wall have survived wartime damage or demolition because of structural defects. The parts that remain, most complete at their southern end, are in a dangerous

- 1 *The formidable eastern boundary wall and the eastern lime avenue planted in the 1880's*
- 2 *The northern entrance and forecourt. The change in facing between Aislaby sandstone and Bath stone can be seen on the side of the gate below the chimneystack*
- 3 *Detail of northern frontage to the west of the main entrance*

