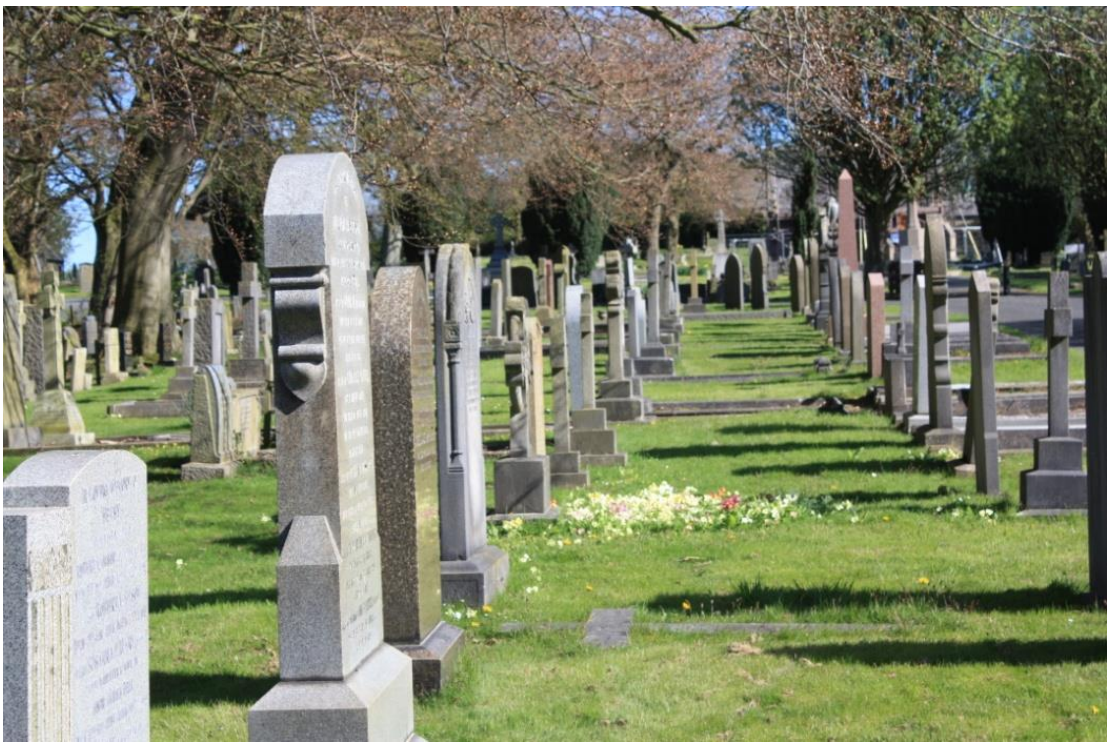
Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

LANCASTER CEMETERY

Lancaster Civic Vision Guide 3



Lancaster Cemetery was laid out in 1854-5 by Lancaster Burial Board, following the Burial Act 1853, which gave local authorities the power to establish municipal burial grounds, those in churchyards rapidly becoming full. Lancaster's population increased by around a half between 1801 and 1851.

The Cemetery stands high above the town, giving splendid views over Lancaster. The 18 acres (7.2 ha) are terraced and well wooded, extending the wildlife haven of Williamson Park next door. The Cemetery is now closed except for burials in existing family plots. Lancaster City Council cares for the site.

At the centre of the Cemetery are three sandstone chapels in a Gothic Revival style (Anglican, Roman Catholic and Non-Conformist), Only one is now used. They were designed by E.G. Paley, the noted Lancaster architect, and are Grade II listed buildings as

is the main entrance lodge house. The Cemetery is divided into sections for the three denominations. The Cemetery is also a Garden of Special Historic Interest (Grade II).

Those commemorated

The Cemetery holds the graves of many Lancaster citizens who were influential in the town's development during the last 150 years.

James Williamson (Lord Ashton) (1842–1930) He developed his father's firm into the largest linoleum manufacturer in the UK from his Lancaster base. He was a major philanthropist in the town and a controversial and unusual character.

Sir Thomas Storey (1825–98) The other textile magnate in Lancaster, also a philanthropic family, perhaps best known for the next generation's association with Westfield War Memorial Village.

John Coulston (1797–1866) John was the Manager of the Lancaster Banking Company for nearly 40 years.

Arthur W. Hunt (1849–1917) of Lancaster's Shrigley & Hunt stained-glass firm.

Dr Denis de Vitre (1806–78) A doctor who became an early specialist in learning disabilities and was consulting physician at Lancaster Asylum. He had local business interests and was Mayor twice.

Pythagoras de Nictheroy (1835?–79) Probably a Brazilian sea captain, he married Ellen from Lancaster in Liverpool and died by the Benin River, West Africa.

Sharpe, Paley and Austin of the notable Lancaster architectural practice are all here as are surgeons, lawyers, a town clerk and several mayors. There is the Keeper of Lancaster Castle, hotel owners, drapers, a stationmaster and grocer.

There is a monument – one of very few – to the local casualties of the Crimean War (1853–6) – "the imperishable memory". It is a limestone obelisk, designed by E.G. Paley in 1860, paid for by public subscription and is Grade II listed. Over 100 casualties of the two World Wars are buried here and many Commonwealth War Graves.

Along the west side and in the northeast corner are the paupers' graves, unmarked, for all those whose families could not afford a gravestone.

The styles

As you walk around you will see a wide variety of styles of stonework – Celtic, Gothic, Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

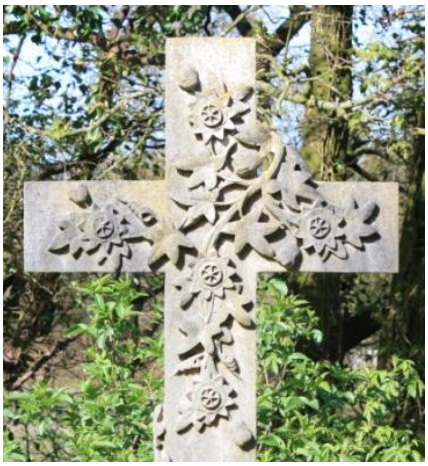
The stonework takes many forms – obelisks, columns, crosses, vertical and horizontal slabs and sarcophagi. Some of the stone carving mimics books, scrolls, crosses made from logs or natural limestone formations. The lettering on the gravestones – engraved or inserted lead work – also follows the styles of the last 170 years.

The symbols

Many of the gravestones have carvings with traditional symbolic meanings. See how many you can spot as to walk around.

An angel – God's messenger
A book – The Bible
A closed book – a life ended
A broken column – a life cut short
A shroud – for sorrow
A palm frond – victory over death
A dove – a soul ascending, purity
Oak leaves – strength
Ivy – eternity
Grapes – Christ's blood
A cross – faith and resurrection.
Doors, gates – to Heaven
A lamb – innocence
A lily – beauty
A rose – martyrdom
An anchor – hope and safety
A wreath – victory in death
A draped urn – grief
Rope – linking Heaven and Earth, the living and dead.

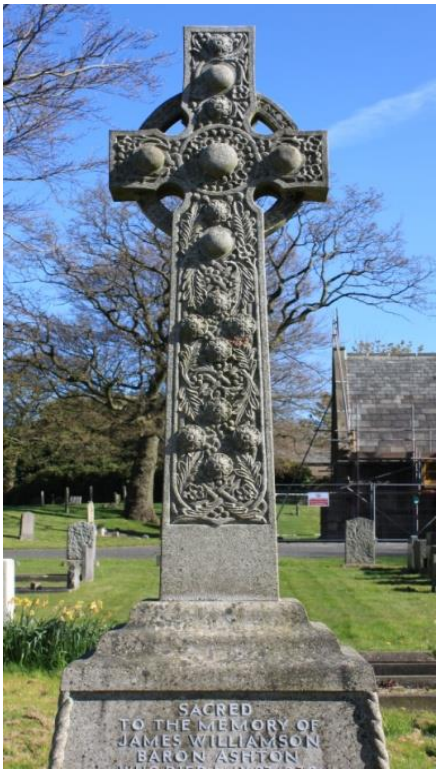




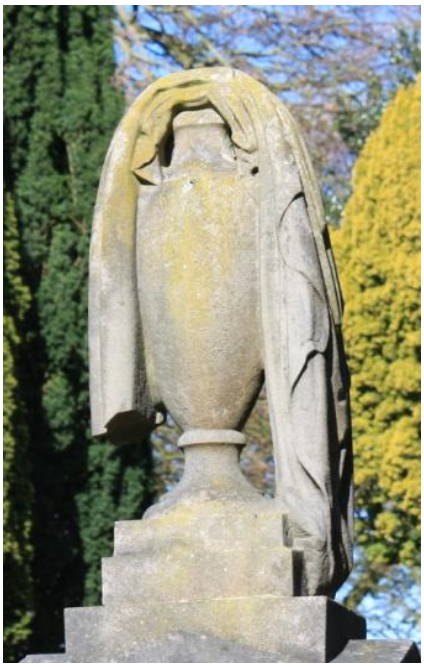




Crimean War



James Williamson, Baron Ashton





Lancaster Cemetery is on Quernmore Road – for satnav use LA1 3JT.

Some other guides of interest include: 2 Crosses in Lancaster Cemetery; 18 Lancaster War Memorial; 33 Scotforth Cemetery; 63 Lancaster Cemetery – Notable Gravestones and Memorials.

Text – Roger Frankland and Gordon Clark. Photographs – Gordon Clark.

Published by Lancaster Civic Vision (©2014; revised 2022)
Lancaster Civic Vision is the trading name of Lancaster Civic Society, registered charity no. 258434