



# Loughborough Cemetery Conservation Area Appraisal

March 2006









## I Summary

1.1 The purpose of this appraisal is to describe what is special about the architecture, appearance and historical interest of Loughborough Cemetery which was designated as a conservation area in May 1991. The appraisal will be used to inform the consideration of management and development proposals within the area.

1.2 Loughborough cemetery was laid out in 1857 and expanded at the turn of the century. It is still open and occasionally used for burials. The area intended for use by the Church of England is consecrated.

1.3 The cemetery is laid out in picturesque style, surrounded by railings and a dense planting of shrubs and trees. It contains many fine specimen trees. The main gates and the railings at the front are listed.

1.4 The centrepiece of the cemetery is the Grade II listed Gothic Revival style chapel building, which was badly neglected, but has recently been brought back into use as a commercial office space. There are two lodges at the front which are now occupied as residential dwellings. One lodge, built in the Gothic style, is listed.

1.5 The cemetery is a tranquil place of repose and contemplation as its creators intended it to be. It contains a wealth of wildlife and a portrait of the history of the people of Loughborough.



## 2 Planning Context

2.1 A conservation area is an area of special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance should be preserved or enhanced. In making decisions on potential development within a conservation area, the Council is required to 'pay attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area'. Permission will not be granted for proposals that are likely to harm the character or appearance of a conservation area. *Sections 69 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.*

2.2 Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: *Planning and the Historic Environment* says that special attention should be paid when considering proposals for development in a conservation area.

2.3 The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands published in March 2005 advises local

authorities to develop strategies that avoid damage to the region's cultural assets. *Policy 27: Protecting and Enhancing The Region's Natural and Cultural Assets.*

2.4 The Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Structure Plan 1996 to 2016 published in December 2004 seeks to identify, protect, preserve and enhance areas, sites, buildings and settings of historic or architectural interest or archaeological importance. Development within conservation areas should preserve or enhance their character and appearance. *Environment Policy 2: Sites and Buildings of Historic Architectural and Archaeological Interest.*

2.5 The Borough of Charnwood Local Plan 1991 – 2006 adopted in January 2004 seeks to ensure that new development in conservation areas preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area. *Policy EV/10..*





## **Loughborough Cemetery Conservation Area Appraisal**

Loughborough Cemetery is a good example of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century formal picturesque layout. It is located on the Leicester Road at the southern boundary of the town, being almost the last development before the countryside.

### **3 History**

3.1 The cemetery was laid out to accord with the ideas of John Claudius Loudon who published “On the Laying out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries” in 1843. The impetus for public cemeteries was a concern for hygiene in the crowded and overfilled churchyards. In 1849 William Lee published his “Enquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of Loughborough” which eventually resulted in the construction of Nantantan and Blackbrook Reservoirs and a piped water supply in 1870. Such improvements were part of the overall surge of national and civic pride in the country that was symbolised by the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace in 1851. In 1855 the Town Hall was built, and two years later, in 1857, the cemetery with the chapels as its centrepiece was completed.

3.2 The cemetery was set away from the main areas of housing, 1 mile from the town, adjacent to Shelthorpe House which has since been demolished. The cemetery was bounded by cast iron railings with a heavy planting of trees and evergreen shrubs. It was divided in half by a central path and planted with several specimen trees.

3.3 In the centre of the cemetery a chapel building was erected in decorated Gothic Revival style with a tall delicate spire. There were two small lodge buildings at the entrance gates and two mortuary buildings on either side of the chapels.

3.4 At the end of the century the cemetery was doubled in size to cope with the massive expansion of the population of the town. The pattern of the layout, paths and planting was faithfully maintained. The path from Shelthorpe to Woodthorpe which had formed the rear boundary was re-aligned to form



a new rear boundary. The new path was provided with the same substantial cast iron railings and evergreen shrubs as the rest of the cemetery.

3.5 Between the wars, at the time of the building of the Shelthorpe estate a new lodge was built at the en-

trance gates for a superintendent and a brick shed was provided for the gravediggers.

3.6 In 1947 a completely new cemetery was opened to the south and west, incorporating a crematorium. In 2005 a mausoleum was opened, one of very few in the country.

### **4 Social Context**

4.1 Loughborough has seen great changes in the 150 years since the cemetery was laid out. At the beginning of the Victorian period the town was engaged in small scale manufacture of boots and shoes, textiles, and machinery. Manufacturing grew and was represented by world class companies such as Brush Engineering, Morris Cranes, Towles and Bentley Cottons, and Fizer pharmaceuticals. All but one of these have been superseded by Astra Zeneca and the university, equally world class.

4.2 The cemetery has been similarly affected by social change. Cremation has taken the place of burial and now natural burial may be superseding both.









## **5 Setting and Landscape**

5.1 The land on the south side of Loughborough is flat and level as it merges into the valley of the river Soar. Beacon Hill forms a distant horizon. From the outside the cemetery is obscured from view by the dense planting. However the spire of the chapel building is a recognisable landmark as one approaches the town from the south, particularly on crossing the railway bridge. It is visible to a lesser degree when leaving the town, when one is more likely to notice the entrance lodges. From within the cemetery the horizon is limited by the trees and shrubs. There is a 1970s housing estate of Whaddon Drive along part of the north west boundary, the other part adjoining the playing field of Shelthorpe Community College. The south west boundary is marked by the

footpath from Shelthorpe to Woodthorpe. Beyond the footpath, and very easy to miss is another housing estate of Bainbridge Road and Perry Grove. The south east boundary is marked by the roadway to the new cemetery.



## **6 Character and Appearance**

6.1 The old cemetery is peaceful, sheltered, secluded. It has a charm which grows as one walks around. It is a place for musing and contemplation. There is abundant wildlife. Much of the area is simply grass. The graves appear to be in informal groups and there are many mature specimen trees. The paths, surfaced with unbound chippings, feel soft and merge into the grass on either side. Many of the paths are overgrown.









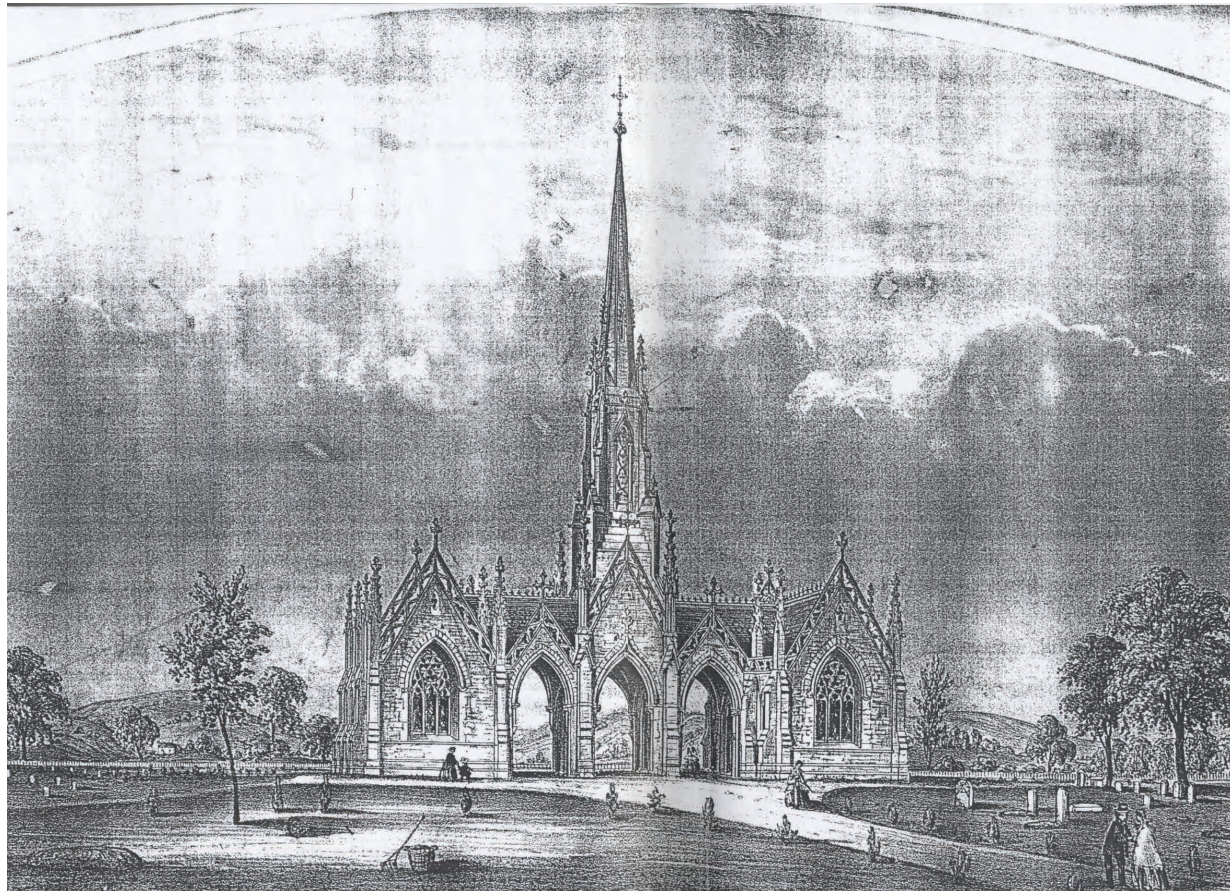
## 7 History of the Chapel Building

7.1 Dominating the space is the chapel building. It was built in 1857 to designs by Bellamy and Hardy in Lincolnshire and declared to be:

*“unsurpassed by any other building erected for the same purpose in the kingdom”.*

7.2 There were two chapels, one to serve the Established Church of England, the other for Non-conformists, of whom there were many in the town. The chapels were linked by three pointed archways as a porte-cochère where carriages could be unloaded under cover. The centre arch carried a tower which was finished by a fine

stone spire. The gable ends of each chapel and arch were finished with decorated tracery parapets and surmounted by a cross. There were crocketed pinnacles on each of the 16 buttresses and on the spire. There was tracery in each of the windows and delicately carved corbels and bosses.



7.3 It is likely that the Victorians understood that the chapel building would not last forever. It was probably built to a specific budget using cheap local stone and the builders probably realised that within 50 years most of the intricately carved finials, pinnacles and gargoyles would begin to be damaged beyond repair.

7.4 Indeed, when the new cemetery was opened the building was suffering through a combination of degradation by the weather, an uncaring lack of maintenance and an easy target of vandalism in the deserted cemetery.



7.5 Despite the fact that the building was listed Grade II in 1965 almost none of the decoration survived. When the pinnacles or the parapets were damaged they were simply removed.







## 8 Restoration

8.1 In the 1980s it was realised that the chapels could be lost for ever. A great deal of work was planned to restore the cemetery as a whole, its burial plots, monuments, its planting, and particularly the chapels and entrance lodges. The cemetery was designated as a conservation area in May 1991. Ideas included planting for wild-life, re-siting of the gravestones and monuments, erection of a band-stand, a statue to Loudon, possibilities of using the chapel buildings for a variety of public purposes in common with other unused ecclesiastical buildings, sale of the lodge buildings for private residences and sale of parts of the cemetery for small scale development. John Loudon's original ideas had always borne in mind the problem of what to do with a cemetery once it was full. His suggestion was to open the space as a public walk or garden while retaining the gravestones, buildings and monuments as a place of instruction, repose and history. In this regard, in 1994, the Geologists Association be-



came interested in the site where students might learn about the different stone used for the monuments and tombs.

8.2 Eventually a scheme for renovation of the chapel buildings was made by offering the building for an "appropriate and dignified alternative use". A lease was offered to a private company for 125 years and in return the chapels were restored into a usable office building. The stonework has been cleaned; the blue lias stone which constitutes the bulk of the material between the quoins has been meticulously re-dressed and the tops of the gables have been protected with lead.

8.3 The wrought iron clamps and the central spire tree were badly corroded and threatening to blow the hand carved stone apart from the inside. The clamps have been dug out of the stone and replaced by stainless steel, with a stainless steel supporting cage for the spire.

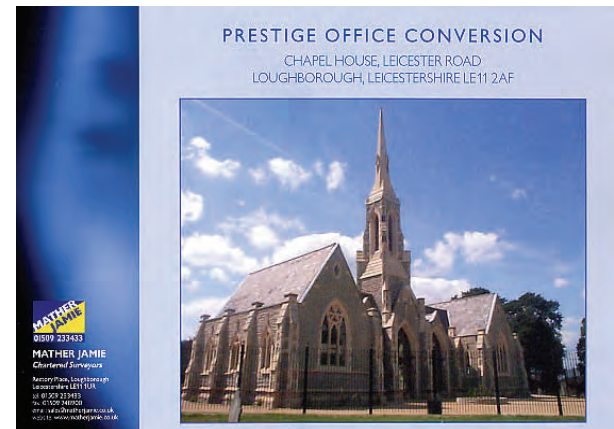
8.4 A mezzanine floor has been carefully in-



serted throughout the building leaving the original internal features intact. The ceilings with their scissor trusses remain visible. The archways have been fully glazed and the floor covered with polished limestone. A spiral staircase leads to the mezzanine floor. The main chapel roofs have been raised slightly to provide space for insulation.

## 9 The Chapel Building Today

9.1 The effect has been wonderful for the building and it now has another century of assured existence. A building which once stood derelict, at risk and neglected, is now a warm and thriving office environment. It stands as a good example of how a redundant building can be given a new purpose and future life. However some tough choices had to be made and while everybody connected with the cemetery is delighted that the buildings have been preserved it could be said that the work that has been done is remedial and not restoration.







## 10 The Chapel in its Context

10.1 It is feared that the cemetery is still subject to vandalism, so the chapels have been surrounded with a high railing which creates a disassociated island in an otherwise obviously public space. The building is on a slight mound with a narrow gravel path for visitors to skirt the railings: the effect is “keep out”. There is no indication of what the building was or now is. While some people appreciate the reassurance of a building occupied and in use, to others the building appears to be used in a way unconnected to the cemetery which is disturbing. As one studies the building it becomes clear that something is missing. The slates of the roof appear proud of the gables, the roof ridges are plain, the buttresses end abruptly in blunt caps, the lancets in the tower remain blank. Only the heavy tracery of the main windows and the fish-scale slates of the roof remain. The glory of the decoration is largely gone.



## 11 Other Buildings

11.1 The buildings at the main entrance were also subject to neglect and they were similarly “saved” by selling them as private dwellings. The small lodge to the right of the entrance was built with the cemetery in 1857. It is listed Grade II in association with the cast iron railings and gates along Leicester Road.



Built of red brick with carved limestone surrounds, including two little cherubs on either side of the door. The roof is of steeply pitched fish-scale slates in the same style as the Chapels. The barge boards are carved.

11.2 To make it a habitable property, it has been joined by a recent dwelling house of red brick with plain limestone window surrounds under a slate roof. The windows are uPVC double glazed and the roof is not pitched as steeply as the original.

11.3 On the right of the entrance gates is a Superintendent's house, built in the 1920's, in a Domestic Revival style similar to the Shelthorpe Estate by Barry Parker. It is two storey, of a rather dull colour brick, with limestone quoins, door and window surrounds under a Swithland slate roof. The windows are metal framed.

11.4 The mortuary buildings on either side of the cemetery have disappeared but the brick shed for the gravediggers remains, built to the same architectural quality as the lodges.









## 12 Layout of the Cemetery

12.1 In the popular imagination the cemetery is now closed. However, this is not true. The cemetery is still open, in use, the space reserved for the Church of England is still consecrated and there is space for burials. The cemetery is laid out in compartments each containing 50 plots, 9ft by 4ft.

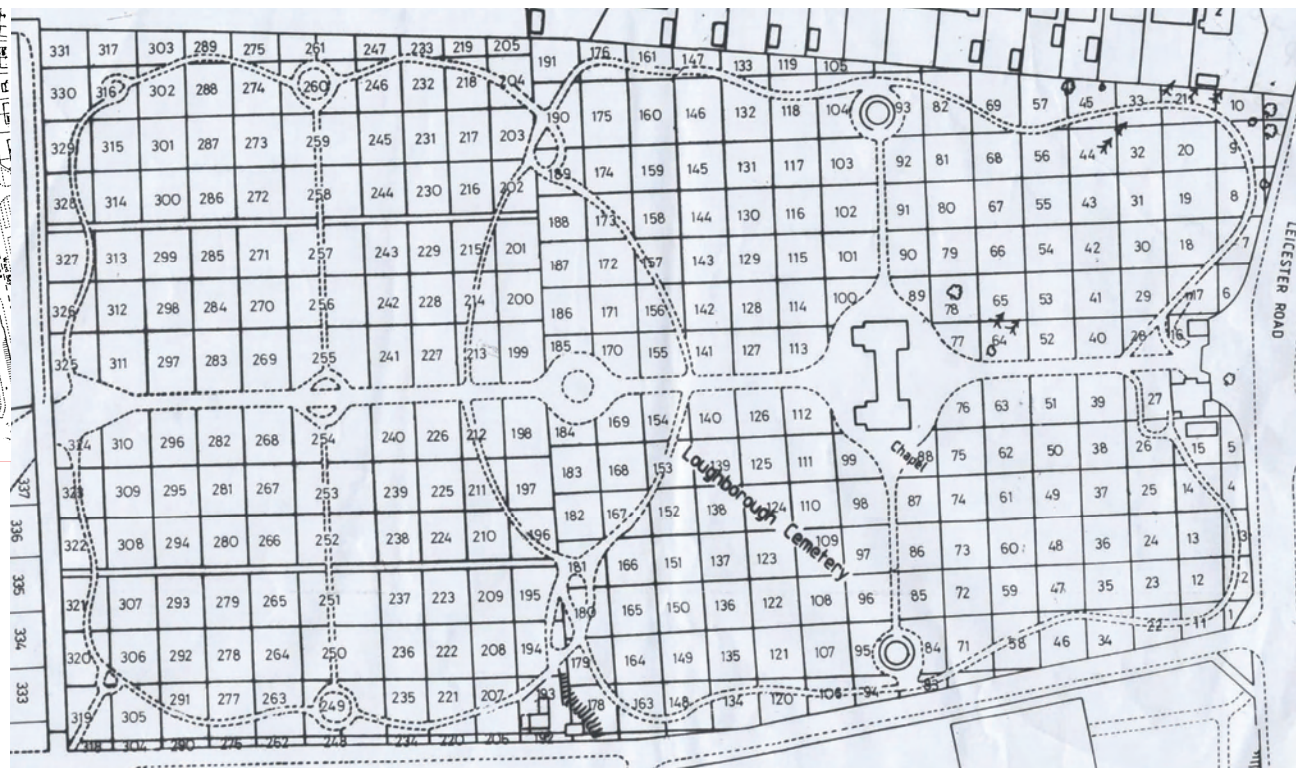
12.2 Burial plots are priced according to “Right of Burial” which may last from 14 up to 100 years. The poorest burials are in “God’s own Acre”, unmarked except perhaps by a small urn.

12.3 The cemetery contains many famous Loughborough people, including Footballer, Jimmy Logan, in an unmarked grave.

*The compartments are undefined on the ground but drawn on a plan.*



*The shaded half is consecrated to the Church of England, the other half reserved for Nonconformists. The oval shaped area in the centre is for Roman Catholics. Paths separate the different faith areas.*







SACRED

TO THE MEMORY OF  
SAMUEL ELLIOTT.

WHO DIED

THE 21<sup>ST</sup> OF MARCH 1868.

AGED 64 YEARS.

ALSO OF

ANN WIFE OF  
SAMUEL ELLIOTT.

WHO DIED

THE 11<sup>TH</sup> OF DECEMBER 1871.

AGED 62 YEARS.

REMAINED SINGLE.



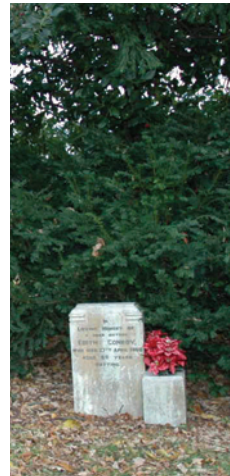
## 13 Monuments

13.1 Besides the chapel building the treasure of the cemetery is in its memorials.

13.2 The earlier graves are marked by a relatively uniform regime of 4 ft high headstones carved in Victorian Gothic style of white Carrara marble with inset lead lettering. The later designs are more varied; they include a number of Art Deco designs which echo the development of the town centre in the late 1920s when the main streets were widened. Also noticeable are some plain white marble crosses. The geologists noted sandstone, rough cut granite, polished pink granite, some highly polished black granite and Portland stone. There are Celtic crosses and more elaborately carved memorials and statues. Some grave plots are marked with square cut edging stones.

13.3 Scattered here and there in the grassy swathes are small urns often with flowers. At the margins of the cemetery, there are graves nestling within the laurels and yews.

13.4 Some of the graves are still obviously visited and cared for. It is a tribute to the maintenance staff that so few are overgrown.



*William Henry  
Paltridge 1924*









## 14 Railings

14.1 The front railings of the cemetery are mounted on a low brick wall with a stone cap. They are of cast iron and have an open character, decorated with gothic representations of fleur de lys and trefoil, spanning between cast iron open pillars.

14.2 The railings around the other three boundaries are also of cast iron on a stone capped low brick wall. They are plainer and tighter but still substantial. Associated with the footpath at the rear there are kissing gates and a bird-cage turnstile. At important corners and entrance points there are large brick pillars with pyramidal dressed stone caps.

## 15 Planting

15.1 The planting adheres largely to Loudon's prescription of tall and elegant evergreens as befitting a sombre place of repose. The boundaries are planted with pines, oaks and horse chestnuts and with yew, holly and laurel as an understory. The specimen trees are mostly cedar and cypress with pines, two sequoia, an araucaria, oak, lime and beech. Unfortunately, four of the larger trees

have recently been felled on the advice of a tree survey carried out in 2003. In three Beech trees the survey found evidence of fungal disease and a Silver Lime was found to have a cavity of 90% of its trunk. There is much anger about this as the disease and decay was not obvious and the trees appeared to be in good health. The large stumps have been left. The clipped yew avenue extends the length of the ground. At the three-quarter point there is a transverse avenue of deciduous trees, lime and beech, marked at the central axis by a pair of cypresses.









## 16 Opportunities

16.1 This Victorian cemetery is both romantic and peaceful and sad and neglected.

16.2 Loudon criticised the use of sheep to keep the grass short. The 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent is the use of tractor-mowing. The grass is roughly cut and there are muddy indentations of tractor paths and many paths are damaged.

16.3 Many headstones and memorials are leaning, some crosses are broken. Many grave plots have suffered from settlement. Besides natural deterioration there is vandalism and official decision to lay headstones flat to avoid risk of accidents should they topple over.

16.4 The entrance lodge buildings are occupied but they are not in the best of health and the ancillary buildings to the rear are dilapidated and broken.

16.5 There are unsympathetic maintenance sheds.

16.6 The railings are becoming entangled with undergrowth which spoils their open character. The birdcage turnstile is in danger of disappearing. All the railings suffer from vandalism and lack of maintenance.

16.7 The trees and shrubs are beautiful and there are plenty of birds and mammals. However, there is no indication of a replacement programme for the specimen trees. In summer there are wild

flowers but in general there is a lack of colour which could be provided by spring and summer bulbs and other planting.

16.8 The cemetery does not figure highly as part of the consciousness of the town. Most potential visitors drive past it. Nevertheless, there are visitors. People do come. Schoolchildren regularly pass through from Tuckers Road to Shelthorpe Community College. The chapel buildings are occupied. There are still burials. The graves and their monuments contain a century of the history of Loughborough.

16.9 The people who care for the cemetery do so with remarkable dedication.

## Acknowledgements

Valuable information has been provided for this appraisal by John Kettle who undertook the restoration of the Chapels, Nellie Callaghan who is responsible for the day to day management of the whole cemetery, Ken, Mark and Trevor Monroe who do the physical work of mowing the grass, pruning the plants, caring for the wildlife and tending the graves and James Winkless of Waveworks Ltd who occupy the chapel buildings keeping them warm and light.

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