GENERAL CEMETERY

B.M.395.7

The General Cemetery Key Hill was The General Centers, and Birmingham's first public cemetery. Opened for burial to all creeds and denominations in 1836 it was compulsorily purchased from the Cemetery Company in 1952 and closed for burial in 1982. The cemetery was added to the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade II in February 1996.

The Birmingham General Cemetery Company was founded in 1832. Although the Board was Non-Conformist their object was to provide a burial ground which would be open to all. Birmingham's population had increased fourfold between 1775 and 1831 and the town's churchyards

were appallingly

overcrowded,

robbing the

dead of their

he high sandstone cliff formed by the quarrying, now shored up with brick and cement, may have been the major reason for the Cemetery Board's choice of the Key Hill site. It formed a dramatic backdrop to the burial ground and paths cut into the cliff face provided a series of viewpoints over the cemetery and the open countryside beyond.

statesman and politician Joseph Chamberlain is perhaps the most well known but others include George Dawson, preacher and educationalist, Charles Edge and John Henry Chamberlain, architects, Joseph Gillott and Thomas Avery, industrialists and Samuel Timmins the Shakespearean scholar and antiquarian.

he Mortuary Chapel, which was demolished in 1966, the boundary wall and railings, gate piers and gates - all now statutorily listed - were designed by Charles Edge, a prominent local architect and a member of the Cemetery Company's Board. Edge and the Board chose to build in the severe Greek Revival style which

appealed to Non-Conformist taste at this time. Charles Edge was also responsible for the design of the catacombs which

are planes. Well-suited to polluted conditions these long-lived trees were and commonly planted in public parks of poplars suited again to difficult conditions and a popular tree in weeping birches and two weeping elms major paths through the cemetery. Key Hill Cemetery together with neighbouring Warstone Lane provides a but hostile environment of the Jewellery Quarter. The cemetery contains a surprising variety of flora and fauna including a range of wood and grassland plants and some nineteen species of bird.

of the cemetery. The original layout of the burial ground is still clearly visible. The northern part was designed and laid out by the Popes, a firm of landscape gardeners based in Sandwell. Here, serpentine paths wind down from the gates on Key Hill, while in the southern part straight paths divide the ground into rectangular sections around the site of the Mortuary Chapel which once dominated the entrance from Icknield Street.

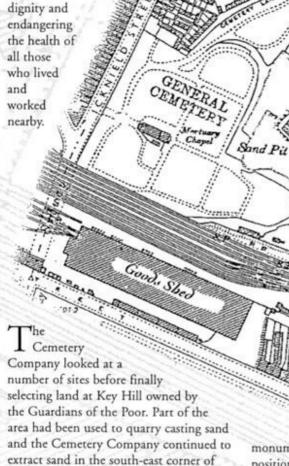
a fine collection of monuments, most placed in prominent positions near the main paths. Many of the most important figures of nineteenth century Birmingham are buried here. The

he majority of trees in the cemetery and cemeteries. There are also a number nineteenth century public parks. Several have been planted at the junctions of the haven for wildlife within the characterful

The Birmingham to Dudley; and Wolverhampton railway opened in 1854 and ran along the southern boundary of the cemetery. The line was closed in 1963 but reopened in 1995 as the Jewellery Line. Some ground within the southern boundary of the cemetery has recently been purchased for the construction of Midland Metroline 1. The remains from this area have been reinterred and a fine memorial erected. A memorial garden designed to match the distinctive character of the remainder of the cemetery is to be laid out around it.

Birmingham City Council

Planning and Architecture



the site up to the 1930s providing an

income for the cemetery.

innoul torestone add greatly to the atmosphere much admired in the nineteenth century

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