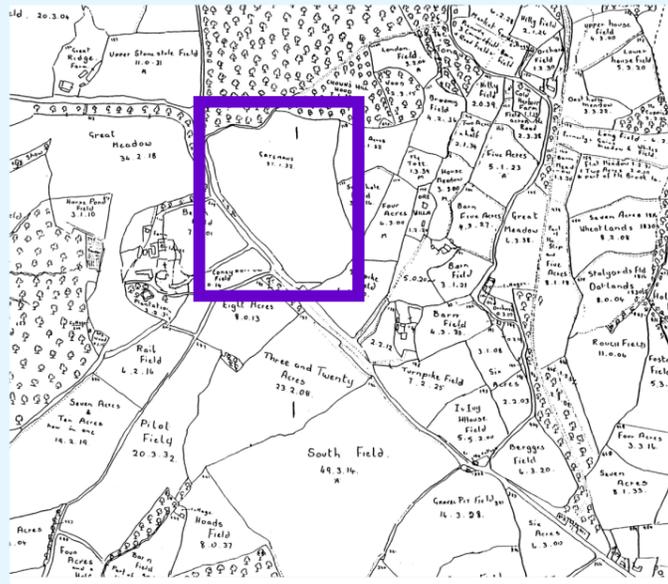


"The grave's a fine and private place..." Andrew Marvell

Exploring History in Hastings Cemetery

In 2012 the Heritage Lottery Fund gave the Old Hastings Preservation Society a grant to recruit a team of volunteers to record the memorials in the cemetery and find out about the lives of some of the people buried there. This exhibition illustrates how Hastings and St Leonards attracted some very interesting people and gives an insight into what the town must have been like in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. It also explores the art and skill of the monumental mason.

If you would like to know more we have a website www.friendsofhastingscemetery.org.uk or you can call into Hastings History House at 21 Courthouse Street in the Old Town, which is open Thursdays to Sundays 11 - 4. We also run guided walks and talks.



Copy of the 1843 Tithe Map with thanks to Danny Dance

In 1839 George Alfred Walker founded the Society for the Abolition of Burials in Towns. The health hazards of over full town churchyards were being recognised and the creation of park-like landscaped cemeteries on the outskirts of built up areas began.

In 1855 Mr Lucas Shadwell offered Hastings Corporation Gateman's Field, an area of 21 acres on what was then the London Road, for a cemetery. The Secretary of State approved the purchase for £770. Henry Carpenter [architect of Blacklands Church] was paid £10 for his plan.

The westernmost part of Gateman's field was subsequently sold off for the development of three villas.

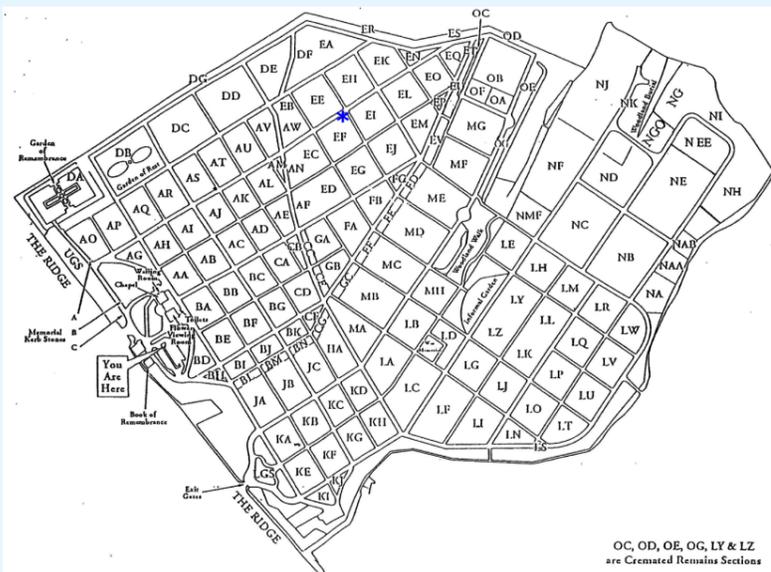
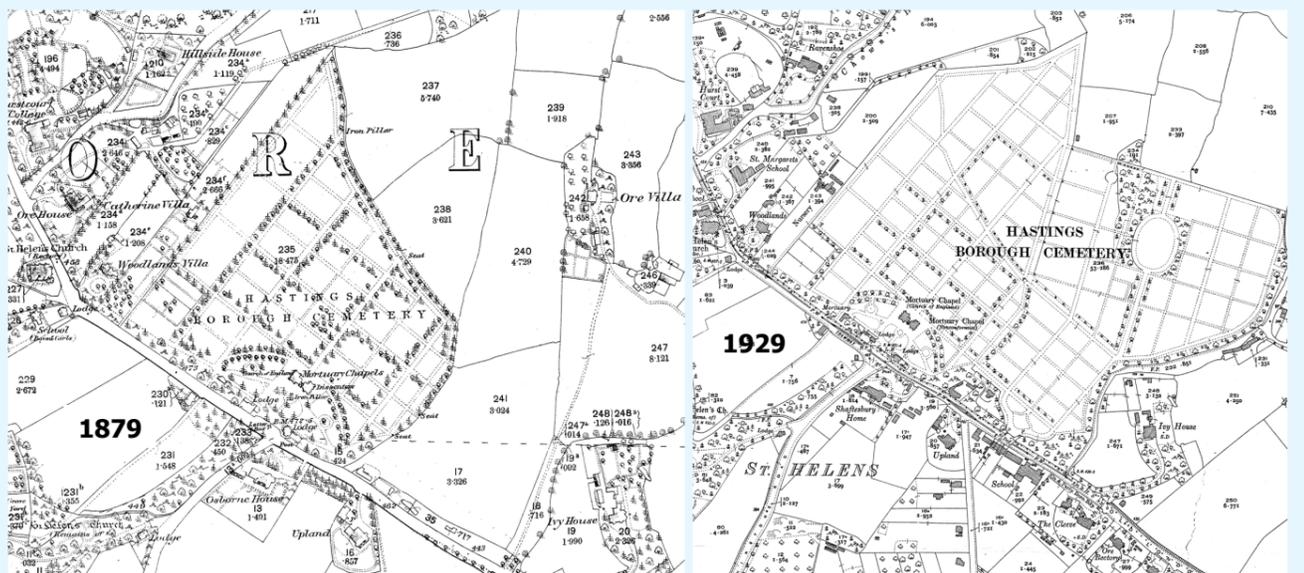
The cemetery was opened on 28th November 1856, the Church of England section being consecrated by the Bishop of Chichester, followed by a service in All Saints Church. There were 2 Lodges for staff accommodation and boundary walls a" made from local sandstone. A broad walk separated the consecrated from the unconsecrated sections.

The first burial on the 2nd of December that year was John "Yorky" Smith. He came to the area to help with the construction of Martello Towers and was responsible for cutting the cliff away for the development of St Mary-in-the-Castle and Pelham Crescent and also for James Burton's St Leonards. He was a builder as well as an engineer and had fingers in other local pies, like many people at that time he had a wide range of skills and interests.

In 1884 nine acres were added, in 1890 44½ making a total of 74½. In 1940 an additional 4½ acres allowed for war graves [of which there are 438 which are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission]. In 1997 land was again purchased for an extension and the total area is now 87 acres.

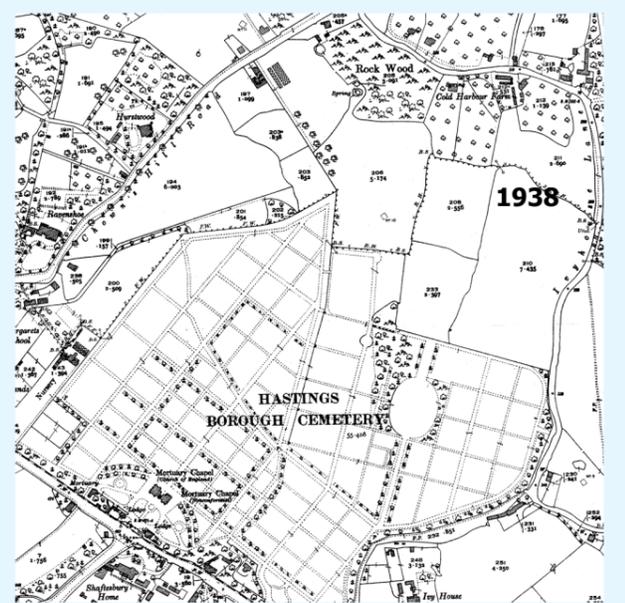
In 1946 there was a first major tidy up when neglected memorials were laid flat and kerbs buried; a similar exercise took place in 1979 and after the 1987 hurricane. There is now an ongoing management plan which checks the safety of the memorials.

The current project is focused on the area on the top of the hill, that is sections A,B,C,D,E,F and G on the plan below.



The sections are divided into rows and plots. If you stand facing the Ridge the rows in the plot in front of you start from A and the plots number right to left. For example the grave with the address EF A01 is marked * on the plan above.

The project has also funded new section markers in this area. These enable visitors to find their way around and also specific locations. A new seat has also been provided, from which you can rest, reflect and admire the wonderful view towards Rye between sections EI and EL.



Left:
a postcard of Hastings cemetery
C 1900

Right:
A picture after the 1987 hurricane.
Thanks to Erica Barrett.
Much damage was done to memorials and many tree were lost. The Scots pines in particular are a very visible landmark on this hilltop.



The cemetery is a wonderful place for a walk, there's lots of wildlife to see