National Lottery cash reviving run-down Gothic cemeteries as public greenspaces and wildlife



The chapel at Brompton Cemetery Friends of Brompton Cemetery

The investment has helped revive mausoleums, chapels, tombs, graves and the biodiversity of historic cemeteries across the UK, creating places for local communities to relax, unwind and enjoy nature.

New grants totalling £6.2million has helped Sheffield General Cemetery Park; Belfast City Cemetery; and Sir Joseph Paxton's London Road Cemetery, Coventry.

Brompton Cemetery, which is one of London's 'Magnificent Seven', will be the first to reopen in July, following National Lottery investment.

Sheffield General Cemetery Park; Belfast City Cemetery; and London Road Cemetery, Coventry have been awarded more than £6.2m of National Lottery cash to be revived and restored for the benefit of their local communities.

The improvements will see historic layouts reinstated; mausoleums, chapels, tombs, graves and sculptures will be restored; the past and present traditions of death and bereavement will be better understood by new visitors; and native wildlife and habitats will be protected and encouraged thorough planting and better horticultural management. The result

will be three welcoming greenspaces that will not only benefit local communities but local wildlife.

These – and four other cemeteries that have received money from HLF and the Big Lottery Fund - take the total joint National Lottery investment in historic cemeteries to £15.1m.

Brompton Cemetery reopens

The news comes as the Grade I registered Brompton Cemetery, one of London's Victorian 'Magnificent Seven', reopens on Wednesday 11 July.

It is the first joint National Lottery-funded cemetery project to open following a £6.2m restoration and conservation project. The project has revealed the cemetery's architectural splendour; uncovered hidden heritage gems; preserved the historic landscape and created a wildlife haven for communities in a densely-populated part of the capital.

The 39-acre Grade I registered garden cemetery was created the 1830s-1840s to tackle London's over crowded graveyards. It is now a Site of Nature Conservation Importance and there are many unique listed monuments and architecture.

It contains 35,000 monuments. The 205,000 people buried there include historic figures such as Emmeline Pankhurst, leader of the suffragette movement; Sir Henry Cole, who was instrumental in the Great Exhibition, founding the V&A museum, building Royal Albert Hall and is believed to have invented the Christmas card; and Dr John Snow, who discovered the link between cholera and contaminated water.

The project has placed the community at its heart, with a new volunteering and training hub, and now offers a cafe and visitor centre. Over 500 volunteers are supporting the cemetery and helping it to reach out to new audiences and share past and present traditions associated with death and bereavement. They are undertaking guided tours, gardening, photography and research. And crucially the project has protected and enhanced the cemetery's diverse wildlife and ecology – which includes 633 trees from around 60 species, 200 moth species and many types of bats, invertebrates and birds.

On behalf of HLF and Big Lottery Fund, Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of HLF, said: "Historic cemeteries reveal much of the past but their true value to local communities and wildlife is firmly in the here and now. Brompton Cemetery is a pioneering project that, with National Lottery investment, is helping people to understand, tap into and enjoy the many benefits these community greenspaces provide. Today's new investment in our historic cemeteries builds on their legacy."

New grant awards**:**

Sheffield General Cemetery Park (£3m grant) - Opened in 1836, Sheffield General Cemetery Park is Grade II* registered and built on the side a steep hill overlooking the densely populated city.

Originally Nonconformist, it was the main cemetery in Victorian Sheffield and was built as a response to the city's rapid growth and overcrowding in its churchyards. An Anglican cemetery with a chapel was consecrated alongside the Nonconformist cemetery in 1846. The wall that divided the consecrated and consecrated ground can still be seen today. Notable burials include George Bassett (1818–1886), founder of The Bassett Company that invented Liquorice Allsorts and later Lord Mayor of Sheffield.

The site closed to new burials in the 1970s. It has been in decline in recent years and is currently listed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. This new project will repair the historic Egyptian Gateway, catacombs, Dissenters Wall and other key monuments and memorials. It will improve access and pathways around the site. The history of the site will be better interpreted and shared. And the landscaping will be restored.

Belfast City Cemetery (£1.6m grant) - Belfast City Cemetery opened in 1869 and contains the graves and tombs of many prominent figures including Sir Edward Harland, co-founder of the Harland and Wolff shipbuilding company; Margaret Byers, educational campaigner and founder of Victoria College, and Sir William Whitla, physician and former Pro-Vice Chancellor of Queen's University.

But it also has areas of lesser-known but significant heritage that remain unmarked. These include the Jewish cemetery with its separate walls and entrances which dates from 1871; the Poor Ground where around 63,000 people are buried in unmarked graves, and the hidden underground wall which was designed to separate Catholic and Protestant graves.

The new project will see the restoration of important historic features such as the Central Steps and Victorian fountains. New signage and interpretation will be installed to raise awareness of this hidden heritage and a dedicated programme of live events, tours and workshops will be used to attract more visitors and share the heritage with new audiences.

Native shrubs and trees will be planted to improve the biodiversity of the area and a new visitor and education space will be developed to provide a hub for exhibitions and events.

London Road Cemetery, Coventry (£1.6m grant) - Grade I registered, London Road Cemetery in Coventry was designed by renowned gardener and architect Sir Joseph Paxton, best known for designing the Crystal Palace.

It opened in 1847 and is considered one of the most complete Victorian cemeteries in the UK. Many of the original buildings, structures and monuments survive. They include the Grade II* listed entrance lodge, Prospect Tower, the Paxton Memorial, the Anglican chapel and the non-conformist chapel.

The project will repair and restore the original landscape design; repair major features including the Anglican Chapel, Terrace Walls and Promenade Walk, along with the main gateway and arcaded screen.

It will also create a more attractive environment to allow the cemetery to become a visitor attraction.

Notes to editors

Since 1996, more than £900m raised by National Lottery players has been used to support the regeneration, conservation and increased enjoyment of public parks and cemeteries across the UK.