

History of Arnos Vale Cemetery

The 18th century in Britain saw a great expansion of the population living in urban centres. Churchyards could no longer cope with the demand for burial ground and private companies formed in order to offer alternative burial grounds. Arnos Vale Cemetery was opened in 1837 and remained the only cemetery (after the closure of the inner city churchyards) until Greenbank Cemetery opened in 1871.

Arnos Vale Cemetery was designed in a Greek Necropolis style set in a landscaped garden of trees and plants. In addition, there are four buildings on site - two entrance lodges and two mortuary Chapels (Anglican and Non-conformist) - which were designed by Chris Underwood and are listed Grade II*.

In the late 1980s, Arnos Vale Cemetery faced the same fate as other Victorian cemeteries in Britain. Practically "full", income decreased and increasingly less money was available for the upkeep of the cemetery. In 1998, Arnos Vale Cemetery reached crisis point as it lost its cremation licence. The owners announced to lock the gates, however, dedicated volunteers kept the gates open for the benefit of the public.

After a long legal battle, Bristol City Council compulsory purchased Arnos Vale Cemetery and licensed the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust to exclusively manage the cemetery in 2003. An application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2005 was successful and £4.8 million were awarded towards the restoration of cemetery buildings and grounds.

Arnos Vale Cemetery now again welcomes visitors to enjoy the history and wildlife of the site. You can find out more about the history of the site by joining a guided tour and using our self - guided trails.