

Visit Elswick Cemetery

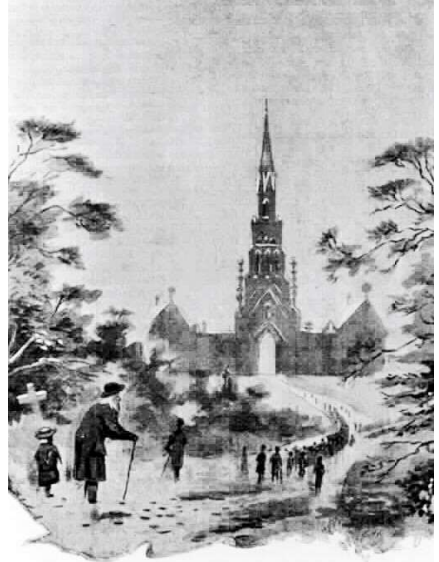
St John's Cemetery in Elswick is well worth a visit. This is the largest cemetery in Newcastle, covering 28 acres, and about 105,000 people have been buried here.

The cemetery was opened in 1857. It replaced the graveyard of St John's Church in Grainger Street, Newcastle – hence the name. All the city's graveyards were forced to close because of a major cholera epidemic.

This guide tells you about a few of the many interesting memorials you can see as you walk around the cemetery. The plan on the back page will help you find their location.

Where to start

You can enter the cemetery from the north, off Elswick Road. The Gothic-style gateway (Pictured here in 1889) is at the bottom of Grainger Park Road. This name is a legacy of the fact that all this land was once part of the estate owned by Richard Grainger who used to live at Elswick Hall, situated nearby where Elswick Park is today.



You can also enter the cemetery from the south from Westmorland Road.

Who to look for

The Montagu Pit Disaster memorial is one of the easiest to find. It stands to the left of the path leading west from the disused chapel in the middle of the cemetery, and just below a low stone wall which marks the boundary of the Jewish burial ground.

The memorial commemorates the worst mining disaster in Newcastle. In 1925, 38 men and boys were killed when the Low Montagu Pit in Scotswood flooded. Most of the victims are buried in this cemetery.

This photograph depicts the funeral that took place at the pithead. Thousands lined the streets as the funeral procession then travelled from Scotswood to the cemetery.



The Fire Brigade Memorial

commemorates another tragedy. In 1890 three Newcastle firemen died from inhaling nitric acid fumes while fighting a fire at Mawson Swan's chemists shop in Mosley Street. This photograph shows Mosley Street in the early 20th century.



The six Chinese sailors and five Japanese individuals who are buried in the cemetery are a reminder that Elswick used to be at the centre of the global shipbuilding industry. The shipyard built at Armstrong's works in the 1880s had given the company the capacity to build and equip a warship from the raw materials to the guns. Most of the world's navies were customers of Armstrong's. This photograph of the shipyard dates from the period when the Chinese sailors met their deaths.



Several of Tyneside's leading industrialists are buried here also.

William Haswell Stephenson

is pictured here in 1880 in his regalia as Lord Mayor of Newcastle. Stephenson was a coal-owner who also had extensive interests in other industries such as shipping, railways and gas. He was a generous philanthropist, funding the Bond Church in Benwell and the libraries in Elswick, Heaton and Walker among other projects.



George Angus is another important figure in Tyneside industry who is buried here. George, known as ‘The India Rubber King’, was the grandson of Joseph who founded the leather business which later diversified into rubber manufacture and merged with Dunlop in the 1960s.

Benjamin Chapman Browne was a major figure in the marine engineering and shipbuilding industries, and also played a significant role in the development of Benwell from a mainly rural area into a residential suburb of Newcastle.

All three men lived in the west end. Stephenson’s home Elswick House stood a short distance east of the cemetery.



Alphonse Reyrolle was another important Tyneside industrialist who lived in Elswick. Son of a French soldier, he was an engineer who in 1901 founded the world famous Reyrolle & Co in Hebburn manufacturing electrical switchgear and employing over 10,000 staff. After merging with the Newcastle firm of C.A.Parsons in the 1960s, the company became the largest employer on Tyneside.

John Woodger was an entrepreneur whose activities had an impact on everyday life. He invented the kipper, opening curing yards in Northumberland. His shops and curing yards eventually spread down the East Coast of England.

George Burn was a sculptor whose work included three famous rowers – the figure of Harry Clasper in Whickham Churchyard, James Renforth outside the Shipley Art Gallery, and Robert Chambers in Walker Churchyard. He was also responsible for the Sailors Memorial and the Larkin monument in Elswick cemetery.

Burn's sculpture of Neptune and Fishwives stands on Newcastle quayside on the site of the old Fish Market next to the Swing Bridge.



Dr John Hunter Rutherford was an evangelist, physician and educationalist. He founded the Rutherford Technical College in 1877. This later became Newcastle Polytechnic and is now Northumbria University.



Rutherford ran a medical practice at Elswick Lodge where the poor were treated for free. The house had been built in 1844 for the famous railway engineer and steam engine pioneer Robert Hawthorn. It still stands today just south of Elswick Road.

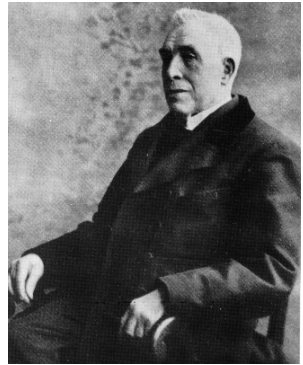
Robert Burns Dick was an architect who designed many important buildings, often in partnership with James Cackett, including the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle University Students Union, Durant Hall and the Spanish City. He was also interested in wider planning issues, and produced a far-sighted plan for transforming central Newcastle. This included ideas for new public buildings, broad tree-lined streets, and a monumental entrance to the city from the south.

Burns Dick designed the towers for the new Tyne Bridge in the 1920s. His headstone in Elswick cemetery resembles one of these.



The real Dr Gibb has a memorial here. Did you know that the Dr Gibb named in the song “Blaydon Races” was a real doctor?

Charles Gibb had his surgery at the bottom of Westgate Hill. The building is marked by a plaque.



Gibb also served as a surgeon at the Infirmary which was then at Forth Banks (pictured left).

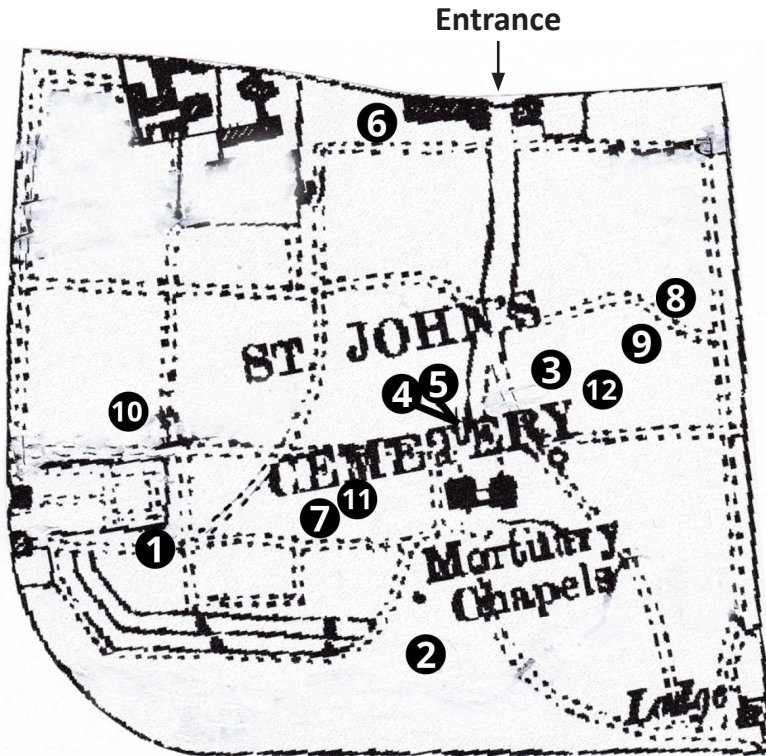
Wansbeck Penitentiary

While you are visiting the cemetery, you might spot a building at the north west corner of the site, on the south side of Elswick Road. For 40 years from 1887 this was a penitentiary for women, known as the Wansbeck Home.

The penitentiary was not a prison. It was intended as a refuge for those condemned by society as “fallen women” – notably unmarried mothers or prostitutes - who were committed to reforming their lives. The building still stands although it ceased to be a penitentiary in 1927

Where to look

The locations of the memorials mentioned in this guide are indicated on the plan - but bear in mind that the size of the area means that it can be difficult to locate particular graves.



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| 1. Montagu Pit Disaster | 7. Dr Charles Gibb |
| 2. Fire Brigade | 8. John Hunter Rutherford |
| 3. Chinese sailors | 9. Robert Burns Dick |
| 4. William Haswell Stephenson | 10. Alphonse Reyrolle |
| 5. George Angus | 11. George Burn |
| 6. Benjamin Chapman Browne | 12. John Woodger |

*This walk leaflet was produced by
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