

Florence Place, Jewish Burial Ground, Brighton

Historical background

The original Freehold Burial Ground was purchased by the Brighton and Hove Hebrew Congregation in 1826 from Thomas Kemp for use as its cemetery. A small plaque recording this is attached to the wall on the left hand side by the entrance. Thomas Read Kemp (23 December 1782 – 20 December 1844) was an English property developer and politician, having been a member of Parliament for Lewes and for Arundel.

The grounds were extended to the north (in 1892) by gift from the Town Borough of Brighton, and south (in 1896) by purchase, with the entrance being remodelled with a new gate, gate posts and rendered walls. The ohel was built in 1893 in Queen Anne Style to the design of David Mocatta (an important British, Jewish architect). The ohel, gates and entrance to the grounds were Grade II listed by English Heritage in 1999 but sadly the gates fell into disrepair and were subsequently replaced.

The cemetery has two sections, A and B, with each section holding around 250 graves. Many of the headstones can be difficult to read despite every effort to photograph them in a way that makes it easy. In part, the erosion of some of the headstones might be due to the fact that the ground is approximately one mile from the sea, so subject to coastal weather.

Notable members of the Jewish congregation whose memorials can be found here include:

Levi Emanuel Cohen— eldest son of the founder of the Brighton Jewish community. Levi founded, owned, managed and edited the *Brighton Guardian*, a radical campaigning newspaper. Although he was imprisoned for six months in Chelmsford Goal for a series of offences (probably politically motivated) he was highly respected and was twice President of the Newspaper Society.

Henry Solomon— Levi's brother-in-law, was a watchmaker from London, who after a series of official appointments became in 1836 Brighton's first sole Chief Constable. Unfortunately he was assaulted in his office in Brighton Town Hall on 13 March 1844 by an offender he was interviewing, and died the following day. There is a blue plaque to his memory on an outside wall of the Town Hall.

Hyam Lewis,— another brother-in-law of Levi, was born in Prague, but after naturalisation, was appointed a Brighton Town commissioner, the first professing Jew to hold public office in the UK. He was the great-great-grandfather of Lewis Cohen, Lord Cohen of Brighton.

Lewis Lewis— a long-standing President of the Brighton Jewish Congregation. There is a plaque to his memory in the lobby of Middle Street Synagogue (now no longer used for services).

Barnett Marks— Mayor of Hove, who was much involved in raising funds for the development and extension of Hove Hospital.

Sir John Howard— engineer and financier. He took over responsibility for the completion of the Palace (now Brighton) Pier when the original developers went bankrupt. He was also a noted philanthropist: the nurses retirement Home, two wards and a wing at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, a ward at the Sussex Women's Hospital and a convalescent home for 'gentlewomen' at Roedean were established through his generosity. His pillared Peterhead granite memorial has been severely broken and is amongst those in need of repair.

Lipman Harris– gave, with only the exception of the two single examples, all the superb double windows which adorn both sides downstairs at Middle Street Synagogue.

There are two graves recorded by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. There is a memorial in Florence Place for 2nd Lieutenant Bernard Clifford Isaacs who died in the First World War at the age of 26 and whose actual grave is in northern France, at the Wimereux Communal cemetery. Lieutenant Arthur Sampson Marks died aged 33 and is buried in Section B Row 4: he died on 25th October 1918, just weeks before the end of the war.

The last recorded burial at the cemetery was in 1976 and it has not been used for burials since then. The congregation opened Meadow View cemetery in 1919 and the Liberal and Progressive synagogues jointly use the Old Shoreham Road, Hove cemetery.

The Brighton and Hove Hebrew Congregation is orthodox, with both Ashkenazim and Sephardim.

A book containing a detailed history of the cemetery and marking the 200th anniversary of its opening, written by Lawrence Suss, is to be published to mark this anniversary.

Web links

Find-a-grave has documented 375 graves in this cemetery (but this is an incomplete list) and although there is a full list of names of the memorials, many of the photographs of them are not easily read. *Sussex Jewish Records* is a detailed and an easily navigated site created by members of the congregation. The data on the JOWBR database is the best researched to date (December 2025) recording over 530 named or partially named graves although a number of headstones are degraded, fallen or broken. We have the names and dates for some buried there from the records of funeral directors, but we have not been able to identify the plots. The main sources of data for the plan of the cemetery have been: the original cemetery plan; a list of date and names on graves created by Berny Goldberg (the sexton) in 1971 when more of the headstones would have been legible than are today; funeral directors' records; a contemporary visual inspection of the burial ground; and the Sussex Jewish Records web site.

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2706303/florence-place-jewish-cemetery>

<https://www.sussexjewishrecords.org.uk/>

Overview of the history of the cemetery

<https://www.ourjewishstory.co.uk/anthology/florence-place-cemetery/#>

<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/planning/heritage/local-list-heritage-assets-directory/florence-place-jewish-burial-ground-brighton>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Read_Kemp

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Goldsmid

<https://www.mybrightonandhove.org.uk/places/cemeteries/jewish-burial-ground/jewish-burial-ground>

<https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/4007529/brighton-florence-place-jewish-cemetery/>