

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

*Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England*

**Inventory of Great Britain**

LANSDOWN CEMETERY AND BECKFORD'S TOWER

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**LANSDOWN CEMETERY AND BECKFORD'S TOWER**

Name: LANSDOWN CEMETERY AND BECKFORD'S TOWER

District: Bath and North East Somerset (Unitary Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

label.localisation: Latitude: 51.406095  
Longitude: -2.3781720  
National Grid Reference: ST7379267520  
[Map: Download a full scale map \(PDF\)](#)

label.overview: Heritage Category: Park and Garden  
Grade: II  
List Entry Number: 1000563  
Date first listed: 30-Apr-1987

## Details

A cemetery consecrated in 1848, incorporating features of a former pleasure ground and ride created by William Beckford and the architect Henry Edmund Goodridge in c 1825-7.

### HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

William Beckford (1760-1844), writer, book collector, patron of the arts, and builder of Fonthill Abbey (qv) in Wiltshire, moved to Bath in 1822. After he had purchased two houses at Lansdown Crescent, he commissioned the local architect Henry Edmund Goodridge (1797-1864) to design a tower on land he purchased at Lansdown Hill. The tower, known as Lansdown Tower or Beckford's Tower, was completed in 1827. It functioned as a retreat, with, on the top floor, a Belvedere from which one could enjoy a panoramic view. The Tower was also to become the focus for the ride which Beckford subsequently laid out (Tithe map, 1838). The ride led c 2.4km from his back garden at Lansdown Crescent, up Lansdown Hill to the Tower which was surrounded by a pleasure ground (Plan, c 1848). The ride was adorned with various features, as illustrated and described in Willes Maddox and Edmund English's *Views of Lansdown Tower*, published in 1844.

Two years before his death, Beckford designed his own sarcophagus and had it erected in the pleasure ground adjoining his Tower. Following his death in May 1844, the sarcophagus was moved to Abbey Cemetery (qv) in Bath because the grounds surrounding his Tower were not consecrated. The Tower was sold in May 1847, but when it appeared that the buyer, a local innkeeper, wanted to turn it into a public house and pleasure garden, Beckford's daughter, the Duchess of Hamilton, bought it back four months later. She presented the Tower and the surrounding grounds to the former parish of Walcot on condition they would create a cemetery so her father's tomb could be returned. The tomb was brought back in 1848 when the new cemetery, named Lansdown Cemetery, was consecrated and Beckford's Tower was converted into a mortuary chapel. At this time Goodridge designed the entrance gateway to the cemetery (restored 2000), incorporating the decorative railings which had enclosed Beckford's tomb when it stood at Abbey Cemetery. Most of the remaining ride was sold separately after Beckford's death and much was subsequently built over in the second half of the C19 and late-C20.

In 1934, following a fire, the Tower and the chapel were restored, and in 1947 and again in 1961, the cemetery was extended. During the following years the cemetery fell into disrepair and the chapel in the Tower was declared redundant in 1969. In 1972 the Tower was sold and converted into a museum and two residential flats. In 1993 the Bath Preservation Trust became the

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sole trustee of the Tower, and following extensive restoration works the Tower was reopened to the public in March 2001. The ground floor of the Tower is now (2001) let as holiday accommodation and the first floor houses the Beckford's Tower Museum.

**DESCRIPTION**

**LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING** Lansdown Cemetery is situated on a plateau on the west side of Lansdown Hill, c 2.4km north-west of Bath city centre. The c 3ha, almost level rectangular site, orientated north-west/south-east, lies south-west of Lansdown Road. The cemetery is surrounded to the north-east, south-west, and south-east by a c 1m high stone wall. The south-east boundary is lined by a track that leads off Lansdown Road in the direction of Chelscombe Farm situated to the south-west of the site. Trees and shrubs are planted predominantly along the north-west boundary.

The setting of the site is largely rural, it being surrounded by gently sloping fields to the south-west, south-east, and north-west. To the north and north-east, on the opposite side of Lansdown Road, are playing fields and Ministry of Defence buildings. Adjacent to the north-west corner of the site stands a large water tower erected in the 1930s. Some of the features and structures which formed part of Beckford's Ride, such as an embattled gateway, now (2001) stand in the grounds of private dwellings to the south of the site.

Long views extend from the site in a south-westerly direction towards the western part of Bath city centre and surrounding hills. From the Belvedere on the top floor of Beckford's Tower a panoramic view over Bath, Bristol, and beyond can be admired, as well as a bird's-eye view over the cemetery below. In the early-C19, the views from the Belvedere reminded William Beckford of Claude Lorraine's paintings of the Roman Campagna (CL 2001).

**ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES** The main entrance (listed grade II) is situated on the south side of Lansdown Road, c 15m east of the Tower. It consists of a richly decorated stone gatehouse designed by Goodridge in the Italian Romanesque style, to match the screen attached to either side of it, which formerly surrounded Beckford's tomb when it stood at Abbey Cemetery. The gateway is hung with an iron main gate and two smaller iron pedestrian gates, which give access to a gravel path (restored 2000) that leads in a north-westerly direction towards the Tower, and to the south to a grass path that runs along the north-east boundary.

A second entrance, c 50m north-west of the main entrance, gives access to a small tarmacked forecourt immediately north of the Tower. This entrance is flanked to the north by an early-C19 gardener's cottage (Plan, c 1848), now (2001) in use as a private dwelling. In the early-C19 James Vincent, Beckford's gardener at Fonthill, lived here.

A minor entrance, c 100m south-east of the main entrance, gives access to the south-eastern part of the cemetery and is marked by a gap in the boundary wall with an iron gate.

**PRINCIPAL BUILDING** The site is dominated by the c 47m high Beckford's Tower (listed grade I) which occupies the north-west corner of the site. It was designed by Goodridge in 1825-7 in collaboration with William Beckford. On the north front a flight of steps from the forecourt leads to the entrance of the Tower. The design of the Tower changed and expanded as work progressed; first the Belvedere and then the lantern were added in order to increase the Tower's height. The final structure is of marked Italianate style, but with a crowning octagonal lantern derived from two Greek monuments in Athens: the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates and the Tower of the Winds.

**OTHER LAND** The cemetery can be divided into three main areas: the grounds immediately to the south and west of the Tower, the central sunken area, and the land covering the south-eastern half of the site. The graves are arranged predominantly in a grid pattern on a north-west/south-east axis, with the most recent burials situated to the south-east, separated from the north-western part by a laurel hedge. The cemetery has a mixed planting of mainly laurel, yew, and cypress concentrated around the Tower. A single mature cedar stands at the north-east boundary to the south-east of the gateway. The majority of the area is left as long grass which contains a rich habitat of wildflowers originating from its former use as pasture.

The grounds around the Tower are reached via a small perimeter path leading from the wider path that leads north-west from the main entrance to the cemetery. This area contains mid to late Victorian tombstones, in both Classical and Gothic style. Amongst them are the graves of Goodridge and Beckford. The latter's tomb stands c 100m to the south-west of the Tower and consists of a pink granite sarcophagus which stands on an oval-shaped mound lined by a stone wall and surrounded by a ditch.

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Before the cemetery was laid out, the grounds around the Tower included a wilderness and shrubbery which formed part of Beckford's Ride (Plan, c 1848; Debois, 1994).

The central part of the site has a simple layout with a grass perimeter walk surrounding a square sunken terrace with subsidiary paths extending from this walk giving access to the individual graves. The sunken terrace has a stone retaining wall on its north-west side, which carries the main grass perimeter path that runs along the boundary walls of the cemetery.

The far south-eastern part of the site is currently (2001) in use as pasture and is separated from the other part of the site by a wooden fence. Along the north-east boundary in this part of the site is a row of evenly spaced lime trees which follows the curve of the stone boundary wall. Between the line of the trees and the wall are the remains of a path, still (2001) evident on the ground but no longer used as such, which is possibly part of the former ride laid out by Beckford (Debois, 1994). In the south-east corner of the site are the remains of a grotto and archway, formerly part of Beckford's Ride (Maddox and English, 1844).

#### REFERENCES

Maddox W and English E, Views of Lansdown Tower, Bath (1844) (Bath Reference Library) Redding C, Memoirs of William Beckford II, (1859), 260-9 (Bath Reference Library) Lansdown H V, Recollections of the Late William Beckford (1893), 22-7 (Bath Reference Library) Murch J, Biographical Sketches of Bath Celebrities (1893), 298-305 (Bath Reference Library) Pevsner N, The Buildings of England: North Somerset and Bristol (1958), 215-16 Architectural Review, (March 1968), 204-05 Lees-Milne J, William Beckford (1976), 88-9, 92-3 Bath History 2, (1988), 90-9 Hoverd K and Morriss R, The Buildings of Bath (1993), 115, 117 Brooks C, English Historic Cemeteries, (English Heritage Theme Study 1994) Harding S and Lambert D, Parks and Gardens of Avon (1994), 70-1, 111 Beckford's Tower: A survey of the landscape (Debois Landscape Survey Group 1994) [Report for Bath Preservation Trust] Hughe P, Beckford's Tower 1, (1999) [Historical report for Beckford Tower Institute] Country Life, no 11 (15 March 2001), 78-82

Maps Goodridge H E, Plan of Land situated in the Parish of Charlcombe the property of William Beckford Esq, 1823 (reproduced in Debois 1994) Tithe map for Charlcombe parish, 1840 (Somerset Record Office) Tithe map for Walcot parish, 1841 (Somerset Record Office) Tithe map for Weston parish, 1848 (Somerset Record Office) Plan of the Tower garden, c 1848 (Beckford's Tower Museum) Cotterell J H, Plan of the City and Borough of Bath and its Suburbs, 1852 (Bath Reference Library) OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1883, published 1887 2nd edition surveyed 1902, published 1903

Archival items Sale particulars of Beckford's Tower and remaining land, 1845 (Bath Reference Library)

#### REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Lansdown Cemetery and Beckford's Tower is designated at Grade II for the following principal reasons: \* The cemetery is a good example of an early Victorian garden cemetery. \* The site includes elements of an early-19th century pleasure ground laid out by William Beckford (1760-1844) and the architect Henry Edmund Goodridge in 1825-27. \* The site includes an outstanding lodge designed by H E Goodridge (1848), and forms the setting of the adjacent Lansdowne Tower, also designed by Goodridge for Beckford (1825-26).

Description written: July 2001 Amended: May 2002 Register Inspector: FDM Edited: December 2009

## Legal

This garden or other land is registered under the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953 within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Historic England for its special historic interest.