

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

HIGHGATE CEMETERY

Auteur(s) : Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

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Name:	HIGHGATE CEMETERY
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.567772 Longitude: -0.14862058 National Grid Reference: TQ 28414 87057, TQ 28704 86796 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: I List Entry Number: 1000810 Date first listed: 01-Oct-1987

Details

Cemetery laid out by the London Cemetery Company and opened in 1839 (Highgate West Cemetery), extended 1855 (Highgate East Cemetery).

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The 1830s programme to provide London with seven privately funded and developed cemeteries resulted in plans being drawn up for the Cemetery of St James at Highgate. It was established by the London Cemetery Company, founded in 1836 by Stephen Geary, an architect and civil engineer. The 17.5 acre (c 7.3ha) site purchased by the London Cemetery Company included part of the grounds of Ashurst Manor, which had belonged to Sir William Ashurst, Lord Mayor of London in 1693.

Geary designed and planned the cemetery, with James Bunstone Bunning acting as the architect for the London Cemetery Company from 1839. The built features included the entrance gates and chapels (1838, listed grade II), a Colonnade on the west side of the entrance forecourt (date unknown, listed grade II), the Lebanon Circle (1838-9) approached along the Egyptian Avenue (listed grade I with the Lebanon Circle) and the Terrace Catacombs (1838-9, listed grade II*; the oldest surviving continuously asphalted structure in England).

David Ramsay, the London Cemetery Company's landscape gardener, designed the cemetery landscape with serpentine roads and broad gravel paths leading up to the burial area beneath St Michael's church. The planting included a row of chestnuts dividing the unconsecrated and consecrated ground, parterres of flowers, picturesque trees and clumps of evergreens (Penny Magazine 1839; Lloyd 1888).

Highgate Cemetery was consecrated in May 1839 by the Bishop of London, the third of the seven London cemeteries. It was an immediate success not only as a burial ground but also as a place to promenade and enjoy the magnificent views from it over London. By 1888 there were more than 25,000 graves, with an average of four bodies each (Lloyd 1888).

In 1854 the cemetery was doubled in size by an extension on the east side of Swain's Lane. This was connected to the west side by a passage under Swain's Lane, allowing the conveyance of coffins from the chapel on the west side to their burial places on the east side. The chapel was extended on the west side in 1854-5 to accommodate the hydraulic lift for the tunnel. The outer half-circle of the Lebanon Circle was added c 1870 at the same time as the Julius Beer Mausoleum by J O Scott.

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The Company had its own nurseries and glasshouses to supply the cemetery with bedding, and maintenance continued at a high standard into the C20. A shortage of labour however and the popularity of cremation led to problems by the mid C20 and by the 1960s the United Cemetery Company (successors to the London Cemetery Company) ran out of money. The cemetery was neglected and allowed to deteriorate and in 1975 it finally closed.

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery (FOHC) were formed in 1975 to preserve the cemetery. The freehold was acquired in 1981 and transferred to the Custodian of Charities in 1989. Since 1975 the FOHC have been responsible for much clearance, restoration work and the on-going maintenance of the cemetery, with special attention to its ecological interest. The cemetery is still used as a burial ground but it is now mostly frequented by visitors interested in the architecture, history and ecology.

Among the people buried or commemorated in the cemetery are George Elliot, Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, Christina Rossetti, Karl Marx, Jacob Bronowski, Tom Sayers (prize fighter, whose tomb was much visited in the C19), the mother of Lord Tennyson, the father, mother and daughter of Charles Dickens, George Wombwell (lion tamer), the architects Edward Blore and James Bunstone Bunning, and the landscape painter Charles Landseer.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING Highgate Cemetery, c 14.5ha, is located to the south of Highgate. The cemetery is in two parts, divided by Swain's Lane. Highgate West Cemetery, c 7ha, is bounded by Swain's Lane to the east and by the buildings and gardens on South Grove to the north, and the Holly Lodge Estate to the west and south. It is on steeply sloping ground, falling from north-west to south-east. Highgate East Cemetery, c 7.5ha, is bounded by Swain's Lane to the west, by Waterlow Park (qv) to the north, the Whittington Hospital and residential cul-de-sacs to the east, and Chester Road to the south. It is on gently sloping ground, falling from north-west to south-east. There are some views from the higher ground southwards but the views are generally restricted by the planting. The boundaries of the site are marked by a mixture of walls and fences, the east boundary wall to Highgate West being of yellow stock brick with Portland stone capping, designed by Geary in 1838 (listed grade II).

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES The main entrance to the West Cemetery is from Swain's Lane, with entrance gates, mortuary chapels and lodge (1838, listed grade II), all designed by Geary in a Tudor style of yellow stock brick with stone dressings. A secondary entrance to the west side lies in the north-east corner, with Gothic-style lodge and entrance gates by Geary (1838, listed grade II). The main entrance to the East Cemetery is now from Swain's Lane through entrance gates which face the main entrance to the West Cemetery. Another entrance to the east side is from Chester Road to the south, where entrance gates and a lodge mark what was formerly the main entrance.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The landscape in the West Cemetery is composed of winding drives and paths through mature trees and shrubberies, with statuary and elaborate funerary architecture arranged within the structural planting on terraces set in the steeply sloping ground. Within the more wooded areas are clearings with meadows of wild flowers and native grasses, and smaller areas with herbaceous planting.

The main entrance to the west side leads through an archway which links the mortuary chapels into the entrance forecourt, with the entrance lodge to the north-east. The entrance gates, chapels, lodge and east boundary walls form the east side of the large forecourt which is paved in setts laid in a fan shape (1989) and bounded on the west side by the Tudor-style curved Colonnade (listed grade II). In front of the Colonnade is the Cross of Sacrifice of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. From the forecourt the cemetery can be approached from the main circuit drive which leads off to north and south, or from a steep path which leads north-west from the centre of the Colonnade. All these routes converge to the north-west of the forecourt at Comforts Corner, named after members of the Comfort family who are buried in the area. From Comforts Corner paths meander to the west and east and in a loop to the south but the main path leads north-east towards the north end of the cemetery. The main path continues in a north-easterly direction up the slope until it reaches the gateway to the Egyptian Avenue. The arched gate is flanked by paired attached columns with lotus bud caps carrying entablature and with an obelisk on each side of the entrance. The Egyptian Avenue leads up a long sloping path between two high walls lined with tombs. At the end of the Egyptian Avenue the path enters and circuits the Lebanon Circle, which consists of a circular crypto-porticus in Egyptian style, with tombs on each side, and a massive cedar of Lebanon (which pre-dates the cemetery) in the earth-filled drum in the

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centre of the Circle. The Egyptian Avenue enters the Circle at the south-east side and on the opposite side of the Circle is the Julius Beer Mausoleum by John Oldrid Scott (listed grade II*, added c 1870 at the same time as the outer half-circle of tombs). The Mausoleum and cedar are both at ground level and are only partially seen from the Circle path which is deeply recessed. Half-way between the Mausoleum and Avenue on each side are flights of steps leading to the upper level from where the cedar is seen more clearly. At the top of the steps there is a further circular path leading around the outer circle. At the north end is the Beer Mausoleum which is centred on the Terrace Catacombs, immediately to the north, which form a retaining wall above which is the church of St Michael's, Highgate. Flights of steps at either end of the catacombs formerly led to the top of the asphalted Terrace, from which there were extensive views over the cemetery and to central London. The path continues around the Lebanon Circle to the east side, past the C19 temple-style Mausoleum to Cheylesmore (listed grade II), and then branches, one part continuing around the Circle and another leading to the north-east portion of the West Cemetery and terminating at the north-east lodge on Swain's Lane. Between the Circle and the lodge two paths lead southwards, giving the option of returning back towards the Egyptian Avenue and Comforts Corner or following a smaller path through the eastern part of the cemetery until it joins the main drive as it approaches the entrance forecourt. In the corner formed between the path, the Swain's Lane boundary and the entrance forecourt is a small area which has been planted up as a Memorial Garden commemorating Friends of Highgate Cemetery who have died.

On entering the East Cemetery from Swain's Lane there are three large, granite mausoleums near to the entrance: the first immediately north of the entrance is to Donald Alexander Smith and is now used by the FOHC; the second immediately to the east is to a benefactor of the blind and stands on the site of a conservatory; the third, and largest, stands to the south of the path and is to Davison Alexander Dalziel. The drive continues to the south-east and then branches, one drive leading south towards the lodge and entrance on Chester Road and the other circuiting the eastern side of the cemetery before returning to meet the other drive immediately north of the lodge. Smaller paths lead off the drives into the centre and edges of the cemetery through mature trees and shrubberies and the graves and memorials. The planting is less dense on this side and the ground less steep, so there are more views within this part of the cemetery but few beyond it.

There is a group of listed graves around the path in the north-east corner of the cemetery including those of Karl Marx (listed grade I), George Elliot (listed grade II), George Holyoake (social reformer and organiser of the Co-operative movement, listed grade II) and Herbert Spencer (philosopher, listed grade II).

Further to the graves and mausoleums individually noted are nineteen graves in the west side listed grade II and a further two on the east side listed grade II. For more information on the graves and on the ecology, see the FOHC literature.

REFERENCES

Penny Magazine, (December 1839) F T Cansick, A Collection of Curious and Interesting Epitaphs (1872) J H Lloyd, The History, Topography and Antiquities of Highgate (1888) Country Life, 150 (5 August 1971), pp 334-6; 159 (1 April 1976), pp 848-50 Highgate Cemetery (FOHC 1978) J S Curl, A Celebration of Death (1980), pp 224-7 H Meller, London Cemeteries (1981), pp 147-64 J Murray, Highgate Cemetery, Victorian Valhalla (FOHC 1984) B Cherry and N Pevsner, The Buildings of England: London 4: North (1998), pp 553-4

Maps John Rocque, Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster ..., 1744-6 Cruchley's New Plan of London and its Environs, 1835

OS 25" to 1 mile: 1st edition surveyed 1873 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1913

Archival items Geary's original plan for the cemetery (Guildhall Library Manuscripts)

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION

Highgate Cemetery is included on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade I for the following principal reasons:

- * The cemetery is an early and important example of an early Victorian commercial cemetery (1839) laid out in the garden style.
- * The site is the third metropolitan cemetery. * The cemetery contains an outstanding collection of funerary monuments which reflect the social and political history of Victorian London. * The cemetery contains an outstanding collection of structures

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designed by Stephen Geary and, from 1839, by James Bunstone Bunning, both of whom were noted cemetery designers. * The cemetery layout is complex and survives substantially intact.

Description written: November 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000 Upgraded: 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.