

Institut Européen des Jardins & Paysages

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes of England

Inventory of Great Britain

ST PANCRAS GARDENS

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Name:	ST PANCRAS GARDENS
County:	Greater London Authority
District:	Camden (London Borough)
Parish:	Non Civil Parish
label.localisation:	Latitude: 51.535531 Longitude: -0.13082384 National Grid Reference: TQ 29739 83503 Map: Download a full scale map (PDF)
label.overview:	Heritage Category: Park and Garden Grade: II List Entry Number: 1001689 Date first listed: 10-Jan-1987

Details

Late C 19 public gardens, laid out in medieval churchyard of Old St Pancras Church and the burial ground of St Giles-in-the-Field; the burial place of Sir John Soane and and Johann Christian Bach.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Old St Pancras Church has pre-Conquest fabric, making it one of the oldest churches in Middlesex. It was enlarged in the later Middle Ages and up until the C 16 St Pancras served as a village church. By the late C 16 the surrounding houses were derelict. Immediately south of the churchyard there was a spa in the C 17 and C 18, with large gardens, and from the C 18 there was a workhouse immediately to the north.

In the late C 17 and C 18 the churchyard, still known as 'in-the-fields', became a popular burial place, being enlarged in 1727 and again in 1792. Due to the severe congestion of their churchyards, the inner London parishes began to site burial grounds away from their respective churches, on the edge of the built-up areas. Another two burial grounds, nominally those of St Giles-in-the Fields and St George's, Bloomsbury (whose own burial ground was congested), were added to the north in the late C 18 and in 1802. The burial ground was popular with Roman Catholics, including refugees from the French Revolution. Many were buried in mass graves, including the composer Johann Christian Bach, known as the London Bach, who died a pauper in 1782. After 1822 when St Pancras New Church was opened, the old church was seldom used. The area rapidly became industrialised from the 1820s onwards and for a while the church lay derelict.

St Paul's relinquished its long control over it in the mid 1840s and the church was then rebuilt and enlarged 1847-8 by A D Gough and R L Roumieu. Following the Burial Acts of 1850, St Pancras churchyard and burial ground were closed.

A movement to turn the smaller burial grounds into gardens, which was started as early as 1843 by Sir Edwin Chadwick, gained momentum in the 1870s and by 1877 eight had been transformed. St Pancras was one of the earliest.

Both the burial ground and the churchyard were cut into from 1863 by the Midland Railway Company for the construction of the railway lines from St Pancras Station. Amid great controversy, the graves were dug up at night, behind screens, an event witnessed by Thomas Hardy and many years later recorded in a poem.

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The churchyard was preserved as an open space in 1875 after the St Pancras Vestry acquired the remaining land. The grandest tombs survived (including the tomb to Sir John Soane (d 1837) and his wife (d 1815)), but others were moved. The ground was levelled and the headstones were placed in mounds or around the walls. The gardens were opened to the public in June 1877 and Baroness Burdett-Coutts laid the foundation stone of the monument she had presented.

The gardens were laid out in their present form in 1890-1 by the Vestry, in conjunction with the Midlands Railway Company.

DESCRIPTION

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING St Pancras Gardens, c 2ha, are located in Somers Town, to the north of St Pancras and King's Cross stations, and south of Camden Town. The gardens are mainly on level ground, with a southward slope along the south-west boundary. The site is an irregular triangle bounded to the south-west by Pancras Road, to the south-east and east by the railway and to the north and north-east by the buildings of University College Hospital. The gardens are enclosed by brick walls on the south and east sides and by fencing on the west and north sides.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES There are two entrances from Pancras Road: the main entrance leads directly to the church, and a smaller entrance to the north, next to the Gardener's Cottage, leads to the gardens. The C19 wrought-iron gates and railings are listed grade II. A third entrance, from Camley Street, enters from the east, 110m north of the Church.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING St Pancras Old Church (listed grade B) stands towards the south of the site, 30m east of the entrance to the Church from St Pancras Way. It has an C11 (pre-Conquest) core with later medieval additions. The Church was rebuilt and enlarged in 1847-8 by A D Gough, with the removal of the tower and porch, lengthening of the nave westwards and building of a new vestry to the north. Further alteration and restorations were carried out in 1888 and 1925. The Church contains a number of C16 to C19 monuments.

GARDENS AND PLEASURE GROUNDS The geometric layout of the gardens is constrained by the irregular outline of the site. The main paths are aligned on the Church or on notable monuments, and these paths are linked by smaller paths. All the main paths are lined with mature trees, mostly plane, and the areas between the paths are laid out as grass with tombstones (in the western and southern parts of the gardens) and a few specimen trees scattered on the lawns, including mature pollarded limes. From the main garden entrance from Pancras Road, the Gardener's Cottage is immediately to the north, and 30m to the north-east is a flight of steps leading to the Burdett-Coutts monument. Paths curve away either side of the steps leading up a gentle slope to the level ground on which the gardens are laid out. The paths and steps cross the main perimeter path which runs around the edge of the northern part of the site and across the north side of the Church. A central rose garden of a circular bed and further beds on the surrounding lawns, is surrounded by six radiating paths leading to the perimeter path. Between the south and south-west paths is the Burdett-Coutts monument: a memorial fountain and sundial of 1877 (listed grade II) in Portland stone, marble, granite and red Mansfield stone, designed by G Highton of Brixton and manufactured by H Daniel & Co, cemetery masons of Highgate. The relief carvings are by Signor Facigna and the sundial is contained in the west gable of the memorial. C20 cast-iron railings surround the monument, with a carved stone dog on a pedestal set in each corner. Around the steps and the monument are bedding displays.

The south-east path from the rose garden leads to a large circular feature comprising of a mature ash tree on a mound of gravestones, surrounded by a fence. To the south and south-west of this feature are three further areas of lawn, enclosed by paths. To the east the path leads south around the Church, which is fenced off and has shrubs against the railings. To the east and south of the Church there are large table tombs set in the grass and amongst scattered trees, including Sir John Soane's tomb (listed grade I). It is a Portland stone tomb erected in 1816, to Soane's design, following the death of his wife in 1815. Soane and his son were later buried in the tomb.

The paths to the south of the Church are straight and lead around the edge of the gardens and across it. There is a small playground in the south-east corner.

REFERENCES

E Cecil, *London Parks and Gardens* (1907), pp 242-4 N Pevsner, *The Buildings of England.. London except... Westminster* (1952), pp 357-8 LCC, *Survey of London XXIV*, (1952), pp 147-50 G Tindall, *The Fields Beneath* (1977), pp 126-7, 170, 182

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ST PANCRAS GARDENS

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: 1 st edition surveyed 1871 2nd edition published 1894 3rd edition published 1914

Description written: August 1998 Register Inspector: CB Edited: May 2000

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.