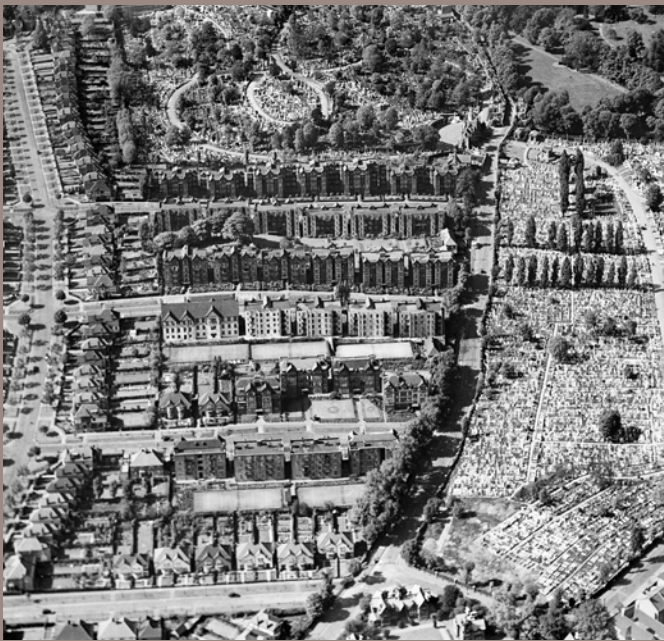


Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads

Highgate Cemetery has been in use as a cemetery for 178 years and has now reached a point where important decisions need to be made about its future. Burial space is rapidly running out and maturing trees are destroying graves and memorials. Doing nothing is not an option. We would like you to help us find the right answers for the future of this amazing place.



THEN
Aerial view of Highgate Cemetery in 1939 showing the relatively open character of the Cemetery.



NOW
Aerial view of Highgate Cemetery in 2017 showing the Cemetery overgrown with trees.

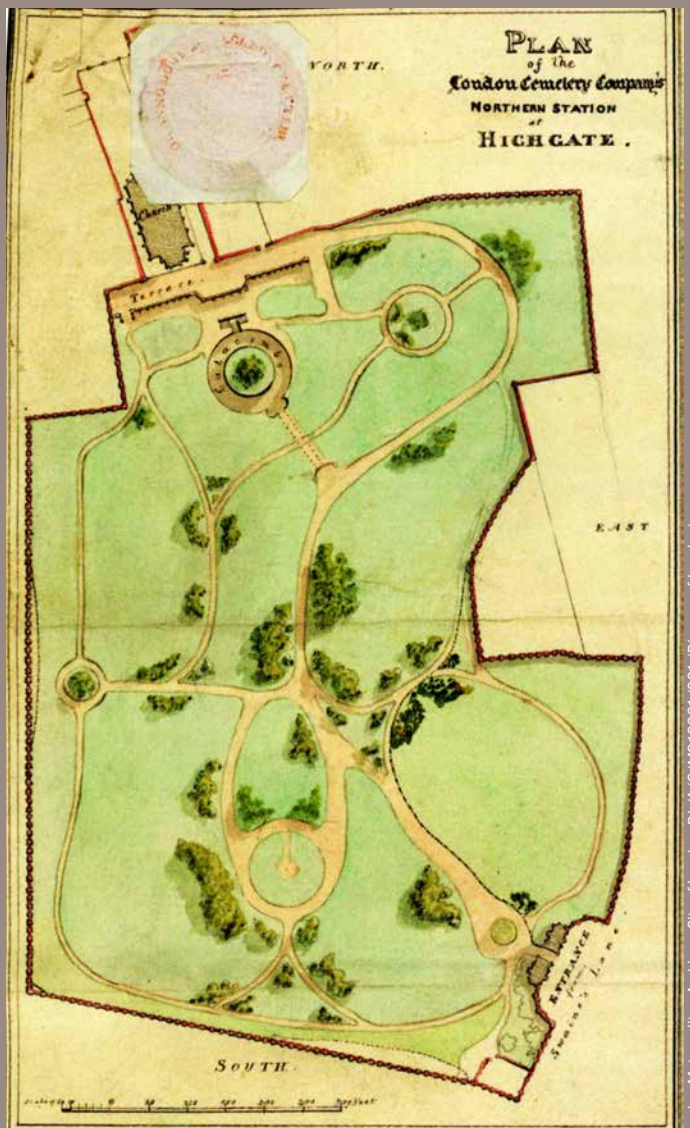
Highgate Cemetery opened in 1839, one of eight new suburban cemeteries designed to solve the problem of London's overcrowded churchyards. For 100 years it was highly profitable and employed an army of groundsmen to tend the graves, mow the grass, prune the trees and plant flowers. As space filled up, profits fell and maintenance was scaled back. Things got really bad by 1975, when a group of local people formed the Friends of Highgate Cemetery to rescue it.

Many other private cemeteries at this time were taken over by local authorities. Highgate Cemetery is unusual in being run by the Friends. The Cemetery receives no funding from Government and is reliant upon income from visitors and burials to maintain the Cemetery and keep it open.

The Friends took over a site which was increasingly overgrown, and buildings and monuments which had been neglected for decades. They restored many monuments while allowing the landscape to develop as a woodland.

Highgate Cemetery is now at a crossroads: it is running out of space for further burials and the trees are destroying the memorial landscape.

What should we do? How can we continue to bury people in the Cemetery, manage the trees and improve facilities for grave owners and visitors?

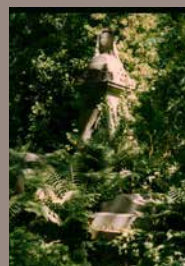


London Metropolitan Archives, City of London, DL/A/C/MS19231/021 (Diocese of London)

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

Trees: out of control

Highgate Cemetery is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation and listed at Grade I in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. 136 historic trees survive, but they are being choked by tens of thousands of self-seeded trees, mostly poor-quality ash and sycamore. These intruders are out of control.



The Cemetery was laid out as a garden with clumps of trees and shrubs framing distant views of London.

The balance has shifted from the romantic to the destructive, as self-seeded ash and sycamore have hidden the original landscape, destroying graves and monuments and obliterating long vistas. These intruders are vulnerable to disease such as ash dieback, which could potentially kill large numbers of them. The thick canopy now restricts the growth of younger trees and shrubs, limiting the overall ecological value of the site.



WHAT WORKS

The juxtaposition of trees, ivy and graves gives the cemetery its unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy, which is treasured by grave owners and visitors.



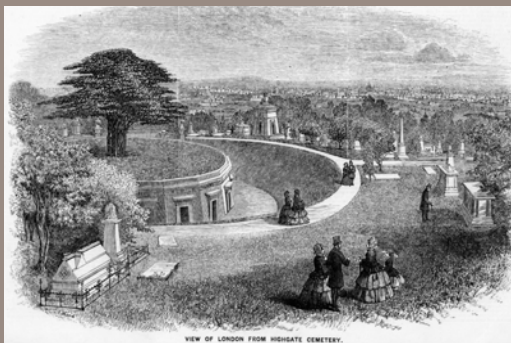
WHAT DOESN'T

The original design had grand graves lining the main paths. Uncontrolled tree growth and ivy has totally hidden this.



DAMAGE

Tree roots, as well as falling trees and branches, are causing serious damage to monuments. The boundary between pleasing decay and dereliction is increasingly crossed.



VIEWS

The Cemetery was laid out to exploit magnificent views towards then-distant London. These views have now been lost.



A GREEN SPACE

The value of the Cemetery as a green space and wildlife habitat is damaged by the dominance of self-sown trees and ivy.

VULNERABLE

The self-seeded ashes and sycamores are poor specimens, all of a similar age (around 50 years old) and vulnerable to high winds and disease.

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

... but could be majestic and atmospheric

The delicate balance between benign decay and dereliction has been tipped. If we continue to allow trees to grow unchecked they will destroy the Cemetery. There needs to be a long-term plan for regaining control and for future maintenance.



© The Trustees of the British Museum

A VARIETY OF LANDSCAPES

The current state of the cemetery obscures the wide variety of its underlying topography and design. Targeted removal of trees would reveal this and enrich visitors' experience of the site. The unique atmosphere which so attracts grave owners and visitors could be not only preserved but enhanced by managing trees more effectively.

MONUMENTS

Trees near significant monuments or along the main paths could be removed, halting damage to monuments and recapturing the spirit of the place envisaged by the designers.



© Historic England Archive



VIEWS

New openings cut through groups of trees would reveal the superb views, which were so important in the original design of the Cemetery.

VIEWS

At Nunhead Cemetery openings have been created through the trees to reveal this striking view of St Paul's Cathedral.



PHASED FELLING

A programme for the felling of poor-quality trees would open up areas for potential grave reuse.



A TRUE WILDERNESS

Parts of the Cemetery could be managed as pockets of wildwood, attracting a wider variety of birds and insects, and enriching the experience of the visitor.



HISTORIC TREES

Clearing space around the surviving historic trees would safeguard their future health.



ENHANCED BIODIVERSITY

New planting and landscaping have great potential to enhance the ecological value of the site, by encouraging a richer layer of trees and shrubs beneath the tree canopy and more variety of habitat for wildlife.



NEW PLANTING

Poor-quality trees could be replaced by a carefully planned planting programme, which respects the original landscape of the Cemetery.



AN ARBORETUM

To replace the existing dominance of ash and sycamore, new specimen trees could be planted for their interest, beauty and contribution to the romantic atmosphere of the Cemetery. A variety of different species would be less susceptible to diseases such as ash dieback.



HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

Highgate's cemetery

Since 1839, more than 168,000 people have been buried at Highgate Cemetery in over 52,000 graves. The Victorians thought it would last for centuries, but now there is hardly any new space. How can it continue?



A WORKING CEMETERY

Highgate Cemetery still provides a place of burial for Londoners and a place for the bereaved to mourn. There are about 90 burials each year.

It is a 'living' cemetery relevant to local people. Tended graves show that loved ones are gone but not forgotten.

Visits by grave owners and relatives enhance the meaning of the place as a landscape of memory, and provide an important reminder that this is not just a park.

New burials help fund the care and enhancement of the Cemetery.



'THE MOUND'

There is very little space for new burials. In the 1990s we created new burial space by building a large earth mound on top of common graves in the East Cemetery. At current rates, this area will last only another six years.



CREMATED REMAINS

As the popularity of cremation burials increases, do we need a more considered approach to design that is in keeping with the character of the Cemetery?



NEW BURIALS

Sometimes plots for cremated remains have been squeezed in unsuitable places, which detracts from the Victorian memorial landscape. Where else could we find space for them?



CRAMMING

The original cemetery company buried many people in common graves underneath paths. The Friends then created new private graves on top of them. As a result, this carriage road has become a narrow track.



NO MONUMENT

Cemetery regulations prohibited the erection of monuments on common graves. But there are also many old private graves without monuments.



DAMAGE TO MONUMENTS

Graves and monuments are being ripped apart by trees and ivy.



CONSERVATION AREA PROTECTIONS

At Highgate Cemetery, all monuments of whatever size erected before 1925 are protected by conservation area controls. There are also 82 listed monuments which have an even higher degree of protection.

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

... but how can it continue?

In 2001 the Select Committee on Cemeteries concluded: 'If the public are to continue to have access to affordable, accessible burial in cemeteries fit for the needs of the bereaved, there appears to be no alternative to grave reuse.'



FORGOTTEN GRAVES

Many graves have not been used for over a hundred years, but still have room for new burials on top. If no one claims ownership, could new burials be added above existing ones?



ASHES IN URNS

At the historic Westerweld Cemetery in the Netherlands, cremated remains are kept in beautiful urns in a memorial garden. When families no longer require them, the urns become available for new occupants.

"... there should be an expectation that grave spaces will in due course be reused, and this is necessary to economise on land-use at a time when gravespace is a diminishing resource... Rather than planning for re-use on a grave-by-grave basis, there is merit in seeking to bring larger areas into re-use as part of a coherent plan."

Diocese of Southwark:
Chancellor's Guidance on Churchyards & Memorials



CREATING SPACE ON TOP

At the City of London Cemetery in Manor Park, burial spaces have been created by moving existing remains deeper in the same grave. New burials can then be accommodated on top. This is common practice in many European countries. The existing headstone is reversed to allow for a new inscription on the other side while retaining the original memorial.



MOVE RIGHT ALONG

At the City of London Cemetery, new graves have been created by exhuming remains from a row of existing graves and reburying them at one end.



NEW COLUMBARIA

At many cemeteries, cremated remains are kept in above-ground structures rather than buried. When families no longer wish to visit, the niches can become available for new occupants.



ROOM INSIDE?

Many private vaults at Highgate Cemetery are less than half full. Could remaining space be sold to new families? Or could vaults become semi-private spaces for cremated remains?



OLD AND NEW ALONGSIDE EACH OTHER

At Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, opened in 1804 and still a working cemetery, old and new graves sit beside each other. Plots are sold on extendable leases. When families no longer require them, they become available for new occupants.

The reuse of graves enables better maintenance of the cemetery, while respecting its historic importance.

ATTITUDES TO REUSING OLD GRAVES

A 1995 study found that most respondents did not oppose reuse of graves, provided that:

- it was 100 years since the last burial
- any remains were retained in the same grave
- a photographic record was made of the memorial before it was removed.

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

A magnet for visitors, a haven for the bereaved

Although Highgate Cemetery does not advertise, visitor numbers are increasing year by year. In 2016, 60,000 people visited the East Cemetery and 25,000 took a guided tour of the West Cemetery. They were greeted by more than 100 volunteers. Visitors and tours accounted for a vital 35% of the Cemetery's income.



Highgate Cemetery draws visitors from around the world to its spectacular landscape, the well-known people buried here and its unique atmosphere of romantic melancholy. But public access is limited: for safety reasons, admission to the West Cemetery is by tour only. Income from tours and visitors is vital to fund the Cemetery's upkeep and restoration. Tours also limit the numbers in the West Cemetery at any one time, preserving its special atmosphere and giving some privacy to those who are visiting graves.

A UNIQUELY PEACEFUL PLACE

The Cemetery is one of the finest and most atmospheric in the world. The two sides of the Cemetery have distinct characters which provide variety for grave owners and visitors. Its reputation is rightly high. Controlling the number of visitors to the West Cemetery helps to preserve its special atmosphere, so appreciated by everyone.



STAYING RELEVANT

Many people come to visit the graves of famous people. But even Karl Marx is less of a draw than he once was, so the cemetery needs to find new ways of attracting visitors. Continuing burials is one way to do this.



INTERPRETATION

Volunteers, along with publications and maps, guide visitors. But there is no space for a museum or display about the cemetery and the history of burial practices.

CONNECTING TO HIGHGATE

Volunteer-led tours increase local involvement with the Cemetery and foster a sense of local ownership. Shortage of volunteers currently restricts the number of tours.



GETTING AROUND

Though some paths in both East and West Cemeteries are level and well surfaced, many are steep and rough. This limits public access and creates the risk of injuries.

VISITOR FACILITIES

Modern tourists and school groups now expect an increasing range of facilities, including cafes and loos and rooms for presentation and teaching. Current facilities are very limited: the toilets in the West Cemetery are inadequate, particularly for women, and lack of catering facilities prevents the offer of funeral teas. A richer experience would help justify the journey to Highgate — even in bad weather.



GETTING IN

The single entrances to the West and East Cemeteries help to control visitors, but can be off-putting to the casual visitor, as can the requirement to book tours in advance.



HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

... but how many visitors could we take?

Getting the right balance between catering for the demands of visitors and preserving the special atmosphere of the Cemetery as a place to be buried is critical. We need to maximise the income from visitors to pay for the maintenance of the Cemetery. This may mean providing better facilities and opening up the Cemetery to greater public access. How can Highgate Cemetery provide better access to visitors, local residents and relatives of the deceased, while preserving its unique atmosphere?



MORE VISITORS?

Increasing the number of tours requires more volunteers but would bring in more, much-needed income.

WEST CEMETERY

Could open access to the West Cemetery be allowed periodically, at specified times? This would encourage people to make return visits, to explore different areas.



BETTER FACILITIES

The Whittington Estate basement car park could house an expanded range of facilities for visitors and schools. There is potential too in the Courtyard.

DISPLAY SPACE

At Arnos Vale Cemetery in Bristol there is a space to display information to visitors. Something similar at Highgate would enrich visitors' experience and make a visit worthwhile even on a wet day. There is huge potential for apps or other devices to help visitors to find their way round.



A NEW THROUGH-ROUTE

Opening up the Chester Road gate would improve access for local residents and create an attractive new through-route from Archway to Swains Lane.

THE COURTYARD

Allowing free access to the Courtyard would entice visitors into the West Cemetery. There is space in the Courtyard for a discreetly designed shop/café.

THE CHAPEL

The shop is very intrusive in the Chapel, and needs to be taken down every time there is a funeral. Moving it elsewhere would immeasurably enhance this sacred space.



PATHS

Off the main routes, the informal surfacing of the paths is part of the character of the Cemetery, but restricts access and can be dangerous. At the George Eliot Path we have experimented with a surface which keeps the sense of informality while providing a decent surface.

NEW GRAVES, NEW AUDIENCES

The Cemetery's ability to attract the graves of famous and influential people is key to its survival as a place people want to visit.

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.

A sustainable future?

This exhibition has set out some of the problems that face Highgate Cemetery today. The Cemetery has changed significantly since it opened in 1839. It continues to change as the trees mature and new burials are added. Change is inevitable, even if we do nothing. But we can shape the future. What form should that change take?



THEN

A view of Highgate Cemetery in 1872 showing the varied arrangement of tended graves and memorials with St Michael's Church in the background.



NOW

The same view in 2017: the cross in the centre of the picture is still visible but the rest of the memorials and the long view have been obscured by the encroaching vegetation.



THEN

An early view of St Michael's church and the terrace in 1858 before the outer ring of catacombs in the Lebanon Circle were completed.



NOW

A similar view in 1990.

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust look after Highgate Cemetery for the benefit of the public. But people value the Cemetery for many different reasons, some overlapping, some contradictory.

- As a place of rest: important not only to the relatives of those who are buried here, but also to those who might be buried here in the future. People need somewhere close to home to bury their own loved ones.
- As a tranquil green space: a haven for wildlife and part of a 'green corridor' stretching from Hampstead Heath to Waterlow Park.
- As part of our cultural heritage, for the design quality of the garden cemetery, the monuments within it, and the stories of the lives commemorated.

The Friends have overseen a remarkable turnaround in the Cemetery's fortunes, thanks to the efforts of a huge number of volunteers over the past forty years. But we are only trustees for those who come after us. It would be wrong to let the Cemetery crumble away, slowly destroyed by trees, ivy and the effects of time. We have to ensure that we hand on to the next generation something that is worth handing on.

A new approach is required to ensure that the Cemetery preserves its significance and remains financially viable. Changes will not occur rapidly, but would be phased over several decades. It is important to draw up a clear plan to guide the Cemetery's development. We are keen to hear what you think.

Please complete the questionnaire to help us plan for the future of Highgate Cemetery.

HIGHGATE CEMETERY.