

# Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust  
Research & Recording Project



## High Wycombe Cemetery

November 2016



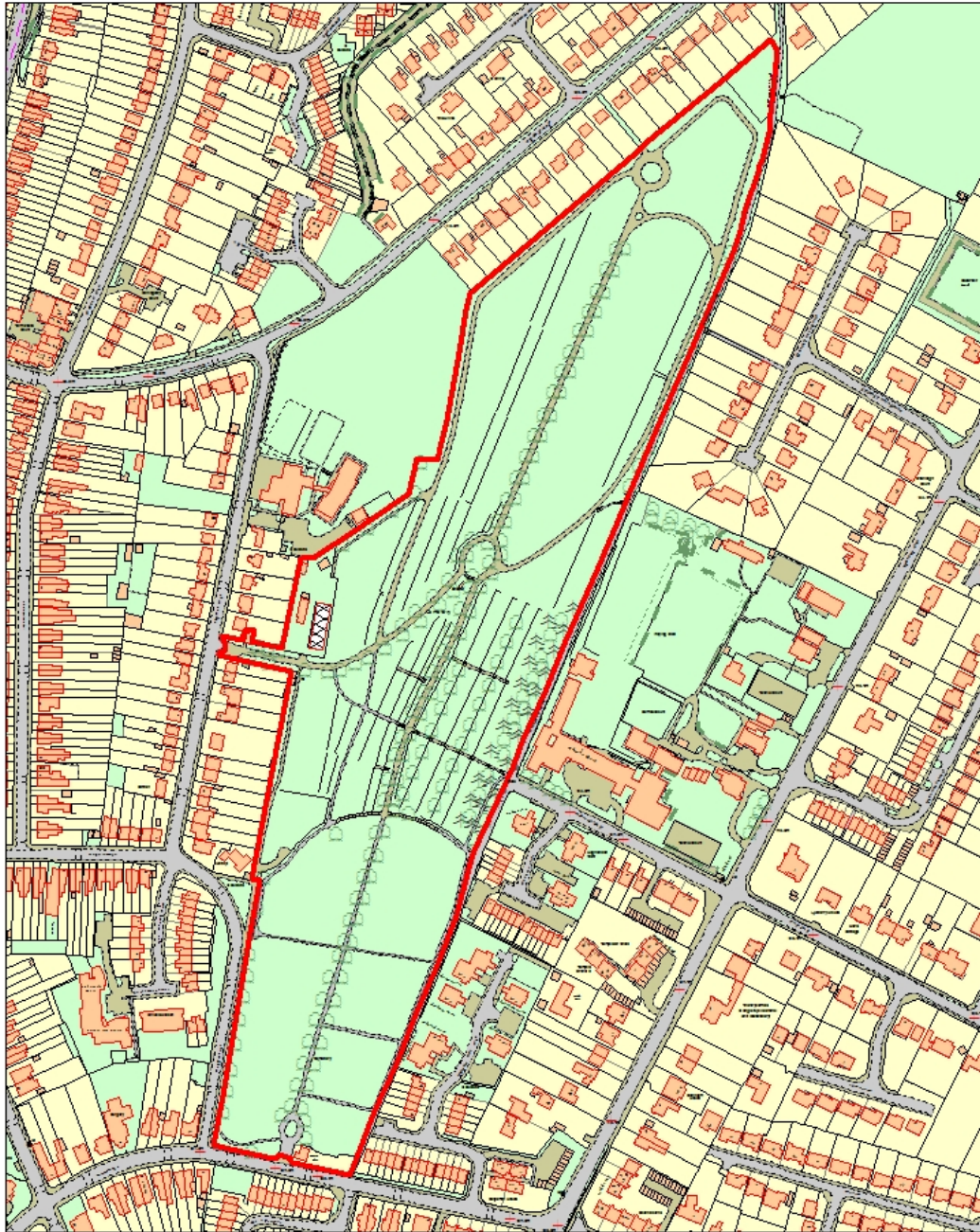
Bucks Gardens  
Trust



Association of  
Gardens



# HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



High Wycombe Cemetery: boundary of historic designed landscape interest

Produced by the County Archaeological Service  
July 2015



Scale: 1:3,331 at A4



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**High Wycombe Cemetery: 2008 aerial photograph**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Project

This site dossier has been prepared as part of The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust (BGT) Research and Recording Project, begun in 2014. This site is one of several hundred designed landscapes county-wide identified by Bucks County Council (BCC) in 1998 (including Milton Keynes District) as potentially retaining evidence of historic interest, as part of the Historic Parks and Gardens Register Review project carried out for English Heritage (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not conclusive and further parks and gardens may be identified as research continues or further information comes to light.

### Content

BGT has taken the Register Review list as a sound basis from which to select sites for appraisal as part of its Research and Recording Project for designed landscapes in the historic county of Bucks (pre-1974 boundaries). For each site a dossier is prepared by volunteers trained on behalf of BGT by experts in appraising designed landscapes who have worked extensively for English Heritage on its Register Upgrade Project.

Each dossier includes the following for the site:

- A site boundary mapped on the current Ordnance Survey to indicate the extent of the main part of the surviving designed landscape, also a current aerial photograph.
- A statement of historic significance based on the four Interests outlined in the National Policy Planning Framework and including an overview.
- A written description, derived from documentary research and a site visit, based on the format of the English Heritage *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.
- A map showing principle views and features.

The area within the site boundary represents the significant coherent remains of the designed landscape. It does not necessarily include all surviving elements of the historical landscape design, which may be fragmented. It takes no account of current ownership.

NOTE: Sites are not open to the public unless advertised elsewhere.

### Supporters and Acknowledgements

The project was supported by The Association of Gardens Trusts and funded by BGT with a significant grant from The Heritage Lottery Fund. BCC generously provided current and historic mapping and access to the Historic Environment Record.

The Trust would like to thank the volunteers and owners who have participated in this project and given so much time and effort to complete this challenging and rewarding task.

Further information is available from: [www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk](http://www.bucksgardenstrust.org.uk)

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	<b>HIGH WYCOMBE CEMETERY</b> <b>BCC HER 0647700000</b>
DISTRICT:	Wycombe	
PARISH:	High Wycombe	
OS REF.:	OS SU 867 934	

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**Overview:** A typical early Burial Board cemetery for a market and furniture town opened in 1855 with successive extensions northwards in similar style in the later C19 and C20. The geometric C19 layout survives largely intact with the Victorian Lodge as the principal building, and a group of vaults. It has some notable trees including an avenue of pleached limes along the main drive. Sited on a steep west-facing slope, it enjoys spectacular views west over the town in the Hughenden Valley and north-west to the rural top end of the valley towards the Disraeli Monument (1862) and across Hughenden Park to the Manor.

**Archaeological interest:** Early evidence identified includes an Iron Age corn storage pit, with implements and a small urn and evidence of cremation. The main potential arises from features associated with its use as a municipal cemetery since the 1850s.

**Architectural interest:** The cemetery never had a chapel, being close to the parish church. The main architectural interest is focussed on the typical mid-C19 entrance lodge with ornamental gates, flanked by a flint retaining wall along the south boundary. The collection of relatively modest mid-late C19 monuments for notable worthies of High Wycombe, flanking the Main Drive, also marks a group of covered vaults. The flint-walled retaining terraces in the first extension may have continued similar features in the C19 sections parallel to the main drive (now largely gone). There is a scattering of Commonwealth War Graves and a memorial to the White House Tunnel railway digging disaster of 1902.

**Artistic interest:** The nucleus of the layout is the southern section, based on a typical mid-C19 geometric cemetery pattern with an intact Victorian Lodge and a number of notable mature trees including an avenue of pleached limes along the main drive, and Holm Oaks and yews at the south entrance surrounding the turning circle. The site enjoys a spectacular situation on a Chiltern hillside with long views west over the Hughenden Valley below including towards Hughenden Manor and the Disraeli Monument. The main drive/avenue is aligned to the south on the site of the former summerhouse on the Mound in Castle Hill House garden (qv), its site now marked by mature trees above C20 housing.

**Historic interest:** There are strong associations between the cemetery and the history of the town, reflected in the changing cultural identity of the population and the many faiths represented. There are also connections with the influential members of the community including Hull and Loosely (furniture makers), Raffety (donators of the Progress stained glass window in the Town Hall), Harman (Mayor), Hearn (lace magnate), Butler (founder of the *Bucks Free Press*), Drewett (first school) and Youens (founders of the tonic sol-fa movement).

## **HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

There is evidence of early occupation on the site (BCC HER) including Early British remains supposed Celtic (Iron Age) of burials, grain storage pits and cremation. By the mid-C19 the land was in agricultural use and meadows. In 1853 legislation made it compulsory for councils to provide adequate burial space. High Wycombe parish church of All Saints graveyard was overflowing. In 1853 the town council bought four acres of land on Amersham Hill from the Carrington Estates for £450.12.6 (BSC) for use as a municipal cemetery.

The cemetery was laid out in a geometrical pattern with a lodge at the entrance but no chapel. It took its first burial in 1855 of an 8 month old infant called Emily Smith, interred in a public grave. The earliest area consisted of the southern section with plots to the east of the drive unconsecrated and consecrated plots down the hill to the west. The earliest evidence for the cemetery layout appears on the 1860 1:500 OS town plan showing the layout of the cemetery with the lodge, planting, turning circle, and grid pattern of paths.

It had been hoped that the cemetery would profit from the sale of extra-large plots for vaults, mausolea and large memorials but by the mid-1880s it became obvious that the cemetery should review its design providing smaller, cheaper, plots. Thus the numbering of the graves became more complex (Scagill, 2015). Section AB, opposite the Lodge, was planned as exclusive private graves, but by 1885 plans were redrawn to accommodate many more graves (pers. comm. Richard Ogden, WDC, 2015). The rest of the C19 layout, sections C & D, is a mixture of public and private graves.

Section E, the first extension, north of the 1850s area, flanking Main Drive, was purchased from Lord Carrington in 1893 for £450 (CBS). The Church of England part of this land was consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford in 1893. The conveyancing map of 1885 shows the cemetery and the area of the proposed first extension purchased in 1893. The extension is first shown on the 1897 OS.

By 1917 (OS) the first extension had a semicircular end and turning circle (now gone, 2015). In 1929 the original, southern entrance was superseded as the main entrance by a new entrance, along with cemetery offices adjacent to Hampden Road on the west boundary, and the cemetery was further extended to the northeast. Terracing was put in place, with flint walls running parallel to the contours. A Muslim section was opened in 1944, the graves in this area facing east. The Snowdrop Garden was opened in 1994 as a further extension to the west, with an entrance in Benjamin Road, for the interment of ashes of infants, stillborns and young children. It was created on ground that was formerly a plant nursery for the WDC horticultural section. There is a scattering of 108 war graves throughout the site.

The site remains in municipal ownership as a working cemetery administered by Wycombe District Council.

## **SITE DESCRIPTION**

### **LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM, SETTING**

The 10 ha. High Wycombe Cemetery occupies a steep, west-facing Chiltern hillside in the Hughenden Valley. The main 1850s gateway at the centre of the south boundary in Priory Road stands 440m north of the centre of town and the second (1929) entrance is 800m from the town centre located on Hampden Road. It is the only cemetery in the town where interments take place. The cemetery is set in a residential area of Edwardian and later C20 housing and schools. It extends 700m, north to south and is 168m wide at its widest point, west to east.

The south boundary, along Priory Road, includes the 1855 main entrance to the C19 area of the cemetery with a high flint wall with brick buttresses and brick coping stones. The south-west, Benjamin Road boundary, to the west is of the same construction. The north-east boundary of the C19 section is marked by a flint wall in similar style with brick buttresses and coping stones. The west, Hampden Road, boundary has a wooden fence and conifer border around the Snowdrop Garden and black metal railings backing onto gardens and a school.

The site is steeply sloping to the west between 100m and 200m AOD with extensive views across the Hughenden Valley, including the town of High Wycombe, and Tom Burt's Hill, and north-west to the Disraeli Monument and the associated Hughenden Manor and its park. The cemetery lies on chalk bedrock. When it was laid out in the 1850s it was surrounded by agricultural land and meadow but with the growth of High Wycombe in the C20 it now lies within an urban setting with a mix of residential, service and school premises.

### **ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES**

The principal entrance to the original, southern section of the cemetery is from the south off Priory Road. It is set back off the road with a pair of wrought iron gates on Portland stone piers (1850s) flanked by curved flint walls. This became the secondary entrance in 1929. North-east of the gateway stands the brick and flint Cemetery Lodge (1850s). The gateway leads directly to a turning circle and flower beds with paired holm oaks. From here the Main Drive runs north-east for 240m to the former northern boundary of the 1890s extension and enjoys the principal views over the valley below. This drive is aligned to the south on the site of the former flint summerhouse on the Mound in Castle Hill House garden (qv), its site now marked by mature trees on the mound, rising above C20 housing. The Main Drive is flanked by a Lime Avenue, with cross paths, now metalled but formerly gravelled. Some cross paths have been lost.

The present main entrance, built in 1929, stands off Hampden Road between houses, in a residential street, 400m north of the 1850s entrance. It marks a drive giving access to the northern sections of the cemetery, with contemporary offices to the north and a small car park and toilets to the south. From here the drive leads east into the northern sections of the cemetery. This drive links with the extended line of the Main Drive some 440m north-east of the main lodge at Priory Road at a large turning circle. The extension to the Main Drive is planted with alternating cherry and lime trees.

## **PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

No chapels were planned or built, due possibly to the close proximity of the parish church and chapels/ churches of other denominations. Instead the main building is the lodge (1855) at the contemporary south entrance in Priory Road. This is a brick and flint building of considerable charm with clay tiled roof and ornamental brick chimneys. It is built in Picturesque style, with ornamental bargeboards and a Gothic doorway set back below a lean-to Gothic-style porch overlooking the turning circle.

Some 440m northwest of the Victorian Lodge is the cemetery office to the north of the Hampden Road, and maintenance buildings and yard from the 1930s.

## **OTHER LAND**

Main Drive in the C19, southern section marks the original division between consecrated land (downhill to the west) and unconsecrated land (uphill to the east). The initial layout of the cemetery was of six roughly square sections, three on either side of Main Drive (OS 1875-76), separated by paths. This was extended in the 1890s by a further pair of sections flanking an extension of Main Drive, with a curved northern boundary.

The graves flanking Main Drive in this section include a group of burial vaults with steps down into them. This is not evident as the entrances have been sealed for safety. The most notable monuments line this section of Main Drive and flank the turning circle (presumably these plots were the most expensive). The monuments in this section are the most notable, although individually they are relatively modest. However, as a collection they indicate the standing of the notable families of the market and furniture town of High Wycombe and the manner and scale in which they chose, to or were financially able, to commemorate their loved ones. The public graves mostly appear as large grassed areas – being public there are no memorials, except on some of the few graves subsequently purchased. Some 150m north of the lodge, Section E contains a memorial as a broken column on a plinth in white marble. This commemorates the White House Tunnel Disaster of 1902 at Loudwater, when a section of tunnel collapsed on the new direct railway line being constructed from High Wycombe to London Marylebone via Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross. The former north boundary of the 1890s extension section is marked by a path and a line of mature trees. The termination of Main Drive here where it intersected with the boundary path was formerly marked by a small turning circle (OS, 1897).

The C20 cemetery extension (north of the 1893 extension curved boundary path) is terraced with a group of very unusual low flint retaining walls in around 7 tiers running parallel to the contours and the Main Drive. These continue similar features in the C19 section, of which some evidence survives including low flint walling. A belt of mature trees shelters the east boundary.



## REFERENCES

Sharing Wycombe's Old Photographs <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/centre-for-buckinghamshire-studies/online-resources/swop/>

Richard Ogden, *History of High Wycombe Cemetery*

Sally Scagill, *History of High Wycombe Cemetery*

S Rutherford, *The Victorian Cemetery* (2008). (general)

## MAPS

Bryant, *A Map of the County of Buckinghamshire from an actual survey in the year 1824 by A Bryant* (1825)

Ordnance Survey

1:500 scale High Wycombe town plan, 1860

1st Edition 25" scale 1875 published 1880 (sheet SUX1V11.1)

25" scale Surveyed 1894 revised 1897 2<sup>nd</sup> edition published 1899 (sheet XLV11.1)

6" scale 1920

6" scale Surveyed 1874 revised 1924/25 (Sheet XLV11)

6" scale Surveyed 1956 Revised 1961 (sheet SU89S)

1:10,000 scale 1965 (sheet SU89SE) National Grid 1977

1:1250 scale surveyed 1965 (sheet SU8693SE) 1979

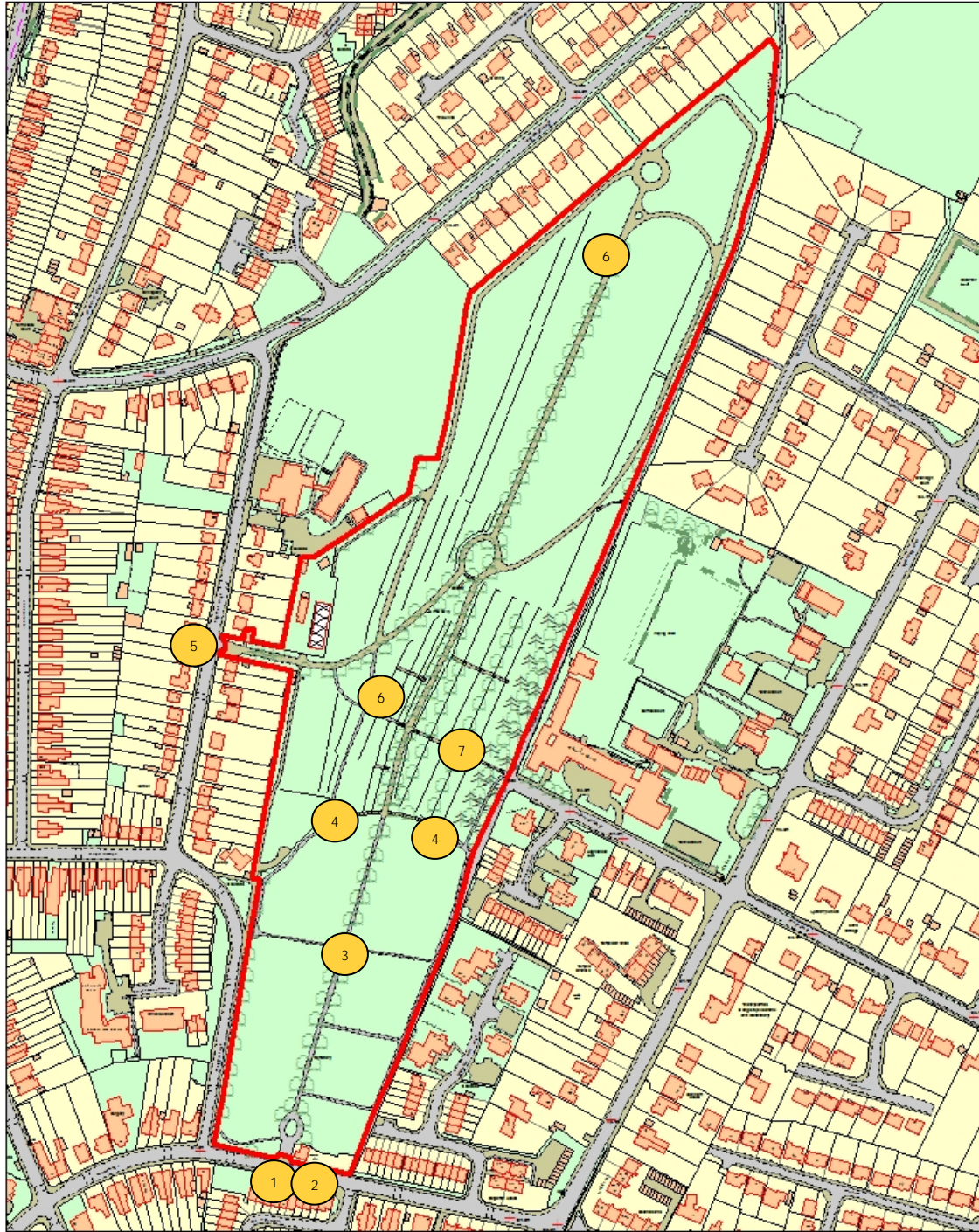
Conveyancing Maps: 1885 & 1893, Carrington Estate (Wycombe Library)

C Balsdon and C Clark 01.04.2015, edited SR 14 April 2015

## KEY HISTORIC FEATURES

### Key to numbered features

1. Main entrance (1850s)	2. South Lodge (1850s)
3. Main drive and northern extent of 1850s section	4. North boundary of 1890s extension
5. Hampden Road entrance (1920s?)	6. C20 Extensions
7. C20 Flint terracing	



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## IMAGES



1850s lodge, gateway and boundary wall

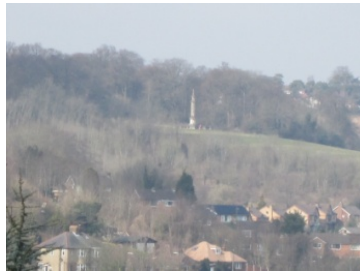


1850s turning circle, gateway and view towards Castle Hill Mound (left); centre: Main Drive; right: flint terrace wall in C19 section.

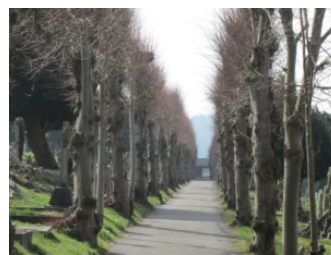


Site Map, showing consecrated and unconsecrated areas

Cemetery terracing in C20 extension



View to Disraeli monument.



View S towards Marlow Hill.



White House Disaster memorial



Decorative Headstones



Site of Victorian Vault