

Understanding Historic Parks and Gardens in Buckinghamshire

The Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust Research & Recording Project



CHILTERNS CREMATORIUM

July 2019

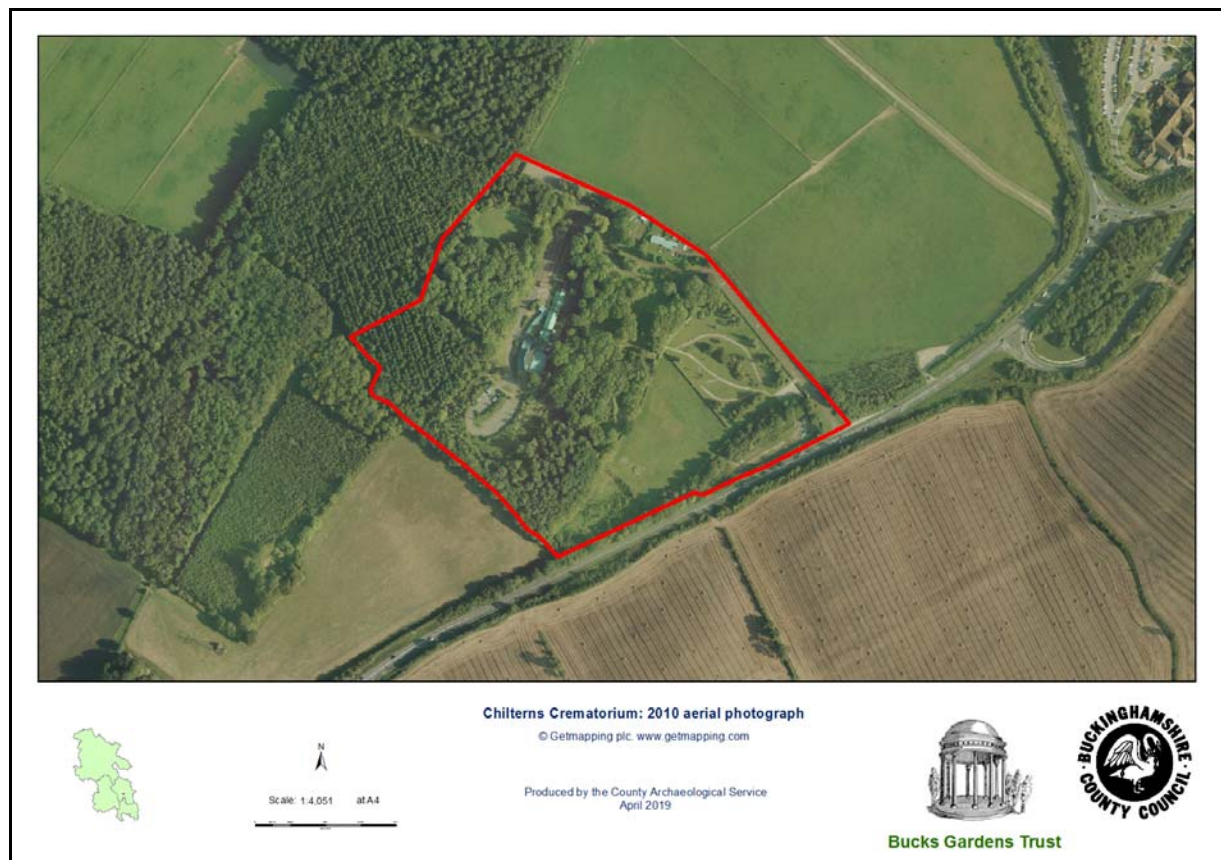
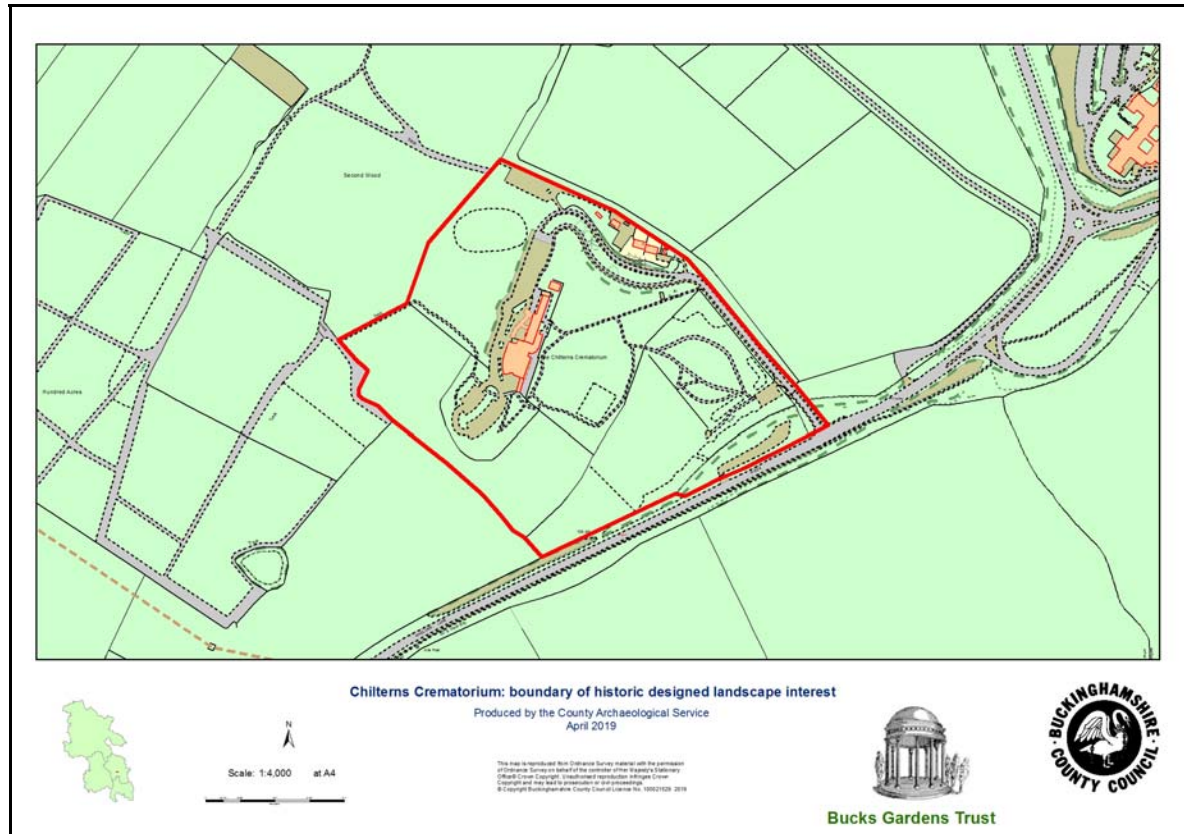


The Stanley Smith (UK)
Horticultural Trust



Bucks Gardens Trust

HISTORIC SITE BOUNDARY



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 (now Historic England) (BCC Report No. 508). The list is not definitive 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/Historic England 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 (now Historic England) *Register of Parks & Gardens of special historic interest* 2nd edn.
- ☐ A map showing principal 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 Gardens Trust (formerly the Association of Gardens Trusts and the Garden History Society) and funded by BGT with significant grants from the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust, Foland Callingham Foundation (Bekonscot) and Bucks County Council. 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

COUNTY:	BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	CHILTERN CREMATORIUM
DISTRICT:	CHILTERN	
PARISH:	AMERSHAM	BCC HER 0650000000
OS REF.:	SU 946 965	

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview: A fine example of the grounds for a mid-C20 rural crematorium ensemble designed to incorporate, respond to and fit sensitively into the rolling Chiltern setting. The naturalistic style includes a large proportion of existing woodland, ornamented with further woody planting, together with scattered lawns which are threaded through with the drive and paths. The main building was sensitively extended in 2005 with some of the layout altered including reworking of the apron in front of the buildings, and also a new car park, but the key elements and design ethos survive well.

Archaeological interest: There is not believed to be any archaeological interest in the site other than the intrinsic interest of the cemetery and its burials.

Architectural interest: The architectural value lies principally in the core 1960s buildings, Hampden Chapel, offices and Chapel of Remembrance, with the sensitive addition of a larger chapel, all set on a terrace overlooking the woodland garden below. The Superintendent's house is set on the far edge of the site. The mid-late C20/C21 monuments are small, with numerous small plaques in dedicated areas. The original buildings were designed by architect Harold Orr c. 1965, who designed other crematoria including at Oxford (1939) and Barnstaple shortly after Amersham. A larger chapel – the Milton Chapel - was built in 2005 adjacent to the Hampden Chapel, sensitively designed by John Moore of Haverstock Associates. Natural materials and copper were used to blend with the earlier chapel and the surroundings.

Artistic interest: The fine layout survives largely intact including memorials and planting and incorporates and includes a significant proportion of existing Chiltern Ancient and other woodland. A section of woodland has been lost to the 2005 Milton Chapel and car park and the approach re-ordered, but this does not greatly damage the original concept. It is an excellent example of public landscape design of this period in naturalistic style, with a particularly good approach, and an informal combination of woodland and lawned areas in which the buildings are set at the heart. Strong definition by woody planting is based on the existing Chiltern beechwood augmented by ornamental forest trees, with ornamental lawns and shrubberies. The isolated rural setting beyond the edge of Amersham has always been a key aspect and remains intact. It affords extensive views of the surrounding hillsides. Grainger (2003, 296) notes the site as a fine example of a site that offered a backdrop of established woodland, along with Wrexham (1966).

Historic interest: A typical example of a mid-C20 crematorium by an established crematorium architect.

HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

The crematorium was first proposed in 1952 by Wycombe Rural District Council. Various sites were considered in the Amersham/Great Missenden area. Eventually land was acquired in 1962 (Grainger) which had been part of the historic Shardeloes estate; the south boundary of the extensive Shardeloes park lay nearby to the north.

The crematorium was built with its own grounds on a rolling Chiltern hillside on the 400ft contour in the mid-1960s for the Chilterns Crematorium Joint Committee. It incorporated a considerable area of what is defined as Ancient Woodland (i.e. woodland in existence continuously since 1600) that was mapped in the early C19 (OSD). The south-west one-third of the site incorporated the existing south half of Second Wood; the majority of the site to the north of this included the whole of Washcock Wood (planted since 1812, OSD) and sections of the Ancient Second and Hundred Acres Woods; the south-east strip was agricultural land. The outer boundary was Whielden Lane which had recently been upgraded as an arterial road linking Amersham and High Wycombe (OS, 1923).

The first chapel – the Hampden Chapel – was designed by Harold R.W. Orr c.1965 and built by Sydney Green and Sons using Bovingdon brown/grey bricks and a copper roof (Grainger). It was intended that the design would blend into the surrounding countryside and the naturalistic landscaping including woodland in part screened it from the road below. The original 11.5 acre site was laid out as a 'natural garden'. The 1964 Annual Report (CBS) notes that proposals for landscaping had been made by the County Planning Officer (name unclear, Pooley?). The 1969 Annual Report (CBS) indicates that landscaping was continuing, with a view out from the large chapel window to a pergola walk and woodland. A larger chapel – the Milton Chapel – was built in 2005 adjacent to the Hampden Chapel, designed by John Moore of Haverstock Associates and car parking facilities were extended. Natural materials and copper were used in order to blend in with the earlier chapel and the surroundings. There are no burials.

LOCATION, AREA, BOUNDARIES, LANDFORM SETTING

The 11ha. Chilterns Crematorium lies 0.5 miles south-west of the centre of Amersham in an isolated rural position. The roughly rectangular site is bounded to the south-east by the A404 Whielden Lane linking Amersham with High Wycombe, and on the other sides by agricultural land and woodland (Hundred Acres and the remains of Second Woods). It is set in rolling Chiltern farmland on a south-east-facing valley side that was formerly part of the Shardeloes estate, just south of the Registered park. It enjoys long bucolic views across the valley bottom to agricultural land and woodland on the hillside opposite; views of the slope on which it is sited extend to the north-east and south-west. It is backed and sheltered to the north-west by the remains of the Ancient Hundred Acre and Second Woods, parts of which were incorporated into the grounds. The rural setting was a key aspect of the design, together with ease of access which influenced its siting.

ENTRANCES AND APPROACHES

The entrance is off the main A404 road, 300m south-east of the crematorium. Brick walls flank a broad steel gateway. The drive leads north-north-west up a gentle slope between a 200m long avenue of young fastigate trees in lawns backed by clipped beech hedges, towards a sentinel oak, and enjoys views of the surrounding countryside. As it reaches the oak it turns north-west and divides into two curving carriageways to allow traffic to pass in opposite directions through woodland on the steeper hillside. 75m north of the crematorium the carriageways turn south and rejoin to pass to the west of the chapels and their respective *portes cocheres* sheltering the chapel doors. It continues south to the car park beyond. A spur off the drive at its north end leads west into an overflow car park. The grounds are openly accessible most daylight hours.

PRINCIPAL BUILDING

The buildings stand at the centre of the site, aligned south-west to north-east. The original buildings by Orr (1965) including the Hampden Chapel, occupy a terrace at the north end, with a Chapel of Remembrance detached to the north; a further chapel, the Milton Chapel, adjacent to the south was added in 2005 by Haverstock Associates (Grainger). Orr's buildings are built from Bovingdon brown/grey brick and roofed with insulated copper to blend with the countryside. His chapel interior is plain and simple, light and airy, entered from the forecourt to the north-west via long, low cloisters and a porte cochere. The chapel enjoys a view through expansive windows opposite the door, of the memorial woodland below to the south-east. The terrace along the south-east side links with the Milton Chapel cloister to the south. Steps from the terrace lead down into the memorial woodland below and the grounds beyond. The Milton Chapel was designed to fit with the existing buildings in style, using copper on the front façade, and a covered entrance cloister (Grainger).

On the north-east boundary a spur off the avenue leads to the Superintendent's house in enclosed grounds screened from the main drive by ornamental planting. The building was designed in linear form in similar materials and style to the main buildings by Orr in the late 1960s.

Harold Orr had also designed crematoria for Oxford (1939) Torquay (1956), and Slough (1963) and went on to design another at Barnstaple around the same time. The Chilterns contractor was Sydney Green of Henley-on-Thames. The building is similar in style and layout to Barnstaple crematorium – although the latter is smaller in scale. Amersham has all the hallmarks of a design by Orr, low lying, long and narrow with clean lines (Grainger).

OTHER LAND

The largely wooded grounds are divided into several sections enclosing the crematorium buildings. The existing Chiltern woodland forms a large part of the character, along with lawns on former agricultural land. The woodland is planted with additional forest trees and ornamental conifers and flowering trees including many cherries.

Adjacent to the south-east is an informal wooded garden of remembrance, thickly planted with beech and birch trees above memorial plantings. It is threaded through by paths. One leads north-east to the avenue and drive, and the other leads east to the Memorial Garden alongside the drive. It is enclosed by a low brick wall to allow views of the surrounding lawns and countryside. Adjacent to the south-east is the rectangular Memorial Garden, again threaded through by paths, with vehicle access to a small car park off the drive in the east corner. It is laid to lawn and planted with several large shrub beds, including a curved central one, with memorial plaques alongside the paths. It is sheltered from the road to the south-east by further woody planting. North-west of the buildings is a further woodland (formerly Washcock Wood) with informal grass paths. Set into the north end is an oval lawn enclosed to the north by a shrubbery which enjoys views of the main buildings filtered by the tree trunks. The rest of the site is laid out with lawn and woodland.

CONTEXT OF POST-WAR CREMATORIA

Amersham came during the great British crematorium building programme of the 1950s-60s in which all crematoria were given their own gardens. It was one of those in outstanding out-of-town locations including Bath (1961), Harlow (1961), Taunton (1963), and several in Wales and Scotland (Grainger, 303). A site with a backdrop of established woodland was the favoured of most architects and landscape architects of the period. This instant maturity avoided a bleak setting for the new buildings which was prevalent at many crematoria, and could be adapted to an ornamental design. Orr himself preferred 'a woodland setting, into which the height of the buildings will quietly merge, offsetting the scale of the unmentionable chimney, and, at the same time, providing the most effective natural garden.' (quoted in Grainger, p.296) This he certainly had at Amersham.

While many crematoria before World War II had large formal gardens for memorial roses, often with pergolas lining the paths, rock gardens and other intensively garden features, by the 1960s the favoured style became more natural and designs worked with existing features. This reflected the style of many contemporary landscape designers in all their work. The Chilterns Crematorium grounds has no major formal features and is essentially a woodland garden with glades. Memorials are small and do not dominate. The Book of Remembrance in the chapel is intended as an alternative to memorials in the grounds. The design echoes the character of Erik Asplund's 1930s seminal Woodland Crematorium in Stockholm which influenced many British Post-War architects.

REFERENCES

HJ Grainger, *Death Redesigned: British Crematoria - History, Architecture and Landscape* (2006), 147, 166-67, 218-19, 229-31, 296-97, 303, 340-41, 366-67, 370, 477.

Maps

Ordnance Survey 6", surveyed 1923, published 1925.

Ordnance Surveyor's Drawing, sh. 154 (1812) (British Library)

Archival Material

Centre for Bucks Studies

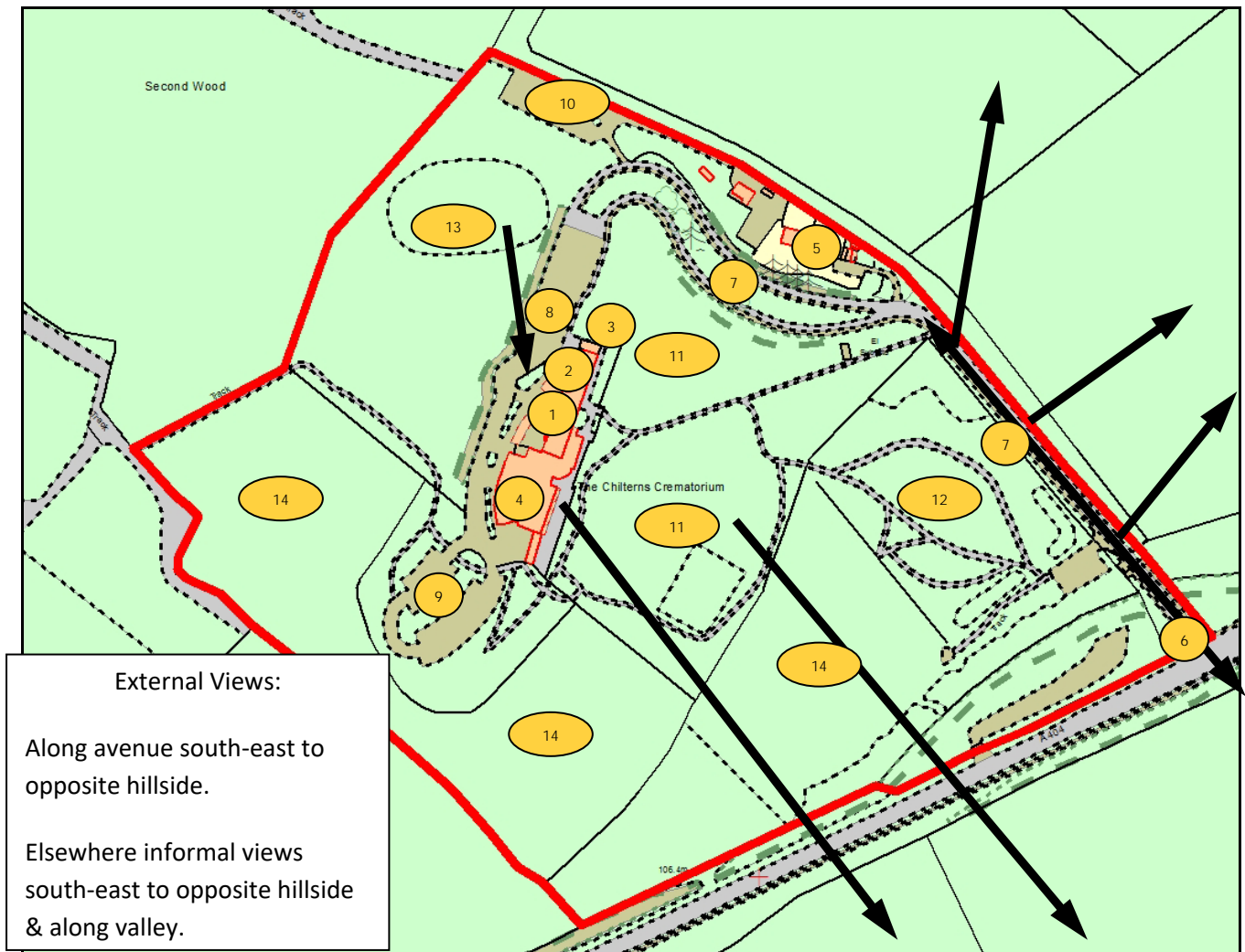
Arnold Baines papers: notes and pamphlets including booklet 1966-67; Annual Reports 1964 & 1969. AR 129/2004
CBS has few papers specifically on the development of the crematorium. There may be material in relevant Aylesbury Vale District, Wycombe District and Chiltern District Council Committee Papers.

NB it is believed that further material is held at Chilterns Crematorium.

Dr Sarah Rutherford

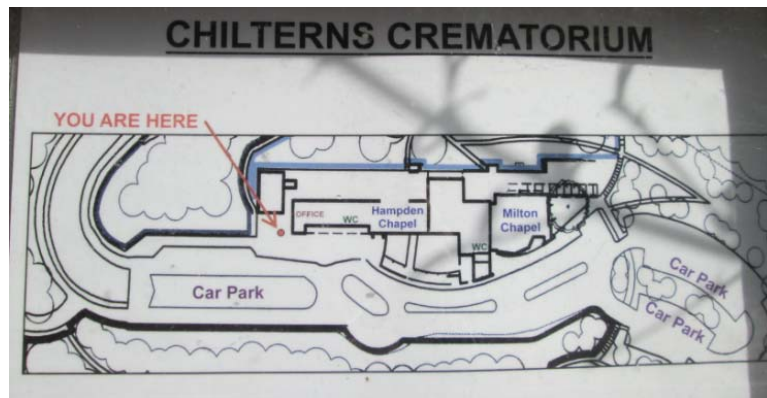
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KEY HISTORIC VIEWS AND FEATURES



1. Hampden Chapel	2. Offices
3. Chapel of Remembrance	4. Milton Chapel
5. Superintendent's House	6. Main entrance
7. Drive	8. Forecourt
9. Recent car park (2005)	
10. Overflow car park	11. Lower woodland
12. Garden of Remembrance	13. Upper woodland in Washcock Wood, with oval lawn
14. Part of Second Wood	15. Lawn

CURRENT IMAGES



Partial site plan near entrance to chapels.



Entrance, approach drive, avenue and Chiltern setting (left); Drive up hillside divided into two carriageways, carefully landscaped into the contours (centre); Superintendent's House above avenue (right);



Approach to crematorium (left); Offices & Hampden Chapel (centre); entrances to Milton & Hampden Chapels (right).



Left: floral tribute area; Right: rear of chapels and cremator on terrace overlooking woodland walks to SE.



Rear of Hampden Chapel on terrace overlooking woodland walks to SE (left); Chapel of Remembrance (right).



Woodland walks and memorials below chapels.



Memorial lawn by road.



Lawn above buildings in woodland (formerly Washcock Wood).