

Highgate Cemetery Landscape Masterplan

Design and Access Statement

Volume 2: Landscape Design and Access Statement

Part 1 of 6

October 2024

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1. Landscape Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Summary

Introduction

Highgate Cemetery is one of the World's and London's most iconic cemeteries, a powerful historical, cultural, architectural and biodiverse landscape. A place of deep resonance throughout time, not just because of the notable people buried there, but the ideas, influences and diversity of people buried there that represent all aspects of life throughout its past, present and future history.

The cemetery demands a holistic and bold master plan or 'experience plan', which respects its use as a working cemetery, but also enables it to realise its huge potential as a place of deep understanding and open dialogue about death. The experience plan will shape how people engage with the site, its significance and assets. It will ensure a respectful environment for graveowners, and that other visitors are stimulated and enriched by its themes and stories.

It is Highgate Cemetery's landscape that holds these ideas and experiences together as a place. Its landscape was laid out on its west side in 1839 using picturesque garden principles and on its east side in 1854 using the more utilitarian principles espoused by J C Loudon in his 1843 publication 'On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries; And on the Improvement of Churchyards'. These are currently in a precarious state, having transformed from managed landscapes (as seen in 19th century illustrations and mid 20th century photos), into a wilderness where nature's disruptive force has created a delightful gothic decline. Where once there were orderly graves and monuments, plants, trees and wildlife have now flourished as nature has been allowed to return to the landscape.

In recent times, keeping nature at bay and preserving the Cemetery's heritage and landscape aesthetic has become an onerous maintenance and management task. Other forces are now at play; climate change with periods of increased rainfall and droughts, is

eroding the Cemetery's path and drainage networks, whilst Chalara Ash Dieback in both the Cemetery's East and West sides, requires immediate action if the precarious state of the monuments and graves are to be preserved, and the safety of visitors maintained.

This document is Volume 2 of the Design and Access Statement, and includes detailed research, analysis, historical context, and proposals for the Landscape Masterplan.

For further details such as the Statement of Historical Importance, Site Context, Brief, Scope, and Existing Conditions, as well as architectural introductions, please refer to Volume 1 of the Design and Access Statement.

For information on Architectural Works by Hopkins Architects and West Scott Architects, refer to Volume 3 of the Design and Access Statement.

And for information on Conservation by West Scott Architects, refer to Volume 4 of the Design and Access Statement.





2. Landscape History and Conservation

- 2.1 Historic Maps
- 2.2 Trees & Historic Views
- 2.3 Historic Planting

2.1 Historic Maps

WEST SIDE

Highgate Cemetery West

Stephen Geary's design for the west side of Highgate Cemetery evolved between 1837 and 1839, as seen in a series of early drawings and plans for the cemetery. The 1839 drawing shows the design finalised by the nurseryman and landscape designer, David Ramsay, with serpentine drives set in a picturesque landscape. Reviewing changes in the path network between these early design sketches, David Ramsay's built layout and changes over the decades are relatively easy to follow and rationalize from archive material. The paths in Geary's early 1839 layout sketch were followed where they coincided with the central theatrical sequence of movement up the hill from the Entrance Chapel to the Egyptian Colonnade, Lebanon Circle and Terrace Catacombs, whilst other perimeter paths vary a great deal due to practical constraints and requirements.

Several practical changes were made to enable horse drawn carriages to move up the steep hillside. The original central route envisaged in Geary's plan was reduced in width to accommodate pedestrians, with a stair at the entrance through J.B. Bunning's retaining colonnade. This placed greater importance on the wider and longer, curved West Carriage Drive with a maximum slope of approximately 7% (1:15), that didn't follow the original sketch. The West Carriage Drive met the central route at Comfort's Corner, before joining the Main Drive to reach the Egyptian Colonnade, where the carriageway continued up via Morgan Road to reach the upper Lebanon Circle and the lower side of the Terrace Catacombs.

The East Carriage Drive was built at a

slightly later date, due to land to the rear of the houses on Swain's Lane not being purchased immediately. However, most this land was acquired and integrated into the cemetery boundary by 1842, with the exception of a few smaller plots. Again, the drive's location varied from the 1839 Geary plan, due to the need to reduce its gradient, however this is steeper than the West Drive, as there was less land available and it required a deep cut into the hillside, hence being referred to as the 'Cuttings' Path'.

At Comfort's Corner, the Oval Drive known as the Meadow skirts the perimeter of a natural platform, or promontory on the hillside, in much the same location as Geary's sketch. Most other paths followed different routes based on the realignment of the carriage drives and the acquisition of land to the east. The Neurath Path, Dickens Path and Snowdrop Bank to the west remained faithful to the sketch, however the turning circle that joined them at their south end on the Prickett Plan of 1842, appears to have been removed prior to the 1869 OS Map, to allow for additional graves.

The north entrance off Swain's Lane that did not appear on the Geary sketch, was presumably found to be the best route out at the north, as the route beside St Michael's Church was agreed to be closed when the cemetery was consecrated in May 1839. In addition, although the width of the Terrace Catacombs was just wide enough at approximately 33 feet, to turn a carriage, it would have required a re-levelling of the land beside St Michael's crypt and unconstrained access across Church land to reach its entry point off South Grove.



John Rocque, London... and 10 Miles Round, 1748



John Tompson, Map of St Pancras Parish, 1804 (British Library)



Topographical Survey of the Borough of St Marylebone, 1834 (MAPCO)



1839 Drawing. Submitted alongside the petition for consecration of the cemetery.



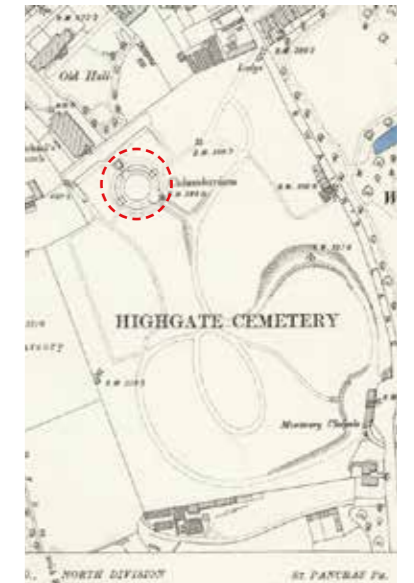
1842 Prickett Map. Early map shows a path network identical to the plan book.



1st edition Ordnance Survey, 25" to the mile, London Sheet III, surveyed 1863-9, published 1870 (National Library of Scotland)



1873-76 OS Map. Unknown path and structure against the western boundary wall. The outer circle is shown as a bank, not a wall.



1895 OS Map. Beer mausoleum and the modified steps to the Circle of Lebanon introduced.

Historic Maps

EAST SIDE

Highgate Cemetery East

The East Side was laid out by architects Frederick Wehnert and John Ashdown in 1854 to maximise burial space by using a grid-like layout of carriage drives, major north-south paths and minor east-west access paths. This layout has almost remained intact, with only minor modifications between the Chester Gate and a south-west gate on Swain's Lane. Originally there had been a lodge at the Chester Gate and a curved path that linked the south gate on Swain's Lane to the main Carriage Road. These are both evident in the 1873 Ordnance Survey Map, however the path is entirely lost from the 1913 OS Map. The lodge was demolished after suffering extensive bomb damage during the Second World War, both making way for further burial locations.

In 1872 a range of greenhouses were built just to the south of the north-west entrance to the East Side. Their position is indicated in the 1895 OS Map and they were used for the propagation of plants for selling and planting out in and around the graves of Highgate West and East. These were removed to a site at Townsend Yard, Highgate in 1905 to make way for additional mausoleums and graves.

Minor Access Paths in Highgate Cemetery West and East

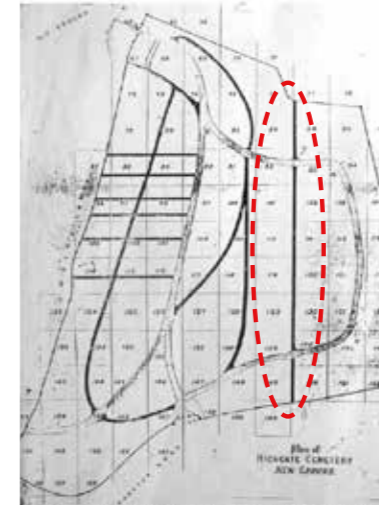
The review of minor access paths that pass between the lines of graves are indicated quite clearly in the Burial Plan Books for Highgate West and East. They show that many of these became the location for unmarked common graves, but also show where these paths are currently located, or can be re-discovered. These plans, and historic aerial photos of the Cemetery, were reviewed to see if access could be re-established to currently inaccessible parts of the Cemetery. The study concluded with a proposal to re-establish the historic path to the top of the Terrace Catacombs in the West side. Further explanation of this path is provided in the following section on accessibility.



Highgate Cemetery Enlargement 1855



Plan Book Grid Reference Plan. Date unknown, but appears to be the earliest plan of the East.



1865 Guidebook. Shows an early layout but quite inaccurate. Lime Path and lateral branches of Poplar Walk shown.



Stanford, Map of London and Suburbs, 1866



London - Middlesex III.72 Surveyed: 1869, Published: 1871, National Library of Scotland



1873-76 OS Map. Lodge at Chester Gate shown



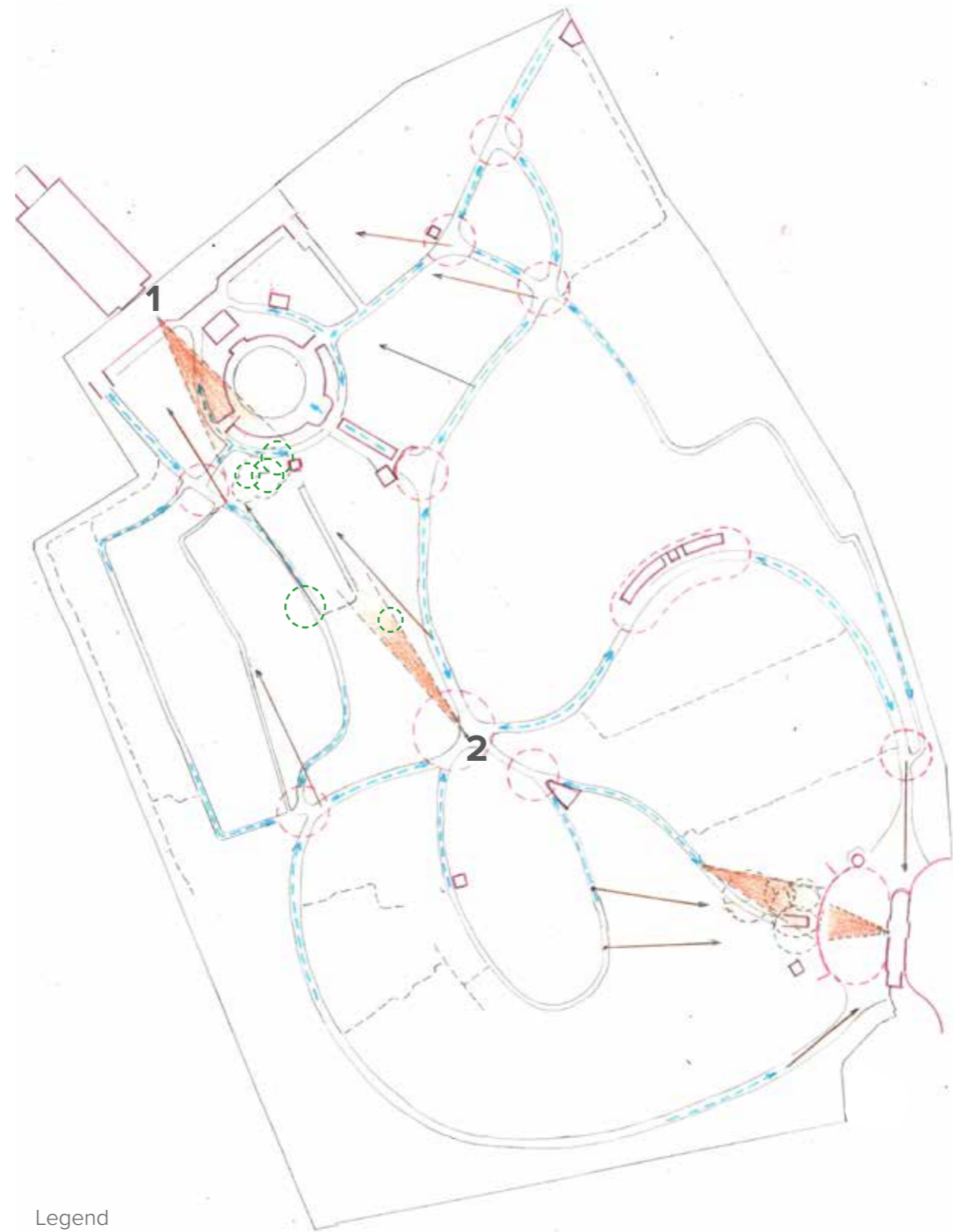
1895 OS Map. Connection to Swain's Lane removed. This was later cut back to the Main Avenue. Glasshouses at the north shown.

2.2 Historic Views







WEST SIDE

The processional route from the archway between the mortuary chapels, through the centre of the Colonnade, up the stairs to Comfort's Corner provided the opening sequence. From Comfort's Corner one would have had a first view of St Michaels Church at the top of the hill, leading visitors to the entrance of the Egyptian Avenue, that provided the central sequence. The cut in the hillside created by the Egyptian Avenue led to the final sequence and below ground world of the Lebanon Circle. Two stairs branched east and west from the circle, towards two flights of steps that placed visitors above the Terrace Catacombs, culminating in a magnificent view south to St Paul's Cathedral and the London skyline. This view was famous and attracted visitors to the cemetery; the view from this spot had been described by John Norden in 1593 when the site was a banqueting house on Lord Arundel's estate and by Daniel Defoe in the 1720s when the site was the terrace in front of Ashurst House.

View 1 from the terrace above the Terrace Catacombs and view 2 from Comfort's Corner were selected for restoration, as they will enhance the narrative of movement within the Cemetery and reveal views towards St Michaels Church, central London and St Paul's Cathedral. Through previous research these were illustrated numerous times during the 19th century as the set piece views that attracted visitors to the Cemetery. The views adjacent to the Terrace Catacombs entrance cannot be reintroduced due to the maturity of the surrounding woodland.



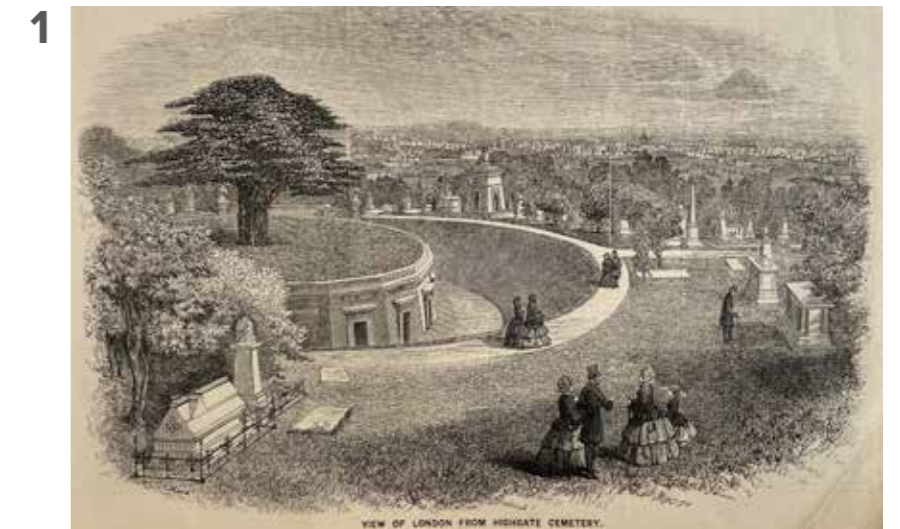
Legend

-  major views
-  incidental view
-  major monuments
-  vistas along paths
-  openings and meeting points
-  select trees to be removed and replaced with smaller tree species

Gustafson
Porter +
Bowman



Views identified in the Alan Baxter Highgate Cemetery Conservation Plan



View of London from Highgate Cemetery (1832-1879) (c.)

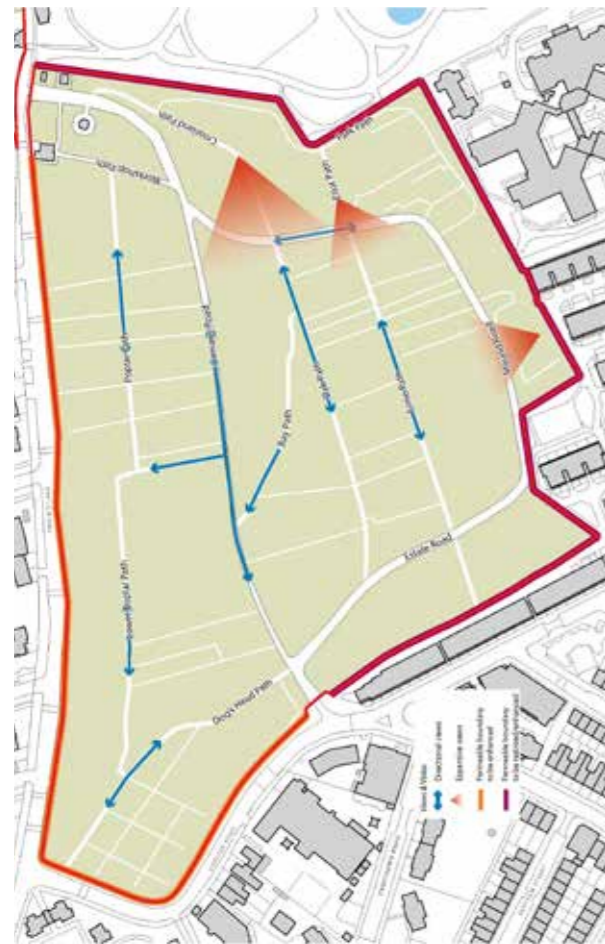


Main path looking up to St Michael's Church, probably 1857-58

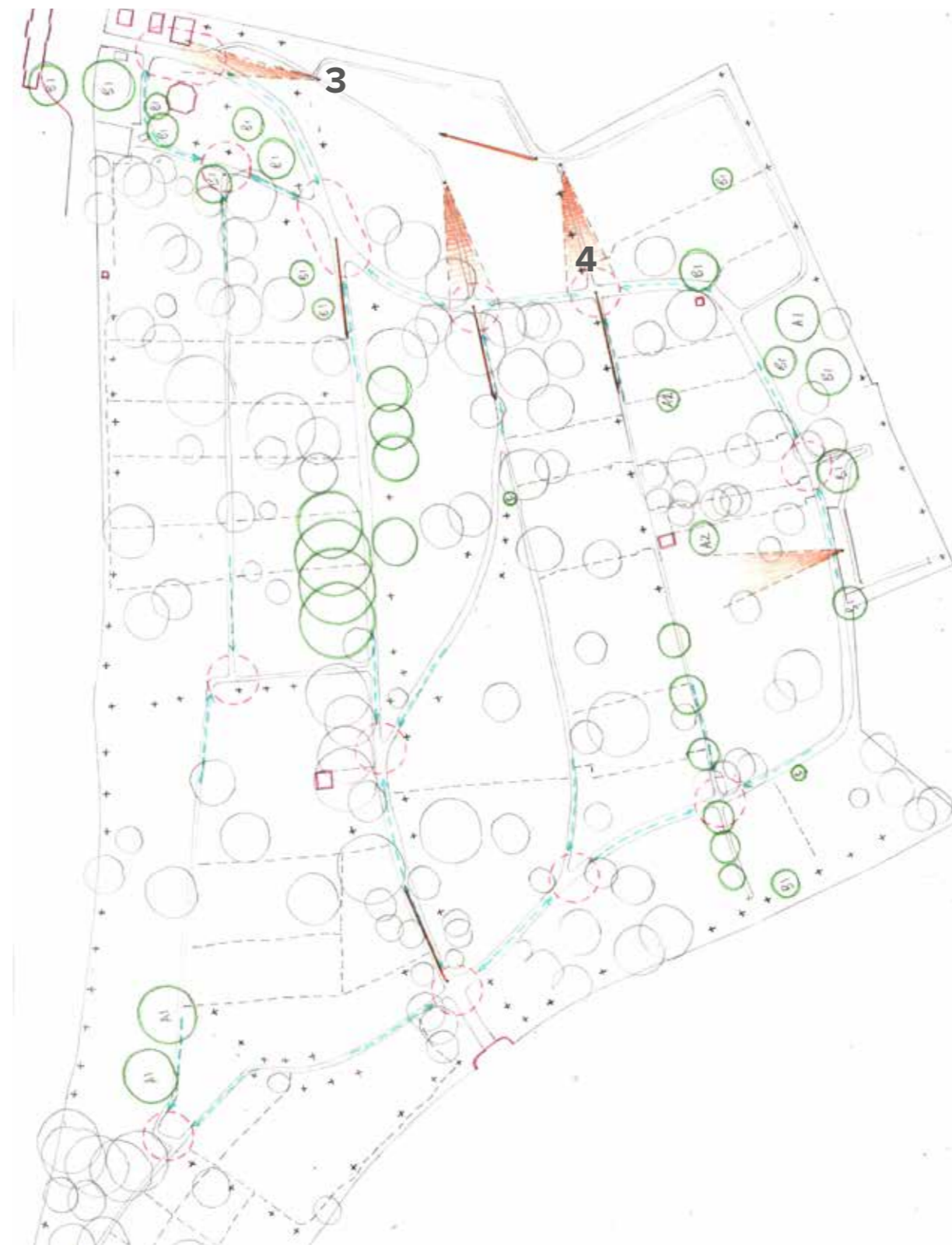
Historic Views

EAST SIDE

Given that the cemetery's east side is placed lower down the hill, it never afforded the same views, or level of interest from illustrators and photographers as the west side. The few illustrations and photos we have found, feature views from the hillside below Waterlow Park, towards the chapels on the west side, (viewpoint 3), or on the same elevated ground looking south along the straight north-south paths (viewpoint 4) which allows views of the linear tree lined path. These provide long internal views through the cemetery and often end on surrounding development.



Views identified in the Alan Baxter Highgate Cemetery Conservation Plan



3



Highgate Cemetery Crunchley's Illustrated London, 1842

4



There are no historical images of viewpoint 4 available but it is clear from this old photo of the Marx grave between 1970 and 1985 that up until the mid-80s the landscape of the east side was clear with open sightlines

The view from the terrace above the Terrace Catacombs - Viewpoint 1, requires removal of diseased Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trees and a few additional trees, allowing the view to central London to be reintroduced. The replacement trees planted on the lower terrace and woodland are smaller species that will allow the view to be retained.

The same trees removed to restore Viewpoint 1 enables a view towards St Michael's Church from Comfort's Corner - Viewpoint 2. This will recreate an important point of orientation that marks the direction of the route up the hill to the Egyptian Avenue, the Circle of Lebanon and Terrace Catacombs.

Please find further descriptions of Comforts Corner and the Circle of Lebanon in the Character Areas Section 8 of this report.



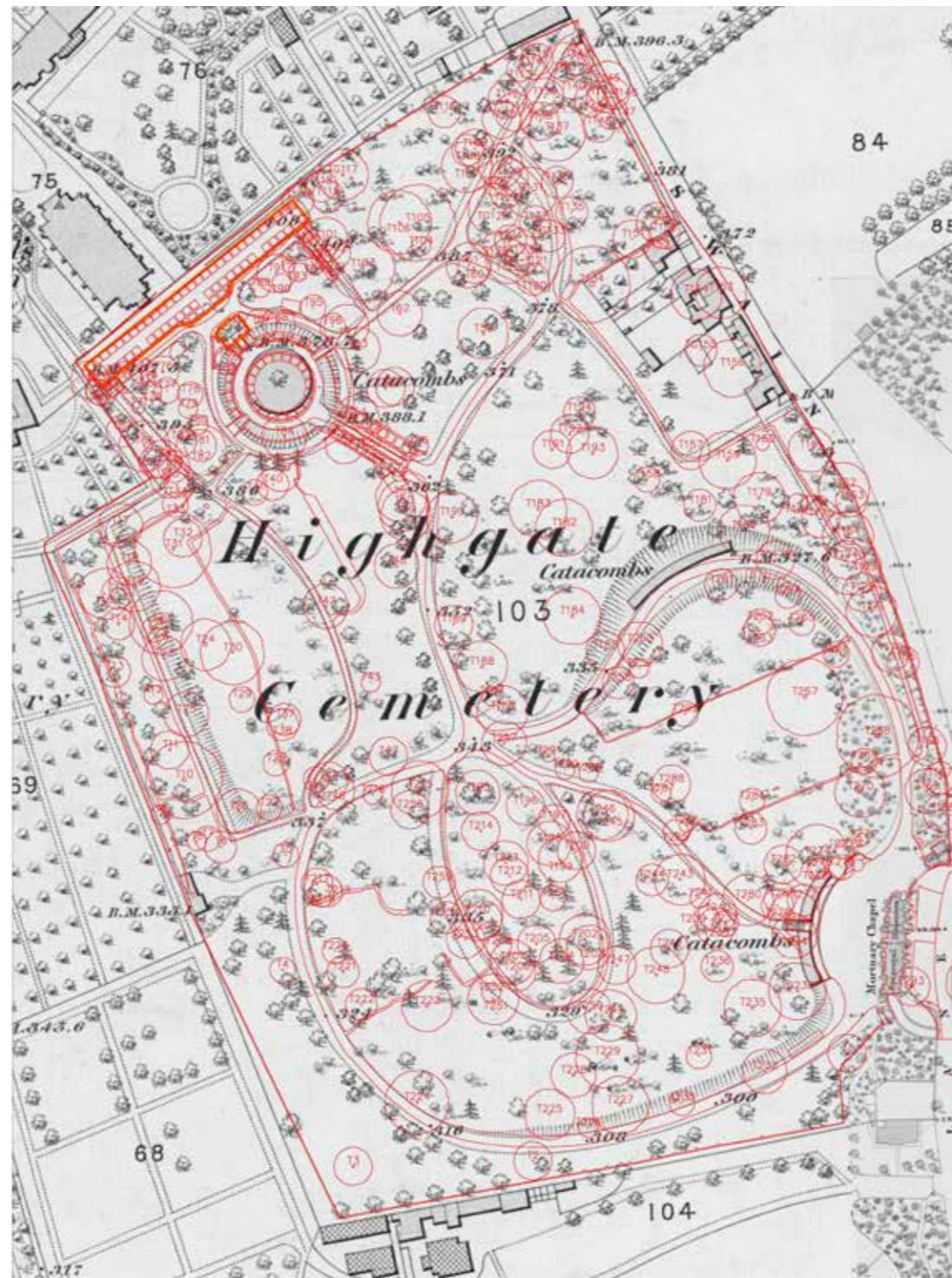
2.3 Historic Planting

HISTORIC AND PRESENT DAY OVERLAY

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps indicate the differences in character between the historic tree planting on each side of the cemetery. The Cemetery's west side was consecrated in 1839 and surveyed between 1863-9 just under 30 years after it was first laid out and shows the position of each specimen tree, shrubbery and hedgerow. The Cemetery's east side was added in 1854 and surveyed in 1869, just 15 years later and provides the same quality of information

The west side was planted as a park land, with trees aligned informally along the main drives and paths. Dense shrubberies were planted alongside the boundary wall to Swain's Lane, whilst the lower west and south boundaries were left open to look out on orchards and meadows. The areas to the south of the Lebanon Circle were also left open to maintain views to central London. The removal of Ash will result in openings in the woodland, allowing a similar strategy of planting new trees on the main avenues, with denser woodland along Swain's Lane and more open woodland along the west boundary. This strategy will leave small openings or glades, allowing afternoon and evening light to support greater plant diversity.

The tree layout on the east side of the cemetery was far less dense to suit the more utilitarian design. This probably took advantage of trees already located along the original field boundaries, planting between them, or formerly planting trees along the central drive. This more open landscape was enclosed by shrubberies at the entrance to Swain's Lane and a hedgerow placed around its entire perimeter. This more open landscape would have allowed for a greater density of graves and with the removal of the current monoculture of young Ash trees, this will again allow for a more open character to the landscape.

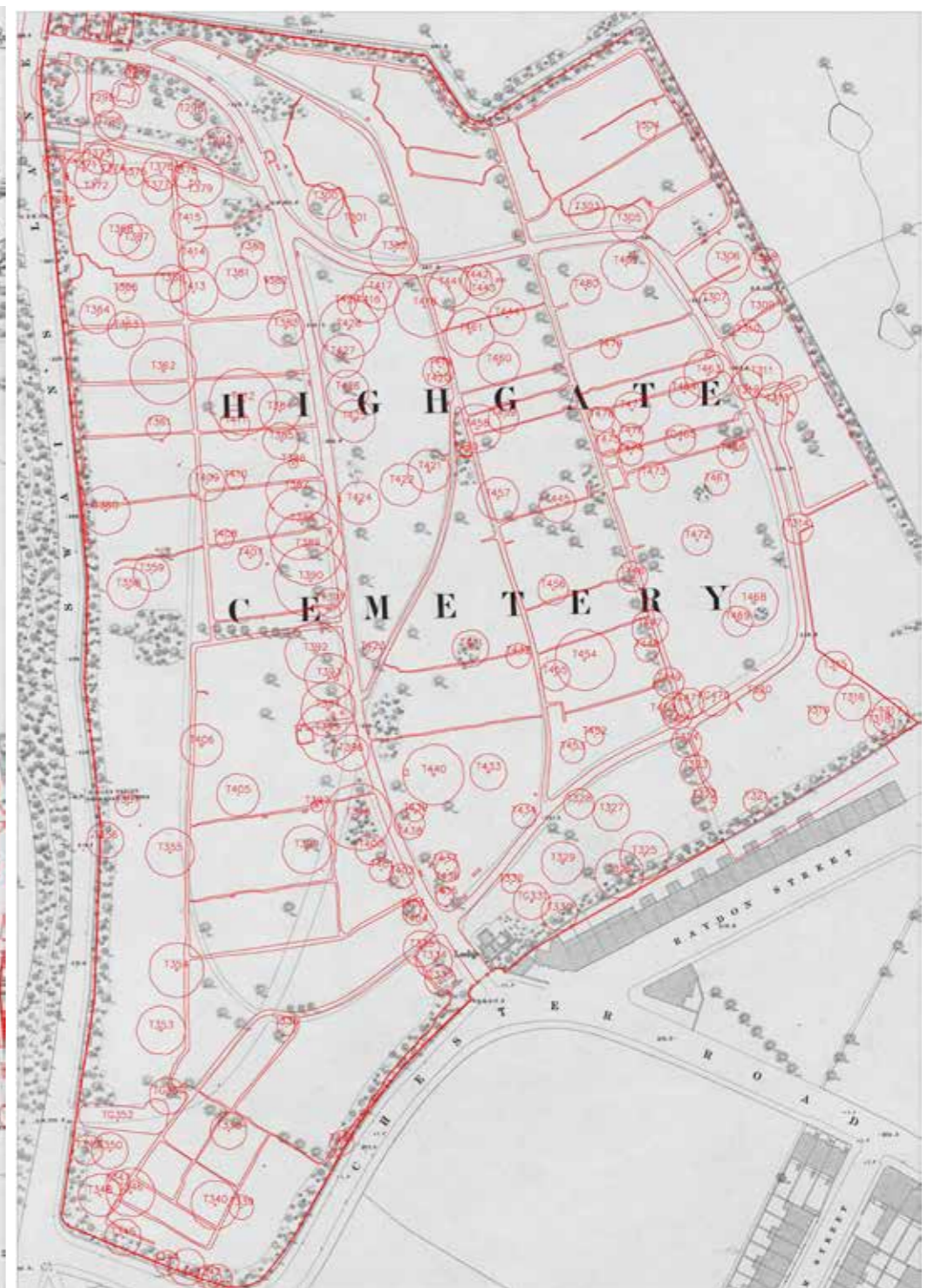


Mixed wood



Brushwood & Bushes

1st edition Ordnance Survey, 25" to the mile, London Sheet III, surveyed 1863-9, published 1870 (National Library of Scotland) - overlay with tree constraints plan



Mixed wood

London - Middlesex III.72 Surveyed: 1869, Published: 1871, National Library of Scotland - map overlaid to the Tree Constraints Plan

Historic Planting

PLANTING ZONES

The early illustrations and photos of the cemetery's west side give us a clue as to the tree choices made by Ramsay and subsequent plantmen. As one would expect from a landscape planted in the 19th Century there is a diverse range of tree species; some were preserved from the existing field boundaries; others like the Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) and Chestnuts (*Aesculus* and *Castanea*) were from the garden of Ashurst House. Newly introduced species were brought in from Ramsay's Nursery at the Brompton Botanic Garden, with an eclectic mix of evergreen, deciduous and non-native species. Whilst at the top of the hill around the Circle of Lebanon, illustrations depict an array of weeping trees.



St. Michaels Church from the Cemetery, nd (HCA) showing the presence of weeping trees



View in cemetery, Anonymous, 1830-1850 (c.) (c.) showing the presence of a mix of conifers and weeping trees



Highgate Cemetery, 1841. London edited by Charles Knight (Virtue, c 1880) showing the presence of the Cedar and Elms



View of Highgate and Kentish Town Cemetery, Unknown, 1839 showing the presence of Elm trees



Main path looking up to St Michael's Church, probably 1857-58 showing the presence of pine trees