

- 5.40 Highgate has been famous as the resting place of Karl Marx since 1883, when he was interred in a plot set back from what is now known as the Lime Path. In 1954, the Communist Party of Great Britain raised money to relocate the grave to a more prominent site around 100 ft (30m) further north and erect a large imposing monument with bust by sculptor Laurence Bradshaw. The Marx grave (see **Figure 5.25 and 5.26**) has increased the public profile of the Cemetery but has also attracted vandals over the years.
- 5.41 The profitability of the London Cemetery Company reduced markedly in the post war years. In 1960 the London Cemetery Company spun Highgate Cemetery off to its subsidiary company, United Cemeteries Ltd.
- 5.42 The London Cemetery Company later became the Raybourne Group which went into liquidation in 1978 with an estimated deficiency of over £4 million, and it was finally dissolved in 1985. By the 1970s Highgate Cemetery was running at a commercial loss, which led to the closure of the Cemetery at Easter 1975. At the time a local public petition collected over 1,000 names in protest at the closure of this much loved and valued place. This protest led to the inauguration of the Friends of Highgate Cemetery in October 1975.



Figure 5.12 OS map, surveyed 1952, published 1953 (source: ProMap)

- 5.43 By the 1950s or earlier, standards of maintenance in the Cemetery had fallen due to minimal resources: fewer repairs were made to the landscape or to the structures within it, and the trees were less diligently maintained. This was accompanied by an increase in vandalism, including some incidents of a disturbing nature. As maintenance reduced, the vegetation began to encroach upon the Cemetery, creating an increasingly overgrown and romantic wilderness. As described by the critic Ian Nairn in 1966:
- At first the landscape is ordinary. But as you wind up the hill it becomes more and more overgrown, choked in winter by dead fronds with an unnerving resemblance to Spanish moss... Then, with a shock like a blood-curdling scream, the Egyptian entrance shows up. Beyond it, the Catacombs... gently deliquescent, crumbling away. (Nairn, 1966, p.212)*
- 5.44 This increasing atmosphere of romantic decay contributed significantly to the Cemetery's appeal. It became a mysterious landscape, inviting exploration and yielding unexpected discoveries as crumbling tombstones were uncovered under creeping tendrils of ivy. It exercised a potent effect on the imagination, providing a connection with the lost world of the Victorians, now quietly disintegrating under the encroaching vegetation.
- 5.45 This was a powerful motivating factor in the formation of the Trust, who principally wished to reinstate access for grave owners. Although the London Borough of Camden was offered the option of taking over the Cemetery in 1976, they were hesitant to assume the physical and financial burden of maintaining the neglected and decaying site. The Friends of Highgate Cemetery took on the challenge of managing the landscape and maintaining the monuments.
- 5.46 The Friends inherited a landscape that was increasingly overgrown and buildings and monuments which had been neglected for a number of years. They were keen to preserve the atmospheric character of the Cemetery and also lacked the resources, professional staff and time to achieve the high levels of maintenance practised historically. They took an approach to landscape management which was described as 'managed neglect', attempting to contain the uncontrolled growth of trees and undergrowth whilst preserving the romantic atmosphere of the Cemetery.
- 5.47 This was a reasonable response to the management difficulties the Friends inherited, but has created its own set of problems. The atmosphere of the Cemetery has changed as the woodland has matured. The policy of 'managed neglect' has itself proved resource hungry and, despite the heroic efforts of hard-working volunteers, has contributed to the present poor condition of the landscape. This is manifested in uneven and unstable ground, a dominant young broadleaf woodland (ash and sycamore), the loss of historic planting as it is overwhelmed by uncontrolled vegetation and the erosion of much of the subtlety of the landscape design in terms of views, spatial relationships and character. It has also allowed ongoing damage to hard landscaping and monuments from the vegetation.
- 5.48 The Friends' approach to the buildings has been one of proactive conservation and restoration. Since the mid-1980s, all of the principal buildings and monuments have been conserved, supported by grant aid from English Heritage (now Historic England). Projects include the Terrace Catacombs, Chapels, North Lodge, Colonnade, Courtyard, Egyptian Avenue, Circle of Lebanon, Beer Mausoleum, South Boundary Wall and North Boundary Wall.
- 5.49 In addition, the gardeners' compound in the East Side was built in 1994. The Dissenters' Chapel was converted in order to provide office and archive space, with the Anglican Chapel used for meetings and services. The Chapels were comprehensively restored at the same time.
- 5.50 Because of these achievements, the next generation can focus on refinements to the building stock. The pinnacles were removed from the Chapels in the 1950s, presumably for safety and maintenance costs, and have not yet been reinstated. Other changes are more subtle. It was discovered that the original base of the Colonnade is partly obscured by the Courtyard pavement, which was laid at a slightly higher level in the 1980s restoration. This change in level (and concealment of the column bases) is visible in the photographs at **Figure 5.27** and **5.28**, which show the Courtyard and Courtyard Colonnade before and after repaving works in the 1980s.
- 5.51 In recent years, as space has diminished, the Cemetery has accepted the smaller monuments associated with cremation burials, sometimes at the expense of the historic layout. The East Side of the Cemetery has become known for graves of imaginative design, such as Patrick Caulfield's contemporary sculpture (2005) Sir Colin St John Wilson's architectural work in miniature (installed 2016) and Malcolm MacLaren's film prop shield made into stone (2010).
- 5.52 Further information on the historic development of individual buildings is provided in **Section 7.0**.
- 5.53 Highgate is a working Cemetery. Recent photographs of the Cemetery are reproduced in the next Section.
- 5.54 The principal new burial space that has been created since 1975 is the Mound in the East Side, which is now almost at capacity. In the original part of the Cemetery, burial space has been created on Cuttings Road, which has not proved popular, and also near the Meadow where a principal path has been narrowed. The Highgate Cemetery Act enables a sustainable approach to burial space, balancing modern needs with the preservation of Highgate's heritage.
- 5.55 Most of the burial plots in the Cemetery were sold in perpetuity, although the Highgate Cemetery Act 2022 now allows the reuse of graves.
- OLDER MONUMENTS**
- 5.56 Highgate Cemetery contains over 50,000 monuments and memorials, primarily dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 5.57 Along the avenues of the Cemetery there is generally a hierarchy to the layout of the monuments. The principal paths are flanked with larger, grander monuments, which tend to have substantial brick-lined vaults beneath. Behind these burials is typically a second rank of monuments, some including vaults. Beyond are a series of simpler and more modest headstones, with occasional taller monuments which provide accent points.
- 5.58 A scoping survey on the condition of monuments in the Cemetery has indicated that a large number of the monuments are in a poor condition. This is primarily caused by tree growth and vegetation, which has caused major damage throughout the Cemetery, including parts of the East Side

- 5.59 Other causes of damage include earth movement and uneven settlement, which is exacerbated by the sloping site; general decay caused by weathering; and some cases of vandalism.
- 5.60 There has been a programme of restoration and repair to the key architectural set-pieces and many of the listed monuments mainly carried out during the 1980s and 1990s, including the Circle of Lebanon and the Beer Mausoleum. These structures are generally in a stable condition but are now in need of maintenance repairs and further interventions to maintain their integrity.
- 5.61 In the East Side, the most significant monuments are arranged in double ranks on either side of the main pathways, in particular the Carriage Road and Marx Road. There is also a cluster of set-piece tombs and mausolea around the main entrance leading down to Cundey's Corner. Behind these are a dense array of headstones and lesser monuments.
- 5.62 The scoping survey revealed that, although tree growth is a less severe problem than in the original part of the Cemetery, i.e. west of Swain's Lane, it is still placing many monuments at risk. Monuments on sloping ground are suffering from subsidence as the ground sinks away from under them. This is often exacerbated by tree growth making monuments unstable. Uncontrolled ivy growth has also swamped memorials in some parts of the Cemetery.

### RECENT MEMORIALS

- 5.63 Additional burial space has been provided by infilling spaces amongst existing graves or creating areas for new burials within the historic Cemetery landscape. New memorials interact with the historic character of the Cemetery as they are scattered throughout the existing older monuments.

- 5.64 In the Cemetery, a space near the Glade has been created for cremation burials. This is discreetly tucked away from the main path and screened from view by larger historic monuments. The loosely informal arrangement of memorials that has evolved here differs from the prevailing character of the West Side of the Cemetery. Along Cuttings Road, space created by clearing vegetation has been only partially taken up for burials. Here, the modern memorials are more prominent and contrast in terms of form and materials with the older monuments nearby.
- 5.65 In the East Side, a series of recent monuments have been added along Carriage Road. These are sometimes quirky in design and often stand out against the nineteenth-century monuments. The memorial to Malcolm McLaren, for example, contrasts in form and materials with the Portland stone and granite memorials adjacent.
- 5.66 The smaller memorials associated with cremation burials have altered the character of the East Side of the Cemetery, particularly between the main gate and Cundey's Corner. Their loosely informal arrangement, coupled with their smaller scale, contrasts with the formal and monumental groupings. These contrasts are especially acute around the Cundey Memorial. By the Dalziel Mausoleum, the original green setting of the memorial has been cluttered by later additional memorials. In both cases the historic, landscaped boundaries have been infilled with smaller memorials, so that these monuments have lost the intended formality of their setting.
- 5.67 Recently, the Goldhammer Mausoleum, erected in the Courtyard 2016–17, has shown that it is possible to add new structures to sensitive areas in a way that complements and reinforces the historic character of the West Side of the Cemetery.

### BEFORE AND AFTER PHOTOGRAPHS

- 5.68 The following photographs provide a comparison of the Cemetery between different periods.

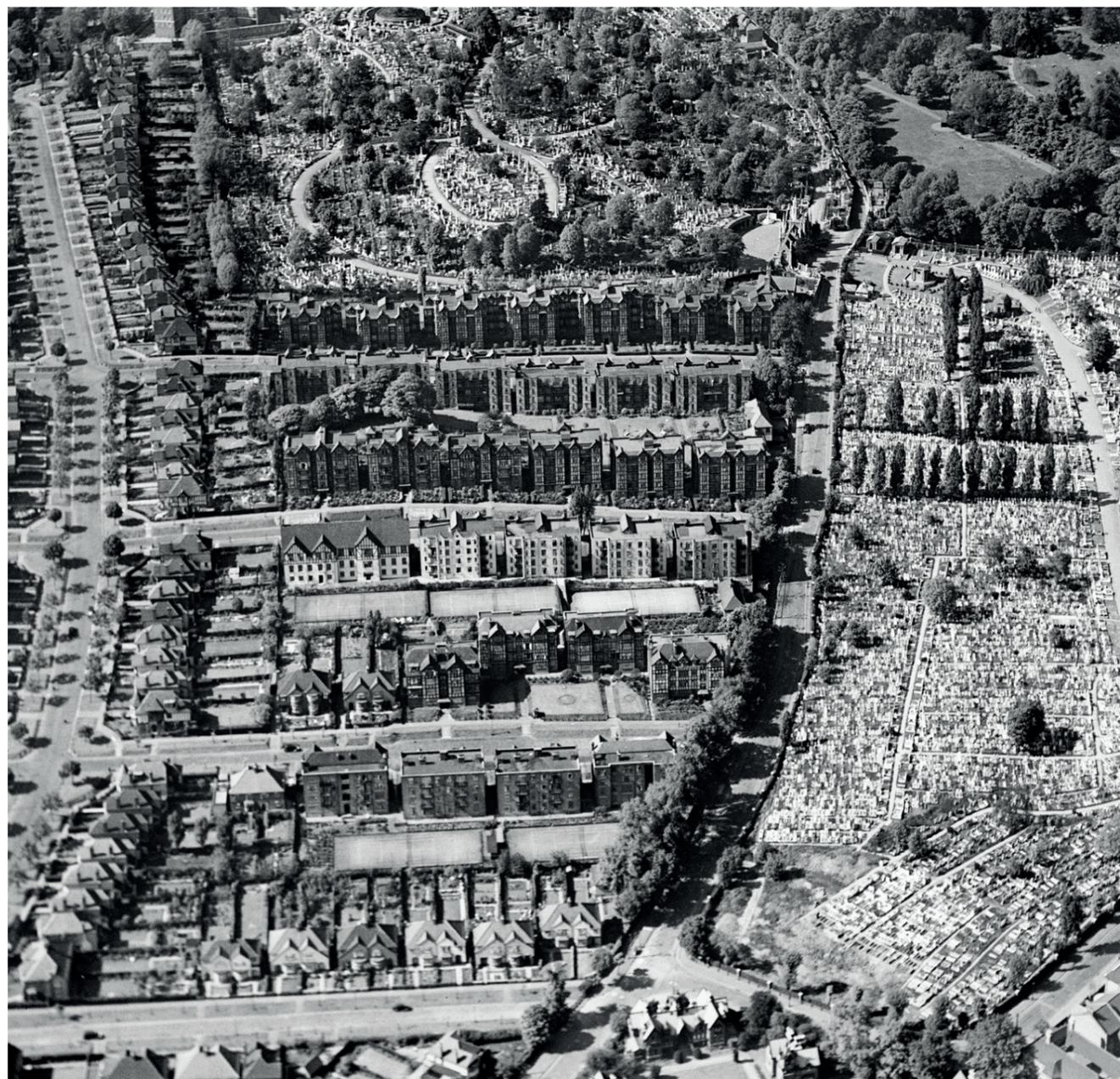


Figure 5.13 Aerial view from the south, 1939 (source: Historic England, Britain from Above EPW061147)



Figure 5.14 Aerial view from the south, 2023 (source: Google Earth)