

## Granite Memorial to the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of St. Albans at Highgate Cemetery: Heritage Statement

The monument to the 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of St. Albans, which currently stands near the entrance to the West Cemetery at Highgate is the property of the current titleholder, Murray de Vere, 14<sup>th</sup> Duke of St. Albans. It is a cenotaph, which has been moved several times since its installation c.1850, and has never marked the burial spot of the man it commemorates.

William Aubrey de Vere Beauclerk, 9<sup>th</sup> Duke of St. Albans, was born in 1801 at his father's principal seat, Redbourne, in Lincolnshire. When he succeeded to the title in 1825, in addition to Redbourne he inherited the Bestwood estate in Nottinghamshire. He considered making Bestwood his base of operations and as early as 1825 thought seriously about prospecting for coal there and had a survey done. In the end, he kept his principal seat at Redbourne, but spent time at Bestwood and took a great interest in the running of the property. He it was who laid out the modern estate and brought water to the gardens.

In 1827 he caused a scandal among the aristocracy by marrying the richest woman in England, Harriett Coutts, née Mellon, the widow of Thomas Coutts the banker. Harriett had become an actress after a childhood of poverty in Ireland. Everything changed, however, when the 37-year-old thespian married the octogenarian Coutts, who died 7 years later leaving her his entire wealth (including his 50% stake in the bank). When she herself died in 1837, after 10 years of marriage to the 9th Duke and 15 years as a senior partner in the bank, she left her money to Angela Burdett-Coutts, a granddaughter of Thomas Coutts, who became a noted philanthropist.

The widowed Duke married as his second wife another Irishwoman, Elizabeth Gubbins, and they had two children, William and Diana. When he himself died on 30 May, 1849, following a riding accident, his 9-year-old son succeeded to the title. Even before he came of age in 1861, the 10<sup>th</sup> Duke had decided to make Bestwood his principal seat. In 1862 he demolished the medieval hunting lodge that was on the site and employed the architect S.S. Teulon to build a house in the Victorian gothic style. This was finally completed in 1864. One of the first guests to visit the house was the Duke's Cambridge chum, the Prince of Wales, who liked it so well that he employed Teulon to redesign parts of the Sandringham estate.

It seems fitting that the father of the 10th Duke should have a presence at Bestwood through his splendid granite memorial, commissioned by his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, Elizabeth Gubbins. The memorial was erected at Highgate Cemetery c.1850. Although his wife had purchased grave no.3218 for him to be buried at Highgate and he himself had purchased one of the large burial chambers in the Circle of Lebanon some ten years before he died, he was not destined to lay his bones at Highgate. His final resting place—rather surprisingly—was with his 1<sup>st</sup> wife, Harriet, in the Beauclerk mausoleum at St. Andrew's Church, Redbourne, Lincs.

On 31 December 1859, a report in *The Builder* about Highgate Cemetery included the following passage: 'The tombs of plain and polished granite are numerous. Amongst these

may be noticed a plinth, surmounted by a ducal coronet, to the memory of William Aubrey de Vere, ninth duke of St. Albans, who died May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1849.'

[The Chief Executive of Highgate Cemetery Dr. Ian Dungavell wrote to Charles Beauclerk on 18 June 2015: 'I was very interested to read about your idea to move the St. Albans memorial to Bestwood Lodge (a house with a dramatic entrance porch well known to all fans of S.S. Teulon who, coincidentally, is buried here at Highgate). It will make a fine feature in the rose garden and, as you say, the claims to historical association are stronger.']