

CEMETERIES UNDER REVIEW

Future Government policy directions

Paradise Preserved was issued in April by English Heritage and English Nature as a draft introduction to the assessment, evaluation, conservation and management of historic cemeteries – their landscape design, important buildings and memorials, and wildlife value

Is it a short cut to school or the shops? Is it a quiet place for a lunch break? A chance to reflect? A wildlife sanctuary? A great hideout for children? What is your local urban cemetery used for?

In drafting *Paradise Preserved*,¹ English Heritage and English Nature acknowledge that cemeteries are, foremost, places to respect and commemorate the dead and are important to the families and friends of the people buried there. The Parliamentary Select Committee on Cemeteries² and the subsequent Government response³ highlighted the need for more guidance on cemeteries and their care.

Cemeteries are also biographies of communities and their social history. Cemetery design and layout reflect fashions. Different religions and denominations are characterised by different styles of commemoration. Inscriptions on the monuments contain important information about the people who are buried there and provide useful evidence for people studying genealogy and family history.

In cemeteries, designed and natural features are combined to create unique landscapes. Design elements include the layout of the site with avenues, drives and footpaths, boundaries and burial plots, significant gateways and chapels, mortuaries and shelters, sculpture and monuments, and planting schemes with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that evoke mourning and contemplation. In time, this artificial environment is softened, overlaid and sometimes obliterated by the overgrowth of the original planting and by the natural arrival of other plants. Wildlife colonises these quiet, green spaces, which become important habitats for plants and animals. In some cases, urban cemeteries also represent locked pockets of countryside with remnant habitats such as heath.

Some cemeteries of national importance are included in English Heritage's *Register of Parks and Gardens of special historic interest in England*. Many more include buildings, monuments and other features that are listed. Others are Conservation Areas, and some are designated as sites of nature conservation importance. A review

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The Health and Safety Executive's campaign poster 'Be Respectful, Be Safe'

is underway to add more of these designed landscapes to the *Register of Historic Parks and Gardens*, and more sculpture and architectural features are being listed.

Friends Groups

The champions for cemeteries have been the Friends Groups,⁴ often started as pressure groups to counter an owner's neglect or proposals for inappropriate use. Groups have continued to care for these cemeteries and often help in practical ways such as surveying and recording, fund raising, and volunteering for activities such as clearing brambles and running open days. For example, The Friends of Arnos Vale Cemetery have set up a trust, with the support of Bristol City Council and English Heritage to safeguard the burial ground, provide a public garden in the heart of the city and develop a wildlife and educational centre. A Compulsory Purchase Order was issued earlier this year with a view to the trust taking on the care and maintenance of the cemetery at a cost of £2.5 million.

High priority of maintenance

In response to the Urban White Paper,⁵ the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce⁶ reported this summer. Cemeteries are acknowledged as special green spaces and, in common with other parks and open spaces, they face maintenance challenges.

One particular maintenance issue is the safety of memorials. Concerned about the number of accidents in cemeteries, the Health and Safety Executive issued advice in 2001 to local authority enforcement officers on the management of unstable memorials.⁷ Cemetery burial authorities – the local authority or a private company – have a duty to assess the risk of all cemetery structures and cemetery work activities. The industry organisations, the Confederation of Burial Authorities (CBA) and the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration, carried out research in 1998 on the stability of memorials

and found that many authorities were not carrying out these checks, especially in closed burial grounds. Many of the unstable memorials seem to be relatively recent stones, installed within the last 30 years. Some important memorials are protected by Conservation Area or Listed Building status but many more are yet unrecorded.

Today, four years after the research on stability, there is a proliferation of memorials either laid down or cordoned off with unsightly hazard tape or bags. Such measures are intended to be temporary until the memorials can be repaired safely, but whether resources can be found is another issue. Parents and teachers are asked to tell children that, while cemeteries are intriguing places to visit, they are not playgrounds. For some communities, however, cemeteries are the only local green space.



The Grade II listed monument to Raja Rammohun Roy – a Hindu reformer and thinker who died in Bristol 1833 – designed by William Prinsep. Beyond is the Dissenters' Chapel, with a Greek Ionic portico designed by Charles Underwood about 1840. Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol (Grade II*), was laid out by Bristol nurserymen James Garraway and Martin Mayes*

Cemeteries under review

The Health and Safety Executive's summary of accidents involving children and memorials 1982-2000⁸

Both pictures: Pupils of William Patten School at work on projects at Abney Park Cemetery, a 32-acre woodland and Local Nature Reserve. Established in 1840, the cemetery is now owned by the London Borough of Hackney. A thriving Education Service provides an environmental education programme for primary and secondary schools

3-year-old boy crushed by gravestone – fatal (Wear Valley)
2-year-old child injured by falling gravestone – non-fatal (Sunderland)
2-year-old child injured by falling gravestone – non-fatal (Preston)
9-year-old child crushed by gravestone – fatal (Liverpool)
9-year-old child crushed by gravestone – non-fatal (Burnley)
4-year-old child trapped by falling headstone – non-fatal (Westminster)
20-month-old child struck by recently erected headstone – non-fatal (Plymouth)
3-year-old child trapped by fallen headstone – non-fatal (Port Talbot)
5-year-old child crushed by memorial – non-fatal (Chester)
6-year-old child crushed by falling memorial – fatal (Harrogate)

Educational resource

Health and safety issues aside, however, cemeteries are full of treasures and offer an excellent education resource for schools. They are used to teach history and ecology as well as other aspects of the National Curriculum such as language work on epitaphs, map work, geology, design and technology, and citizenship (see Spicer, 30–1). English Heritage's magazine for teachers, *Heritage Learning*,⁹ has highlighted school projects such as the William Patten School's work at the urban cemetery in Abney Park, Hackney, and the Schools Adopt Monuments 2000 scheme¹⁰ which included a study of the Muslim Burial Ground at Brookwood Cemetery, Woking. There are also English Heritage teacher's guides and videos¹¹ on recording and surveying sites. Groups such as the Living Churchyard and Cemetery Project¹²



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have also produced education packs to encourage children and community groups to learn about wildlife and its conservation.

Pilot survey of burial grounds

Causes for concern – the lack of burial space and maintenance funding, clashes between the historic, cultural and ecological importance of cemeteries, and health and safety issues – led the Select Committee to challenge the future validity of burial practice and procedure, given so many demographic, cultural, historical and environmental changes over the last 150 years.¹³ Local communities have been responsible for burials in the past, but new Government direction is now needed, both to deal with the lack of burial space and give the burial industry direction. In response, The Home Office has convened a group to provide good practice advice on the provision, management and maintenance of burial grounds as well as burial practice and procedures, and to make recommendations for policy. A pilot survey of burial grounds was begun during the summer to compile information on the number, condition and operational liability of cemeteries; the group plans to report to Ministers by December 2002. English Heritage and English Nature's *Paradise Preserved* contributes to this debate and offers guidance on managing the different conservation interests in cemeteries. □

Jenifer White
Senior Landscape Advisor



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The draft *Paradise Preserved* is available on www.english-heritage.org.uk. Please send comments to Jenifer White, English Heritage, 23 Savile Row, London W1S 2ET or jenifer.white@english-heritage.org.uk

Burial and Cemeteries Advisory Group Membership

Association of Burial Authorities
 Association of Private Crematoria and Cemeteries
 Board of Deputies of British Jews
 Cemetery Research Group, University of York
 Churches Funerals Group
 Commonwealth War Graves Commission
 Confederation of Burial Authorities
 Council for the Care of Churches
 Cremation Society of Great Britain
 Cruse Bereavement Care
 Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
 Department of Culture, Media and Sport
 English Heritage
 English Nature
 Federation of British Cremation Authorities
 Health and Safety Executive
 Home Office
 Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration
 Local Government Association
 Muslim Council of Great Britain
 National Assembly for Wales
 National Association of Local Councils
 National Association of Memorial Masons
 National Federation of Cemetery Friends
 Society of Local Council Clerks
 Welsh Local Government Association

- 1 *Paradise Preserved* is a draft document published on both English Heritage (www.english-heritage.org.uk see>conserving historic places>conservation advice>conservation and management of cemeteries) and English Nature (www.english-nature.org.uk) websites.
- 2 *Eighth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee: Cemeteries*, London and English Heritage's memorandum for the inquiry, House of Commons, March 2001 (See www.parliament.uk)
- 3 *The Government reply to the eighth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 2000–2001 HC91, Cemeteries. Cm5281*, Home Department, October 2001, London: TSO
- 4 See National Federation of Cemetery Friends web site and links (www.cemeteryfriends.fsnet.co.uk)
- 5 *Our towns and cities – the future: Delivering an urban renaissance*. Urban White Paper, Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, November 2000
- 6 *Green Spaces, Better Places: Final report of the Urban Green Spaces Taskforce*, DTLR, May 2002
- 7 *Management of unstable memorials*, Local Authority Circular 23/18, SIM 7/2001/28, Health and Safety Executive, August 2001 (www.hse.gov.uk/lau/lacs/23-18.htm)
- 8 *Health and Safety Executive launches campaign to prevent more graveyard tragedies*, Press Release E188:01, 17 October 2001 (www.hse.gov.uk/press/e01188.htm)
- 9 *Exploring an urban cemetery: Heritage Learning 11*, English Heritage, Spring 1998
- 10 *Schools Adopt Monuments 2000: Heritage Learning 18*, English Heritage, Summer 2000
- 11 English Heritage teacher's guides: Susanna Marcus and Rosie Barker, *Using Historic Parks and Gardens* (1997); Richard Morris and Mike Corbishley, *Churches, cathedrals and chapels* (1996); Sallie Purkis, *Using memorials* (1995)
- 12 The Living Churchyard and Cemetery Project, *Hunt the Daisy*, 1998, Tel. 024 76696969
- 13 *The Government reply to the eighth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 2000–2001 HC91, Cemeteries, Cm5281*, Home Department, October 2001, London: TSO