

Nominate a Heritage Asset

Ss Mary and John's Churchyard, Cowley Road



1. WHAT IS IT? Is it one of the following?	Tick
a building or group of buildings	
a monument or site (an area of archaeological remains or a structure other than a building)	y
a place (e.g. a street, park, garden or natural space)	y
a landscape (an area defined by visual features or character, e.g. a city centre, village, suburb or field system)	

2. WHY IS IT INTERESTING? Is it interesting in any of the following ways?	Tick / Rank
Historic interest – a well documented association with a person, event, episode of history, or local industry	y
Archaeological interest – firm evidence of potential to reveal more about the human past through further study	
Architectural interest – an example of an architectural style, a building of particular use, a technique of building, or use of materials	
Artistic interest – It includes artistic endeavour to communicate meaning or use of design (including landscape design) to enhance appearance	y
What is it about the asset that provides this interest?	
<p>Historic interest: The churchyard was bought for the people of the East Oxford suburb by Father Richard Meux Benson as part of a large plot intended for the construction and support of a church. It was consecrated in 1878 and included space for non-conformists and atheists, as well as the Anglican Community of the church.</p> <p>The graveyard provided a place of burial for a large part of the suburb's community in the late 19th and early 20th century. It continues to have an important role as a place of meeting and commemoration within the suburb, retaining the memorials of numerous citizens of the suburb who contribute to its historic interest. These include (among many others) the memorial to the Cowley Fathers and Father Benson, as well as the members of the suburb's other religious orders</p>	

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and locally notable politicians such as the builder Thomas Gray. A community website provides considerable detail about the identity and monuments erected to those buried in the graveyard, which is a fascinating resource for local history.

In opening the graveyard the Lord Bishop of Oxford described its design which had been laid out "...with so much care and taste, ... [so that] those who lived about it [could] make it a place of resort."

Artistic interest:

The artistic interest of the graveyard is formed both by the design of monuments and in the lay out of the graveyard as a public space, including its historic tree planting and the arrangement of paths that provide a series of routes through it. This has been added to over the years with dedicated areas of remembrance including seating and other garden features.

3. WHY IS IT LOCALLY VALUED? Is the interest of the asset valued locally for any of the following reasons?	Tick / Rank
Association: It connects us to people and events that shaped the identity or character of the area	y
Illustration: It illustrates an aspect of the area's past that makes an important contribution to its identity or character	y
Evidence: It is an important resource for understanding and learning about the area's history	
Aesthetics: It makes an important contribution to the positive look of the area either by design or fortuitously	y
Communal: It is important to the identity, cohesion, spiritual life or memory of all or part of the community	y
How is the asset locally valued as heritage?	
<p>Communal: The graveyard has an important communal value in providing a space and individual memorials to many past residents of the East Oxford Suburb, many of whom had an important influence on the character of the suburb. It was designed as a space for the use of the people of the suburb for relaxation, reflection and peaceful enjoyment, which it continues to do to this day. It has an important role in the spiritual life of the community, and is regularly used as a space for Evensong services.</p> <p>Aesthetics: The graveyard retains many elements of the formal plan that was created in the 1870s, whilst the maturing of the tree planting provides an attractive sylvan character to the southern half of the area in particular. The tall trees also contribute to the character of surrounding streets. The green space with attractive planting is part of the curtilage of the listed church of Ss Mary and John, providing it with an attractive green setting. The many gravestones and memorials also contribute to the aesthetic value of the area</p> <p>Illustration: The many memorials to the members of Religious orders in particular help to illustrate the role of these communities in the early development of the suburb and the distinctive character of East Oxford as a focus in the city for those wishing to live a religious life.</p> <p>Association: The churchyard has a strong connection with Father Benson in particular as an individual who made a major contribution to the landscape and community of East Oxford in the mid and late 19th century.</p>	

4. WHAT MAKES ITS LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE SPECIAL? Do any of the following features make the heritage significance of the asset stand out above the surrounding environment?	Tick
Age ... Is it particularly old, or of a date that is significant to the local area?	y
Rarity ... Is it unusual in the area or a rare survival of something that was once common?	y
Integrity ... Is it largely complete or in a near to original condition?	y
Group value ... Is it part of a group that have a close historic, aesthetic or communal association?	y
Oxford's identity ... Is it important to the identity or character of the city or a particular part of it?	y

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Other ... Is there another way you think it has special local value?

How does this contribute to its value?

Oxford's Identity: The churchyard is a focal space for the suburb, commemorating many of those who contributed to the growth of the suburb and who forged its identity as a distinct district within (and originally largely outside) the city. It continues to function as an important meeting place and a focus of community endeavour to maintain an attractive environment for the people of the suburb. As surviving element of the Victorian landscape of the suburb, which was designed to accommodate the needs of a diverse community with many differing religious beliefs it makes a strong contribution to the character of the East Oxford Suburb.

Age and Integrity: The churchyard was developed during the early development of the East Oxford Suburb, at a time when many of the surrounding streets of housing had not been built and therefore represents an early element of the suburb's landscape. It has retained many of the designed features laid out in the 1870s.

Rarity: The graveyard is a rare green open space within the heart of the suburb (although there are a number of green spaces around its edges).

Group value: The graveyard is part of a group of features that are associated with Father Benson as a notable individual within the suburb's history and with the several Religious Orders who made East Oxford their home in the late 19th century, as such it contributes to the combined interest and contribution to the character of the suburb of the heritage assets associated with both of these themes.