

Introduction

South Hill Park is a large, attractive, historic park located south of Bracknell town centre. The grounds are open to the public every day of the year and include landscaped gardens, lakes and woodland all of which surround a Grade II Listed mansion. The park, which has a Green Flag Award for its quality, is an ideal place to enjoy a range of activities including walking, picnicking and bird watching.



Paws in the Park event

Park History

Over the years a succession of owners, including nobility, a later Prime Minister and the BBC, have helped shape the park to make it the popular site it is today.

The place where the park now stands was once part of the ancient manor of Easthampstead which existed before Domesday (1086). The park first started to take shape when it was enclosed from Windsor Forest and developed around the 18th and 19th centuries to include pleasure grounds, shrubberies, serpentine walks and four large lakes.



Postcard of front of South Hill Park, after c1900

The current chain of ownership began in 1760 when William Watts bought the estate on his retirement from service in Bengal and built a classical villa. The mansion and grounds were further extended by George Canning, later Prime Minister, who worked the farm with cattle and sheep, wheat, barley and hay, built a kitchen garden and developed a beautiful arboretum and shrubbery. He is reported to have plagued the British Envoy in Lisbon for many good large orange trees for his conservatory!

Today the building is used as an Arts Centre, with the grounds owned and managed by Bracknell Forest Council and Bracknell Town Council.

For more information on the history of the house and grounds see the exhibition on the upper landing of the mansion.

Waymarked Trails

In 2008 a £2.3M grant was approved by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund to help restore South Hill Park grounds to their former glory.

The South Hill Park - Parks for People Project has seen the restoration of many of the park's original heritage features, as well as the creation of four new waymarked trails so that you may explore the parkland and re-live what it would have been like to walk around these magnificent grounds some 120 years ago.

On your journey around the trails, you will be able to admire many attractive parkland features and enjoy fabulous views across the north and south lakes to the mansion. There is also an abundance of wildlife in the lakes, reedbeds and woodlands.

The trails are all named after famous people who have been associated with South Hill Park at some point in its history including a famous author, a diplomat, a noted architect and a former Prime Minister!



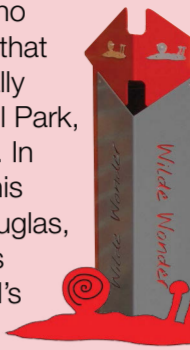
Haversham Hike, North Lake

Wilde Wander



1854 - 1900

Oscar Wilde named one of his best known characters Lady Bracknell. She is said to have been modelled on the Marchioness of Queensberry who lived locally. Although there is no evidence that Wilde actually visited South Hill Park, he could well have done so. In October 1892 he wrote to his close friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, of sitting in yellowing woods in Bracknell with Lord Alfred's mother, the Marchioness.

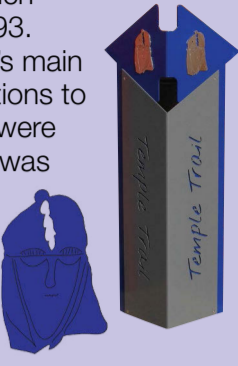


Temple Trail

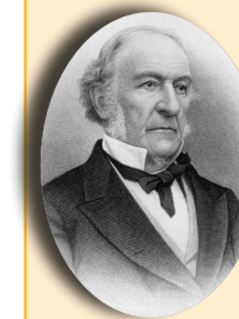


1856 - 1920

Temple Moore was a noted English architect who remodelled the mansion and redesigned the formal Italian Garden in 1893. Moore's main contributions to architecture were his church designs. This was his only garden project.



Gladstone Glade

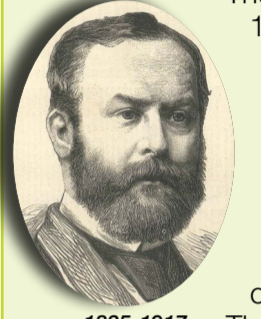


1809 - 1898

William Ewart Gladstone had a political career extending over 60 years. He was Prime Minister on 4 separate occasions and was also Chancellor of the Exchequer 4 times. William Gladstone was friends of Sir William and his son, Sir Arthur Hayter who lived in the mansion. In December 1893 he visited South Hill Park and planted a Holm Oak by which this trail passes.



Haversham Hike



1835-1917

The restorations of the 1890s were undertaken by Sir Arthur Hayter, Baronet. He was elevated to a Barony in 1906 and took the name of **Lord Haversham** of Bracknell. Thereafter he was as active in the House of Lords as he had been previously in the Commons.



Produced and published by Bracknell Forest Council

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www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parksandcountryside

The OS map data included in this leaflet is provided by Bracknell Forest Council under licence from the Ordnance Survey.

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Visitor information

Please help keep South Hill Park a safe and welcoming space for everyone to enjoy

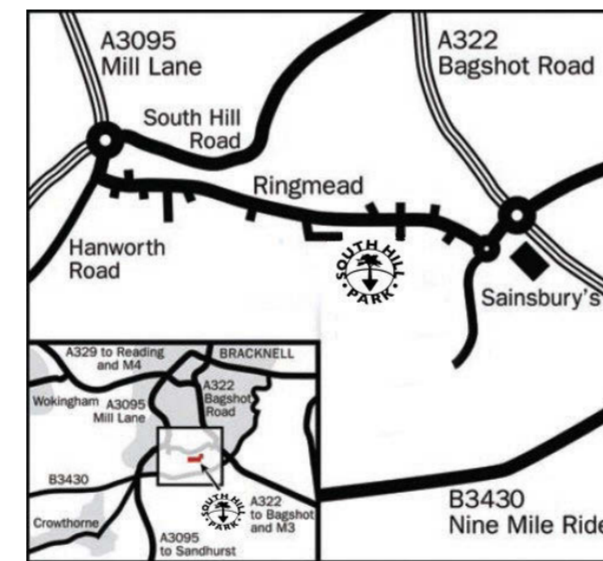
- Don't feed bread to birds (please use grain only), as this can cause serious harm both to the birds and the surrounding environment
- Protect plants and wildlife
- Please note no BBQs or fires are allowed anywhere on site
- Use the bins provided or take your litter home
- Keep dogs under control, keep them on the lead on the terrace by the café and around the lakes to prevent them from approaching or chasing wildlife
- Please clean up after your dog
- Please consider other users of the park
- Be safe – follow any signs and take care when crossing the road at the front entrance

Refreshments are available from the Atrium Bar & Restaurant. For opening times visit: www.southhillpark.org.uk or contact the Box Office on tel: 01344 484 123.



www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/parkstovisit

Directions



By Car: South Hill Park is about 7 minutes drive from Bracknell town centre just off the A322 Bagshot Road. It is easily accessible from the M3 (Junction 3) and the M4 (Junction 10). Look for the brown road signs saying 'Arts Centre' or showing a comedy mask.

FREE Parking is available at South Hill Park for up to 200 cars. Time limited parking is available at Birch Hill Neighbourhood Centre.

Postcode for Sat Nav users RG12 7PA

By bus: A number of buses serve the park, for more details visit www.traveline.info or call 0871 200 2233

By train: Bracknell is well served with train services from London Waterloo, Reading and towns in the surrounding area. For details call 08457 48 49 50 or visit www.nationalrail.co.uk

By bike: Three adopted cycle routes run through South Hill Park and bicycle parking is available. To plan your route visit www.google.co.uk/maps

Acknowledgements

Credit for research and text used in this leaflet goes to Diane Collins and the Friends of South Hill Park Grounds.

Photo's courtesy of Peter Hayward (Swans), Rachel Johnson (Bluebells), Geoff Brandwood (Temple Moore), Old-Print.com (Captain Arthur Divett Hayter) and Thinkstockphotos (Oscar Wilde and William Gladstone) and A.H. Etechells (Postcard of front of South Hill Park, after 1900), Jeff Lawrence (Tulips). South Hill Park has endeavoured to ensure that full permission has been sought and given for all materials used in this publication. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders and we apologise for any unintentional omissions, which we would be pleased to correct in any subsequent edition.

Waymarkers and map artwork created by Fred Baier Associates.



Tulips

Get Involved

The maintenance of the grounds of South Hill Park is the responsibility of a full time manager and gardener who are always happy to answer any questions you may have while on site.

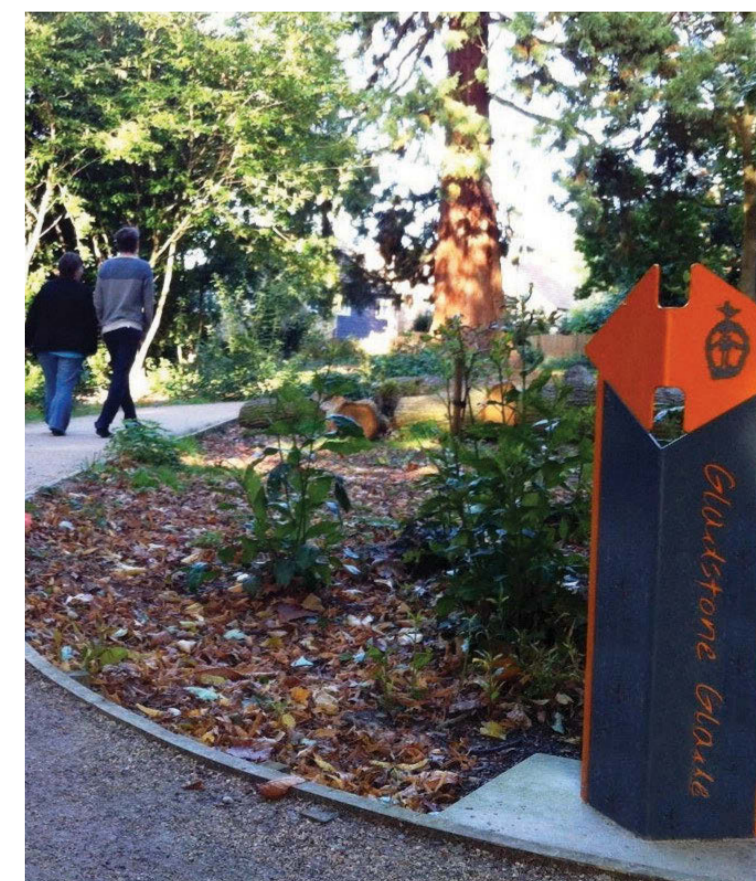
The Friends of South Hill Park Grounds represent the needs and views of the local community and park users. They meet on a regular basis to share information and discuss issues and initiatives affecting the park. Please contact them on foshpg@gmail.com for more information.

South Hill Park Gardening Group
Every Wednesday, 10am - 12 noon
Join our small, friendly group who help to keep the grounds of South Hill Park looking beautiful! Tea/coffee provided. No gardening experience is necessary, just a willingness to get involved and enjoy the outdoors! Please bring gardening gloves if you have them. Meet: Rear terrace at South Hill Park, RG12 7PA. Please contact shp@bracknell-forest.gov.uk for further details.



Gardening group

South Hill Park Four walking trails



Your guide to 4 waymarked circular walks around this award winning, historic parkland.

Wilde Wander

Please note that parts of this trail are on unmade tracks and there are steps at the end. However, these could be bypassed by retracing part of your route back.

From the Rose Garden pass through the walled yard, and cross the two driveways between the beech hedges and hornbeam trees to reach the roadside pavement. Carefully cross the road. Follow the path, keeping the lake on your right. At the far end you will see a small reed bed (see Haversham Hike) as well as water loving plants like reed mace, loosestrife, yellow flag irises, willow herb, water mint, alders and various species of willow. On the water you may see mallard ducks, coots, moorhens, swans, various geese and more.



Swans make their nests of straw beside the lake.

When you reach the end of the lake, go straight on at the crossroads and turn right onto the un-made path into the woods and children's play area. Turn right near the zipwire to go into the woods where you will find a mix of broadleaved species including oak, sweet chestnut, birch and holly. Continue straight on to the top of the hill and then, at the top, turn right into the open meadow.

There is a grand view here across the lake, which is particularly beautiful on a clear sunset.

Pass behind one of the majestic cedars of Lebanon that used to encircle the whole estate. Some still remain but others have been newly planted as part of the restoration works. Past the giant cedar, turn right down the hill and then left following the lake side path, passing a stand of young oaks on your left hand side. Make your way along

Haversham Hike

Leave the Rose Garden, pass through the walled yard, and cross the driveways between the beech hedges and hornbeam trees to the pavement. Carefully cross the road and turn left to head towards the small car park. Cross this and continue along the Ash Avenue.



Ash Avenue

This avenue of ash trees was planted in 1995 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The older, historic trees along this avenue are oaks and limes, which mark the original drive to the mansion.

Make your way down the tree lined avenue until you reach its western end which was the original entrance to the mansion and had the West Lodge nearby. From here turn right and then right again until you reach the board walk on your left which runs across a wetland area, containing reed beds and a pond.



Wildflower meadow

The lakes are fed both by earth drains, and Gormoor Brook, which rises in Swinley Woods south of Bracknell. There were previously at least four lakes on the site: one is lost, one remains in ducting under the car park and the South and North Lakes remain for us to enjoy.

this path back towards the mansion. Cross over the road, turn left and walk for about 50 metres. Take the opportunity to look to your right towards the restored gates and courtyard in front of the Wilde Theatre and the main mansion entrance.

Features you might spot are the coat of arms of the Hayter family, owners in 1890, over the mansion door and nearby, the Bull at the Gate sculpture by Marcel Baettig (1995).

When you reach the Wellingtonia tree, take the path on the right behind the Wilde Theatre. Pass through the gate to the Upper Italian Garden and descend the steps on the right to return to the start, passing the Italian Garden and terrace. For those who would like to avoid the steps, return to the front of the mansion retracing your steps and either cut through the building, or go back via the route you came across the driveways to end back at the Rose Garden.



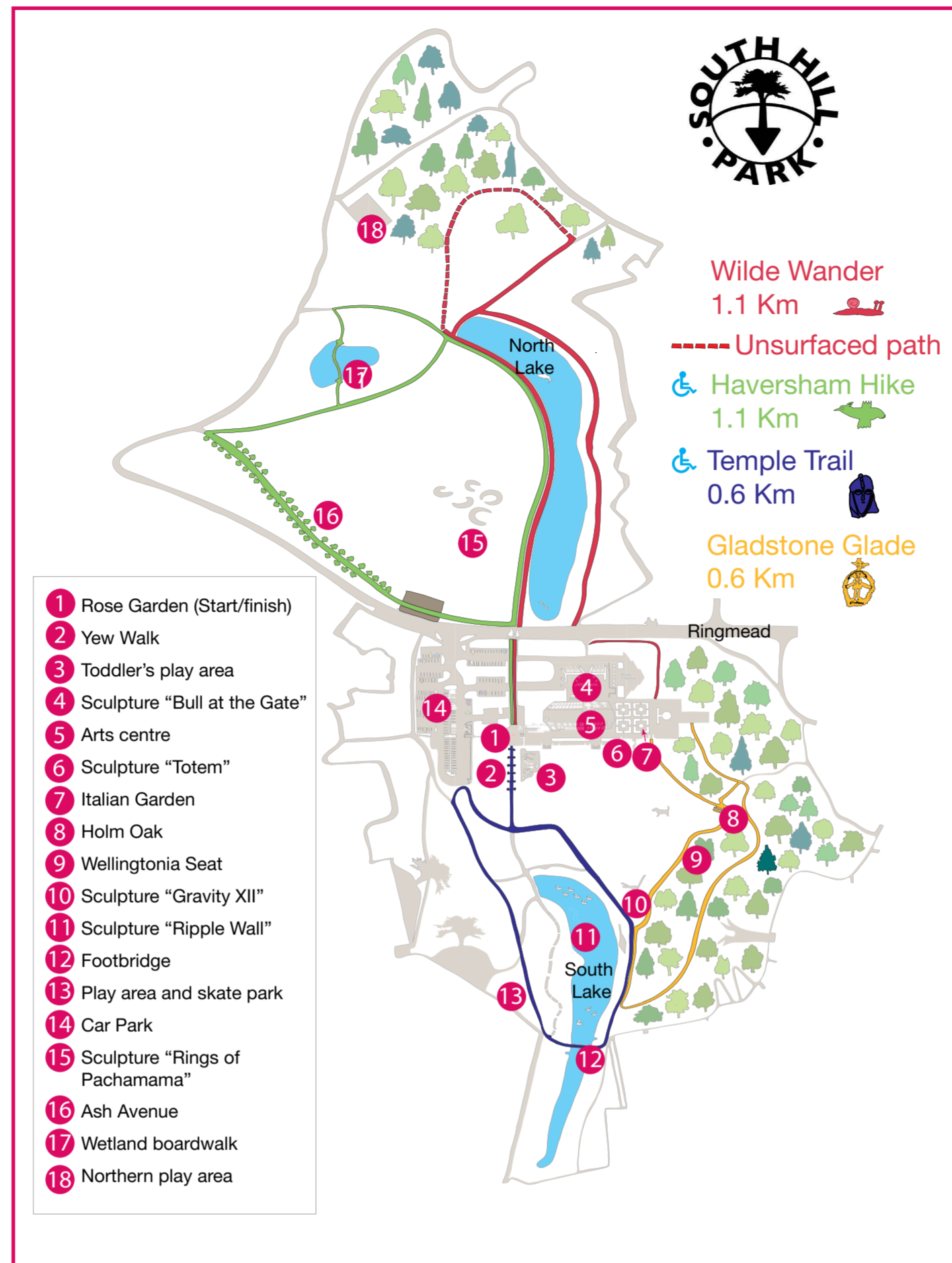
Wetland boardwalk

Reed beds are traditionally used as filters for household 'grey water' and it seems likely that this was historically the purpose of this area. Today the lake and reed beds serve as balancing ponds to absorb excess water and prevent local flooding. Wildlife such as dragonflies thrive in these damp conditions.

Cross the boardwalk, then follow the path to your right passing near the end of North Lake and the weir. Follow the path keeping the lake on your left and return towards the mansion. By the lake you will see a sculpture commissioned for the restoration project – the Rings of Pachamama (see below). Cross back over the road with care to return to the trail start.

The Rings of Pachamama have been specifically made for South Hill Park by sculptor Lucy Strachan. They have evolved as part of a series of work inspired by the lines and markings of our own ancient landscape and an environmental story from South America. The sculpture has five, 3 metre concrete elements that are in a constant state of sinking into or being ejected from the earth. Lucy hopes that people will want to interact with the sculpture and enjoy it on many levels.

Trails map and key



Italian Garden

Temple Trail

From the Rose Garden go through the arches of the Yew Walk and then turn left. As you follow the path, you will see (on your right) the remains of formal stonework which was the original headwall to the lake. Continue on the path, keeping South Lake on your right.

The reconstructed Yew Walk is a delightful feature with two yews to each arch (twelve in total) as well as a rose strewn arcade and herbaceous border.



Yew Walk

As the path bends you will pass on your left the sculpture Gravity XII (1980), (pictured right) by Barry Mason. Also note the sculpture Ripple Wall (1982) by William Pye, within the lake on the opposite side.

Continue with the lake on your right, until you reach the footbridge. Before turning to cross the lake, look ahead to a large Yew avenue and to the left you will see the old kitchen garden wall. There are good views across the lake to the fountain and the mansion beyond.

Gladstone Glade

This walk takes you mainly through woodland. In places it is steep, with drops to the side but it does follow surfaced paths. It is unsuitable for wheelchairs. From the Rose Garden turn left up the steps or via the access ramp to the terrace which takes you across the rear of the mansion and to the Italian Garden. From the terrace there is an excellent view of the sculpture Totem by Robert Carruthers.



Note the initials in the wrought iron railings, ADH, Sir Arthur Divett Hayter, owner at the time of the 1890s works.

At the end of the terrace there are two alternative routes to the woodland:

- Go up the steps to the Upper Italian Garden, where you will see yew hedges ahead on either side. Pass through the gate in the yew hedge on your right and follow this path along an avenue of lime trees. At the path junction, continue straight on into the woodland and up a steep slope.
- To bypass the steps, from the Italian Garden pass through the gate between stone pillars and follow the path along the top of a low bank. At the triangular junction, bear left into the woods and then the first right up the slope.



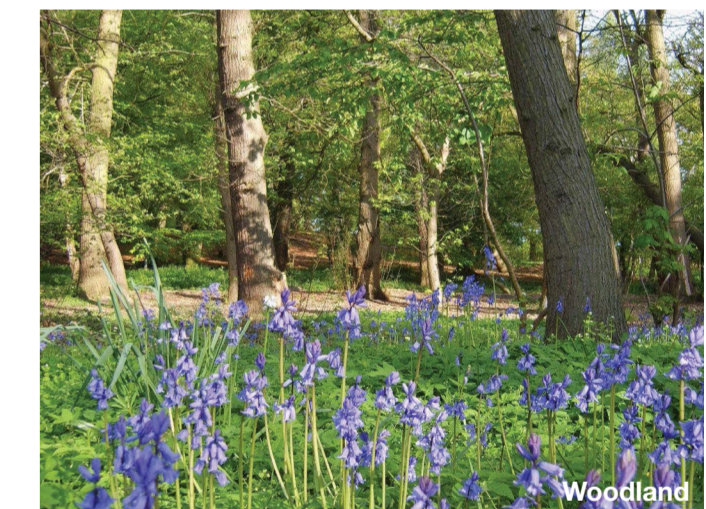
South Lake and fountain

On warm summer evenings keep an eye out for bats, including tiny pipistrelles and daubentons, which skim just above the water at dusk, catching midges and mosquitoes.

Once over the bridge turn right onto the tarmac path where you will see a beautiful lucombe oak and another cedar of Lebanon believed to be several hundred years old. Continue down this path passing a play area to your left and on to an avenue of unusual birch trees marking the Birch Hill neighbourhood. At the car park turn sharp right following the path back into the park and then turn left to return down the Yew Walk and back to the start.



Gravity XII



Woodland

Here are more lime trees and various species of oak, yew and cherry laurel. At the top of the path you can see clumps of silver birch yet higher up which are common in the local sandy soils. As you walk through the woods, note a standing dead beech tree which has been monolithed (reduced back to its main stem) to create a habitat for wildlife. Continue down the path and towards the bottom of the track.

Keep an eye out for remnants of the old 'pet cemetery' on the left where family pets were historically laid to rest.

When you reach the lake, turn right and continue for about 30 metres before turning right again onto the path that leads back into the woods. As you continue along the path, note the amphitheatre on your right, a popular venue for outdoor theatre production in the summer. You will also see the Wellingtonia Seat nearby, which was carved from an old monolith to create a resting point, and lovely setting for story telling.

Where the path bends sharply to the left near its end, you will see a Holm Oak on your right. This unusual evergreen tree was thought to be planted in December 1893 by William Gladstone, former Prime Minister.

Continue straight along the path to the Italian Garden and then across the terrace back to the start.