Explorer Backpacks
Families can enjoy our explorer bags full of activities to help younger children find and learn things in the museum. Borrow one from our Volunteer Wardens in the Parlour.

Do you have a smartphone?
Use www.uk-safari.com/wildlifies to find out more about the plants and animals you can see around Headstone Manor.

Make your own trail with:
http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/spotting-sheets

Find out more about our native trees at:
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

With thanks to the Harrow Natural History Society (and particularly the late A.M. Pollard, who funded the original trail on which this version is based).

This trail was made in memory of Geoff Corney, who loved this place.
Turn left towards the back of the Great Barn.

The name ‘Headstone’ comes from the Anglo-Saxon names ‘Hegestan’ or ‘Heggestan’, meaning a farm surrounded by hedges. Hundreds of years ago, this farm was probably surrounded by blackthorn or hawthorn hedges, both of which would quickly have grown into a prickly barrier.

Blackthorn

The blackthorn (or sloe) is laden with beautiful white flowers in early spring. Its leaves provide food for the caterpillars of many species of moth.

Blackthorn wood is hard-wearing, so it was traditionally used for making walking sticks and tool parts. According to folklore, it was also used for making witches’ wands!

The blackthorn’s name comes from its black, spiny thorns. Its fruits (sloes) are traditionally used for flavouring gin.

Double back and take the path to the left.

Hawthorn

Hawthorn is nicknamed the ‘May Tree’, making it the only British tree to be called after the month when it blossoms. Hawthorns can support over 330 species of insect.

Hawthorn blossom was traditionally associated with death. More recently, scientists discovered one of the chemicals in hawthorn blossom is also one of the first chemicals produced when animal tissue decays. So, the traditional association makes sense after all!

Follow path round to the left then turn right and cross the bridge.

The path in front of you used to be the main entrance to Headstone Manor. During the Georgian period it was flanked with Elm trees to create a shady driveway.

Turn back over the bridge and enter the old farmyard.

On your left is the Tudor Great Barn (built in around 1506).

Headstone Manor was originally built with sturdy oak beams. You can still see them today in the Great Hall and the Great Barn.

Oak trees produce one of nature’s hardest and strongest timbers. This native tree has become a symbol of strength and survival, and an emblem of England.

Oaks are brilliant for wildlife because they support more species than any other native tree. They can be seen growing at the back of the moat.

Turn left at the end of the Great Barn to look down at the moat.

The banks of the moat are home to many plants including bramble, cow parsley and dock. Plants such as yellow flag flourish at the water’s edge.

Yellow flag iris

Yellow flag iris is a tall plant that thrives in damp, marshy areas and on riverbanks. In some parts of the country it’s known as ‘sward grass’ because of its blade-like leaves. But it’s most famous for its large yellow flowers or ‘flags’, which bloom between May and July. The ‘fleur-de-lis’ that is often used on coats of arms may be based on the yellow iris.

Go over the bridge to Headstone Manor (built in around 1510).

Take a moment to enjoy the smells of the plants in the herb garden, including sage and lavender.

After that, go around the building to the rear.

Please be careful on the island, because the edges of the moat are not fenced.

We know from old records and maps that the garden around the house was used as an orchard in the past. There is still a walnut tree, an apple tree and a pear tree on the island today.

This fine old yew tree can be seen in the 1800 illustration of Headstone Manor, shaped into a human form. Yew trees were often used in topiary, and were commonly found in churchyards. Their strong, flexible wood was also useful for making longbows! The yew tree here is around 500 years old.

Blackbirds and song thrushes enjoy eating yew berries, but almost all parts of yew trees are highly poisonous to humans.

Fellow the path back to the bridge and leave the island, bearing left just after the Small Barn.

The trail finishes at the bee-friendly planters outside the visitor centre.