



NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2017

**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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With thanks to

Justin Bickersteth, Frank Cano,
Adam Cooke, Gina Goldhammer,
Penny Linnett, Robin Oakley, Nick
Powell, Ellen Scrimgeour.

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Cover photograph

Highgate Cemetery Chapel, the
photograph taken probably sometime
in the 1950s before the bell tower
and pinnacles were taken down.
Should we consider restoring these
in the future?

Chairman's note



There has been more than usual change in the Board of Trustees following our Annual General Meeting in April. All three trustees who retired had come to the end of their maximum six-year term, and two new protectors were appointed. Our thanks once again to Penny Linnett, Ceridwen Roberts, Margaret Butt and in particular Ian Kelly, my predecessor as Chairman.

It is an exciting time for new trustees joining the Board – Martin Adeney, Doreen Aislabie and Eve Wilder – and the two new protectors, Dr Tye Blackshaw and Philip Williams, as we are in the middle of work on the conservation plan for the Cemetery. As this newsletter reaches you there will be a display in the Chapel (and also on the website) seeking your views about the direction in which we should be heading. Please do take a look.

We are keen for you to be involved in these important decisions which need to be made about the Cemetery's future. Burial space is rapidly running out and maturing trees are destroying graves and memorials. Doing nothing is not an option. We would like you to help us find the right answers for the future of this amazing place. Your thoughts will help influence our strategy and the conservation policies which will underpin the management of the Cemetery for many years ahead.

I would also like to thank all the wonderful volunteers who do so much to keep the Cemetery going. We have over two hundred on our database at present and we are enormously grateful for their help. They are an important part of what makes Highgate Cemetery special. If you have not visited recently please do come back for a look.

Adam Cooke, Chairman



Epitaphs and gravestone poetry

'To write an appropriate epitaph is by no means an easy task,' declared THOMAS DOLBY in 1845. And of the poetical epitaphs in Highgate Cemetery at that time he concluded that 'few, very few, have any pretensions to excellence'.

The following extracts are taken from our first guidebook, *Memorials of the Highgate Cemetery*. It is surprising that Dolby felt so free to criticise the memorials erected to those who had died very recently — the cemetery had only been open for six years.

There is no phraseology adapted to the expression of grief; a mere name therefore inscribed on a monument, where stillness reigns, and where graceful objects and pious associations abound, as in this Cemetery, would call up a sympathetic sigh, while a laboured encomium is often avoided as an impertinence; and it were but a poor result, for an age of inquiry and refinement, to discover that Nonsense was still so far from having been eradicated, that the sculptor had picked up what the scribbler had thrown away; and that the crudities of ill-regulated minds, like the demented spirits of old, had fled for refuge to the tombs and memorials of the dead.

When or how the fashion of inscribing poetry on monuments and gravestones arose, is not a question here to be discussed; but that it has grown into a sickly, and in too many cases a vulgar affectation, is undeniable.

The moralist is not unfrequently disappointed on meeting with effusions

devoid of a purpose; as on the memorial of C.A.J.:—

There was too pure and clear a light
Within her radiant eyes;
They were too beautiful, too bright,
Too like their native skies.

Now all this is pure fondness; and it is no more than justice to add, very prettily expressed: but the reader, for whose edification epitaphs should be written, is naturally led, from the information conveyed by these lines, to infer that the little innocent was the victim of a too great lucidity of vision; no other object, point or purpose being so much as hinted at.

The case of A.A., that of a "truly amiable and affectionate daughter," cut off in the thirteenth year of her age, is one at the mere reading of which every sensitive heart must feel an emotion of sorrow; why, then, need parents have recourse to a prosopopœia [a figure of speech in which an abstract thing is personified], or encumber so moving a case with such lines as, —

If yet thy gentle spirit hover nigh

The spot where now thy mouldering ashes lie,
Here wilt thou read:—

Affliction's semblance bends not o'er thy tomb,
Affliction's self deplores thy early doom.

What is this but asserting that the grief of the parents, on this sad occasion, was genuine; a fact which every reader must have taken for granted: and not pretended; a thing which nobody could for a moment have imagined?

The disadvantage of not knowing *when to stop*, is made apparent in the case of J.M.R., in which some lines of pious resignation and hope are made to terminate with this ill-timed and unavailing speculation:—

But who can tell what blissful shore
Your angel spirits wander o'er?

It is to be regretted that the memorialist of T.B. had no judicious friend at his elbow to remind him that he was not *obliged* to attempt anything poetical; which might have prevented him from exposing himself in such lines as,—

Why should you tremble to convey
My body to the tomb.
Where the dear flesh of Jesus lay
And left a sweet perfume?

Insertion is here given to the following, from the memorial of C.H.W. for the sake of the last line; which it is to be hoped that the writer will bear in mind, and never attempt to grieve in poetry again:—

Alas, little did we think to lose so sweet a child,
Thy parents' pride, so lovely and so mild;
Our blind affection might have hoped thy stay;
The voice of GOD has call'd His child away;
This has left a wound no time can heal,
Which poets cannot paint, but mothers feel.

The illiterate coarseness and impropriety of such lines as the following, from the memorial of T.H.G., *Esq.*, are too obvious for

commentary:—

We joined were in mutual love,
And so we did remain,
Till parted were by GOD alone
In hope to meet again.

There is something aimed at, in the following two lines on H.T., but it is expressed in a manner that would have made Priscian tremble for his head, while Maevius might have claimed the production for his own:—

Farewell, dear husband, but departed friend,
A sincere right have I to mourn thy end.
The bereaved one probably intended to say something to this effect:—

Farewell, dear husband, and most honoured friend;
Too sad a cause have I to mourn thy end.



Above Unlike Dolby, Frederick Teague Cansick's *Collection of Curious and Interesting Epitaphs* (1872) was not critical of the epitaphs it reproduced. It was more of a straightforward transcription typical of an antiquary and so is very useful today when many are no longer legible.

The great error of our time, however, with respect to epitaphs, and the most repulsive to those who wish to meditate in the “Silent, cypress shades, Unpierc’d by vanity’s fantastic ray,” is redundancy; which in turgid panegyric and bad poetry is insufferable: for the charm, “the golden cadence of poesy” consists not in lumbering rhymes, but in originality, brevity, and elegance of expression; and it may be useful to the generality of those who imagine they can deal poetically with their sorrows, to reflect upon the words of one, who was pronounced by the most learned and conscientious of critics, “the only legitimate model of versification we possess.”

In other sciences, without disgrace,
A candidate may fill a second place;
But Poetry no medium can admit,
No reader suffers an indifferent wit.

— DRYDEN

But this desire to express grief in the difficult language of poetry, will be found,

after all, to prevail within a certain class, usually considered, on other occasions, the most unimaginative. And it is not without an unpleasant kind of surprise, after having lost a very honest and worthy old neighbour, whose word had always been considered as good as a bank note, we find that, being now dead and gone, there is a pretended reflection of him cast back upon this life, from a gaudy gravestone; but in which not a single feature of our lamented friend can be recognised. Instead of being allowed to repose quietly in his grave, until the resurrection of the just, his surviving friends have officiously plunged him into poetry and polemics; or if allowed to put in a word on his own behalf, it must be all, *children dear, falling tear, buried here, friend sincere*, and so forth; language so constrained, artificial, and unlike himself, that if uttered in his lifetime it would have ruined his credit at his wholesale house in the city.

Tears have been shrewdly said to be of great poetical account; but few are the poets that are qualified to call them forth; to enter the inmost recesses of sorrow, and embalm

The memory of what has been
But never more can be:—
or like the divine Porteus, to sanctify
— — — — the dank grave,
Made pervious to the realms of endless day,
No more the limit, but the gate of life:
for “the truest poetry” being “the most feigning,” it follows that the best can be but a successful effort of art; and being such, it can never give a natural expression to grief. Whatever the scientific may have discovered concerning the inimical contrarieties of substances, there can be nothing more repulsive to a lively imagination than dull poetry. And without

The Epitaph
Of
SUSAN ANNE,
The beloved wife of
James Wason,
Of Liverpool, Solicitor,
Sent by her
From the Spirit World
To her husband.

✠

“Joy has come to me.”
“I live in the love of Christ.”
“My Cross is over.”
“No longer Death — but Everlasting life.”

✠

Her departure from this life was on the
18th of Sep^r., 1865. The epitaph was sent
on the 9th of April, 1866.

meaning to say that poetry ought to be wholly excluded from epitaphs, it would be well if those who think they have the gift of grieving poetically, could remember a poetical maxim of universal application,—the smoothest lines having a tendency to diffuseness:—

NOT TOO MUCH. What solid sense

Three such little words dispense!

The additions best calculated to convey instruction, to impart a devout character, and give an air of calm dignity and pious hopefulness to the memorials of the departed, are of course to be found in the Sacred Scriptures; many of which are happily introduced in this Cemetery: but Shakspeare abounds with solemn reflections on the vanity of human life; Milton's genius was essentially pious; and even from the gentle Felicia Hemans drop beauties which, in her own chaste language,—

Fall on the heart like dew

Upon the drooping heather bell.

But there is one more impropriety in the composition of poetical epitaphs, which in this age of becoming regard for the decencies of sepulture ought to be repressed; and that is, the practice of using the most sacred of names, as an ordinary word is used, to make a rhyme with it. We should insist on the impropriety of this practice, even did our language offer a far more extensive choice of words, of a corresponding sound, than it does; feeling it to be improper to appropriate that awful name for the purpose of imparting a striking feature to a mere work of inventive art. But what are the words which our language offers for the rhymster's choice? We have *rod*; which must ever appear more or less at variance with the Divine attribute of mercy: and we have *trod*; which

Sacred
To the Memory of
Mrs. PEGGY MALONE,
Who Departed this life
December 28th, 1851
Aged 80 years.

Stay, courteous reader, nor so careless pass
This silent tomb which warns thee of thy last,
For both the aged and the youthful heart,
Are equal marks for death's relentless dart.
Be wise, improve the present fleeting hour,
While heav'n in mercy kindly offers power;
Haste then, nor let thy precious moments fly,
The next may find thee in eternity.

“Prepare to meet thy God.”

is unmusical and undignified. Some have attempted, in a round-about way, to bring in the “humble sod:” but in addition to the general objection, as before stated, the practice will only be made to appear more unseemly by descending into particulars.

These brief observations, it is therefore hoped, will tend in some slight degree to the improvement of what may be called Cemetery Literature; to render our newly-formed suburban Cemeteries places as suitable to be visited for the edification of the young, as for the consolation of those in the more advanced stages of life: and to convince all (who might not be aware of it,) of the absurdity of supposing that because they are sorrowful, they must be poetical also. Sacred be all sorrows! They have been, and will be, felt by all. Every day brings forth its causes of grief to thousands: — but is there one who can express what it is, in the measured and artificial language of poetry? Let us see. ■

Tree troubles... and some good news!

Trees contribute strongly to the special character of Highgate Cemetery. But they require a huge amount of maintenance as our head gardener FRANK CANO reports

Worrying about trees takes up a huge amount of my time, as it would at any site with thirty-six acres open to the public. But here many of our trees are self-seeded, which means they are not in ideal locations, and their roots are hemmed in by graves. Many are poorly-formed with multiple stems leaving them vulnerable to fungus.

The two pictures (*below right*) show fungus attacking mountain ash near the entrance to the East Cemetery, the top one

with fruiting bodies of King Alfred's cakes (*Daldinia concentrica*). *Bottom left* is the rotten stump of a cherry we spotted and cut down before it fell.

There is good news about our great Cedar of Lebanon in the West Cemetery: Bartletts the tree experts came in earlier this year with special equipment to aerate the roots and fertilise the soil around. The photo (*below left*) shows the bright green of new spring growth. A happy tree! ■





The Ecohut at Highgate Primary

ELLEN SCRIMGEOUR reports on how ash trees felled at Highgate Cemetery have been put to good use

The idea for this special little hut first came back in 2014 as a rain shelter for children learning about growing on the Highgate Primary School plot at Highgate allotments.

The hut was completed in May 2017 and is already being used as a focal point by children learning about growing food, as a site for the school's forest school activities as well as for a new 'Slugs and Stories' project, where grandparents and other older people tell stories to younger children.

The building uses natural, local and recycled materials. The frame is nearly all made of saplings donated by Highgate Cemetery, shaped into A-frames in the style of woodman Ben Law. The rafters and terrace framing are mainly of elm donated by Hampstead Heath, while the roof is

covered in over 1200 hand-cleaved wooden shingles of green oak mainly donated by Hampstead Heath. The walls are wattle and daub; the wattle is made of hazel coppiced on the allotment itself and the daub contains clay from a residential building project opposite the school entrance. There are too many other stories to mention here!

The hut was built by volunteer Ellen Scrimgeour, who is the aunt of one of the schoolchildren. During the course of the project over fifty people have volunteered their time to help. They include friends, family, parents, teachers and others interested in green building.

More information can be had from naturalbuildingsuk@gmail.com. ■



South Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta

ROBIN OAKLEY explores some Calcutta connections with Highgate Cemetery

Highgate Cemetery is one of the first of the great British 'garden cemeteries'. It is arguable, however, that the first British garden cemetery was not constructed here in Britain, but in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in India some seventy years earlier — during the pioneering days of British colonial activity on the sub-continent.

In the early eighteenth century, Calcutta was a fort and trading centre on the bank of the River Hooghly, established by agents of the East India Company. As the size of the British settlement increased, the original burial ground (which now lies under St John's Church) was closed, and a new site was chosen on land outside the settlement to the south-east.

The new burial ground, which was opened in 1767, was spacious, carefully planned and laid out on a grid pattern. Many fine tombs were erected, in a mixture

of Classical and Indo-Saracenic styles. Lawns and flowering shrubs abound, and there are fine vistas down the main avenues. The cemetery continued to be used until around 1830, when a much larger cemetery was opened to accommodate the vastly increased population of the city.

The South Park Street Cemetery, as it is now known, continues to be well-maintained, and retains much of its original character. Unlike early garden cemeteries in Britain, it did not become crowded, and it is not overgrown with ivy and trees. When I visited it late in the afternoon some years ago and took the photograph above, I found it evoked a very strong and distinctive atmosphere, and perhaps reflects more how cemeteries like Highgate would have looked originally as against how they appear today.

The graves and their inscriptions

speak much of the lives and fortunes of the early British settlers — sometimes nobly, sometimes poignantly. Many of the great and the good of those early days are commemorated here: colonial administrators, army officers, and some of the earliest Indophiles, such as Sir William Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society, and Major-General Charles Stuart who was popularly known as 'Hindoo Stuart'. But there are also many sad graves of young wives and little children whose lives had been cut short after they presumably succumbed to disease.

Perhaps the most interesting connection between Highgate and South Park Street cemeteries concerns the Dickens family. Charles Dickens' family grave in Highgate West Cemetery contains his wife Catherine and several of their children, but the gravestone records that their second son Lieutenant Walter Landor Dickens died on 31 December 1863 in Calcutta aged

23. He had left England in 1857 at the age of 16 to become a cadet in the army of the East India Company. He was buried originally in a British military cemetery, but in 1987 his tombstone was moved to the South Park Street Cemetery as a tribute to Charles Dickens and his family.

Another family with graves in both cemeteries is that of William Remfry, who died in 1879 and is buried in the West Cemetery. As a young man from Cornwall, he (along with several of his brothers) went out to Calcutta, married there in 1838, established himself as a trader, and returned to London around 1875 to a smart address in Kensington. His wife Mary Anne and two of their daughters are also commemorated on the family grave in Highgate, but at least two more of their children who died in infancy in the 1840s are buried in South Park Street Cemetery, along with numerous members of his brothers' families.

There are a number of other interesting connections between Highgate Cemetery and Calcutta. One concerns Virginia Woolf's mother, Julia Prinsep Stephen, who is buried along with other members of the Stephen family in the East Cemetery. She was born in Calcutta, where her father Dr John Jackson was a physician, though the family returned to England while she was a child. Several other graves record connections with Calcutta or other parts of India during the nineteenth century, but these still need to be researched. ■

Top left South Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta. Although it closed around 1830 it is still well-maintained and not overgrown with trees and ivy. **Left** Remfry family grave in Highgate Cemetery West. They lived only a couple of years after their return from Calcutta in 1875.

(Pictures courtesy of Robin Oakley)



'I told you I was ill'

Epitaphs provide an opportunity to praise, mourn or reflect on the individual and the mystery of life and death. Sometimes shocking, sometimes sad, this book gives all of us pause for thought as to how we might like to be remembered

It is not surprising to find that the two epitaphs selected from Highgate Cemetery for this book come from the graves of two of our most famous occupants, Karl Marx and George Eliot.

Perhaps Michael Faraday might have been included as well, had his headstone not been so taciturn. Even at his funeral there was perfect silence, in accordance with Sandemanian tradition. Naturally many of the examples in this book are drawn from monuments with more to say.

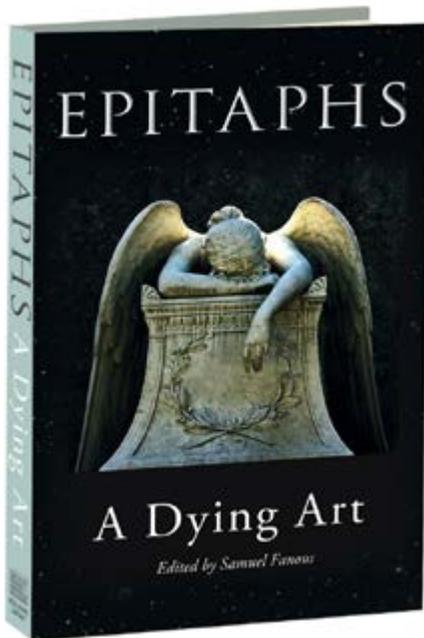
But at least Faraday's monument gives his full name, which is more than can be said for the remarkably modest memorial in St Margaret, East Wellow, Hampshire, which reads: 'F. N. Born 12 May 1820. Died 13 August 1910'. This was Florence Nighthingale!

While this is perhaps not a book to be read from cover to cover, Fanous gives it some structure by grouping the epitaphs in seven sections, covering 'Long life, love and friendship', 'Occupations and professions', 'Famous men and women', 'Elegiac, Poignant and Plaintive', 'Peculiar, Gothic, whimsical and absurd', 'Violent or untimely death', and literary epitaphs.

The advantage is that you can read it according to your mood, avoiding the most harrowing accounts of violent deaths should you wish and sticking to the funny ones.

Many epitaphs give an insight into what the deceased (or the bereaved) expected after death. One of the most amusing is from St Lawrence, Ramsgate, Kent (1903): 'This marks the wreck of Robert Woolward who sailed the seas for fifty-five years. When Resurrection gun fires, the wreck will be raised by the Angelic Salvage Co. surveyed and if found worthy, refitted and started on the voyage to Eternity.' ■

Epitaphs: A dying art, edited by Samuel Fanous. The Bodeian Library, 2016. 144pp. ISBN 9781851244515. £9.99.





‘Hampstead’ in Highgate

This new film starring Diane Keaton and Brendan Gleeson shows why the irresistible beauty of Highgate Cemetery is such a draw for filmmakers

Based loosely on the true story of Harry Hallowes, a reclusive squatter who set up home in a corner of Hampstead Heath, this is a charming, if unlikely, romance. One of the delights of the film is its setting, the landscapes of the Heath, the Cemetery and the streets of Hampstead all shot in a magical summer light. You can enjoy identifying the locations and spotting the liberties taken with the layout of the Cemetery. It’s so beautiful that perhaps this will do for Hampstead what *Notting Hill* did for Notting Hill. ■

Above Strolling through the West Cemetery on the way to Marx

Right An illicit picnic beneath the Cedar of Lebanon



News roundup

Summer hours

Highgate Cemetery is open until 5pm every day from 10am Monday to Fridays and 11am weekends and public holidays. We switch back to closing at 4pm on 1 November 2017.

German Sherlock Holmes Society

Recently we hosted the German Sherlock Holmes Society, some of whom are pictured *below* with guide Sarah Lawrie, who came on a tour of the West Cemetery all kitted out in period dress. They then set off back for central London on a horse-drawn omnibus. It turns out that Stanfords, the map people, run horse-drawn omnibus tours of London (www.stanfords.co.uk/london-horse-drawn-tours) using horses from Tim Wood (www.twcarriages.co.uk) who also supplies carriages for weddings and funerals.



New Deputy Head Gardener, Claire Freston

We are thrilled to have a new addition to the gardening team! Claire Freston comes to us from the Roof Gardens in Kensington where she was senior gardener. She has a BTEC (Level 3) Horticulture and Garden Design, and has also worked for almost twenty years as a teacher and curriculum area leader, so she has a great set of skills and experience. Welcome, Claire!

New Archivist, Judith Etherton

Also new is our part-time archivist, Judith Etherton, working on average a day a week, thanks to the Pateman Memorial Fund. Judith is a freelance archival consultant, and has been Archivist at the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, and previously Deputy Head of Special Collections at the University of London Library. Already she has started on the task of evaluating and selecting cataloguing software so that our archive can grow with us.

2017 Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM was held at the end of April at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution in Pond Square. It was preceded by a fascinating talk by Sally Prothero on the Heritage Lottery Funded project at Brompton Cemetery.

The minutes of the meeting have now been uploaded to our website at www.highgatecemetery.org/about/AGM.



Goldhammer sepulchre

Finally complete, at least externally, is this glorious sepulchre which will soon receive its first occupant. As well as being a fine piece of funerary architecture it is, as we noted in the last newsletter, a powerful visual symbol to reinforce the message that we remain an active cemetery.

Thanks to a generous donation from the Goldhammer Family Foundation the area surrounding the building has been laid with red granite setts, greatly improving the setting of the South Lodge in the process.

The Club Car ambulance has arrived

We now have a six-seater Club Car to ferry visitors around the site, whether they are on a grave search, looking to purchase a plot or just needing a little bit of help. Equipped with a first-aid kit it is also an emergency vehicle so that staff can get to the scene of any accident quickly. Unfortunately it was used for that purpose within two days.

Ask not for whom the bell tolls

There is a new plaque in the Chapel marking the restoration of the bell a couple of years ago in memory of Robert Goldhammer. It is a beautiful thing in itself, carved by the leading lettercutters in the UK, the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop (www.kindersleyworkshop.co.uk) to whom our thanks for the photo *below*.

The bell repair turns out to have been in the nick of time because the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, who supplied the bell back in 1838 and recently restored it for us, have now ceased trading. Although bell hanging and repair has been taken over by Whites of Appleton (www.whitesbellhangers.co.uk), there is something very special about having been one of their last projects. The plaque says, “Campana per saecula pulsat” – the bell tolls through the ages.



Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads

Look out for the flyer in this mailing about *Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads*, a display in the Chapel which asks for your thoughts about the future direction of the Cemetery. It will be on display at weekends until 6 August. If you can't make it, don't worry: it is also available online at highgatecemetery.org/news. And once you have seen it, please do fill in the questionnaire which seeks your views. ■

Historic cemeteries news

What's on at our sister cemeteries

ABNEY PARK

Guided tours first Sunday of every month at 2pm. Free, but £5 suggested donation. www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Guided tours at 2pm every Sunday in August and on Sundays 10, 24 September, 8, 22 October, 12 and 26 November. £6 donation requested. For other dates see brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

Guided tours first Sunday of every month from March to November at 2pm. £3 donation requested. Various themes. See www.tbcs.org.uk for details.

BUNHILL FIELDS BURIAL GROUND

Guided tours with access 'behind the railings'. Every Wednesday from April to October at 12.30pm. £8. www.citygardenwalks.com

CITY OF LONDON CEMETERY

Guided walks usually run every month throughout the summer. Phone 020 8530 2151 or email cemetery@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

KENSAL GREEN

Guided tours normally at 2pm every Sunday from 1 March to 30 November. £7 suggested donation. www.kensalgreen.co.uk

WEST NORWOOD

Saturday 21 October 2017 AGM and Lecture: *Sir Horace Jones* by Dr Jennifer Freeman

Saturday 18 November 2017 Lecture: *The Music Hall Guild of Great Britain and America* by Matthew Neil

Guided tours first Sunday of every month at 2.30pm from April to October, and at 11am from November to March. www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

Special tours at 2.15pm 'Music Hall Artistes', 13 August. 'Cemetery Symbols' 15 October. LWT Fungi tour in November. 'Military Connections' 12 November.

Guided tours last Sunday of every month at 2.15pm and last up to two hours. Free. Full programme see www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

Guided tours third Sunday of every month at 2pm. Free. See www.fothcp.org for full events programme.

BRISTOL: ARNOS VALE

The Turn of the Screw, a brand new adaptation of Henry James's 1898 ghost story. Performed by Red Rope Theatre, 18-29 October.

Christmas Market, Sunday 3 December. They host many other events too. See: arnosvale.org.uk/all-events.