

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2017



**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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The Swain angel, Highgate Cemetery
West. Photo © Robert Krawiec.

Chairman's note



All Saints Day was once again an occasion for reflection and remembrance at Highgate Cemetery. Continuing the practice of the last few years, the East Cemetery was open late to allow grave owners, Friends and visitors the opportunity to place candles on graves. In some countries, such as Poland and Sweden, this is such a popular practice that the cemeteries are all aglow. Here the effect was rather pretty as hundreds of candles flickered gently beneath the light of the full moon.

As Halloween becomes an ever more secular and commercial celebration we want to remind people that we are an active cemetery, visited by those who are reflecting on the lives of loved ones buried either here or elsewhere. Every candle is a symbol of a life remembered, and a gentle reminder to those who are more interested in the fun of zombies, witches and ghosts, that this is not the place for it. I do hope you will join us next year if you can.

Christmas is also a time of year when families remember those who are no longer with us and decorate their graves appropriately. It is another sign for all visitors that alongside the famous figures of the past lie the loved ones of today. This is what being a 'living cemetery' is all about.

As space runs out, we need to ponder how Highgate Cemetery could continue into the future as a 'living cemetery'. Our consultation suggests that many people think this is important, as we report on page four. Other cemeteries are grappling with similar problems, as you can see in the article on New Southgate Cemetery Bill, currently awaiting royal assent.

But Highgate Cemetery is so important that we will have to find our own unique way forward.

Adam Cooke, Chairman

Highgate Cemetery at a crossroads... What next?

Highgate Cemetery has been in use for 178 years and has now reached a point where important decisions need to be made about its future. Burial space is rapidly running out and maturing trees are destroying graves and memorials. We held an exhibition in the chapel and online asking Friends, grave owners, visitors, neighbours and the general public to give us their views.

The exhibition and questionnaire were structured around three main areas of concern: trees and ecology, burials, and providing for visitors and grave owners. There was a mix of 'tick box' questions, which help us to quantify responses, and open-ended comments, which help us to understand the diversity and complexity of peoples' views.

There were 340 respondents: 20% identified themselves as grave owners, 25% as Friends, and 23% as local residents. 25% came from N6, N19 and NW5, and 36% from elsewhere in London.

Trees and ecology

Trees contribute so much to the experience of visiting Highgate Cemetery, which is also a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation. Yet they can also damage graves, hinder growth of heritage trees and reduce biodiversity. There was considerable support for more active management of our trees: 79% thought that it was important to remove trees harming graves where appropriate, and 76% thought that areas around heritage trees should be cleared to safeguard their vitality. Restoring lost vistas and views was also considered important by 73%. By contrast, interventions to encourage a greater variety of wildlife were less popular

(63% in support) and only 34% in favour of introducing a greater variety of trees and shrubs. That said, the questions related to the cemetery as a whole and it may be that there would be greater support for variety in the East Cemetery where the landscape design is of less interest than in the West.

Burials

Highgate Cemetery is both a place of burial and a visitor attraction, and has been since its earliest days. But with space running out, how important is it for the cemetery to remain open for burials? Only 11% thought it was not important, and 76% thought the opposite. We asked very directly 'Where should the focus lie in our future activities?' and presented a continuum with 'tourism' at one end and 'burials' at the other. 52% chose the middle point, while 29% veered more towards tourism and 19% more towards burials. There was also strong support for generating income by charging for visits and guided tours (69%).

Questions about abandoned graves and grave re-use were more difficult for respondents as this is unfamiliar territory. We did not have the luxury of a long set of questions administered by professionals, as they did in the ground-breaking study, *Reusing old graves: A report on popular British attitudes* by Douglas Davies and



Alastair Shaw (1995). Nevertheless, 69% thought it was acceptable to re-use abandoned graves after a period of time, over 75 years being supported by 30% of respondents and over 100 years by 85%. Implicit in this is support for the cancellation of exclusive rights of burial following 'abandonment'. Only 15% thought graves should never be reused. (Interestingly, the 1995 study found that support for reuse was generally higher in London, with around two-thirds of respondents in favour.)

How reuse might be achieved is more complicated than we had space to set out in detail, but there was support for using spaces within existing vaults and graves, filling them up (63%) and for burying existing remains even deeper in the old grave, creating new space on top (64%). And, as the 1995 study also found, there was little support for cremating existing remains and burying them elsewhere in the cemetery (21%).

Providing for visitors and grave owners

We asked a number of questions about what other facilities might be useful or expected. The most popular answer was a museum or display (76%), followed by a café (55%) or area for funeral receptions (54%). There was less enthusiasm for a classroom for school groups (43%), more signage to help people find their way around (38%) or more shelter for visitors in wet weather (30%). We might have had a different answer to the last question if it had not been so sunny and warm for most of the consultation period!

What next?

The responses provided a useful snapshot of attitudes which will help the trustees develop their strategy for the future of the cemetery. They have also helped the team preparing our new conservation plan, and a consultation on that will follow in due course. ■



New Southgate Cemetery bill

Many London cemeteries filled up much faster than their promoters had expected. Reusing graves is one way to ensure that they can continue to meet the needs of the twenty-first century.

New Southgate Cemetery in north London opened in 1861. Designed by the little-known architect Alexander Spurr, it was one of the few private cemeteries to be set up following the burial acts of the 1850s. Laid out on a radial plan with the chapel at the centre of the circle, it has many beautiful trees. It was served by special cemetery trains from its own station at Kings Cross but with a journey time of only fifteen minutes compared to the forty-five it would have taken to get to Brookwood Cemetery in the south. Unfortunately the train service had stopped by 1873.

The owners of New Southgate are now promoting a private bill in parliament intended to ensure the future sustainability of the cemetery. Based on powers already available to local authority-run cemeteries in London, the company seeks to be able to extinguish the rights of burial in grave spaces where they have not been exercised for 75 years or more. Notices would be served on registered owners in various

ways and if they objected then the right could not be extinguished.

The company also seeks to create additional space in graves by removing any remains, excavating the grave to the deepest possible depth, and then reintering the disturbed remains at the bottom of the grave. The space so created would be used for new burials. This would only apply to graves which had not been used for at least 75 years and if there were no objections from the registered owner or relatives of the person buried there.

Memorials on graves would remain the property of the owners but could be removed if the rights of burial had been extinguished. Having been properly recorded, they could then be disposed of or put to another use but they could not be sold without the consent of the owner.

The bill awaits royal assent. Could similar powers help Highgate Cemetery continue operating as a place of burial while keeping its special character? ■

‘... I prayed, mid agonies, for death’

It is unusual for headstones to record the cause of death, let alone in such harrowing detail as this one in Highgate Cemetery West. STUART ORR has unearthed the story behind the tragedy.

Near the centre of Highgate Cemetery West is the grave of Emma Wallace Gray whose headstone states that in October 1845 at the age of nineteen she died of burns. Two decades later, newspapers were full of reports of women burning to death when their wide crinoline dresses got too close to an open fire.

However, Emma’s death was not a result of wearing a crinoline, as we learn from the inquest into her death. It was held in the Blue Anchor pub near where she lived with her father, a railway agent, in Coleman Street in the City of London.

The *Morning Post* of 23 October 1845 carries her father’s sad report:

‘...shortly after eight o’clock on the 11th inst. [a Saturday], he was sitting in his dining-room with his back to the deceased, who was sitting at the table, when suddenly he discovered a strong light behind him, and before he could turn round the deceased exclaimed “Father, I’m on fire,” and he found her standing up close to the table in one mass of flames.’

‘He caught her immediately in his arms, and with his hands succeeded in putting out the flames, but having no water at hand to put out the burning clothes, he took her up stairs to the kitchen, but in ascending the staircase, a draft of air again set her dress in flames. He immediately ran to get some water when he found there was not a drop to be obtained in the house, during

which time the deceased was rushing from place to place, and screaming from the excruciating agony she was suffering. With the assistance of a young man named Gay, the fire was eventually extinguished, but not before she was dreadfully burnt, and expired on Monday evening. Before her death she informed her father that she had let fall a piece of lighted cotton on the carpet, and that on placing her foot upon it her dress caught fire.’

The verdict was accidental death. ■



‘One of the six hundred’ in Highgate Cemetery East

ANDREW YEO uncovers the story of Edward Woodham who survived the charge of the Light Brigade

Capturing its rich vein of chivalry and lunacy, the eminent French commander, Marshal Bosquet exclaimed ‘C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre’ as he observed the Light Brigade’s misconceived charge into the murderous storm of the Russian guns. Stricken horses and men were left strewn across the valley floor as rifle shot, cannon ball and grape tore into the advancing ranks from three sides.

The Crimean War was the first that brought vivid and uncensored reportage to the Victorian breakfast table and club room and within weeks the charge had become a legend. This was most notably through William Russell’s work for *The Times*, which in turn inspired Tennyson to put pen to paper. His eponymous ode, celebrating the unquestioning bravery of the common soldier at the mercy of aristocratic blundering, had much to do with immortalising the charge and giving it the special place it holds in the nation’s lexicon of heroic failure.

Subsequent obituaries of survivors consistently make proud reference to their participation in the charge and, of those, Edward Richard Woodham’s story is of particular interest because he lies in Highgate Cemetery East.

Like many in the ranks that day, he was convinced there would be no head-on assault on the guns and witnessed the

confusion between senior officers over the order that led to the charge. He rode in the second line; however the position offered no shelter. As one survivor graphically explained, a cannon ball was not stopped by the first man it hit. The rider next to Woodham was killed immediately.

Providence, though, smiled on Woodham and he made it to the Russian lines unharmed. Russian gunners defended themselves with ramrods and scurried between the cannon for protection while being ‘cut down like ninepins’.

In the retreat his horse was shot from under him and he was pinned to the ground, but the beast’s temporary revival allowed him to struggle free. Under fire, he attempted to free a comrade who was similarly trapped but was forced to leave him behind to the scant mercy of the advancing Russians as the dead horse proved less obliging. The stray horse of a luckless rider proved his salvation and he was able to remount and reach safety.

The twenty-first anniversary reunion took place in 1875 at Alexandra Palace, bringing together a hundred and twenty survivors and their guests. Woodham, who was known for having a keen interest in the welfare of his former comrades, was appointed chairman of the organising committee and was praised in newspaper reports as being ‘indefatigable in his



exertions to promote its success'. He had corresponded with the Poet Laureate, inviting him to the banquet. Tennyson declined but enclosed £5 to 'defray some of its expenses'. In his letter he revisits his theme of blunder and bravery and declares he will drink a cup in the Brigade's honour that evening.

As a plot at Highgate suggests, Woodham fared better than many other veterans of the Crimea who were condemned to destitution. After his military service ended, census records show that he found occupation as a warder, an inquiry officer and as a 'commercial', whilst his sons are noted as clerks and sales assistants.

Woodham died aged fifty-five, near Highbury on 12 December 1886, heart disease having accomplished what Russian steel could not. His grave, downhill from Marx's original family plot, is marked by a tall memorial stone capped with Gothic ornamentation. He shares the grave with his wife Maria Jane and an aunt, Elizabeth

Blizzard. Also memorialised on the stone is Arthur Handell, the couple's youngest son. He is noted as having been interred at Brompton Cemetery. Brompton's records show this to be in 1875 when Arthur, aged three, was placed in a common grave. This was presumably a form of reunification that was comforting to Maria, both wife and mother.

Another notable name on the stone, added in Maria's lifetime, is that of their grandson, Second Lieutenant Frederick Woodham Evans of the Royal Flying Corps, who was shot down over France in 1917 and who died in a German military hospital.

The monument makes no reference to Woodham's regiment, 11th Hussars (Prince Albert's Own), but instead bears the proud inscription 'one of the six hundred'. For poetic expedience, Tennyson's collective understates the number of riders that formed the Light Brigade at Balaclava, but for his family, friends and any passer-by of the time it said all that was necessary. ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOE DE SOUSA / FLICKR

Photography in the catacombs

Visitors to the Terrace Catacombs are not allowed to take photographs inside. Is there an ethical reason for this prohibition? asks IAN DUNGAPELL

Visitors on a tour of Highgate Cemetery will be politely asked not to take photographs inside the Terrace Catacombs. And at Brompton Cemetery's catacombs they are forbidden to do so by a large sign. But at West Norwood, which has by far the most interesting catacombs of London's Victorian cemeteries, photography is welcomed. Even at the catacombs in Paris (*above*), where the bones of over six million Parisians are displayed in decorative ensembles, photography is fine, but without a flash. Our visitors often ask why we don't allow photography. Is it time to think again?

Elle Hazlewood, volunteering manager, surveyed our volunteers for their views.

The vast majority were in favour of allowing photography without a flash. Those who objected cited both practical and ethical concerns, but the latter are the most interesting and seem to arise from a feeling that it would somehow be disrespectful to the dead who are interred there.

No one seems worried about whether it is right to allow photography in the cemetery itself. The Victorians happily photographed monuments and we have examples in our collection. Visiting a cemetery or taking photographs does not appear to have been thought at odds with the desire that the dead should rest in peace. We publish photos in the cemetery guidebook.

So, what is special about the Terrace Catacombs? There are no human remains visible, unlike in Paris, or at the famous Capuchin monastery in Palermo, Sicily, where desiccated corpses hang from the walls. But even in England there was no great outpouring of disapproval when photographs of the remains of Richard III were widely published following their discovery under a Leicester car park in 2012.

In any case the Victorians were less squeamish about photography of the dead than many of us are today. There were numerous photos of dead children taken in lifelike poses, sometimes surrounded by their living siblings in an effort to preserve the memory of happy families. When photography was expensive, sometimes the first opportunity taken to capture the likeness of a loved one was after their demise.

Some of our volunteers felt that the coffins were never intended to be on show. But for the Victorians, just as today, coffins were an object of display as much as of use, and some of those which can be seen are (admittedly decaying) examples of the most elaborate sort, as described in *Cassell's Household Guide*: 'case covered with black or crimson velvet, set with three rows round, and lid panelled with best brass nails; stout brass plate of inscription, richly engraved four pairs of best brass handles and grips, lid ornaments to correspond'. Hearses have glass sides, and some of the niches even have glass panels through which visitors could peer.

Are photographers somehow intruding on the privacy of those interred in the Catacombs that would not be the case if they were six feet under, outside in the cemetery? No more so than any other visitor. It is difficult to understand what

violence photography does to a coffin that mere looking does not.

Perhaps a concern is what happens to the pictures? Even in the deepest corners of the dark web, surely there is little scope to misuse them. Instead, websites such as www.ianvisits.co.uk show they have great educational potential. There, alongside a picture of the Brompton catacombs (*below*), he writes: 'Officially no photography was allowed, but I asked very nicely and was allowed to take a general photo along the corridor'. What harm was done?

We will all have our strong personal views on photography, but the Friends are custodians of Highgate Cemetery for the public benefit. We should have good reasons for the controls we put on visitors. Is it time to change our mind? ■

What do you think? Let Elle know at info@highgatecemetery.org.



PHOTO COURTESY OF IANVISITS.CO.UK

French cemeteries

A new book is fascinating reading for anyone interested in their history and present state

Soon after the new cemetery of Terre-Cabade in Toulouse, France, was opened in 1840, there was some criticism in the local press of the 'revolutionary and anti-religious' character of its spectacular Egyptian-style entrance. Visitors arrived between a pair of brick obelisks over forty-foot tall to find the symmetrical pavilions which house the depository and offices dressed up as majestic Egyptian temples.

Designed in 1836, at the same time as Stephen Geary was working up his designs for Highgate Cemetery, surely the choice of the Egyptian style for both was not just a coincidence. For it was in October that year that the great Luxor obelisk was erected in the Place de la Concorde in Paris, no mean engineering feat, to great international attention. (It was not until 1843 that Pugin's cruel caricature of an 'Egyptian' cemetery entrance dealt a fatal blow to the style's popularity in Britain.)

Patrimoine funéraire français: Cimetières et tombeaux is a new book published by the respected *Centre des monuments nationaux*, part of the French Ministry of Culture. In a refreshing change from the biographical focus of many publications, it covers the origins and development of the urban cemetery in France right up until the present time, not the life stories of those who are buried in them. There is also much about funerary art: the designers and makers of tombs; the chronological development of styles;

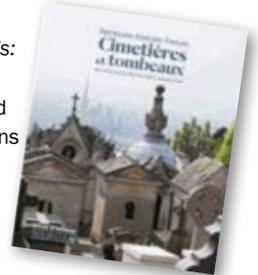


© ROLAND STUEHMER / FLICKR: TOULOUSE CEMETERY

the 'grammar' of monuments, and how they vary according to different faiths.

And, importantly, there is also the sobering question of how to look after this 'fragile and threatened heritage': 'One of the major difficulties of present day management of cemeteries, which have become important for biodiversity, is how to reconcile the growth of vegetation for environmental reasons with the conservation of monuments mostly built of stone, a material which suffers from the damp, from the growth of micro-organisms and structural damage caused by roots or falling branches.' But there are many other problems which the French, like us, must grapple with in order to preserve the character of these exceptional sites. ■

Patrimoine funéraire français: Cimetières et tombeaux
edited by Régis Bertrand and Guénola Groud, Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, 2016. ISBN 978-2-7577-0450-9. 296pp hardback, about £41.50





Maurice Melzac (1952–2017)

Our ecology adviser and beekeeper is remembered by fellow apiarist IAN CREER

There was more to Maurice, who died in September, than the beekeeper, striding with veil and smoker towards his hives on the terrace above the catacombs. Having studied marine biology at university, Maurice started work as a researcher with Sir David Attenborough and Gerald Durrell. Later, as an independent film director, his passion for all nature led him to make TV films and documentaries about varied urban wildlife subjects: zoos, aquariums, animal hospitals, urban pigeons and city rats. In 2000, he created a programme for BBC1, *Josie's Journey*, about Josie's recovery from trauma — following her mother and sister being killed in an attack — through her artistic talent and love of wild animals. This led to a Channel 5 series about an academy for crime-scene investigators in Tennessee, and a film, *The Natural History of Murder*, showing how a forensic botanist linked samples to help convict criminals such as the Soham murderer.

Based in Highgate, when not walking his dog on Hampstead Heath, Maurice was active in Waterlow Park, working to improve the ponds and establish native wild flowers and evict invasive species. He also campaigned further afield within the capital, petitioning the Mayor of London to support a scheme, 'Homes for People, Homes for Birds,' to encourage the installation of nesting boxes. And, living by the cemetery, he made his mark. He loved the cemetery's history, its beauty and the habitats it provided, advising on conservation and wildlife, and obtaining a grant to introduce over 100 bird nesting boxes and bat boxes. But he will still, perhaps, be best remembered here as the man who introduced beekeeping and supplied honey, and portrayed his quiet humour through its distinctive red label, its bust of Karl Marx surrounded by bees: 'Workers Unite.' ■

Above Maurice Melzak inspecting the beehives on the roof of the Terrace Catacombs

News roundup

Winter hours

Highgate Cemetery is open until 4pm every day, from 10am Monday to Fridays and 11am weekends and public holidays. We return to closing at 5pm on 1 March 2018. The Cemetery will be closed on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. West Cemetery tours will be offered on Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, and places can be booked online. See our website.

Major film

Unfortunately we cannot tell you anything about it due to the usual confidentiality clauses, but the West Cemetery recently hosted a shoot for a major international film which will be on general release next year. We are very grateful that grave owners, visitors and neighbours have been so understanding about this important event.

The production company went to great lengths to keep neighbours informed – and to ensure their sleep was not disturbed, as the filming took place at night. More importantly they were also scrupulously careful to ensure that no damage was caused to the cemetery or its monuments in the process.

In addition to helping support the care of Highgate Cemetery, the film generated income for the London Borough of Camden and Waterlow Park. We hope you will enjoy it next year, and we'll let you know as soon as we can what it is called.



Highgate Cemetery needs YOU!

There are over two hundred war graves in Highgate Cemetery, both East and West, which we look after on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. A team of three meet on Wednesday mornings from 10am to 12.30pm to do this, and they want to expand their group. They are looking for people who aren't afraid of hard work and getting their hands dirty, as the graves can sometimes be very overgrown. Do let Elle know if you are interested: elle@highgatecemetery.org or 020 8347 2474.

East Cemetery map new addition

Nigel Browne was Eric Clapton's bodyguard, a victim of the helicopter crash that also killed blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan, Clapton's agent, Bobby Brown, and

assistant tour manager, Colin Smythe. The helicopter took off in heavy fog from an open-air concert in Wisconsin and slammed into a man-made ski slope nearby. Pilot error was held to be the cause.

The Death Express

The enduring fascination with the train to Brookwood Cemetery was demonstrated by a special Halloween performance at the London Dungeon, billed as 'the scariest journey of the nineteenth century'.

The publicity promised: 'It's the 1850s and London's cemeteries have become so overcrowded this new train line has one purpose... to transport the dead out of London. Guests will experience the clickety-clack of the train... or is that bones from the coffins? As visitors step aboard the Death Express the official conductor shares the tales of his journey going back and forth, transporting over 2,000 corpses per year!'

'The Plot for Karl Marx' ...

Marx's grave at Highgate Cemetery was the focus of a recent BBC Radio 3 documentary.

Presenter Alan Dein said: 'We wanted to do a programme a bit differently. It's about the impact of having this grave in the area. There are a lot of twists and turns in the grave's story that are really interesting. It's a local story as well as a global one.'

'The Plot for Karl Marx' was on *Between the Ears* on BBC Radio 3, Saturday 18 November. Catch it on iPlayer.

... and Karl Marx's plot

Next year is the bicentenary of Marx's birth and we are expecting many more visitors to his memorial. We have plans to re-landscape the area in front of it with flamed dark-grey granite which should both

enhance the monument and make it safer, especially in wet weather. We will also be marking the bicentenary with some stories in the April issue of the *Newsletter*.

Become a trustee

We are expecting to have two vacancies for new trustees at the 2017 AGM. The Friends follow the recommended practice of the Charity Commission in conducting a skills audit of the present board and then advertising for new trustees with particular skills and experience. Keep an eye out on our website in December for the call for nominations and to find out this year's skills sought.

2018 Annual General Meeting

A date for your diary: Wednesday 25 April 2018 at the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution in Pond Square. Full details will be sent in the next mailing.

New postcards

We have some new postcards for sale featuring photographs taken by visitors who have been proud to share them with us. One shows the grave of bare-knuckle fighter Tom Sayers with his dog 'Lion', by Athina Oikonomou. And there's also the Swain angel which features on the cover of this newsletter in an atmospheric photo by Robert Krawiec.

BSL West Cemetery tours

We have been running a number of British Sign Language tours featuring volunteer John Wilson which have been very popular. He is accompanied by Malcolm Duffy for spoken English translation. Tours have normally been on Saturdays at 2.15pm and are advertised on our website. Prices are as normal but carers come free. ■

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 start again in March 2018. For 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.

KENSAL GREEN

Guided tours normally at 2pm first and third Sunday only in November, December, January and February. Tours begin at the Anglican Chapel in the centre of the grounds, and finish around two hours later at the Dissenters' Chapel, £7 suggested donation. www.kensalgreen.co.uk

WEST NORWOOD

Guided tours first Sunday of every month at 11am from November to March. Tours start at the Cemetery Main Gate, Norwood Road, SE27. The tours last about an hour and a half. www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

Special tours at 2.15pm

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

There are some **Friday night tours** which take place in the dark. Bring a torch!
Christmas Market, Sunday 3 December.
Life, Death (and the Rest) is an annual event of talks, walks, theatre and film that supports a growing social movement talking about death, and how we remember our loved ones. 22–25 February 2018. They host many other events too. See: arnosvale.org.uk/all-events.

GLASGOW: NECROPOLIS

Tours: Saturday 25 November 12 noon
Saturday 9 December 1pm
Sunday 31 December 11am
for further dates see: www.glasgowneecropolis.org/tours-events