

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2019



**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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Ian Dungavell

With thanks to

Frank Cano, Adam Cooke, Craig Hamilton, Ian Kelly, Penny Linnett, Robin Oakley, Nick Powell, Charles Warren

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Cover photograph

Flowers appeared following test clearance of overgrowth in the East Cemetery last year.

Chair's note



Spring is always an exciting time at Highgate Cemetery, but this year more so than most. That's not because the strange burst of summer weather in February has confused the plants, but because ground has been uncovered which has not been seen for many years.

The clearance of a small area of the East Cemetery last year brought forth bluebells and other bulbs in place of a dense carpet of ivy, sunlight finally having reached soil which had been long starved of it, as you can see in the picture on the cover. Supplemented by a number of temporary gardeners, our team has now cleared most of the East Cemetery of overgrowth.

The impetus was a new mapping project which will accurately record the location of all our visible graves for the first time, and link to the cemetery's burials database. But it is also in accordance with our new conservation plan, which found that where 'large areas of the woodland ground layer are dominated by bramble and ivy, ... there is very little regeneration of desirable tree and shrub species'. The plan therefore recommends more active management of the understorey.

The work has also enabled us to assess the condition of many trees which were previously hard to inspect, and we found a number which required urgent attention. The clearance has revealed graves which had been hidden for decades and already we have heard from appreciative relatives finally able to locate theirs. Unfortunately quite a few monuments have also been damaged by the rampant growth in one way or another.

There is certainly much more to see on a visit to the East Cemetery. One can now read all the inscriptions, and the higgledy-piggledy appearance of the headstones now catches the light in a charming fashion.

As this is my sixth and therefore final year as a trustee, this is the last introduction I will write for the newsletter. It has been a great privilege to have served as a trustee, and huge fun too. The conservation plan paves the way for an exciting future and I am sure that the Cemetery will continue to thrive.

Adam Cooke, Chair



Died at Brighton... buried at Highgate

ROBIN OAKLEY notices that some Brighton deaths were buried in Highgate

From time to time one notices inscriptions on graves which record that the person buried there died in Brighton, or sometimes in other south coast towns such as Hastings or Eastbourne. Why then should they have been buried in Highgate Cemetery?

In Georgian times, Brighton became a fashionable resort for wealthy Londoners. The small fishing town originally named Brighthelmston was the destination of those seeking to bathe in, and drink, seawater as a health cure. The treatment's principal advocate, Dr Richard Russell, a medical practitioner in Lewes, particularly recommended it for curing glandular diseases.

The town grew rapidly during the second half of the eighteenth century, and began to be patronised by members of the aristocracy and royal family, and in due course by the Prince Regent (later King George IV) who built the extravagant Royal Pavilion. Initially the wealthy visitors took lodgings, either for short periods or over the winter, though later many purchased houses where they could retire.

As a result, there were many older Londoners who were either convalescing in or had retired to Brighton, some of whom inevitably died there. Whether or not they kept a London base, in death they were often

Above
Brighthelmston,
Sussex. Watercolour
by JMW Turner,
c.1824

Right, from top:
Frederick Akbar
Mahomed, Tom
Sayers, and
Charles Walker

reunited with their families in graves they owned back in the capital.

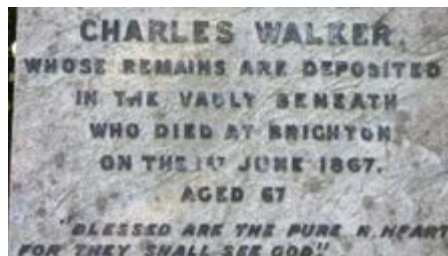
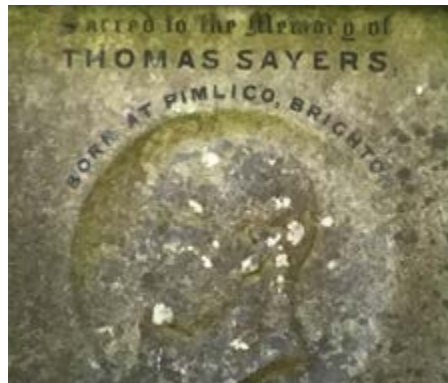
Well-known persons interred in Highgate Cemetery who died in Brighton but were not born there include Ernestine Rose (1810–92), the Jewish suffragist, abolitionist, and freethinker. Unwell, sad and lonely following the death of her husband ten years earlier, it was natural that in death she joined him back at Highgate Cemetery.

Also socially-isolated was the philosopher and social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), born in Derby, who died at home in Brighton and was cremated at Golders Green. The authorities at Westminster Abbey having turned down a request from his admirers for a memorial there, his wish to be buried in the grave he had bought at Highgate in 1899 was followed.

George Holyoake (1817–1906), the free-thinker and co-operator, had moved to Brighton shortly before his second marriage (twenty years before his death) but, like Spencer, was cremated at Golders Green and buried at Highgate in a grave he had bought before leaving London.

On the other hand one can also find in Brighton and Hove graveyards a number of inscriptions which give a prestigious London address or location for a person buried there. If the architect of Highgate Cemetery, Stephen Geary, had had his way, there would have been a new commercial cemetery in Brighton to take the remains of deceased locals and Londoners alike, as Ian Dungavell explains over the page.

One can also find graves in Highgate with the reverse trajectory, that is, that the deceased was born in Brighton and died in London. Two interesting examples in the West Cemetery are the grave of Dr Frederick Akbar Mahomed (1849–84), a pioneer physician who moved to London



following the death of his wife in Brighton, and Tom Sayers, the Victorian pugilist (1826–65), but no doubt there are many others less well-known. ■



The Brighton Cemetery Company

IAN DUNGAPELL looks at another of **Stephen Geary's** cemetery projects

In 1837 Highgate Cemetery was a hive of activity: the walls were being built, grounds being laid out, and chapels and lodges underway, all under the superintendence of its architect, Stephen Geary. And by the end of that year, nearly everything was complete.

Everything, that is, except the necessary agreements with the Cemetery's neighbours. Geary's failure to organise this led to a long delay in securing the consecration of the Cemetery, a souring of his relationship with the London Cemetery Company and an internal meltdown of the board.

In September 1838, the London Cemetery Company advertised that Highgate Cemetery was finished and ready for consecration. Geary was off the job. He was involved with three other cemetery

projects, having been appointed architect to Brompton Cemetery in July 1837 (although he was sacked very early in 1839), to Gravesend Cemetery in May 1838 and to Brighton Cemetery by September 1838. Like the London Cemetery Company, all of these companies he claimed to have founded, so his involvement in the project would have long preceded his appointment.

In Brighton, as in many other towns, the cholera epidemic of 1832 had brought calls to establish a cemetery. The Brighton Cemetery Company was first mooted in April 1836, precisely at the same time as moves were afoot to set up Highgate. But, while Highgate steamed ahead, all went quiet in Brighton for a couple of years until announcements that the company was now

to be formed started appearing in the press in September 1838.

There was, the promoters claimed, no town in England where a cemetery was more needed: Brighton had only one churchyard for a population of 48,000. The new company would have a capital of £25,000 raised in shares of £10 each, and its cemetery would be open to people of all religious persuasions.

The company must have secured enough investors, for the Brighton Cemetery Company Bill was duly presented to Parliament and received royal assent on 17 August 1839, precisely three years to the day after the London Cemetery Company's Act.

Geary's undated design for the cemetery is in the collection of the Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove (left). It looks like a preliminary 'ideal' scheme because the site and topography are vague, and an octagonal parcel of land would be most unusual. So it is likely to date from the 1836 proposals, as by 1838 a plot of about twenty acres had been found at "Scab's" or "Scabe's" Castle on the Lewes Road, near where the Brighton Extramural Cemetery was later laid out (opened 1851).

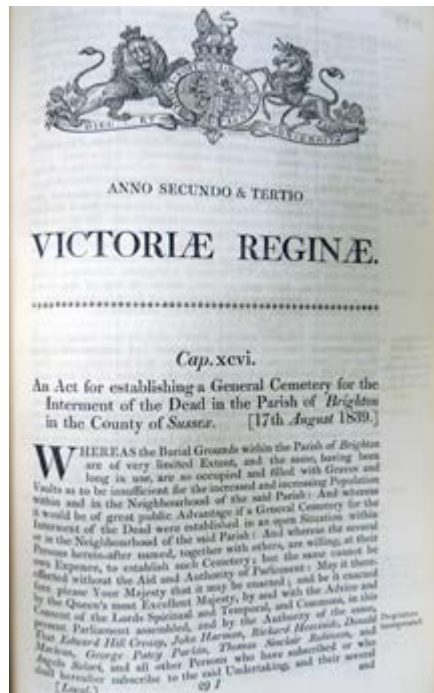
In October 1838 Geary's name still appeared as architect in the Company's advertisements, but early in 1839 a notice stated, 'The nomination of the architect will be left to the decision of the shareholders.' He had lost Brompton and Brighton in quick succession.

Geary's drawing showed a funeral procession passing through one of entrance lodges and through a cloister to the Anglican chapel, or it could go further on to the larger Nonconformist chapel at the hub of a network of radiating paths. At the opposite end of the site was a

raised terrace of catacombs providing a promenade with a view over the whole. Unlike Highgate Cemetery, the architecture is entirely Gothic in style.

Geary showed the cemetery planted with a mix of conifers and broadleaf trees and dotted with tombs in the conventional classical style of the time. He was clearly in need of a landscape architect.

But the Act having passed, nothing happened. Was it all a fraud? One of the directors was Angelo Solari, a rogue who it was later discovered was involved with a number of other joint-stock companies which failed to deliver for their shareholders. He died in 1840 but, amidst the scandal which eventually erupted, the name of the Brighton Cemetery Company was not mentioned. ■





New York in Highgate Cemetery

IAN DUNGAPELL finds that the Cheylesmore Mausoleum was designed by the leading American firm of architects of the early twentieth century

The monument to William Huskisson, the first widely-reported train fatality in England, is the centrepiece of St James's Cemetery in Liverpool. But who knew that interred at the heart of Highgate Cemetery is the first British peer to have died as a result of a car accident?

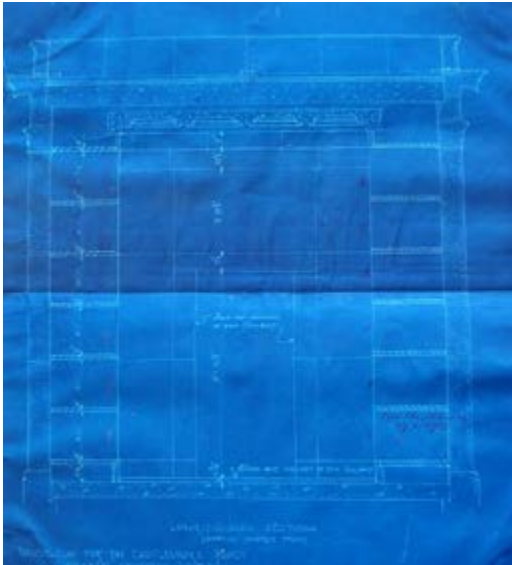
Herbert Francis Eaton (1848–1925), third Baron Cheylesmore, had been travelling back to his home near Egham, Surrey, one night after a National Rifle Association meeting at Bisley. His son, driving, lost control when he swerved to avoid a cyclist and the car careered into a telegraph pole. Cheylesmore, in the front passenger seat, was badly injured and died ten days later.

He had been extensively involved in public life: his monument in Victoria Embankment Gardens, designed by the great architect Edwin Lutyens, records him as 'Major-General Lord Cheylesmore, GBE, KCMG, KCMO, Grenadier Guards. Born 1848. Died 1925. Soldier, administrator, philanthropist and steadfast friend.' He had been chairman of the National Rifle Association since 1903, he had served on Westminster Council and had been chairman of the London County Council in 1912–13.

Like his father, Cheylesmore had taken an American wife: Elizabeth, the daughter of New York lawyer and banker, Francis Ormond French (1837–93), in 1892. Her younger sister married the phenomenally-wealthy Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt in 1901 (although they divorced in 1908 after his affair with the wife of the Cuban attaché in Washington DC). Since 1851 the Cheylesmore's London home had been at 16 Princes Gate, Hyde Park. Their neighbours were the Morgans, the wealthy American banking family: Junius Spencer, John Pierpont and John Pierpont junior in succession. So the Cheylesmores were closely connected to American aristocracy.

In 1925–26 the Morgans' London house was remodelled as the American ambassador's residence. The architect was Thomas Hastings of the pre-eminent New York firm Carrère & Hastings known for, among many other works, the Frick mansion and the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue, one of the most sumptuous buildings of its time. And that is saying something.

It has only just been rediscovered that, when faced with the task of choosing an architect for their mausoleum at Highgate, the Cheylesmores also went for Thomas Hastings. If you wanted a gleaming white marble mausoleum in a chaste Classical style, you could do no better. His British reputation had been cemented by the award of the Royal Institute of British Architects Gold Medal in 1922. As well as the ambassador's residence



he was at the same time working on the massive new Devonshire House on Piccadilly, which explains why he might have taken on what was a small job. The attribution is plausible on stylistic grounds, but clinched by the fact that a blueprint of the mausoleum glued in the back of the Cemetery register is stamped on the back, 'CARRÈRE & HASTINGS / 13 DEC 1926'.

The site was complicated and constricted, and the mausoleum small by American standards. The grave, just over 21 by 14 foot, had been purchased in 1859 and already contained in a brick vault the remains of the first Baron Cheylesmore, his wife and their eldest son, as well as the second Baron Cheylesmore and three others. As the blueprint shows, the new structure provided twelve more spaces, six shelves stacked high either side of the entrance. In the centre remains the earlier memorial, a cross on a stepped base.

Though there was ample space for the Cheylesmore dynasty, the third Baron was the last to be interred there; the fourth Baron (1893–1985) died in Canada without children and the baronetcy became extinct. Although there were two later interments, it seems unlikely the remaining spaces will ever be occupied. ■

Top The rubber stamp of 'CARRERE & HASTINGS' dated 13 December 1926 is on the reverse of the blueprint.

Above The blueprint, glued in the back of our owner's register, shows a section across the mausoleum, looking towards the front. According to this, the third Baron was interred in the bottom niche on the left of the entrance.

Left The interior of the Cheylesmore Mausoleum is panelled in white marble. The cross in the centre is the first memorial, around which the mausoleum was constructed.



A new beauty: uncovering the East Cemetery

IAN DUNGAPELL looks at the recent transformation

It's hard to imagine that one person working for a year could have managed to clear the East Cemetery of rampant ivy and bramble. Our gardeners had done their best to keep on top of it, preventing it spreading and making occasional inroads.

Now, with six extra hands working for two months, a transformation has been accomplished. Memorials which have been hidden for decades can once again be seen. Unfortunately, the destruction wrought by the growth is also evident.

Trees have toppled tombstones, and moisture held in by ivy has corroded their faces. At least we can now see what we have, where it is, and the state it's in.

Most concerning is the condition of the trees, many of which are poorly rooted or badly formed and, in some cases, already prone to decay. The priority is to identify and remove dangerous ones, and to promote the health of our heritage trees by haloing around them.

As that is done, suitable locations for new

“The gothic taste for overgrown cemeteries with ivy-clad tombstones and tumbling monuments poses another threat. Of course there is some appeal to a ‘wild’ landscape, but these are complex sites that need careful management. Unchecked vegetation is not benign. It poses serious challenges to the conservation of cemetery buildings and structures, as well as their setting. It can mask historic landscape design and cause the destabilisation, and eventually the collapse, of its built features. This deterioration only adds to the difficulties and final costs of conservation.”

Rebecca Barrett and Jenifer White of Historic England
'Saving cemeteries' in *Historic Churches*, 2016





planting will become evident. A landscape plan will be developed to guide the choice of new plants and their locations. We'll work out how to manage future regrowth. And soon we'll begin the task of putting

back together some of the memorials, while accepting that irregularity is attractive.

The work has shown that there is a lot more beauty to the East cemetery than used to meet the eye. ■

News roundup

Elle Hazlewood

Elle has left the staff to continue her career in volunteer management, joining the U3A as a Volunteering Officer. But she's already been back to her old ways as a volunteer tour guide. Meanwhile Kevin Bourne has been helping us keep things running smoothly during the interim.

Nikki Druce

Our new Volunteering Manager, Nikki Druce, started on 25 March. Nikki worked at London Zoo, where she was Volunteer Coordinator. She has held volunteer management roles at Carers UK and Bristol Zoo. She is also keen on London history.

The Reverend John Fielding

We were saddened to learn of the death of the Reverend John Fielding, aged 89, on 11 February. John's health had been in decline for a number of years causing him and his wife Margaret to move to Cheshire in order to be closer to their daughter Hilary. John was a former vicar of St Michael's Highgate. During his incumbency he served as a trustee of FOHC and following his retirement he became a Vice President. Those who served with John will recall with gratitude his wise counsel, keen judgement and sense of justice. The Friends have much to thank John for. ■



AGM

The Friends' AGM is on Wednesday 1 May, at the HLSI in Pond Square. It begins with a talk by Ian Dungavell at 7pm and the meeting proper starts at 8pm. Members will have received papers with this mailing,

New membership database

We've moved on to a new system called 'membermojo' which works best via email and the web. Simply by logging on members will be able to print their own membership cards, check the status of their membership, and renew if necessary.

Marx vandalism

The photo above shows what the monument looked like on 15 February. Historic England have commissioned a conservation report and the Marx Grave trust will then begin repairs. Much of the paint has since been cleaned off. ■

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.

Details: www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Regular **guided tours** start 2pm in the Meeting Place, North Lodge. £8 donation. 14, 28 April; every Sunday during May, June, July and August; 8, 22 September; 13, 27 October; 10, 24 November. There are also many themed tours covering areas such as suffragettes, trees, wildflowers, and the catacombs! Full details see brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

KENSAL GREEN

Guided tours normally at 2pm every Sunday afternoon from the beginning of March to the end of October. 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 2.30pm from April to October. Tours start at the Cemetery Main Gate, Norwood Road, SE27. The tours last about 90 minutes.

Talks start at 2.30pm at Chatsworth Baptist Church, Chatsworth Way (off Norwood Road), SE27. £1 donation. Saturday 19 October 2019. AGM and

Lecture: The Cubitts and the River Thames by Chris Everett www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

Guided tours last Sunday of every month at 2.15pm and last up to two hours. Free. 18 May, 11am to 5pm. Annual Open Day Full programme see www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

Guided tours third Sunday of every month at 2pm. Free. Many other events relate to nature, such as birds, insects, and trees. For the full programme see www.fothcp.org



THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

Saturday 18 May 2019

Great gardens of death: Urban cemeteries of the nineteenth century in England

A **study day** at the Art-Workers' Guild, London, organised by Professor Hilary Grainger and Ian Dungavell.

£55 including sandwich lunch

Book at www.victoriansociety.org/events.