

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2019



**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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Registered Office

Highgate Cemetery

Swain's Lane, London N6 6PJ

Telephone 020 8340 1834

Web www.highgatecemetery.org

Company Number 3157806

Charity Number 1058392

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Cover photograph

The chapels at the entrance to Highgate Cemetery West.

Trustee elections

In 2020 three trustees will come to the end of their first terms and have indicated that they will stand for re-election or re-appointment.

Any other member who wishes to stand against them should see our website for information.

Chair's note



As 2019 draws to a close I am delighted to report two major developments. After eighteen months of work, we submitted our Private Bill to Parliament on November 27. Then in the last few weeks the Camden Planning Officers have notified us that they are recommending approval of our plans for a new electronically controlled entrance at the Chester Gate at the foot of the East Cemetery.

The Private Bill is crucial to our plans to keep Highgate as a 'living' cemetery. If passed, it will allow us to continue with burials by taking back long-abandoned graves so preserving the cemetery's special character. It won't be an instant process. It could take as long as two years as it will have to go through all the usual Parliamentary processes. We are delighted that Baroness Featherstone has agreed to sponsor the Bill in the Lords while Catherine West will sponsor it in the Commons — provided she is re-elected. As for the Chester Road gate, we hope to start work in the New Year on our plan which will provide electronic entry for Friends and Grave-owners and also allow visitors to exit that way.

Developments like this are all part of our plans to improve access to the cemetery for everyone including our rapidly increasing number of visitors. This year we came within a whisker of 100,000, the highest ever, up an astonishing 16 percent.

That is a tribute to the work our volunteers and staff have put in, come rain or shine, throughout the year. Congratulations and thank you. But we are aware what a strain it is placing on everybody. We urgently need more help. So if you might be interested in becoming a volunteer — guiding, greeting, booking people in, helping with gardening, please get in touch. We will welcome you.

Martin Adeney, Chair



Above

Stephen Geary's *Cemetery designs for tombs and cenotaphs* was published in 1840, the year after Highgate Cemetery opened

The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. 17230e.7.



Left

Final touches to the Chamen monument

© Sally Strachey Historic Conservation

A monument by Stephen Geary

STUART ORR has discovered the only monument at Highgate Cemetery we know to have been designed by its founder



A few days after the architect Stephen Geary died of cholera in August 1854, he was buried in Highgate Cemetery.

Among the many and varied things he had done during his career, besides founding the London Cemetery Company and being architect for Highgate Cemetery, was to publish a pamphlet entitled *Cemetery designs for tombs and cenotaphs*. It contains twenty-one designs for monuments in a variety of styles.

An article in the *Morning Advertiser* on 5 November 1840 noted that in ‘...this interesting work, Mr. S. Geary, the architect, has given the public in a neat form a series of designs for tombs and cenotaphs, which will be useful to architects and sculptors in rendering the last duties to the dead. Twenty-one sculptural monuments copied from the antique display much of the taste of the Egyptians and Greeks, from whom the moderns have derived great advantage. This little effort will introduce a combination of beautiful designs in sculpture, proper to enrich our cemeteries.’

How widely it was distributed we do not know, but one of the very few surviving copies is in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Until recently, we were not aware that Geary had ever put his theory into practice.

In May this year I was trying to locate the graves mentioned in Thomas Dolby’s idiosyncratic 1845 book, *Memorials of the Highgate Cemetery*. I noticed that one entry included a note that the architect of the monument was Stephen Geary. I located it on the relevant plan and went looking for it

Above and right
The Chamen
monument, before
and after



Above The Chamen grave, number 24, which once would have stood in glorious isolation, is now surrounded by many others on a side path in the north of the West Cemetery

at the top of the Western cemetery. After a bit of a search I found what appeared to be the right location and there found a stone monument which had fallen apart. On one of the end panels were the words 'Stephen Geary, Architect, Hamilton Place'. Geary's practice had been at 10 Hamilton Place in King's Cross, so I knew this was the monument.

The monument had been described by Dolby as, 'A transverse section of a roof, with an acroter [i.e. a platform for statue or urn], and a double handled urn on its apex'. Although the monument had fallen apart, the panels were intact and matched the description. However, there was no trace of the urn. Though the monument dates from the year before Geary published his book of designs, it resembles none of these.

Thanks to a generous donation from Dr Peter Sowerby this important grave has now been restored. As it is the only surviving monument at Highgate we know to have been designed by the architect of the Cemetery, it is of very special significance,

Below

Both the architect's and mason's names were recorded on the monument



and we hope that in due course it will be listed.

It was the twenty-fourth plot to be sold in Highgate. The first burial in this grave was a twenty-nine year old woman, Elizabeth Chamen, born in Wiltshire, who died on 16 August 1839. Her husband of just eighteen months, Richard Tewkesbury Chamen, of Red Lion Square, Holborn, had bought the plot a month earlier suggesting, perhaps, that her death was not unexpected.

Chamen was a wine merchant and that was probably his link to Stephen Geary. Geary had a connection with the alcohol trade as an architect, '...especially of gin palaces'. However, his link to Chamen was probably through the Association of Licensed Victuallers. Geary had been described in 1834 as Architect to the Association. Both he and Chamen are recorded as being financial supporters of the Licensed Victuallers School, a building

in Kennington for the children of 'deceased or distressed' member of the trade.

Later in his life Geary's attitude to alcohol changed. In 1851 Geary had said to the artist, George Cruikshank, whose influence led to him giving up drink, 'I am tired of building gin palaces, and I'll build no more'. He became a 'committed teetotaler' and a member of the General Council of the newly-formed *United Kingdom Alliance for the suppression of the traffic in all intoxicating liquors*.

But ironically, at a time when many drank beer because it was safer than water, Geary was struck down by cholera in August 1854. In November that year, at their annual meeting, the Alliance members made record of the fact that they deplored the loss of their zealous General Council member, Stephen Geary.

Geary's monument in Highgate is nothing like the one he designed for the Chamen's grave or like any of his published designs. It is a small, simple headstone with the words,

'Sacred
to the Memory of
STEPHEN GEARY, E^{sq.},
Architect and Founder of this Cemetery' ■

**Above**

Geary's own monument is much plainer © Stuart Orr



Neave Brown: A pioneer of housing

ROBIN OAKLEY remembers a RIBA Royal Gold Medal winning architect, the first to have all his UK work listed, who is now buried in the East Cemetery

A recent arrival in the East Cemetery is the grave of the architect Neave Brown, renowned world-wide for his pioneer work here in Camden on high-quality low-rise housing. He was the only architect to have all his major work in the UK listed (by Historic England) during his lifetime, and was the recipient of the RIBA Royal Gold Medal Award in 2017 shortly before his death in 2018.

After studying at the Architectural Association in the 1950s, Neave undertook various projects, the most significant of which was the construction of a terrace of five houses at the bottom of Winscombe Street (just south of the Cemetery) for his own family and friends. These demonstrate

many of what would become his trademark features, including the ingenious combination of private and communal space.

Subsequently, he joined the Architect's Department of Camden Council in 1966 where he played a leading role. He had been recruited by Sydney Cook, who had been appointed the year before as the new Borough Architect, and who built up a remarkable team of talented young architects to undertake projects.

The first project Neave designed was the Dunboyne Estate on Fleet Road, where with low-rise terraces he achieved the same housing densities as the high-rise towers that originally had been envisaged. Every

Opposite

Neave Brown in his
flat in Dunboyne
Road. © Stefi Orazi

Below

Winscombe Street
houses
© Jo McCafferty



house opened out onto a public walkway and had its own patio garden area. His design established a template that other projects undertaken by the team would follow and develop.

His second project, the estate at Alexandra Road in South Hampstead, was his largest and most ambitious, and won him wide recognition. It was a comprehensive low-rise landscaped development, with stacked terraces along pedestrian streets, and a full range of communal facilities including a school,

shops and a small park.

It was bedevilled, however, by construction delays (due to problems encountered on site), and rising costs due to the massive inflation of the 1970s. The Council attempted to blame the architects, who were exonerated by a subsequent inquiry, but after this Neave never again worked on a major project in Britain and transferred his efforts principally to the Netherlands, where his final 'master work', the Medina at Eindhoven, was completed in 2002.

His immediate legacy, however, lies not just with his own designs, but also the projects in Camden by other members of the team. Prominent among these is the Highgate New Town Estate (now called Whittington) which borders on the south-east corner of the Cemetery. Designed by Peter Tábori, it illustrates all the main features advocated by Neave, and a walk-around is easily combined with a visit to the Cemetery.

Above Dunboyne
Road Estate



Neave had great respect for the famous modernist architect Le Corbusier, but rejected his ideas about high-rise housing and the lay-out of cities. Instead, he was passionately committed to the idea of the street as a focus of communal life, and was an admirer of well laid-out Georgian towns with their streets and squares, as well as Victorian terrace housing.

He envisaged his design for Alexandra Road as lying firmly in this tradition of housing in London and other British cities, and used modern ideas and materials (such as concrete) to continue this tradition. He also designed the interior features of the housing he built, ensuring they were suited to the needs of modern families. He did not see himself as specifically designing ‘council housing’, but rather housing of a standard that everyone should be able to have access to.

Neave Brown had been a local resident

since the 1960s, and I had the privilege of getting to know him well when we became fellow-grandparents for the last two decades of his life. After they moved out of Winscombe Street, he and his wife Janet lived in a flat on the Dunboyn Road Estate which he had designed. His modest grave lies on the path which runs along the wall adjoining Waterlow Park, on the north border of the Cemetery.

Further information about Neave’s work and that of Sydney Cook’s team can be found in two excellent and well-illustrated books. The first is a short guide in paperback, *The golden age of Camden housing*, by Fabian Watkinson (himself a long-standing resident on the Whittington Estate), while the second is a very substantial and comprehensive account of *Cook’s Camden: the Making of Modern Housing*, by the architectural historian Mark Swenarton. ■



Losing our Cedar of Lebanon



Above

The canopy survived towards the north-east and the south-west, with a 'bald spot' in the middle



Above

The removal of the tree was a painstaking process to avoid damaging the listed structures

Top

The loss of the central upper crown has been attributed to snow damage. © Ethan Parker



For many, perhaps the saddest event of the year has been the loss of the Cedar of Lebanon at the heart of the West Cemetery, our most significant tree.

It was here before the Cemetery, which was laid out around it, effectively marooning it as a giant bonsai encircled by a ring of burial chambers. It had nine co-dominant stems fused together to a height of about 2.5 metres, the central one dead.

The appearance of a fruiting 'Chicken of the Woods' fungus prompted us to commission a full structural integrity report. Advanced stage internal decay was found as well as a significant cavity.

Alas, the conclusion was that the tree had a high potential of catastrophic failure and posed a risk to both persons and property: we were told to close the Circle of Lebanon until the tree was made safe. As that involved removing the canopy, effectively it meant the end of the tree.

A vigorous young Cedar has just been planted which will in due course become a majestic tree of the future. ■



Above

The removal of the old Cedar of Lebanon

Photos © Parker Visuals

Above

Although some of the canopy timber was sound, the stems were riddled with decay

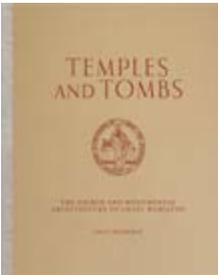
News roundup

Chapel roof fixed but changes needed

Recently we repaired damage caused by furniture beetle to the roof of the Chapel. Using the building as a visitor reception with the heating on and the doors open all day created ideal conditions for them as moist air condensed on the relatively cool timbers of the roof. Insulation and ventilation would improve things, but even better would be to move our visitor reception elsewhere.

Temples and Tombs

The architect Craig Hamilton designed our Goldhammer Sepulchre, and another mausoleum by him here has just received planning consent. This beautiful new book about him includes two mausolea (ours, and one at Kensal Green) as well as an introduction by Ellis Woodman which sets Hamilton's work within a rich historical context. Published by Lund Humphries. £40 hardback. FOHCT members get 20% off and free UK postage: order through www.lundhumphries.com and use code *Highgate20*. Offer valid until 31 Dec 2019.



A new Highgate Cemetery Act

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust has submitted a Private Bill which, if successful, would allow us to better manage the Cemetery. Similar powers are already available to local authority cemeteries in London.

We would be able to extinguish rights of burial in unwanted grave spaces and, if necessary, disturb and reinter human remains in order to increase space for further burials and for the improvement of the cemetery. We could also use appropriately or remove altogether any memorials on such graves.

The Bill would also repeal redundant legislation pertaining to the London Cemetery Company, which was originally responsible for running Highgate.

Naturally there are many safeguards to preserve the interests of grave owners and their families, and to protect the heritage. A copy of the Bill may be viewed from 4 December 2019 at highgatecemetery.org/news. ■

Above Chairman Martin Adeny and Trustee Katy Baldwin with the signed Petition for Leave to introduce our new Bill



In memory Nora Perfect

Nora Perfect, née Thompson

20.8.1922 – 21.9.2019

remembered by Lizzie Wells

Nora's father was an irrigation engineer and between the ages of five and eleven she lived with her family in the Punjab. She was then sent to board at a girls' school in Windsor where she endured the miseries of home-sickness but her holidays were passed among friends. With them she revelled in the dancing, films and pantos which provided pre-war entertainment for young girls. On the outbreak of war in 1939 the family settled in Formby, on Merseyside.

After graduating from Liverpool University, Nora joined the ATS (a branch of the Women's Army), through which she was recruited to serve at Bletchley Park. She was later billeted next to the Albert Hall, which provided the ideal base for joining the rousing VE-day celebrations in Pall Mall which marked the end of the war in Europe in 1946. She was involved, as an administrator, with the 1948 Summer Olympics and, in 1951, with the Festival of Britain. By that time she had become Mrs Nora Perfect; she and Peter were to spend the next sixty years together, raising their three children at their home in north London.

In 1961 Nora began a long career as a primary school teacher. This was in due course followed by many years of happy and healthy retirement whose serenity was only shaken by Peter's death in 2007. Apart from her extended family, her abiding enthusiasms were their allotment, the Golders Green Wives Fellowship, her once a week volunteer 'watch' at St Martins within Ludgate — and Highgate Cemetery.

In 1991 Nora and a friend took responsibility for the maintenance of the three hundred or so graves of servicemen and women who are buried on both sides of Highgate Cemetery. The plots had to be located before being freed from their thickets of brambles, horsetail and bindweed. Her work continues today with a group of volunteers who give their time and skills to ensuring that these Commonwealth War Graves are visible and well-maintained.

Widely respected and well-loved, Nora delighted in her family and in her wide circle of friends. Hers was a long life, well lived. ■

Historic cemeteries news

What's on at our sister cemeteries

ABNEY PARK

8 Dec 12pm: Seasonal songs. Free.
14 Dec 2pm: Tour: The Three Trials of William Hone, led by Alan Gartrell
Tours and special events are advertised on their website. Details: www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Regular **guided tours** start 2pm in the Meeting Place, North Lodge. £8 donation. 2020 dates to be confirmed
8 Dec 2.15pm: Christmas Carol Concert
Full details see brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

8 Mar: Brookwood Muslim Cemetery Trail Walk led by Tharik Hussain
www.tbcs.org.uk

KENSAL GREEN

Guided tours normally at 2pm every Sunday afternoon from March to October; first and third Sunday of the month from November to 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. No need to book. www.kensalgreen.co.uk

WEST NORWOOD

Guided tours first Sunday of the month at 11am from November to March. Tours start at the Cemetery Main Gate, Norwood Road, SE27 and last about 90 minutes.

Talks start at 2.30pm at Chatsworth Baptist Church, Chatsworth Way (off Norwood Road), SE27. £1 donation.
www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

Guided tours last Sunday of the month at 2.15pm for up to two hours. Free.
8 Dec: Woodland trees walk.
Full programme see www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

Guided tours third Sunday of the month at 2pm. Free. Many other events relate to nature, such as birds, insects, and trees.
4 July 2020, 12pm to 5pm: Summer Fair
For the full programme see www.fothcp.org

WILLESDEN JEWISH CEMETERY

until 16 Feb: The House of Life exhibition at Willesden Green Library, 95 High Road, Willesden London, NW10 2SF.
22 Jan 7pm: Songs Unearthed: Music from Willesden Jewish Cemetery
www.theus.org.uk/houseoflife

CROATIAN CEMETERIES TOUR

13 to 15 May, including cemeteries in Zagreb, Zadar and Rijeka, and a workshop on cultural tourism in cemeteries. See cemeteriesroute.eu/news/european-cemeteries-tour-2020.aspx