

# NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2022



**HIGHGATE  
CEMETERY.**

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Ian Dungavell

Our apologies that this issue is slightly late due to circumstances beyond our control.

## With thanks to

Martin Adeney, Brent Elliott, Penny Linnett, Robin Oakley, John Shepperd, Florence Nightingale Museum, London Transport Museum

The December 2022 issue will be posted on 18 November 2022. Contributions due by 13 Oct 2022.

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## Cover photograph

A bus decorated with flowers as a tribute to Albert Roy Luxton, who slammed his runaway bus into a lamppost, killing himself, but thereby avoiding a large crowd of pedestrians. Postcard, 1912. *Highgate Cemetery collection*

## Chair's note



It's been a busy summer for the Cemetery. A huge amount of preparatory work, explained in the booklet enclosed with this mailing, has been proceeding to make sure we get our Conservation Project right. We have been strengthening our team to meet the challenges. Meanwhile on the ground our gardeners have had to work extra hard to deal with the effects of the drought. Visitor numbers, and demands, have been increasing.

Our Conservation Project emphasises the importance of proofing the Cemetery as far as we can against the ravages of climate change — and the drought has delivered a sharp reminder of its potency. Along with the general dryness and brownness, we have had an increase in trees splitting and dropping branches, and there will be longer-term effects. We must plant more resilient varieties for the future.

At the same time visitors have been coming back to the Cemetery. Latest figures show a near ten thousand increase on the last, admittedly difficult, year with July particularly busy. The opportunity for self-guided visits to the West continues to be a big draw and foreign visitors are back in numbers.

So we are delighted to welcome our new Head of Operations, Guinevere Short, who is responsible for all the day-to-day activity associated with opening the cemetery to grave owners and visitors. She will bring extra skills to a management team which is already benefiting from the contribution of our first Head of Finance, Judith Chadbourne, who joined in the Spring.

Finally, you will be delighted to know that after some renovations, the installation of new lighting, a hearing loop and removal of the ticket sales desk, the Chapel is once more being appreciated as a place of sanctuary and quiet and it is now possible to light a candle of remembrance there. Do come and see!

Martin Adeney, Chair



## The funeral of the Highgate Hill runaway motor bus driver

**A newspaper account of a funeral offers a tragic insight into a grave in Highgate Cemetery East**

On Saturday afternoon, 15 June 1912, at 3.30pm, the funeral procession with the body of Albert Roy Luxton, the driver of the Highgate-hill runaway motor bus who went to an almost inevitable death in his gallant effort to avoid the crowds in Holloway-road, smashing himself and his 'bus against a tramway standard at the foot of the hill, left the house at 24, St. John's-road, Upper Holloway, and proceeded through streets thronged with a press of spectators to the final resting place of the dead hero in the Highgate Cemetery.

Never perhaps has a man of Luxton's station in life gone on his last journey in a more fragrant wrapping of flowers. They were there in costly profusion; wreaths of

the most ingenious and artistic form; a wreath of colours wonderful to behold. The mauve and the pink, the green and the white, the red and the purple embalmed the body in a winding sheet of hue and perfume.

The 'bus, draped with cloths of black and purple and hung and festooned with flowers, was a gorgeous centre-piece in the picture. It was loaded and piled with flowers. The coffin itself was buried in a mass of blooms; and the open funeral car was heaped with the pillage of a hundred gardens.

Every house in the road was blank with blinds. There were no indecently-winking windows in St. John's-road; every eye of every house was reverently closed.

The widow was a pathetic figure as she

**Above** A bus decorated with flowers by his colleagues as a tribute to Luxton. Postcard, 1912. *Highgate Cemetery collection.*

was helped into her carriage in the heavy odour of lilies and roses, the nerve-shaking strains of the “Dead March” sounding ominously in her ears.

There were many wet eyes in the crowd. It was always a revelation to witness the sensibility of the public on sad occasions... Everywhere one could see the quivering lip and the watery eye. Everywhere was the bowed head and the raised hat. Everywhere were the outward and visible signs of regret and respect for a hero. It was a triumphal procession marred by the fact that the hero of it was not conscious of his triumph.

And so, amid flowers with their colour and perfume, they bore him to his tomb. In the street the sellers of memorial cards did a roaring trade, making their night’s supper

and lodging out of the funeral. But the eagerness with which the public purchased showed how its great heart was stirred by a story of pluck and steadfastness, a story of devotion to duty, as it is not often stirred. The dead man’s colleagues, in their white coats and caps tramped slowly along in the wake of the hearse, paying their tribute to one to whom the public in very many thousands also paid a tribute that is only given to statesmen and famous soldiers, and – heroes!

#### AT THE CEMETERY

It was nearing five o’clock when the strains of the “Dead March” denoted to the waiting throng in Highgate Cemetery that the cortege was nearing the end of its journey.

All along the route the final passing of Instructor Luxton had claimed its thousands of sympathetic onlookers. So also at the cemetery had a multitude of citizens gathered to await his arrival and to pay him the last tribute.

The resting place was not far from the lower cemetery gates, approached by way of Chester-road. The crowd stretching away to the left indicated the site of the grave. Rope cordons extended from the main pathway to the graveside, and on either side the crowds gathered thickly. Their demeanour, as with those on the line of route, was one of deep respect and of profound and whole-souled sympathy. Again, again, and again could the passer-by hear the event of the previous Saturday being discussed and admiration expressed for what Instructor Luxton did to save others. It was an assembly, mainly, perhaps, of Holloway and Highgate people. It mourned the loss of a fellow-citizen, a neighbour, and a brave man. It voiced its sympathy for the widow and little ones in



**Above** Luxton’s memorial in Highgate Cemetery East, made by E. Mills & Sons.

**Below** Driver Luxton. *Image from the London Transport Museum collection 2004/13171*



the most human terms. And from these congregations of the living, drawn up in long, deep-set lines amidst this city of tombs, there seemed to go up the general appeal on behalf of the bereaved ones, "God bless them!"

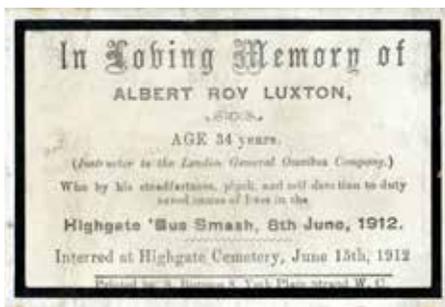
Nearer and nearer the procession approaches the final scene. The solemn, impressive music breaks with more fullness upon the ear. It is the "Dead March," and never more did it seem to press home the poignancy of its sadness and the depths of its mournful woe. The white-coated men of the London General can be seen in the distance. At stately, measured pace come the four horses drawing the open hearse, which is canopied with the floral emblems, choice and fragrant. Next the funeral coaches, and then, like a great moving monster, impressive in its drapery of purple and black and hung with handsome specimens of the florist's art – tributes inscribed with words of sympathy from all their garages – follows the "L.G." bus.

Then there is the main body of uniformed men, numbering their hundreds. As the

cemetery gates are neared they move ahead. The pathway approach is a long line of white service coats. There is a halt for a moment. The band continues its solemn music. Breaking away, the uniformed men of the London General quietly fall back on either side. Hats are off. They are at attention. They are a guard of honour, and avenue of comradeship, through which Inspector Luxton must pass on to his final resting place.

As the procession reaches the graveside the music ceased. Rev. W. Stephens Muntz, D.D., of St. John's, Upper Holloway, took up his position and conducted the last rites. The whole of the burial service was conducted in the open air, as, of course, it would have been impossible to find accommodation in the chapel for the numerous attendance of mourners. Gathering round the grave the uniformed men performed a share in the service, and particularly impressive was the manner in which they took up the recital of the Lord's Prayer.

After the proper lesson, the officiating minister took an opportunity of addressing the huge concourse of people. In the course of an appropriate line of thought, he reminded the people that the church's burial service was not for the dead, but for the living. It bore a message of warning to all, "Be ye also ready." He exhorted them



**Above** Luxton's memorial card.  
©TfL from the London Transport Museum collection 1998/2468.

**Below** Luxton's funeral procession on Holloway Road, at the corner of Fortnam Road.

*Image from the London Transport Museum collection 2004/13175*



to be ready for a call which must come to everyone.

Comrades in the London General service lowered the coffin, and Instructor Luxton was in his final resting place. The last prayers were said, and then the minister's voice, pronouncing "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," denoted that the service was at an end.

There was yet to follow another impressive period. It was whilst the band rendered that beautiful hymn, now made famous amongst all nations by the recent "Titanic" disaster – "Nearer my God to Thee."

"There let the way appear  
Steps up to heaven.  
Angels beckon me...  
Nearer to Thee."

With bowed heads the congregation followed the rendering, and here and there were attempts to sing the hymnal words... Its tender strains left an impression upon a vast concourse of people now about to leave that scene of restfulness to return

to their every day pursuits in the world outside. Before leaving, the mourners and public passed before the grave and gazed upon the coffin, whose breastplate read:--

ALBERT R. LUXTON,  
Died June 9th, 1912  
Aged 36 years.

To take this final look was to make the truth more and more impressed upon all that surely this was death in the midst of life.

Afterwards the uniformed men formed up, and headed by the Holloway Town Silver Band, marched back to the garage. The rule of military life by which soldiers, after paying farewell to a departed comrade, are enlivened by brighter music on the return journey, was here observed. The London General men returned to the inspiring strains of quicksteps, such as "The Young Recruit" and "The Emperor." On arrival at the garage in Holloway-road they were dismissed. ■

Transcribed from *Islington Daily Gazette and North London Tribune*, 17 June 1912, page 5.



## An angel fails to please

**Precious little is known about how a nineteenth-century widow might go about choosing a monument to her husband. But, thanks to a court case, BRENT ELLIOTT can reveal the sorry story of one of Highgate Cemetery's angels**

Thomas Litton (1806-73) is shown in the 1851 census as a meat salesman, but his business evidently moved upmarket during the following decade, for in the censuses for 1861 and 1871 he is described as a provision merchant. He lived with his

wife Maria (c.1817-99) and children at a number of different addresses, ranging from Cottage Place, Finsbury, in 1851, to 1 St Mark's Villas, Tollington Park, in 1871.

When Litton died, his widow Maria arranged with Millward and Co. to construct

**Above** *Left*, Thomas Litton's grave in Highgate Cemetery West with, *right*, the angel from *The Spirit of Praise* which inspired it

his monument. It was to consist of a sculpture of an angel, with a pedestal, and metal posts and chains. The total cost came to £448, of which Mrs Litton had paid £406. In February 1874, Millward took her to court for the remainder. The only surviving records of the case are newspaper reports: in *The Times* for 19 February, and the *Building News* for 24 February; there is no full record of the testimony — many people, nowhere listed, appeared to give evidence for each side — but the reports provide enough information to give an interesting insight into British monumental masonry in the mid-19th century.

Mrs Litton's case was that the monument had not been carried out to her requirements, and that she should not be required to pay the full sum when her wishes had not been met. *The Times*, giving fuller details, revealed that Millward had produced a design which she had approved, and that she had visited his studio while works were in progress and made additional suggestions, which had been carried out. How far had the works advanced, that she was not able to see the shortcomings of which she later complained?

The design had been based on an illustration in a book which Thomas Litton had owned. Only *The Times* identified it: *The Spirit of Praise*, an anthology of hymns and religious lyrics published by Frederick Warne in 1866. A sumptuous product of 1860s book production, it was bound in red cloth with bevelled edges and the title set in a recessed panel on the front board. The illustrations were engraved by the brothers Dalziel, the leading firm of wood-engravers at the time, whose vaults and graves will be found in the Egyptian Avenue and elsewhere in the West Cemetery; the artists included William Small, Arthur

Boyd Houghton, George John Pinwell, and Edward and Thomas Dalziel (the last three buried in Highgate), but there is no index to the illustrators and the signatures can be difficult to distinguish. Most of the wood-engravings were in monochrome, but each section had a frontispiece in which the engraving was framed against a gilt background.

One of these, introducing the section entitled 'The kingdom of Christ' (facing p. 217 in the original edition), is the illustration Mrs Litton proposed as the model for her husband's monument. Her objections to the completed sculpture were: 'the figure was too thin and slim, and the measurement across the wings was not as much as it should have been' (*Building News*); 'the wings were too scanty, the feathers not cut deep enough, the foot not sufficiently prominent' (*Times*). Millward responded that they had altered the depth of the feathers 'once or twice, and were willing to alter still further'; and that the slimness of the figure 'was rendered necessary by the fact that the base of the monument could not be made more than four feet wide, and therefore, to preserve the pyramidal form, it was necessary to

make the figures less wide than in the book'. Neither of the press reports made any remark about the differences in facial expression and stiffness of posture.

Mrs Litton's



**Above** The lavish title page of *The Spirit of Praise*, published by Frederick Warne in 1866

**Below** The back of the Litton angel



final point was that the angel ‘was not the work of a sculptor’. The judge said that ‘Mrs. Litton, having agreed to pay a handsome price, was entitled to look for a handsome monument, but not for a production of high art’. The jury found for the defendant: ‘the work was not executed with that amount of skill and care to which the defendant was entitled considering the amount paid’.

That would seem to put monumental masonry in its place: ‘Not a production of high art’. Note the vocabulary used by *Kelly’s Directory* in 1870: while other firms are described as ‘monumental masons’, Millward & Co. were described as ‘monumental sculptors’. The implication is clear: Millward’s team actually carved statues, while many other firms limited themselves to headstones, kerbs, railings, and inscriptions. The quality of Millward’s work, at this early date at least, is stiff,

formal, and hieratic by comparison with the work of a fine-art sculptor like John Henry Foley, whose monument for the artist James Ward in Kensal Green Cemetery attracted press attention in the 1860s; Mrs Litton was presumably expecting something like Foley’s work.

The irony is that within a few years angels of finer quality were entering English cemeteries in increasing numbers. Millward’s problem was that he didn’t own a quarry in Italy. During the course of the 1870s, two English firms which did own quarries near Carrara – Walton Gooddy and Anselm Odling – which had begun their careers as exporters of marble, turned to the production of monuments, for which they employed teams of sculptors trained in Italian schools. Had Thomas Litton only lived a decade longer, his widow could have commissioned a monument that would have met her standards more easily. ■



## Putto mended

Our little marble of a putto mending his net has been cleaned and his wings refixed by conservator Claudia Fiocchetti. Where did he come from? He has spent very little time outside, if any, and has been in the office for as long as anyone can remember. ■



**Above** Claudia Fiocchetti at work cleaning the putto and **right**, the conserved sculpture once again at home in the office.

# Florence Nightingale's Goddess

**ROBIN OAKLEY** finds that a disciple of Florence Nightingale is buried at Highgate Cemetery

One of the pioneers of modern nursing, a disciple and close friend of Florence Nightingale, is buried on the East side of Highgate Cemetery. Rachel Norris, née Williams (1839-1908), was a leading member of the group of nurses who implemented Nightingale's reforms in hospitals around the country. Many had been initially trained by Nightingale at St Thomas's. They acted as 'matrons' or 'superintendents' for nursing staff in hospitals, some setting up training schools and writing guidance books for the new profession.

Little is known about Williams' early life. Born in 1839 in Dudley in Worcestershire, where her father was recorded in the 1841 Census as a miller, ten years later she was at a Quaker girls' boarding school in Croydon, while in 1861 she was back with her family in Dudley. Then in 1871 she began her training at St Thomas's Hospital with Nightingale.

From 1873 onwards her nursing career is quite well documented, thanks especially to the extensive correspondence between her and Florence Nightingale that has survived. Nightingale formed a high opinion of Williams, nicknaming her the 'Goddess', and supported her progress by both providing advice and creating opportunities.

Williams' first appointment was as Assistant Superintendent of Nurses at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. Nightingale received glowing reports of her work there, and when the post of Matron at

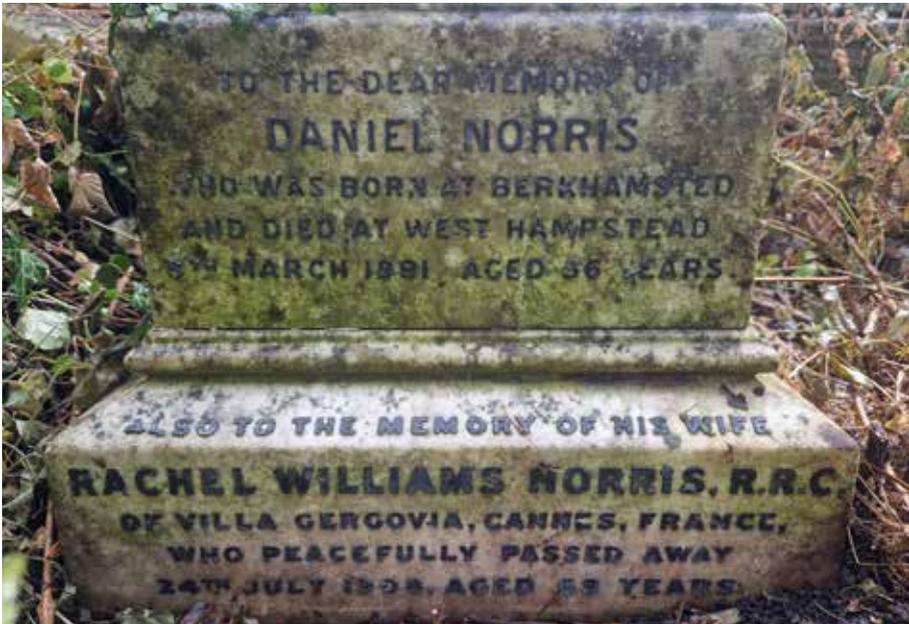


St Mary's Hospital Paddington became vacant in 1876, Williams was appointed on Nightingale's strong recommendation. She introduced a range of reforms, with nurses graded in a three-tier structure of 'sisters', 'staff nurses' and 'probationers', each with specific roles and salary levels. With her friend Alice Fisher, another of Nightingale's disciples, she published a book entitled *Hints to Hospital Nurses* in 1877. Her dynamism, though, gave rise to tensions between her and some of the established staff and governors, and she eventually resigned in January 1885.

At the same time, however, she was

**Above** Rachel Williams was nicknamed the 'Goddess' by Florence Nightingale.  
*Image courtesy Florence Nightingale Museum*

**Below** The grave of Rachel Norris in Highgate Cemetery East



invited by the Government to take a team of nurses out to Egypt and the Sudan. Initially she went to Suakin, the port in north-east Sudan that was the base for British military operations against the Mahdist Revolution. In April she returned briefly to England with a contingent of sick and wounded soldiers. Subsequently she acted as Superintendent for the nurses at the British Military Hospital at Suez, before finally returning home in September. On 23 October 1885 the London Gazette announced that she had been awarded the Royal Red Cross (R.R.C.) by Queen Victoria, a decoration for exceptional services in military nursing. .

Then in December that year, she married Daniel Norris, a widowed doctor whom she had met in Egypt, and they lived on the Finchley Road in West Hampstead. Although it is not clear how much she remained involved with nursing, Nightingale

complained that Williams had given up her career by marrying. But in March 1891, however, he died aged 56, and Rachel, now Norris, buried him here in Highgate Cemetery.

Her husband's estate went to his daughters, not her. Nightingale rejoiced at the thought that Rachel might return to nursing, which she did, in a way. To make some money, by July 1891 Norris had rewritten her 1877 book which was then republished as *Norris's Nursing Notes*.

In 1892, she set up a nursing home at the Villa Gergovia in Cannes for 'invalids' intending to winter there, including 'young people... requiring medical care and supervision whose parents are unable to accompany them abroad.' Her gravestone records this as her home at the time of her death on 24 July 1908, although she actually died at Boulogne-sur-Mer. ■



**Above** This is a view of the main path in the West near the large horse chestnut tree. Recently a dangerous tree forced us to close the Faraday Path at short notice. When trees are in too poor a state

to be climbed, we need to hire a 'MEWP', or mobile elevated working platform, from which the tree surgeons can work. This adds a hefty extra £800 a day to the cost!

# News roundup

## West Norwood new guidebook

West Norwood is said to have been known as the 'Millionaires' Cemetery' on account of the many wealthy families who buried their loved ones there. Reading the 99 biographies by Bob Flanagan in this lavishly-illustrated new guide, you won't be surprised, though Bob sensibly resists revealing which of his subjects was buried with a diamond-studded tiepin, diamond ring and silver cigarette case!

*West Norwood Cemetery: An Illustrated Guide* is published by the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery, 2022. 116 pages, £7.50. We plan to have some copies for sale in our shop at Highgate.

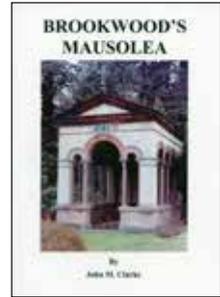
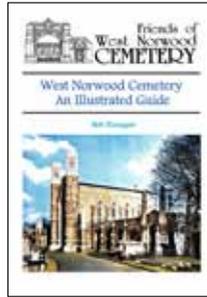
## Fox news

Award-winning wildlife photographer Matt Maran has been following Highgate's foxes on their escapades amongst our monuments. An astonishing image of a fox snooping around the Circle of Lebanon is included in a new book celebrating this much misunderstood animal. If you love



foxes, you'll love this book; if you don't love them, you need to read it!

*FOX: Neighbour, Villain, Icon*, Hemisphere 2022. £35 hardback is now available from [www.matthewmaranshop.com](http://www.matthewmaranshop.com).



## Brookwood's mausolea

Brookwood Cemetery has 36 surviving mausolea which are all illustrated and described in this new booklet by John M. Clarke. *Brookwood's Mausolea* is published by the author, 2021. Paperback, with 36 pages, and 36 illustrations £5 ISBN 978-1838130817. £5 from his website, [www.john-clarke.co.uk](http://www.john-clarke.co.uk).

## Last rites

The Church Monuments Society and the Ecclesiological Society are holding a joint conference on funerals and funerary monuments on 1 October 2022. Speakers include Brian Parsons on *The Victorian funeral* and Roger Bowdler on *19th century funereal monuments*. Attend in person at the venue near Chancery Lane or online. More information at [eccsoc.org/events](http://eccsoc.org/events).

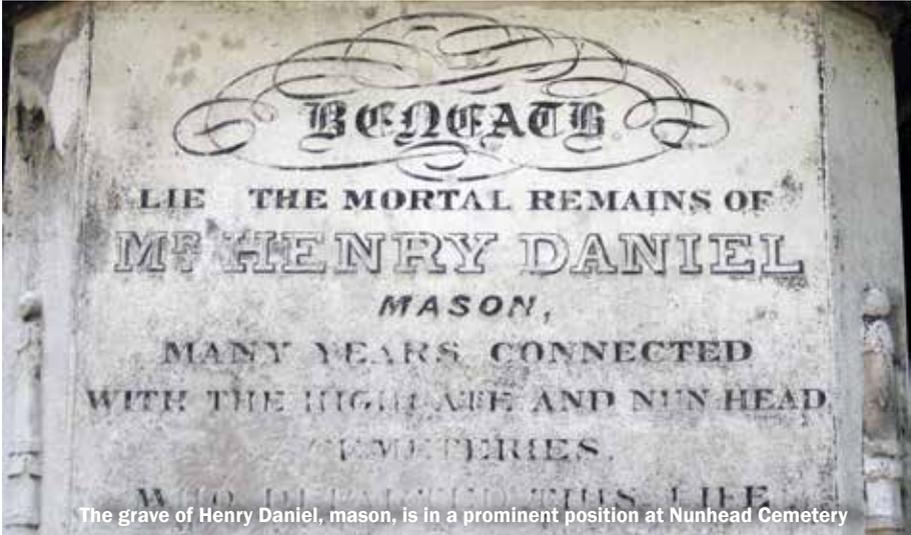
## Mausolea and Monuments Trust Annual Lecture

This year's speaker is Sir Charles Saumarez Smith on *The Mausoleum Revisited*.

His talk will focus on the one at Castle Howard, one the best documented, which inaugurated a fashion for mausolea in the grounds of country houses. Date: 22 September 2022 at 6.30pm. Venue: Great Hall of St Bartholomew's Hospital. To book, visit [mmtrust.org.uk/events.php](http://mmtrust.org.uk/events.php). ■

# Historic cemeteries news

## What's on at our sister cemeteries



The grave of Henry Daniel, mason, is in a prominent position at Nunhead Cemetery

### **ABNEY PARK**

16 Sep Commonwealth War Graves  
Heritage Open Day; 17 Sep 2pm The 1840  
Anti-Slavery Convention walk; 23 Sep  
10am Plant identification for foragers; 15  
Oct 2pm Charles Dickens, Abney and Stoke  
Newington. See [www.abneypark.org/events](http://www.abneypark.org/events)

### **BROMPTON**

Guided tours every Sunday to 4 December.  
£10 cash donation is sought. See  
[brompton-cemetery.org.uk](http://brompton-cemetery.org.uk).

### **BROOKWOOD CEMETERY**

Guided tours first Sunday of every month,  
£5. See [www.tbcs.org.uk/walks.HTM](http://www.tbcs.org.uk/walks.HTM).

### **KENSAL GREEN**

Guided tours 2pm Sundays weekly until

November. £12 donation requested.

Booking essential. [www.kensalgreen.co.uk](http://www.kensalgreen.co.uk)

### **WEST NORWOOD**

Guided tours first Sunday of the month:  
2.30pm April to October; 11am November  
to March. Donations welcomed. Book  
online. See [www.fownc.org](http://www.fownc.org).

### **NUNHEAD**

Guided tours last Sunday of the month 2pm.  
18 Sep and 11 Dec 2pm: Woodland tree  
walk. 16 Oct Black History month tour. 13  
Nov Great War tour. See [www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk).

### **TOWER HAMLETS**

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park events are  
listed online at Ticket Tailor. See their  
website at [www.fothcp.org](http://www.fothcp.org) for details.