

The image shows the interior of a grand, ornate building, likely a mausoleum or a church. The ceiling is a large dome with intricate, colorful mosaics in shades of blue, green, and gold. Below the dome, there are arched windows with decorative glass. The walls are made of light-colored stone or marble, with red and blue decorative borders. In the center, there is a large, white marble relief sculpture depicting a figure with wings, possibly an angel, embracing another figure. The overall atmosphere is one of historical grandeur and artistic detail.

# NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2023

**HIGHGATE  
CEMETERY.**

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**Chair's note** .....3

**Varvara de Vesselitsky**  
**A pioneer social researcher** .....4

**The real designer of the**  
**Beer mausoleum**.....6

**Through enemy action** ..... 12

**News roundup** ..... 15

**Historic cemeteries news** ..... 16

## Cover photograph

Interior of the mausoleum of Julius Beer. *Photo: Hugh Thompson*  
A 360 degree photo of the interior can be viewed on our website at <https://highgatecemetery.org/images/tour/julius-beer-mausoleum/vtour/tour.html>

## Chair's note



It has been an encouraging spring. A particularly rich display of daffodils through our grey March. Visitor numbers, even in mixed weather, continuing to rise towards their pre-Covid peak. Demand for grave space strong with a celebratory funeral last month when a New Orleans Jazz Band was flown over to lead mourners to the grave side.

And good news from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. They have accepted our Expression of Interest and invited a Round One application for funds for our Conservation Project. There is still much to do. Their requirements are stretching; nothing is guaranteed. But the huge amount of work which we have already put in — detailed surveys on the ground, historical research, concept designs and engagement with the planning authorities should stand us in good stead when we submit our application for funding sometime in the autumn.

Before then we will be giving more detail of our proposals and inviting comments and suggestions. At present we are in the midst of what is called RIBA Stage Two when, after the information gathering of Stage One, concept design is begun. Again, first ideas are encouraging and we propose to start public consultation on our options in June to coincide with the Highgate Festival. It will include a stall at the Highgate Fair on June 10 and an exhibition at the Cemetery, as well as online information.

It is an exciting moment and a mark of how far the Friends have come in managing the transformation from a place of dereliction and decay to its recognition as perhaps the most celebrated cemetery in the land, requiring professional financial management, but still depending on exceptional volunteers.

As I step down after four years as Chair, I feel privileged to have been part of the community of Highgate Cemetery.

Martin Adeney, Chair

# Varvara de Vesselitsky

## A pioneer social researcher

**ROBIN OAKLEY** on a researcher who favoured empirical investigation over armchair theorising

Among the significant women buried at Highgate Cemetery is a pioneer social researcher active at the beginning of the twentieth century, Varvara De Vesselitsky (1873–1927).

Born in France, her father was Gabriel de Wesselitzky-Bojidarovitch, a prominent Russian diplomat and historian from St Petersburg. He travelled widely around Europe, had fought in the Balkan wars and he knew most of the leading European statesmen of the time. Later the family made their base in England, and Varvara also worked for a while as a teacher in the USA (her mother Julia was an American citizen). She and her brother Sergei eventually became naturalised British citizens in 1923.

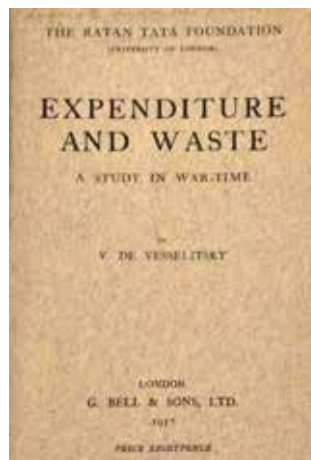
She died in 1927, her contribution — like that of other early women social researchers — relatively forgotten, eclipsed by the view that the founders of the social sciences were exclusively male. And her grave, like many others, has no monument.

Several of these ‘founding fathers’ of the social sciences in Britain have their final resting-places in Highgate Cemetery, the two best-known being near-neighbours in the East side, Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx. Although their respective conceptions of the nature of society were very different, both approached the issues primarily from a philosophical or theoretical perspective.

A contrasting approach emphasised the need to build up social scientific

knowledge through empirical investigation. The studies of *Life and Labour of the People in London*, undertaken by Charles Booth and his colleagues in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, are the best-known early examples. The Fabian socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb also advocated this approach, and were among those who established the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) at the end of the century to further it. Of course, nowadays the LSE has become a very large and diverse institution, and a number of its more recent well-known alumni are represented in the Cemetery, including Ralph Miliband, Richard Titmuss and R.H. Tawney.

What is not well-known is that



**Above** *Expenditure and Waste*, by Varvara De Vesselitsky, published in 1917.

much of the early social investigation was in practice undertaken by women, who gathered information and conducted interviews, and then analysed the data and wrote the reports. They were mainly young women from the first generation to gain access to further and higher education, and for whom such work was one of the few career opportunities readily available.

Varvara De Vesselitsky joined the LSE around the beginning of the First World War, when a Department was established in the nascent organisation (with funding from the Ratan Tata Foundation, now one of the oldest grant making foundations in India) to carry out empirical research on the economics and sociology of work, women and the household. A bit older than many of her female colleagues, she personally undertook a series of studies including one in 1915 on women home-workers in the tailoring and box-making industries, and another on the wartime budgets of working-class families in London during the war, and she published monographs on both of these.

For the first, she took substantial samples of women workers in East London (877 tailoresses and 330 boxmakers), who were visited for interviews often several times, so that she was able to obtain detailed understanding of their individual situations as well as identifying statistical patterns in their circumstances. That is to say, in modern social research terminology, she was one of the pioneers in adopting a research methodology that generated both 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' data.

Her work played a significant part in establishing the British tradition of empirical social science, oriented towards current issues in social policy, as contrasted with the gentlemanly 'armchair' theorising of better-known predecessors.

When she died in 1927, her funeral notice recorded that, at the time, she was



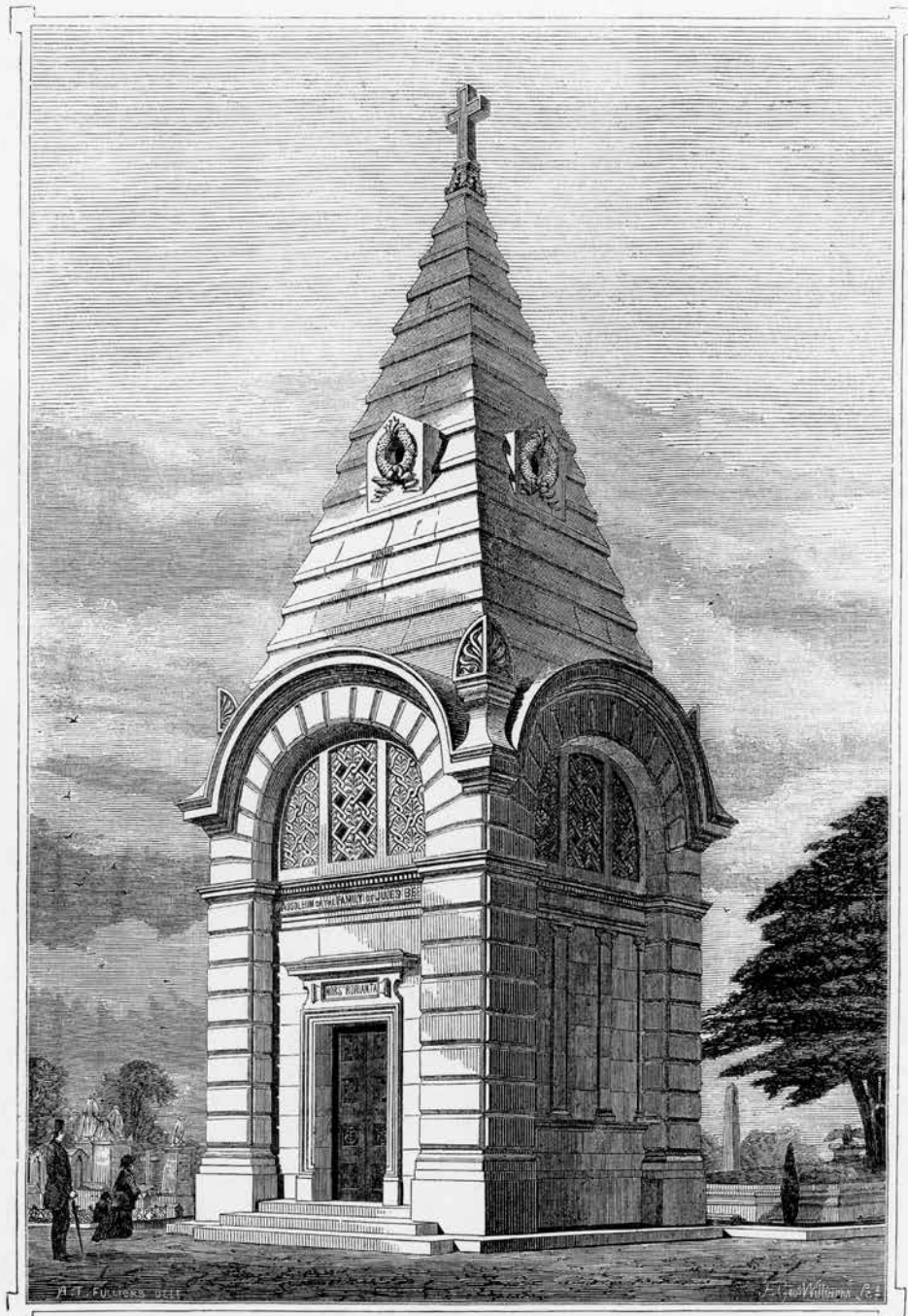
Secretary of the Stepney Skilled Employment Association, based at Toynbee Hall, so she had continued to be active in the field of social welfare, if not in social research.

She had also written and published a play entitled *Up or Down?*, bringing to life the daily struggles of working-class families. In writing this play, she followed the pattern of numerous other early women writers on social issues in using fiction as a tool for drawing attention to the situation of women and impoverished groups. She designated the authorship as by 'V. de V.', and she had also used the gender-blind initial 'V.' for her social research publications.

The owner of her grave is recorded as her brother Sergei who at the time ran a private hotel in Surbiton, but neither he nor anyone else is buried there. Sergei married and took the name Merriman and died in Northampton in 1957. The absence of any monument on the grave remains a puzzle. ■

*With thanks to Ann Oakley, on whose research the article is largely based.*

**Above** The only known portrait of Varvara De Vesselitsky.



THE BEER MAUSOLEUM, HIGHGATE CEMETERY.—MR. JOHN O. SCOTT, ARCHITECT.

# The real designer of the Beer mausoleum

**IAN DUNGAPELL uncovers a little bit of naughtiness which until now has denied an architect the credit he deserved**

The mausoleum of Julius Beer is one of the best-known structures in Highgate Cemetery. Just below St Michael's Church and tucked in between the Terrace Catacombs and the Lebanon Circle, since the 1870s its pyramidal roof has been a prominent landmark. Mentioned in numerous accounts of the Cemetery, it is listed at Grade II\* by Historic England, putting it in the top 8% of buildings in the country.

Julius Beer himself has remained a rather obscure figure. Even during his lifetime it was said that he seldom appeared outside the boardroom. Later visitors to the Cemetery cursed that they knew nothing of him, or they confused him with the de Beer brothers whose name was immortalised by the diamond mining company founded by Cecil Rhodes.

But Beer (1836–80) was neither South African nor a gemman. Born in Frankfurt, he had come to London as a young man, and done well in the City. Setting up his own banking firm at the age of thirty-one, he ended up owning the *Observer* newspaper while still in his forties. As an investor in railways, ocean telegraphy and various government projects it suited him not only to keep up with developments abroad, but to seek to influence foreign policy where he could.

He was prompted to build the mausoleum by the death from scarlet fever of his only

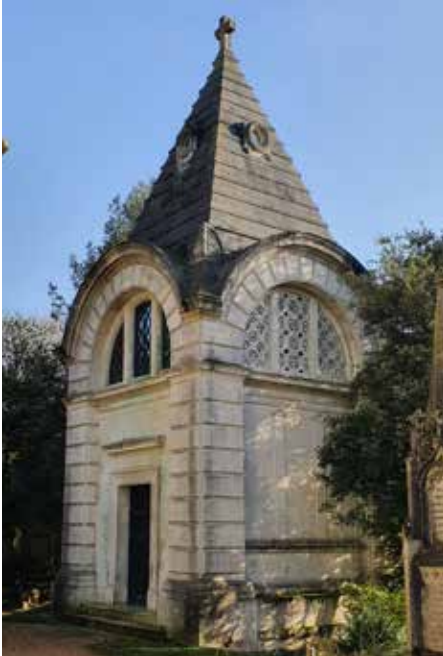
daughter, Ada (1866–75), aged eight. It took three years before it was ready for her: she spent 1875 in the Terrace Catacombs, and 1876 and 1877 in what is now the Chillingworth vault in the Egyptian Avenue, before being moved to the crypt of the new mausoleum at the end of February 1878. Beer himself joined her there early in 1880, no doubt much sooner than he anticipated, followed in the same year by his brother Arnold, and in 1881 by his wife Thyrsa.

In May 1878 a full-page engraving of the Beer Mausoleum had appeared in *The Builder*, the leading weekly architectural magazine. In the short text alongside, credit for the design was given to the architect John Oldrid Scott (1841–1913). He had worked with his father, the great Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811–78), designer of the Foreign Office, the Midland Hotel at St Pancras, countless churches and much else besides. Following the death of his father in March 1878, John Oldrid was no doubt keen to build a reputation on his own account.

Over three years later, in September 1881, the editor of *The Builder* must then have been surprised to receive a letter from a 'W. Bouwens, v. d. B.' of Paris belatedly correcting the article about the mausoleum. Bouwens claimed to have designed the building at the request of his friend, the late 'Jules' Beer, and to have prepared a model and drawings showing

**Left** The full page engraving of the Beer mausoleum published in *The Builder* in 1878.

**Below** *Left*, the Beer mausoleum today and, *right*, Bouwens's drawing of the entrance front. The railings either side were to protect steps down to the crypt.



all the detail. He felt he should have been credited as the actual designer; Scott had been only the executant architect overseeing its construction.

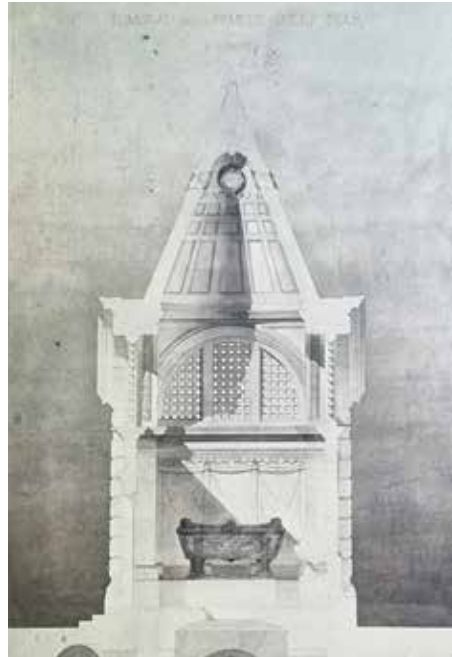
Bouwens was no insignificant figure, but an architect with a reputation. Full name, William Oscar Wilford Bouwens van der Boijen (1834–1907), born Dutch, naturalised French, he started out at the *École des Beaux-Arts* as a pupil of leading architects Henri Labrousse (1801–75) and Léon Vaudoyer (1803–72, who in 1860 would become his stepfather). He went on to run a flourishing practice in Paris building houses for wealthy bankers around the Parc Monceau in the prestigious 8th arrondissement. He is best remembered for the impressive new headquarters of *Crédit Lyonnais* bank on the *Boulevard des Italiens* (1876–83).

Bouwens was named *Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur* in 1878 and among his works cited in the supporting papers was the 'tombeau de la famille Jules Beer à Londres'. That list included Paris houses for Frankfurt banking families Erlanger (1864–65), Goldschmidt (1872–4) and Bamberger (1875–8), as well as one for the banker and collector Henri Cernuschi (1873–5, now the *Musée Cernuschi*) for whom Bouwens later designed a tomb in *Père-Lachaise*.

In his letter to *The Builder*, Bouwens had referred to Beer as 'my friend', not as 'my client'. He was not being presumptuous. One of Julius Beer's close friends and business partners in London was Louis Schott, who had also grown up in Frankfurt. His sister, Flora, married Bouwens there in 1861, and this was, no



**Below** Bouwens's drawing of, *left*, the west elevation and, *right*, a section through centre of the interior.



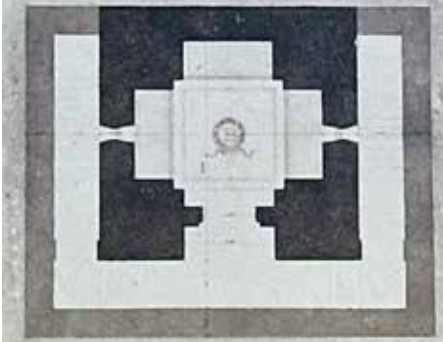
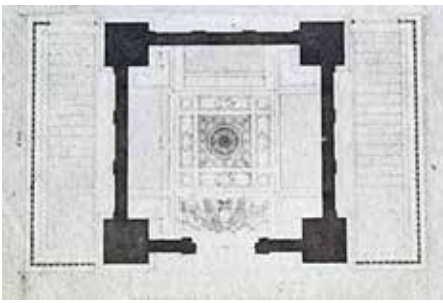
doubt, how Bouwens came to design the mausoleum. Business and social circles were interlinked. Bouwens would also become godfather (and was, apparently, grandfather) of Nadia Boulanger, perhaps the most influential music teacher of the twentieth century, and his son Otto would be a close friend of Proust.

Scott, of course, had been sent a copy of the letter before it was published by *The Builder*. He offered his own rather unconvincing explanation: 'It is quite true that the first design for Mr Beer's mausoleum was made by M. Bouwens of Paris,' he admitted, but he had not known that the view had been published. 'Had I been at home when the view appeared... I should certainly have taken care to state that fact.'

But wherever he was in May 1878, a

little over a month after his father had been buried in Westminster Abbey, it seems most unlikely that nobody in his office or family ever mentioned that his design had been published in the leading English architectural magazine. And somebody in his office must have provided the information and drawings from which they worked.

Scott continued: he had 'set to work and remodelled the first design, altering it very considerably both in its proportions and its detail, and so it has been built. It is a joint work, as the leading ideas of the first design have been kept to, while it has been much altered in all other respects.' He had agreed to superintend the construction providing that he 'should be at full liberty to make any alterations in the design which [he] thought desirable'. He regretted the oversight that Bouwens had not received



his credit.

Scott's excuses might have been more convincing had he not concluded with the justification that, 'If I remember rightly, M. Bouwens quite agreed to my dealing with the design as I might think best; but I am not clear about this, as it was only told me by Mr Beer by word of mouth.' It was a safe thing to say now that Beer himself was dead, but it is inconceivable that Bouwens would have given Scott free reign to modify his meticulously worked-out design.

Bouwens wrote again to *The Builder* to object to Scott's claim that the mausoleum was a joint work, and to ask that the question be settled by 'a jury of distinguished architects'. The editor's response: 'We must ... decline interfering further in the matter'.

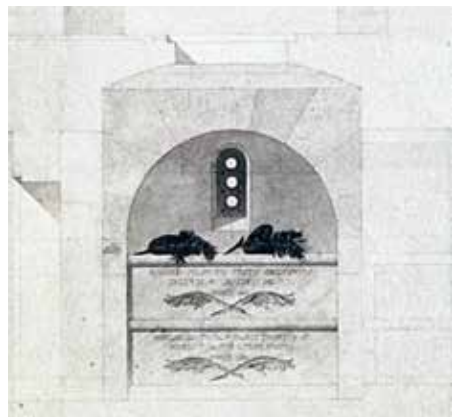
However a photograph of Bouwens's drawings for the mausoleum has survived in the collection of the Académie d'Architecture in Paris so we can judge for ourselves. And these prove Bouwens

**Above** Bouwens's plans of the main floor (top) and crypt. Scott changed the plan to give access to the crypt from the Lebanon Circle.

right. Despite Scott's protestations that he had 'very considerably' altered Bouwens's design both in detail and proportions, it does not look that way. All the main elements are there: the pyramidal roof above the semi-circular windows, the heavy quoins, and the Ionic pilasters on the side elevations. Externally the biggest change was to make the roof ribbed rather than smooth, which is to say, not much.

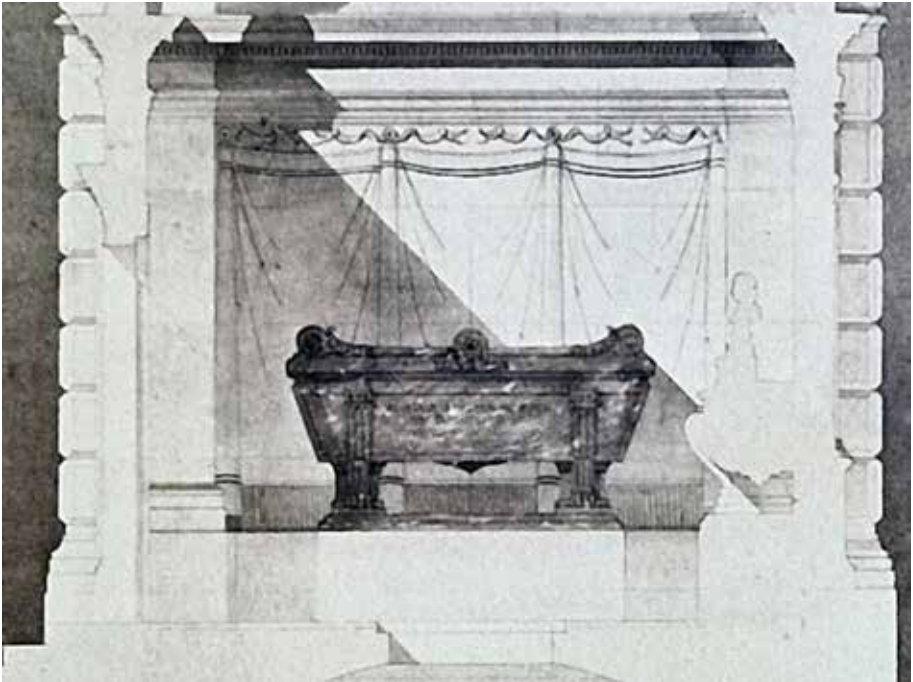
Internally, too, the designs are very similar: the sarcophagi arranged around the sides of the room, with Ada's facing the door. The most striking change is that Scott improved the proportions of Bouwens's interior by substituting a lower ribbed dome in place of the coffered conical high ceiling, while adding further richness with gold mosaics, ruby red and white tiles in *pâte de verre* decorating the frieze and pilasters, and peacock blue tiles framing the bookmatched marble panels on the walls. The effect is much richer than Bouwens's more austere classical design; High Victorian melding into Arts and Crafts.

Close inspection of the drawings shows that Bouwens was not familiar with the Highgate site. His mausoleum could just as



**Above** Bouwens's drawing of the crypt. Coffins would have been lowered through the opening in the floor above, a standard French detail.

**Below** Bouwens's drawing of a section through the interior. The fictive drapery on the wall probably would have been painted.



easily have been put up on flat ground in Père-Lachaise. The clue is the railings either side of the building. They are to protect the symmetrical narrow flights of steps he planned to lead down to the crypt, turning 90 degrees at the corners to enter directly beneath the main door above. Coffins are arranged on shelves in the niches.

But how were the coffins to have got down there? The standard solution, as shown in many examples in César Daly's recent book on contemporary funerary architecture, *Spécimens de tombeaux* (1871), was an opening in the floor of the mausoleum through which they could be lowered vertically into the crypt. And this is what Bouwens designed, and Scott built, despite the fact that at Highgate coffins could enter the lower level easily and with more dignity

from the Lebanon Circle directly behind, which is what happened. The stairs shown on Bouwens's plan were not built.

Unfortunately, easy access to the crypt also made it less secure. During the dark days of the 1970s intruders interfered with the coffins, and what remained was later collected up and reinterred behind a sealed-off panel. Their invisibility has given rise to speculation that the burials were actually in the sarcophagi above, but the Cemetery register makes clear that poor Ada found her final resting place behind the iron gates of the crypt rather than in the splendid marble-lined interior above. ■

Access to the photograph of Bouwens's drawings in the Académie d'Architecture, Paris, was very kindly provided by Marilena Kourniati, Responsable des archives.



## Through enemy action

**MAGGIE PULLE reports on a research project with Lynda Cowan and Theo Taylor to uncover the stories of the civilian war dead**

The visitor maps of Highgate Cemetery are packed with the names of famous people buried within its grounds. But there are many others whose lives or deaths tell something of the impact of world events.

During the long process of transcribing and checking of Highgate Cemetery's grave registers, we noticed variations in the numbers of burials and ages at death and guessed they related to peaks in infant mortality linked to epidemics. But around 1940 we noticed an increase in more than one person from a family being buried on

the same date, and speculated it could be linked to Second World War air raids.

We checked the names of all burials from January 1940 to April 1945 against the register of civilians who died from enemy action during World War II maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and eventually identified 123 as being buried in Highgate Cemetery. It took two years of searching to find all their graves, except three which eluded us, and we photographed them where possible.

Our research gave interesting insights

**Above** The aftermath of the V2 Rocket attack in Archway, Islington, 5 November 1944  
*Photo: Islington Local History Centre*

into the victims' lives and a now lost world of only eighty years ago. Some of their more unusual occupations include relief stamper, gold/silver walking stick mounter, tooth brush trimmer, ballet dancer, and die sinker. Two of the victims were the siblings Will and Agnes Leigh, whose father and grandfather were 'oil and colourmen'; in other words they had a paint and hardware shop. Will was also in the same trade while Agnes had trained as a teacher. They died at home in Marylebone in an air raid on 17 April 1941, then in their late forties. The inscription on their family grave sadly records that they 'died together through enemy action'.

Altogether we found nineteen civilian war dead memorials with a reference to the war as causing the death, usually including the words 'enemy action'. One example is the grave of Rose Armit, aged 25, 'who was killed by enemy action' on 5 November 1944. Rose, who worked as a 'lead capsule embosser', (presumably the lead capsules covering the corks on wine and spirit bottles), lived just a short walk from Archway tube station, where a V2 hit the junction of Boothby, Giesbach and Grovedale Roads, killing 35 people and injuring 219; ten other victims of the same event are buried in Highgate Cemetery.



**Above** The memorial to Rose Armit at Highgate Cemetery West

*Photo: Maggie Pulle*



Six of those buried at Highgate Cemetery, who were related, are two private graves next to each other, neither with memorials. Head of the family was Frank Hamilton, born in Liverpool, who had fought in the 1st Derbyshire Regiment during the First World War and at the time of his death, aged 50, was a foreman ticket collector. He is buried together with his youngest daughter Maureen, aged ten, in one grave. In the other is his eldest daughter Sylvia, aged 25, and her three children, Martin, Terence and Patricia, aged six, four and two. They lived together at 33 Grovedale Road, St John's Way, of which there is no trace today; its place is 'Bowerman Court' a late 1950s block of social housing. The tragedy was commemorated in 2021 by the unveiling of a memorial plaque on Giesbach Road.

Twenty of the civilian war dead are buried in eight common graves (on which memorials were not permitted) mainly on the West side of the Cemetery. Mostly their deaths went unreported in the press, but one exception was Edward Eysackers, known as Ted, who died early in the Blitz on 9 September 1940. Born in Camden

**Above** Unveiling of the plaque in July 2021 to remember victims of the 1944 V2 attack

*Photo: Islington Council*

## *Refused Friend's Tea And Went Home To Be Bombed And Killed*

Refusing an invitation to tea on Friday afternoon, 81-year old Mrs Garnham left her friend and neighbour's house and went to her own home of 50 years a few doors away. She said to her friend, Mrs Featherstone, "Thank you, dear, but I think I'll make a cup in my own place. I'd like to sit quietly by the fire."

Ten minutes later, as Mrs Featherstone sipped her own cup of tea alone, there was a terrific explosion. The house rocked and there was the crash of flying glass as every window was shattered.

Recovering in a matter of seconds, Mrs Featherstone dashed into the road and looked at No. 4 – the home of Mrs Garnham. But now there was no No. 4 –

only a heap of debris, from which clouds of dust were still pouring.

Mrs Featherstone said: "I am anxious she shall have a proper funeral, not a pauper's funeral. She has money in the bank I can't touch at the moment. There is enough to pay the funeral expenses if only I can get it. Otherwise...!" And Mrs Featherstone shrugged her shoulders to indicate her repugnance at the thought of her friend not having the funeral she would have liked. ■

From *Islington & Holloway Press and St Pancras Gazette*, 25 October 1940, p. 5. Alice Garnham, of 4 Grafton Crescent, Kentish Town, was buried in Highgate Cemetery on 26 October 1940, reunited with her husband in a private grave she already owned.

Town in 1904 to a Belgian father and Dutch mother, Ted, like his father, worked as a plasterer.

He was one of the best-liked men in the Holborn Air Raid Protection stretcher party, which he had joined in May, according to a report in the *Islington & Holloway Press and St Pancras Gazette*: 'Bombs had struck Chancery-lane, starting terrific fires, causing severe damage to property and wrecking an air-raid shelter. Eysackers was in the first squad called to rescue those trapped in a shelter. In the greatest danger from bombs, fire and falling debris, he worked with his squad releasing casualty after casualty. Suddenly another bomb crashed into the scene of ruin. When the roll was called Eysackers was found to be one of those missing. His body was found a week later, buried beneath debris.'

His brother George, also working at the same scene, was injured. The men had been the sole means of support for their 'poorly-off parents' who, a month later, were still waiting for news of compensation, the level of which was thought to be miserly. 'Even the funeral expenses have so far been denied them,' reported the paper. 'So that their son should not have a pauper's funeral, the old couple paid the expenses themselves.' Having left no will, it took until 8 November for his father to be granted administration of his estate, valued at £128.

These are just a few of the stories we have uncovered. Our research is available for consultation in the FOHCT archives. ■

*Details of each of the deceased will be added to the Roll of Honour on our website in due course.*



## News roundup

### Internal reorganisation

We recently adopted a new corporate structure more typical of a charity with a trading subsidiary. From 1 April 2023 all of our charitable activities are conducted by the charity, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, which now employs all the staff, and non-charitable activities, such as publications and merchandise sales and filming, are managed by the trading subsidiary, Highgate Cemetery Limited. This is an administrative simplification.

### Fair in the Square

The Fair is back in Pond Square on Saturday 10 June 2023 from 12.30pm to 5.30pm. The Friends will have a stall and it will be a good opportunity to drop by and find out a bit more about the Conservation Project and the Highgate Cemetery Act.

**Above** As an experiment, Jeremy's coffee van has moved into the Courtyard, with tables and chairs set out for visitors. It is proving very popular.

### Highgate Cemetery Burials database

We're thrilled to announce that online access to our burials database is now at <https://highgate.burialgrounds.co.uk/>. There are still a few issues to be resolved and, no doubt, lots of errors remaining to be corrected. Mapping West side graves remains to be completed.

Searchers can find people by name and the map will show roughly where in the cemetery they are buried. Clicking on the marker will give a list of everyone in that grave.

It's been a huge project. Our thanks to Jean Ettinger who created a database and led a team of volunteers to edit and improve the data. Our gardeners cleared the entire cemetery in stages for the digital mapping by Atlantic Geomatics. Please report errors to [info@highgatecemetery.org](mailto:info@highgatecemetery.org).

# Historic cemeteries news

## What's on at our sister cemeteries



### **ABNEY PARK**

Abney is in the midst of a £5m lottery-funded project and many exciting things lie ahead: new Trust premises, a café and many activities. See [www.abneypark.org](http://www.abneypark.org)

### **BROMPTON**

27 May Catacombs tour 10am to 3.30pm, every half-hour. Book online. £6.13. Cemetery tours every Sunday at 2pm, £10. 2023 Programme is published on their website at [brompton-cemetery.org.uk/events.html](http://brompton-cemetery.org.uk/events.html)

### **BROOKWOOD CEMETERY**

Various tour dates in May and June, booking required, £5 donation requested. See [www.tbcs.org.uk/walks.HTM](http://www.tbcs.org.uk/walks.HTM).

**Above** The spectacular Gothic entrance archway at West Norwood Cemetery

### **KENSAL GREEN**

23 April 11am: John Passmore Edwards festival, free. Guided tours 2pm Sunday. £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. Donations welcome. Book online. See [www.fownc.org](http://www.fownc.org).

### **NUNHEAD**

20 May: Annual Open Day. Special tour programme on website. Guided tours last Sunday of the month 2pm, donation. See [www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk).

### **TOWER HAMLETS**

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