

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2023



**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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With thanks to

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Oakley, John Shepperd, Guinevere
Short.

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The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in
Highgate Cemetery West

Chair's note



This summer has seen a period of particularly intense work on the Trust's bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for development phase funding for our conservation project, 'Unlocking Highgate Cemetery'. We submitted the application in the middle of August, and we should find out by the end of the year whether it is successful.

Although the strength of competition for limited funds means success is far from guaranteed, we think we have a compelling project. We would then have up to two years to complete all the detailed work for a delivery phase bid, for which once again we'd be up against numerous other applicants.

While the NLHF is a key source of capital funds, a wider programme of fundraising is needed and so it is wonderful to welcome Leo Crane as our new Director of Development. Leo will be responsible for establishing over the next few years a programme of regular giving of all kinds to make the Trust more resilient and sustainable. We also welcome our new Volunteer Manager, Kim Nazarko, who is already hard at work recruiting and training more volunteers.

There has also been a series of meetings and events to share and discuss the Conservation Project with neighbours and others. Since mid-July an exhibition in the Colonnade has presented some initial findings of the work on the landscape, monuments and buildings. You can also see the exhibition panels on our website ('Our Future > Consultation' will take you there) together with an overview of progress so far and an opportunity to add your own comments and suggestions.

A huge amount of work and many uncertainties lie ahead but reaching this stage has put us in a strong position to protect and conserve this unique and treasured place for others for years to come.

In taking over as Chair from Martin Adeney, I would like to thank everyone for their hard work and contributions.

Liz Fuller, Chair



Found! The lost grave of one of the first abstract artists

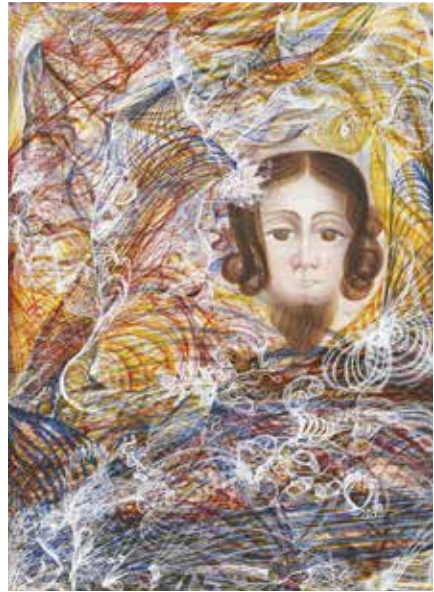
ROBIN OAKLEY on unearthing the gravestone of spiritualist artist Georgiana Houghton

Georgiana Houghton developed a style of abstract painting that pre-dated the modern pioneers of abstraction by some fifty years. A prominent spiritualist practitioner and writer in the 1860s and 1870s, she was also well-known for her pictures. After her death in 1884 her work was largely forgotten and has only begun to receive the recognition it deserves in the last decade or so, including an exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery in 2016.

Houghton was buried in a grave in the West side of Highgate Cemetery,

the precise location of which has long remained elusive despite numerous attempts to find it. Although every grave was recorded in the Cemetery map books, some pages have been damaged and bits are missing, especially around the edges, and some text is illegible: it could not be traced in the paper records. Trying to find it by laborious monument-by-monument inspection was no more fruitful, as over time many gravestones have become buried under soil and decaying leaf mould.

Elusive, that is, until now. After several



unsuccessful excavations and with the help of clues obtained from the Cemetery day books, and from her published memoirs, I managed to identify a spot where, with the aid of a probing tool, we finally found her clearly-inscribed ledger-stone concealed under a foot or so of earth and thick roots.

Georgiana Houghton was born in 1814 in Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, where her father was as a merchant. The family returned to London when she was young and moved out to Kentish Town in 1830. They lived in the centre of the old village at No. 5 Upper Craven Place, a Georgian terrace at the bottom of Highgate Road: No.4, which was a girls' school, still stands but the site of No.5 now lies under the O2 Forum Kentish Town. In her memoirs she records that they regularly attended the old Kentish Town Chapel close by where she sang in the choir.

Little is known about her childhood, but it

Above Georgiana Houghton in her late sixties, from *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance*, 1882.

appears that she had received training in painting and was familiar with the work of the great Renaissance artists. Deeply affected by the death of her younger sister Zilla in 1851, she turned to spiritualism for guidance and comfort and to make contact with her in the afterworld. She soon became experienced at conducting séances both at her own house and elsewhere. She also began using a 'planchette' by means of which 'spirit guides' directed her hand while she drew abstract images of spirit entities. These are elaborate, florid, and richly coloured, and typically also have written statements of their meaning on the back.

During the 1860s she started to associate with prominent members of the spiritualist movement and by the 1870s was recognised as one of its leading practitioners. But she also increasingly identified herself as an artist, the

Above *The Portrait of the Lord Jesus Christ*, 1862 by Georgiana Houghton. Collection: Victorian Spiritualists' Union, Melbourne.

Top *The Eye of God*, c. 1864

Below *The Eye of the Lord*, c. 1864

Both by Georgiana Houghton. Collection:
Victorian Spiritualists' Union, Melbourne

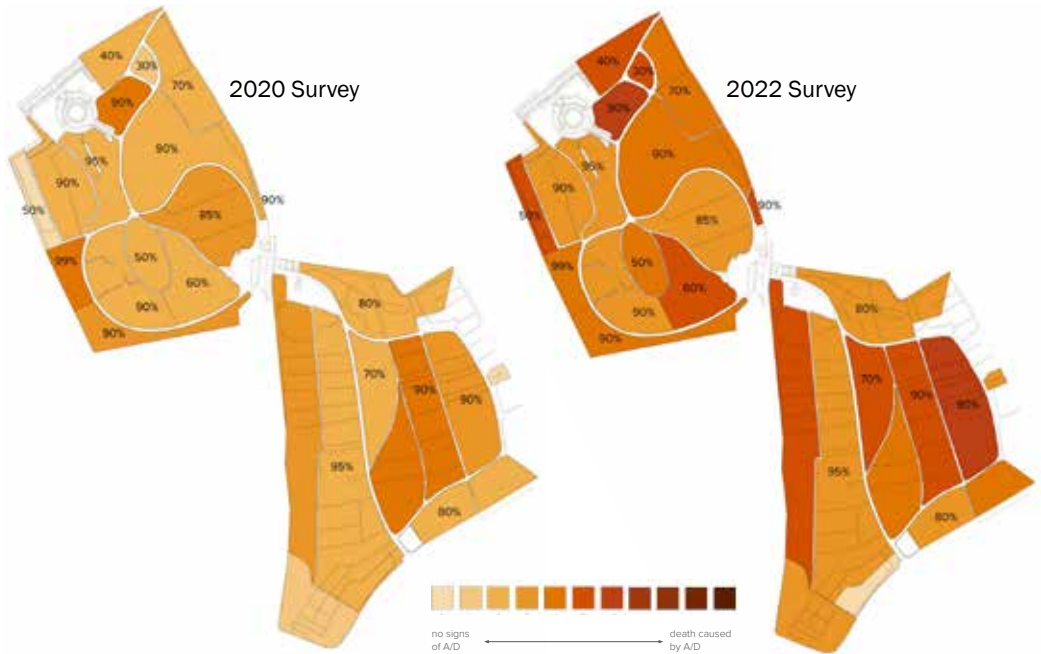
occupation she declared in the 1871 Census.

Unsuccessful in getting her paintings accepted for Royal Academy exhibitions, in 1871 she privately-funded an exhibition of 155 of her pictures at the New British Gallery in Old Bond Street which lasted nearly four months. It attracted a lot of attention from the press and the public, though much of it was critical and commercially the exhibition of 'spirit drawings' was not a success. At the time, however, it enhanced her reputation, but she was soon forgotten after her death in 1884. Almost all of her surviving works later found their way to Australia, although a small group of paintings is held in the College of Psychic Studies in London, of which she was a founder member.

Georgiana Houghton never married and lived with her parents until after her father's death in 1863, and then in 1867 moved with her mother (who died in 1868) to a house in Kensington in West London. Both were buried in the grave which she had bought and in which she later joined them. Her sister Zilla (Warren), who lived on Fortess Road, is buried only a few plots away, as is her brother Clarence and his family. Her brother Charles and her older sister Marianne (Hyde) also had family graves close by. All had lived locally in what was at the time still a relatively rural area, and for them Highgate Cemetery was the equivalent of their village churchyard. ■



Vivienne Roberts, curator and archivist at The College of Psychic Studies in London, will talk on *Georgiana Houghton: A Pioneering Spirit* on Tuesday 21 November 2023 at 7.30pm in the Chapel. Book at highgatecemetery.org/events. See also www.georgianahoughton.com.



Ash dieback

The disease which is likely to kill up to 80% of all ash trees across the UK is already taking its toll at Highgate Cemetery

Ash is the dominant tree species at Highgate Cemetery, so ash dieback is very bad news. We have commissioned surveys to establish its extent and progression and the results, shown in the plans above, are alarming.

So many trees are affected that the disease is bound to have a major impact on the appearance of the cemetery. Already we are keeping tree surgeons busy reacting to the worst cases, but diseased trees are not always easy to spot before they fail. We will need to move from reactive to proactive tree management if people and monuments are to be kept safe.

Above Ash dieback has made rapid progress in the last two years. The numbers are the percentage of trees affected in each area; the colours represent the severity.

But it's not straightforward. Due to their proximity to monuments, the only safe way to remove diseased trees is laborious and costly: each tree must be climbed and cut into sections small enough that one person can lower them to the ground using a rope.

Mature and semi-mature ash trees which display resistance will be retained. In their place we will plant new trees more resilient to the effects of climate change.

Ash dieback is caused by a fungus which blocks the tree's water transport systems, causing it to die. Our native ash species have no natural defences as they did not evolve with it. ■



Filling up down under

IAN DUNGAVELL finds that despite the size of the country, Australia's urban cemeteries are running out of space for new burials

Waverley Cemetery in Sydney is, according to the *Smithsonian Magazine*, one of the world's most beautiful cemeteries — like Highgate. Opened in 1877 as a grand metropolitan cemetery, its rolling slopes and cliffside location afford the deceased, and those who visit them, spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean. Thanks to a public outcry, proposals in the 1970s to convert it into a 'remembrance park' by moving the monuments to one corner and landscaping the rest as parkland were defeated.

Waverley's back story is typical: the Old Sydney Burial Ground, laid out like a parish churchyard, opened in the 1790s on the edge of the town, but was full by 1820. Unsurprisingly it soon became neglected

and 'a place of resort for bad characters at night'. After some initial opposition to its use for other purposes, selective exhumations took place in 1869 to enable the building of Sydney's new Town Hall on the site. Its successor, Devonshire Street Cemetery, lasted only from 1820 to 1867 (the same year the vast Rookwood Necropolis opened), and before too long the site was taken for the building of the new Central Railway Station and some of its occupants were reburied at Waverley.

In Brisbane, too, cemetery development followed a similar pattern. Its first cemetery lasted only from 1825 to 1842, to be replaced by the North Brisbane Burial Ground in 1844. This was soon overtaken

Above Waverley Cemetery, Sydney, has spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean

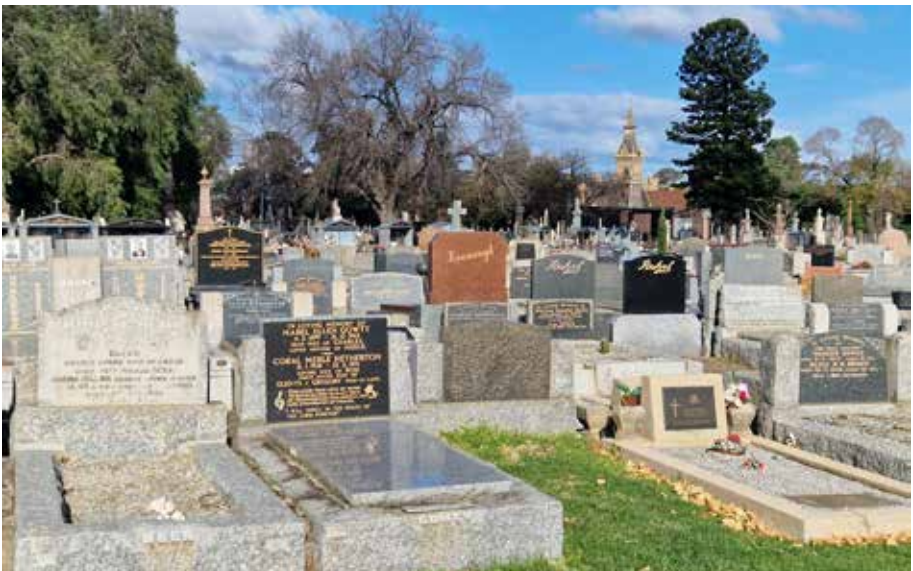
Below Devonshire St Cemetery, Sydney, prior to closure. Credit: State Library of New South Wales. Two photos stitched together by Wayne Hill.



by the growing suburbs and the search for a new location began in the 1860s: Toowong Cemetery, opened in 1875, was a large new interdenominational cemetery on a hill some distance from the centre of town. In 1913 the old North Brisbane Burial Ground became an athletics field and relatives were offered the opportunity to exhume and relocate family members; today it is the Suncorp Stadium, the home of rugby

league in Queensland, and a popular venue for soccer and rugby union. Only a few monuments remain in the grounds of adjacent Christ Church as a reminder of the site's early history.

In Melbourne, the same cycle was repeated. The Old Melbourne Cemetery, its first burial ground, lasted only from 1836 to 1854, although burials continued until 1917 in existing graves on part of the site.



Above Melbourne General Cemetery was laid out as a public park, but today there is barely any room for trees

Below One of the main avenues in Melbourne General Cemetery now has a double row of graves as a continuous central reservation



The remainder of the land became the Queen Victoria Markets, which opened in

Above Roads in Melbourne General Cemetery have been filled with graves, making it harder to appreciate the original landscape design

1878 and expanded to cover the rest of the Cemetery in the 1920s. Some bodies were reinterred elsewhere, but not all.

Its place had been taken in 1853 by the Melbourne General Cemetery at Carlton, now one of Australia's most important cemeteries with over 300,000 interments. It was laid out like a public park, with curving roads and clumps of trees, and attracted the great and the good.

But only fifty years later, in 1904, the sale of new graves ceased by order of the Board of Public Health. Advance notice of the closure prompted the Cemetery to sell off for burial space whatever land it could: new graves formed on asphalt footpaths and borders were snapped up not only by families, but by undertakers and monumental masons to be held in stock. One visitor said that the Cemetery resembled a battlefield, and others complained that it was only possible to get to some new graves by walking over others.

As Melbourne continued to grow, two large new cemeteries were laid out. The Necropolis at Springvale, 14 miles south-east of the centre, opened in 1901 and Fawkner Municipal Cemetery, 7.5 miles to the north, opened in 1906, both accessible by coffin-bearing funeral trains. Soon Fawkner decided to change its name to the 'New Melbourne General Cemetery' to emphasise the line of succession and attract custom which might otherwise have gone elsewhere. Both are still working cemeteries (now rebranded Springvale Botanical Cemetery and Fawkner Memorial Park) but, without a system of renewable tenure, they will fill up too.

Today, from a distance, Melbourne General Cemetery appears to be a peaceful green haven. But look more closely, and in parts it is pretty depressing. Once a sepulchral garden, it has become as congested and built-up as a city, if not more

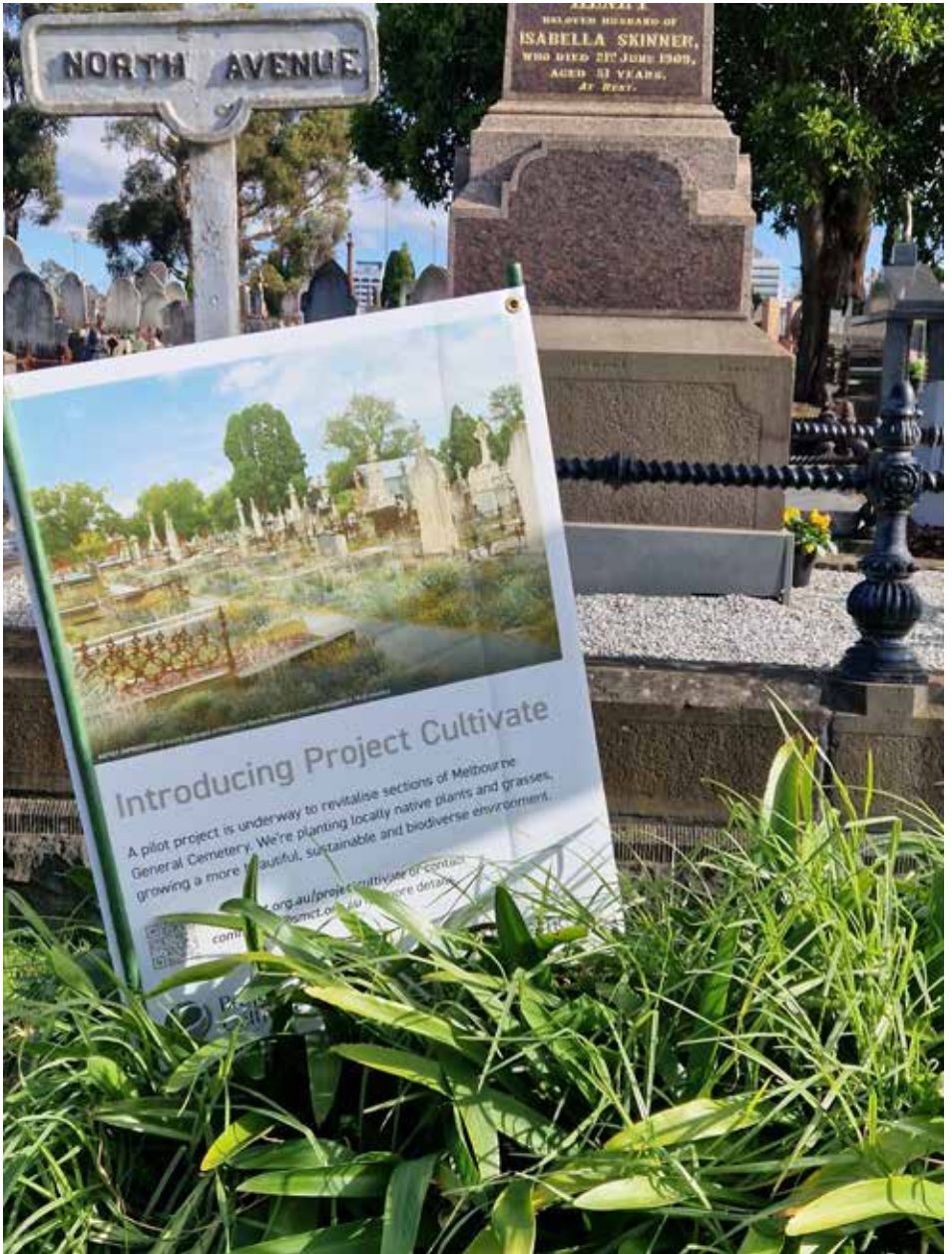
so; it has much less tree cover than the surrounding suburbs. With pressure to find more spaces within its walls, nearly every inch has been covered by graves, leaving little room for nature.

Australians like their cemeteries neat. There are none as overgrown as Highgate, Nunhead or Abney Park. And so, while the remaining grass verges are immaculately edged, there are many areas more barren than a desert where nothing lives at all thanks, it seems, to liberal amounts of weedkiller. These are cemeteries with no place for life.

However, things are changing: public pressure to make Melbourne General Cemetery more of a green space has led this year to 'Project Cultivate,' a pilot programme to reduce herbicide use and improve biodiversity and soil quality. The first stage is spreading layers of mulch before planting out around 127,000 native



Above Melbourne General Cemetery: while weedkiller may reduce the cost of maintenance it leaves a barren landscape lacking in biodiversity



Above Melbourne General Cemetery: 'Project Cultivate,' which started this year, aims to reduce herbicide use and improve biodiversity and soil quality

plants of varieties which happily grew on the site before it became a cemetery — kangaroo grass, wallaby grasses, tufted bluebells and clustered everlastings. Eventually more trees and shrubs will be planted to combat the urban heat island effect, but it will be difficult to find places for large canopy trees due to proximity of monuments and graves.

How sustainable this will be remains to be seen. Rather than reusing burial space, cemeteries have sought to find more elsewhere, leaving an expanding legacy of historic burial areas which generate no income to fund their care. Despite larger cemetery trusts absorbing smaller ones, bringing economies of scale and more professional management, the maintenance burden must just keep growing as the preserved area becomes larger and larger. High maintenance costs will inevitably lead to a decline in management standards.

Even in Australia, space is not infinite. In Sydney, as the population continues to grow, and to age, burial space has become one of the most expensive forms of land. If social and economic sustainability is considered alongside environmental sustainability, then continually building new cemeteries does not really seem to be a solution — especially when new cemetery developments regularly attract much opposition from nearby residents.

We are used to thinking of a cemetery as a timeless place to be preserved, unchanged, the memorials permanently marking the site of the bodies beneath, rather than an active place in permanent flux. This is challenging, especially from a heritage perspective. But burial in perpetuity is a relatively modern phenomenon and cemeteries are

bedevilled by the mismatch between revenue from sales and cost of eternal maintenance. Even now, less than two hundred years after their erection, many monuments are in disrepair or degraded, and visited by fewer and fewer people. Burial laws based on perpetuity are creating increasingly derelict cemeteries, as graves are left to go to ruin.

Among the recommendations in a 2020 report, *11th Hour: Solving Sydney's Cemetery Crisis*, was that all future interments be on a renewable basis. Alarming, it noted that the the Crown sector (responsible for most cemeteries) 'has accumulated significant unfunded liabilities, associated with the requirement to maintain cemeteries in perpetuity' which exceeded £150m.

By contrast in Adelaide, South Australia, grave reuse has operated since 1863. Once the lease expires and is not renewed, and if the grave is not deemed to be historically significant, any remains are reinterred three metres down in the same grave and they stay there forever, allowing the space on top to be reused. If the monument is not required, it is taken away and crushed and the stone is used back in the cemetery. (The same even happens at Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris!)

Robert Pitt, Chief Executive of the Adelaide Cemeteries Authority, said 'The remains stay there, our cemetery records are permanent records, and we have photographs of the headstones, and we think that that is striking the right balance between respect and preserving history and heritage, plus providing ongoing burial space.'

Could such a balance keep other cemeteries such as Waverley and Melbourne General alive too? ■

MONUMENTAL MARBLE STONE & GRANITE WORKS.

Central Depot, Kentish Town Wharf, N.W.

M^r Forster London 17 April 1872
128 Lupton Rd

To Millward & Co^{rs} Dr

SOLE APPOINTED SCULPTORS & MASONS TO THE HIGHGATE & ABBEY PARK CEMETERIES.

Highgate

1796s Gothic marble headstone, being twelve ft. long by four inches high 20 - - -
Description of job being copy for - - - - - 3 4 3
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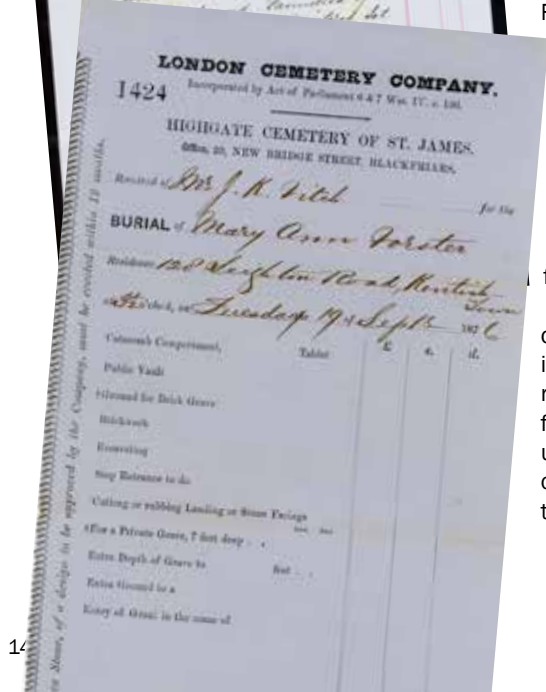
From the archives

From time to time we find on eBay interesting documents relating to Highgate Cemetery burials which allow us to better understand the business of death.

This small collection relates to the Reverend William Forster who was an interesting character in the Nonconformist world, causing a religious scandal by very publicly switching from Congregational to Unitarian and founding a 'Free Christian Church' in Kentish Town.

We have Millward's bill for a 'Gothic Marble Headstone' (£24.4.3) with a laudatory inscription of 306 characters following his death in March 1871.

There are also two bills relating to the death in 1876 of his wife, Mary Ann. One is from the London Cemetery Company for re-opening the grave (£6.10.0); the other, from John K. Fitch of Highgate, furnishing undertaker, includes items such as her elm coffin covered in black cloth and funeral transport, which totalled £20.19.10. ■



News roundup



New Staff

We are thrilled to welcome two new members of staff since the last newsletter. Kim Nazarko has joined us as Volunteer Manager, having previously worked at the Dickens Museum. We bade farewell to her predecessor Nikki Druce who has gone on to great things with English Heritage at Eltham Palace. Leo Crane has joined us as our first Director of Development. He has worked Victoria and Albert Museum, Dulwich Picture Gallery and the Royal Institute of British Architects. We wish them both well!

Events

As well as a stonemasonry workshop with Neil Luxton on 16 September, coming up are talks in the Chapel on 'Why the common grave matters' by Professor Julie-Marie Strange on 21 September and on Georgiana Houghton by Vivienne Roberts on 21 November. We are also hosting events for the London Month of the Dead in October, including a talk on the scientific roots of Frankenstein by Cat Irving, and one on Egyptian (-style) funerary architecture in

London cemeteries by Michelle Keeley. See highgatecemetery.org/events for details and to book.

South Gate away for repair

The vehicle gate into the West side of Highgate Cemetery was damaged by an errant road roller earlier this year and has now been taken away to the heart of Herefordshire for expert conservation repair. The leaves will be laid flat in a large kiln to fuse the ruptures back together without the whole thing just melting!

Conservation Project Stage 2 Update

Keep your eyes out for a full report on progress with the Conservation Project in the December newsletter.

Priscilla Oakeshott remembered

We were very sad to hear the news in August of the death of Priscilla Oakeshott who for many years had been a gardening volunteer. A memorial service was held at All Saints Margaret Street. Here she is, on the left, with the team tending war graves. ■



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

BROMPTON

3 September 11am-5pm: Open Day
Cemetery tours every Sunday at 2pm, £10.
2023 Programme is published on their website at brompton-cemetery.org.uk/events.html

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

Sunday 1 October at 1pm: tours about HS2 and other reburials; Dickens Connections; and a Railway Walk; booking required, £5 donation requested. See www.tbcs.org.uk

Above The family grave of Alfred James Gill and Captain Warne at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

KENSAL GREEN

Guided tours 2pm every Sunday to end October; first and third Sunday November to February. £12 donation requested. Booking essential. 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.

NUNHEAD

Special tour programme on website.
Guided tours last Sunday of the month 2pm, donation. See www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park events are listed online. See their website at www.fothcp.org for details.