

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2024

The image shows the interior of a church, viewed from the back of the sanctuary looking towards the front. A large, ornate Gothic Revival window with three lancets and a central quatrefoil is the focal point, allowing bright light to filter through. Below the window is a wooden altar with a cross on top. The church has high, vaulted ceilings and dark wood paneling. Pews are visible on either side of the aisle.

**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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With thanks to

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The December 2024 issue will be posted on 15 November 2024. Contributions due by 10 October 2024.

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Cover photograph

Highgate Cemetery's Anglican Chapel. Black and white photo probably from mid 20th century, with colour added by AI
Photo: Trust archives

Chair's note



Over the course of the last year the *Unlocking Highgate Cemetery* conservation project has gathered both momentum and shape, building on the work done over the last several years. We are delighted that the project's ambitious scope, outward looking aims and urgent nature are gaining official recognition and winning support from funders, outside authorities and importantly our local community, not least our members.

As we move on to the crucial next step of submitting our planning and listed building consent application, we need to confront the funding challenges these plans present. In this issue of the newsletter in which the impressive charitable efforts of our Victorian predecessors forms the backdrop to several fascinating articles, it seems fitting to focus on fundraising for the cemetery in which so many of them are buried.

In July, as Leo Crane writes on page 12, we introduced the new patrons programme and we will shortly be launching our refreshed members offer. Leo's article gives details of the benefits of these schemes and you will also find details on the website. The aim has been to create an increase in benefits balanced against an increase in cost of membership and the opportunity to give more in a structured way. Since the Trust was established, there have been generous and committed donors and now we have a way to acknowledge and reward those individuals as well as to encourage others. Please spread the word.

On behalf of the Trust, we extend a deep message of gratitude both to those who have supported us over the years by becoming members and also to our more recent funders, the Heritage Fund and the Pilgrim Trust. We welcome and thank our newly joined patrons and pay important tribute to the many who give their time and their expertise to volunteer and work for the Cemetery. We look forward to welcoming many new people to this community of supporters, who want to see the future of the Cemetery secured for the benefit of all.

Liz Fuller, Chair



Remembering the governesses

Highgate Cemetery was not just for the wealthy. RICHARD KUHN uncovers the story of an institutional grave for an often-overlooked group of women

On the west side of Highgate Cemetery, not far from the entrance, lie the forlorn remains of an unusual memorial, broken in two. The inscription reads:

GOVERNESSES' BENEVOLENT INSTITUTION
IN MEMORY OF 45 GOVERNESSES
LATE INMATES OF THE ASYLUM
FORMERLY IN KENTISH TOWN
SINCE REMOVED TO CHISLEHURST

The memorial stood at the head of four graves owned since 1854 by the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, and was probably put up by them in 1889. Of the forty-five governesses mentioned, only thirty-one, buried between 1854 and 1888, are listed in the Cemetery's burial records. We can only assume that the Institution,

whose history was chequered up to 1843, buried the other fourteen governesses elsewhere.

By the Victorian era governesses were commonly found employed in the houses of the burgeoning affluent middle classes. Many started at the age of sixteen, so were little older than the children to whom they acted as tutors and chaperones. Neither domestic servants nor members of the family, they held a rather anomalous position.

At the time, such relatively well-educated middle class young women would not have been expected to work, but would either have got married or have come from families wealthy enough to support them. That some sought work implied either a

Above View of the Asylum for Aged Governesses at Kentish Town, c.1848.

© The Trustees of the British Museum

failure to secure a husband or that their families had fallen on bad times – or both. In addition, their professional need for rectitude often left them isolated, unapproachable and lonely.

Their earnings, if any beyond board and lodgings, were modest, and what little they did make was all too often needed not only to sustain their own living but that of elderly relatives or orphaned siblings. Illness or old age usually resulted in the loss of both their ‘homes’ and their income.

The first acknowledgement of the sorry plight of unemployed, sick or elderly governesses resulted in the creation of a Governesses’ Mutual Assurance Society (1829-38), which offered minor hardship grants and annuities but was unable to

meet the growing demand. Subsequent attempts to address their needs including the founding of a new society in 1841 also failed, until the involvement of an exceptional young chaplain to the Middlesex Hospital and St Anne’s Society Schools.

The Reverend David Laing (1800-60) took on what had become the Governesses’ Institution in 1843. Through his impressive powers of persuasion and an enormous amount of hard work, he attracted subscribers to fund hardship grants. Many of the donors had themselves benefitted from the services of those they now wished to help. A Ladies’ Committee managed the grants and a Provident Fund offered governesses who could afford to



Above The memorial to David Laing (1800-60)

Below The Governesses Memorial



RICHARD KUHN

do so the opportunity to invest in annuities and commercial savings schemes, the Institution acting as their banker.

Once the Institution was up and running, Laing busied himself with the purchase of a house in Harley Street (1845) where unemployed governesses could rent rooms

cheaply while waiting for employment found through a free job agency run by volunteers from the same premises.

Laing became increasingly aware of the limited education and lack of professional training which had so blighted the lives of the women and was determined to address the problem. He believed that they had a right to the education afforded to most men at the time and to the benefits of qualifying as teachers.

This resulted in the purchase of an adjacent property in Harley St (1847) which soon became Queen's College (patron, Queen Victoria), where Laing persuaded professors from King's College, University of London, to lecture in the daytime to paying students, whose fees subsidised free lectures for governesses in the evenings.

Two of the first fee-paying students were future pioneers of women's education: Frances Mary Buss (1827-94) went on to become Head of the successor school to Queen's, the North London Collegiate School, and to found the Camden School for Girls; Dorothea Beale (1831-1906) became the Principal of Cheltenham



Above Portrait of the Reverend David Laing by an unknown artist. (Colorized with AI from a BW photograph)

Ladies' College and the founder of St Hilda's College, Oxford.

In 1847 Laing left Middlesex Hospital to establish the new parish of Holy Trinity, Haverstock Hill (now Kentish Town). He built up a large congregation over a very short period of time and was able to raise enough money to build both a church, consecrated in 1850, and a school. Laing advanced money and contributed some of his own funds; he was the son and son-in-law of planters in Jamaica.

Meanwhile a proper board was established to run the renamed *Governesses' Benevolent Institution*. Its patrons included Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Fund-raising dinners attracted members of the Royal family, and Charles Dickens was the guest speaker at the first of these. Although Dickens had decided 'to decline attending many projected dinners on behalf of charitable institutions,' he made an exception for the governesses because he had 'conceived in the Institution a heartfelt interest.'

In 1847, too, the Institution had taken land in Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town, on which to build an Asylum for Aged Governesses designed, like Laing's nearby Holy Trinity church, by T.H. Wyatt and David Brandon, a significant architectural practice of the day. It opened in June 1849.

Initially there were ten bedrooms, according to the *Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times*, 'carpeted all over, with a neat French bedstead in each, an easy chair, glass, a chest of drawers, night-lamp, washhand-stand, &c., and last, not least, a Bible and stand; so that the worldly comforts of the inmates are not only attended to, but their spiritual welfare is not neglected by the society; and there is every solace to soothe the declining years of this

Below A typical bedroom at the Asylum for Aged Governesses, Kentish Town



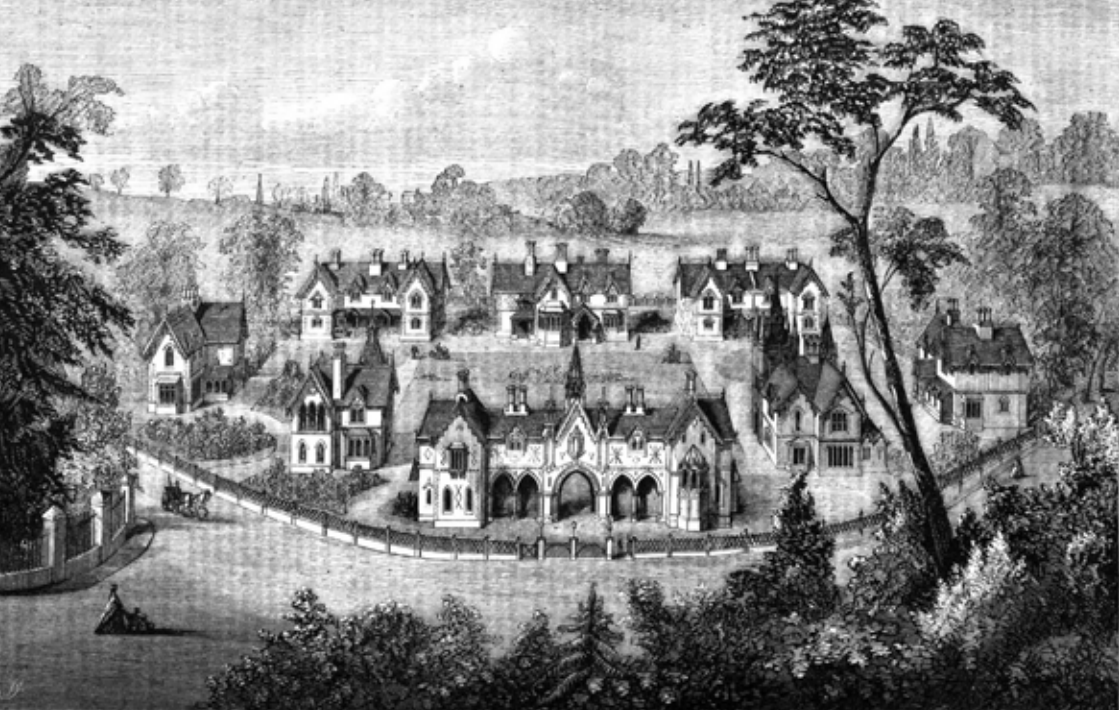
hitherto-neglected class that have such peculiar claims upon our sympathy and affections.'

Laing died in 1860 and was buried at Highgate Cemetery, his monument recording that he was the 'first Honorary Secretary of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution'. The arrival that same year of a new railway line nearby made the asylum at Kentish Town less attractive and in 1872, after enduring a decade of noise and dirt, it moved to Chislehurst, Kent. Buss bought the site for her school.

At Highgate Cemetery the Institution had originally purchased ten graves but by then had used only four; in 1889 five of the others were sold back to the London Cemetery Company and one was transferred to the Reverend Alfred Buss, younger brother of Frances.

And so the Governesses' Benevolent Institution link with north London was broken. It continued under that name until the mid-twentieth century, when it became the Schoolmistresses' and Governesses' Benevolent Institution, and then part of the Teaching Staff Trust in 2017. The Trust makes grants to a much wider range of women who work or have worked in education.

No doubt the redoubtable Reverend Laing would have approved. ■



The true origins of Holly Village

Visitors to the Cemetery are often captivated by the fairy-tale village down the hill. Speculation abounds as to how it came about. IAN DUNGAVELL delves into the mystery

Remarkable places often attract their own legends. And there are few more remarkable places in London than Holly Village, the picturesque group of Gothic cottages at the corner of Swain's Lane and Chester Road, at the foot of the east side of Highgate Cemetery. Built by Angela Burdett Coutts (1814-1906) as an eyecatcher at the margin of her Holly Lodge pleasure grounds, one enduring myth is that it was occupied by her staff, another is that it was intended for clerks working at Coutts Bank.

The name 'Holly Village' was no doubt intended to suggest idyllic country living away from the spreading suburbs of Victorian London. At that stage it was still

surrounded by open fields, yet it was not a village, not even a hamlet, but just an enclave of eight buildings dotted around a small green. Four were individual houses, four were semi-detached pairs. The name 'Holly' linked it to Holly Lodge, Burdett Coutts's house further up the hill.

Visitors sometimes mistake the gatehouse for a cemetery lodge, understandably as this pair of houses recalls to mind the pair of chapels at the entrance to the Cemetery itself, united by a Gothic arch with an oriel window lighting a room above. But the carving around the arch, in lively Gothic letters, declares otherwise: 'Holly Village erected by A. G. B.

Above 'Miss Burdett Coutts's new model cottages, Holly Village' in *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, 19 August 1865



Coutts A.D. 1865'.

So there has never been any doubt that Burdett Coutts was behind the project. Moreover she was known for her interest in social housing. Early on with Charles Dickens she founded Urania Cottage (1847) in Shepherd's Bush, a refuge for homeless women. And in the late 1850s there was Columbia Square, a model development of four five-storey blocks (1859-62) in Gothic style, on the site of a notorious dust heap in the East End of London.

Nearby she built the magnificent Columbia Market (opened 1869), sadly demolished in 1958. The market square was enclosed on two sides by blocks with shops on the ground floor and housing for 'clerks and others employed in the city'.

Her architect was the relatively little-known Henry Astley Darbishire (1825-99) who also designed Holly Village. He had been appointed architect to the Peabody Trust in 1863, set up the previous year 'to ameliorate the condition of the poor and needy' of London.

But who were the intended residents of Holly Village? She has left us no record, but one of the earliest published accounts was in *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper*, 19 August 1865. Holly Village was 'a beautiful

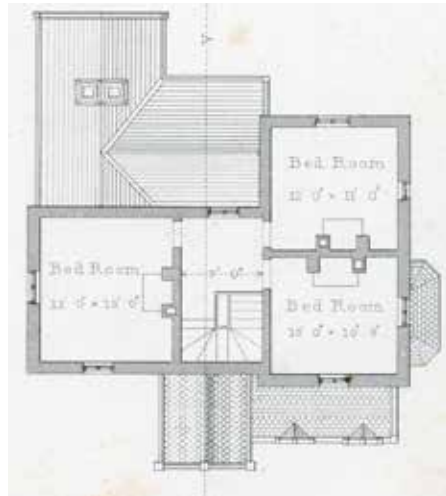
cluster of model cottages of a superior kind... intended for occupation by persons accustomed to town life, but desirous of enjoying the purer atmosphere and the comparative quiet to be found in the suburbs. It is for such persons, we believe – persons some of whom have been several years in the employment of the lady at whose expense the buildings are erected – that these model cottages are designed.'

The story has a plausibility about it, especially given Burdett Coutts's reputation for benevolence. A well-known precedent was Blaise Hamlet (1811), a group of nine cottages dotted around a green in Henbury, four miles north of Bristol, designed by John Nash for John Harford, banker and Quaker, to provide housing for his retired servants. But Cassell's report seems to have been speculation; the 'we believe' injects a note of uncertainty. And the first residents were yet to move in as the estate was still being built.

Two months later, a more detailed report in the *Illustrated Times* (21 October 1865) began with an outline of Burdett Coutts's philanthropy but set Holly Village in a slightly different context: that of 'the erection of tasteful and comfortable dwellings', a concern of writers such as

Above View of one of the detached houses at Holly Village from *Villa and Cottage Architecture*, 1868, and the same building today

Below Plans of the ground and first floor of a detached house at Holly Village with separate accommodation for a lodger, from *Villa and Cottage Architecture*, 1868



Ruskin and Carlyle. It concluded that: 'Everything has been done to render these cottages suitable residences for clerks, commercial travellers, and so on, the class of persons for whom they have been designed.' As the *Camden and Kentish Towns Gazette* pointed out, despite the name, Holly Village 'is evidently intended for the homes of a superior class of humanity, beings to whose lot falls a much larger share of fortune's favours and the world's goods' (19 May 1866).

A later report in *The Christian Times* attempted to make sense of the conflicting accounts by saying that Holly Village was 'intended, in the first instance, to provide cottage accommodation of a superior description for Miss Coutts's own workpeople; this idea, however, was subsequently abandoned, and the houses are now occupied by a higher class in the social scale.' But it is hardly likely that Burdett Coutts had changed her mind so drastically between August and October 1865. (And no evidence at all has been

found to support the other enduring myth that the intended beneficiaries were employees of Coutts Bank, a firm in which she took little day to day involvement.)

Well, the architect himself was likely to know better than anyone who he was building for, and his report was published in a book of *Villa and Cottage Architecture* in May 1868. Its unnamed editor made great claims to accuracy: the text, he wrote, 'has been compiled from information furnished in reply to queries addressed to the architects; who had in every case submitted to them proofs of the letterpress, before publication, in order that any additions or corrections might be made.'

The most reliable account is then that Holly Village was 'to serve the wants of clerks and others in receipt of limited incomes, for whom little has been done hitherto to provide comfortable dwellings.' These were not the working classes housed by the Peabody Trust. The accommodation was 'of a superior description, and as the materials and workmanship are of the



Left Darbshire also designed 'residences for clerks and tenants of a middle class' at Columbia Market in East London. In recognition of Burdett Coutts's patronage they were named 'Angela Gardens' and 'Georgina Gardens'

very best description, the cost has been considerable.' Though some had referred to them as 'model cottages', they offered 'no criterion for the cost at which a cottage of the same design and dimensions could be erected in a substantial but more ordinary manner.'

The ordinary cottages had at least three bedrooms with parlour, kitchen, scullery and wash house, but there were also two cottages arranged for lodgers. Here, the larger portion of the building was occupied by the family while the lodger had their own separate entrance, parlour, bedroom WC and pantry. They would have 'all the privacy, quiet, and comfort of a separate dwelling without the responsibilities of a household.' (Lodgers were best kept away from the rest of the family as much as possible!)

As well as being well-equipped and laid out, solid and durable materials had been chosen: 'honest bricks' rather than 'slimy compo', as one correspondent in the *Camden and Kentish Towns Gazette* put it. 'Stucco and stuck up (people) are too

often synonymous... builders and landlords sacrifice comfort and convenience too often to a mere show, as a plea for high rents.' As *The Christian Times* concluded, Holly Village was 'one place in London which will not need to be rebuilt in the course of seventy years... truth in architecture and truth in building are not quite things of the past,' (22 November 1867).

The 1871 census showed that the occupants were as Burdett Coutts and Darbshire had expected. They included: a clerk at the Inland Revenue; one in the tea trade; commercial, chancery and manufacturers clerks; a collector for the New River Company; a couple of merchants, and some people of independent means.

A remarkable place, Holly Village was 'worth a walk, and a long one, to see; it is very pleasant to behold,' according to the *Camden and Kentish Towns Gazette* (19 May 1866). But should you be tempted now to go and have a closer look, please do heed the large 'PRIVATE' sign by the entrance. Holly is spiky. ■

Below The new membership scheme unlocks free entry for members to the west side of Highgate Cemetery for the first time.



ANDY BATE

New membership scheme to help fund essential conservation work

LEO CRANE, the Trust's Director of Development, explains how members will be supporting the conservation of Highgate Cemetery and enjoying a wider range of benefits

Almost fifty years ago, a visionary group of volunteers banded together to form the Friends of Highgate Cemetery. Over the decades, they and their successors have worked tirelessly to save and protect this special place. Fundraising has always been an essential part of our activities, from seeking grants and donations to the annual subscriptions of members. It's the same today and we remain grateful to everyone who supports us.

Earlier this year, we announced a major award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the start of a seven-year conservation programme called *Unlocking*

Highgate Cemetery. Its impact is already visible, from conservation architects checking the condition of historic tombs to the gardening team testing new approaches to planting where diseased and dangerous trees have been removed.

To secure the full Heritage Fund grant, we must raise an additional £200,000 each year. We're delighted that the Pilgrim Trust has kicked this off with a £25,000 grant to fund investigations of the Grade I-listed Circle of Lebanon. Over time, many of its vaults have seized shut due to corrosion of door frames, hinges, and locks. Conservation specialists are now opening

them up to check their condition. The results will shape our application for listed building consent to conserve them properly for the future.

Underpinning one-off grants like this is the foundational support of members. We are truly grateful for this. We have now reviewed the **members' programme** to offer better benefits and to provide additional support for the conservation project.

From September, members will have unlimited free access to both sides of Highgate Cemetery during normal opening hours. They will also have early booking and a discount for our monthly events and a discount in the shop. Members will continue to receive this newsletter three times a year, as well as an email update every couple of months.

The new rate for **individual members** is £50 a year. While we appreciate this is an increase, the rate is comparable to membership at similar heritage organisations. To ease the transition, members may choose to renew at the old rate until 31 August 2025 by using the code RENEW24 on our website. If you pay by Direct Debit you don't need to do anything as we will apply this discount automatically.

Joint membership will be replaced by **'Member Plus'**, which comes with a guest pass so the benefit of unlimited free entry can be shared with another person. Your 'plus one' doesn't have to be always the same person or visit at the same time as you, but only the named member will be eligible to vote at the AGM. The 'Member Plus' rate is £75 a year. Joint members can transition to 'Member Plus' at the old joint member rate until 31 August 2025 by using the code PLUS2024 on our website. If you pay by Direct Debit you don't need to do anything as we will apply this discount automatically.

Below Liz Fuller, Trust Chair, at the launch of the new Patrons programme in July



Life members do not need to do anything: they will automatically enjoy the new benefits from September. However, like many organisations, we will no longer offer new life memberships.

Overseas members will become digital only, so there will be no surcharge for postage. Please contact us if you have not yet given us your email address.

Separately, for those who wish to contribute at a higher level, we have launched a **Patrons programme**. Patrons will be invited to special events and private tours throughout the year. Some of these will be at the Cemetery, others will be private visits to places that reveal the Cemetery's fascinating history and exciting future. We launched the programme in July and would be delighted to welcome you.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who supports Highgate Cemetery. You can find out more about members and patrons at www.highgatecemetery.org/join or by email to membership@highgatecemetery.org. ■

Our Florence Nightingales

ROBIN OAKLEY discovers that there are more Florence Nightingales at Highgate Cemetery than you might think

Florence Nightingale became something of a cult figure following her return from Crimea in 1855. Her name is not normally associated with Highgate Cemetery although she lived at several places in Hampstead and Highgate including at West Lodge at the top of Highgate West Hill, where there is a pink plaque commemorating her.

But there are four graves in Highgate Cemetery that have occupants with the forenames 'Florence Nightingale'. They represent just a tiny fraction of the 578 births registered of children who had been given her name between 1855 and 1910, when she died, reflecting the popular adulation of her as a national hero.

Highgate Cemetery's own 'Florence Nightingales' range from an infant who died after a few months, to three who lived adult lives ranging from 48 to 66 years, and across the social spectrum. All were born between 1855 and 1862, the peak period for naming infants after Nightingale.

Florence Nightingale Hardy was born and died in 1855, aged four months. Her parents lived near Albany Street, Regent's Park,



ROBIN OAKLEY

where her father was a coach-maker. She is buried in a common grave in the west side.

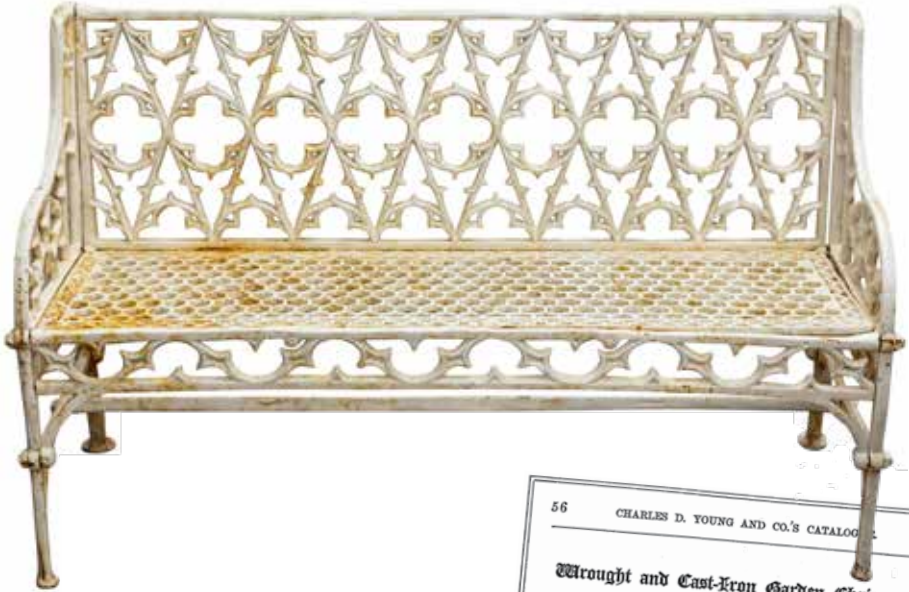
Florence Nightingale Eve née Cross (1857-1915) was the sister of John Walter Cross, who late in life married the novelist George Eliot. She was buried in the same grave as him across the path from Eliot's, and the inscription on the gravestone records their sibling relationship. She married Henry Weston Eve in 1886 and lived in Gordon Square. He was a prominent educationalist and Headmaster of University College School.

Florence Nightingale Roper née Scruby (1861-1909) was a 'trained hospital nurse' – a case, no doubt, of 'nominative determinism'. She lived at East Finchley. When her husband died the following year, he was buried in Manchester, leaving her alone in the grave near Comfort's Corner in the west side.

Florence Nightingale Giles née Wall (1862-1928) was the longest-lived of the four. She lived in Archway and Kentish Town with her husband Thomas. He was recorded in the census as a 'fish hawker' in 1891. The real Florence Nightingale noted in a letter that the namesake wife of a fish worker in Kentish Town had written to ask for help in finding work. It must have been her. She was buried in a common grave in the west side. ■



ROBIN OAKLEY

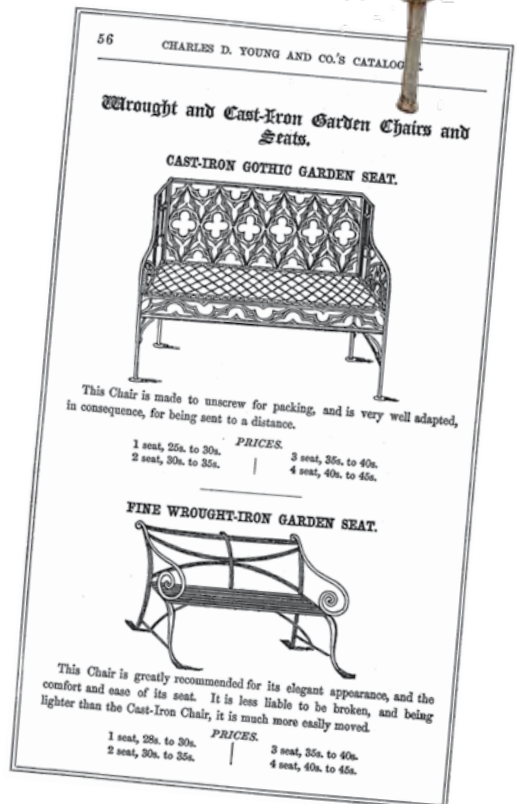


A new Gothic seat

One of the aims of our conservation project is to provide more seating in the cemetery. We recently added a three-seater cast-iron bench outside the Terrace Catacombs, where its Gothic style sits very happily beneath the Gothic balustrade. Eventually they might even be painted the same colour!

It is a good example of a design which was enduringly popular: illustrated in an early nineteenth-century pattern book, it is also included in the 1861 catalogue of Charles D. Young & Company of Perth. It was made to pack flat for easy transport.

Cast-iron seating was not so easily moved around by visitors, but its fragility left it prone to vandalism. Although chairs with wooden slats were less cold to sit on, people complained that they tended to retain the wet and stain their clothes. ■





Coming up

Saturday 14 September 10am to 4pm
Stonemasonry Workshop with Neil Luxton
£149 including materials

Thursday 19 September 7.30pm
A Spectacle of Death in the Victorian Age
by Adrian Mackinder £10; members £9*

Thursday 3 October 7.30pm
**Myths of life, death and rebirth, when
gods walked the land of the pyramids
under the desert sun**, told by Jason Buck
£10; members £9*

Thursday 21 November 7.30pm
**No Digging Here: the story of the BBC's
Ghost Stories at Christmas** by Jon Dear
£10; members £9*

Tuesday 17 December 7.30pm
What, no pudding? A Christmas mystery
set in Highgate Cemetery. Presented by
Don't Go Into The Cellar with Jonathan
Goodwin £20; members £18*

*Use code MEM24EV148 on our website for member prices.

London Month of the Dead

The following events will take place at Highgate Cemetery but are organised by the London Month of the Dead. To book, see londonmonthofthedead.com

Saturday 12 October 10am and 12 noon
Mysteries of the Mausolea, a tour with Ian Dungavell £20 (Sold out already, sorry)

Thursday 17 October 7pm
The Afterlife of Animals: Exploring the Natural History Museum's Hidden Collections with Richard Sabin £12

Wednesday 23 October 7pm
Faithful unto Death: Pet Cemeteries and Animal Burials by Dr Paul Koudanaris £12

Above The morgue on the Ile de la Cité in Paris became an unlikely tourist attraction, especially popular, apparently, with the English. *A Spectacle of Death in the Victorian Age* is on 19 September.