

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2021



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CEMETERY.**

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With thanks to

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Shepperd.

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Cover photograph

View into the West Cemetery from
the Terrace Catacombs

Chair's note



What a difference a few weeks make!

After the shutdown of winter, new life has really come to the Cemetery with daffodils everywhere and my favourite wild garlic rampant along the verges in the West Cemetery.

And our initiatives to secure the future of the Cemetery are also starting to put out their green shoots. We finally found ourselves in front of a House of Lords committee for the examination of our Parliamentary Bill last month (March). You can read all about it in Hansard but here are the words of the Chair, Lady Hallett, 'the members of the Committee have decided that the Bill should proceed. In our view, it is the only way Highgate Cemetery can continue to operate, as it should, as a place of burial, and as a site of historic and cultural significance'.

There is still a long way to go. The Bill is expected to reach the Commons later this month (April) but it's a most encouraging start.

And then we have just received the fascinating entries for our landscape competition which you will find displayed here and in greater detail on the website. Do have a look and let us know what you think. We shall be judging later this month but whatever is suggested our commitment remains to retain the Cemetery as the place of enchantment we all appreciate.

And recognition to all our staff and volunteers who have worked so hard to get us to this stage and to keep the Cemetery open for individual visits during the lockdown of so much else. Passing by on weekend mornings I have been moved, and sometimes astonished, by the unsolicited appreciation and interest of our visitors, so many of them now local. It is a tribute to the continuing enthusiasm and commitment in difficult times of our volunteers. Thank you, and keep safe.

Martin Adeney, Chair



Keeping their tails bushy

KAREN HEATH from Mama Cat Animal Rescue has been working to save our foxes from an agonising condition

Highgate Cemetery is an excellent habitat for foxes. It is such a wildlife friendly environment and is perfect for them with plenty of wild areas. There are places to hide if they want to, bring up their young and great sources of food from their natural diet of rodents, birds, worms, insects and fruit. Yet the cemetery foxes are not without their problems.

For the last few years they have been suffering from sarcoptic mange, the most common infection in foxes, which causes them much misery. It is the result of a microscopic mite which burrows into their skin and multiplies causing immense irritation leading to incessant itching, constant scratching and fur loss. This can lead to sores and skin crusting. Left untreated, a fox will die a miserable and

painful death.

Mange seems to be an increasing problem, but it is not really clear why. Foxes living in close proximity, as London foxes do, are more likely to catch this very contagious condition but not all foxes do. A strong immune system helps. Sadly, it is possible for them to get mange again but in very many cases, they don't. There is nothing to prevent this although catching it early makes a huge difference.

Treatment for mange is by various means but none is that easy. Homeopathic remedies are used a lot and in most cases are the only option for ordinary people to use. Of course there are sceptics but there are many reports of it working in less extreme cases.

Otherwise to be really effective you



need strong prescription medication, only available from a supportive vet, and it must be administered with great care. It may also be toxic to some breeds of dogs. My methods vary depending on the fox. In severe cases where the animal needs to come into care for treatment, we would catch a fox in a cage trap. But wherever possible, I prefer to treat foxes in situ as it is less stressful for them if they can be treated in their own environment. I give a

one-off medication in food, which is quite costly but very effective.

As soon as medication is given, they start to feel better immediately as the discomfort and scratching abates but it takes several weeks and months even for their fur to grow back properly so they still look scruffy. Severely-affected foxes may need antibiotics to deal with skin infections.

This time of year is cub season. When the parents have mange the cubs will almost certainly be affected too. Parent foxes cannot be cage trapped and brought into care for treatment as they cannot leave their cubs. Also the medication has to be appropriate for a nursing vixen.

While some people are not fans of urban foxes, they are certainly here to stay. With healthy coats and bushy tails they are much admired by most of Highgate Cemetery's visitors. It would be inhumane of us not to do what we can to ease the pain and suffering caused by this agonising condition. ■

For more information about Mama Cat Animal Rescue, see www.mamacat.co.uk or MamaCatTrust on Facebook. Donations by Paypal to mamacattrust@googlemail.com.



Above David, before treatment



Above Valentino, after treatment



A surprising haven for life

SÉRGIO HENRIQUES shares his scientific findings on the importance of Highgate for some remarkable British species

It might surprise many to hear that in the scientific community cemeteries are known as havens for life. Research published in the journal *Nature* earlier this year found that graveyards in China's agricultural landscapes had a surprisingly high diversity of plant species not easily found elsewhere in those regions. Similar conclusions have also been reported from South Korea, the Middle East and Europe, including the UK. Cemeteries are now recognized not only as havens for plants but have become well known to be the homes of important pollinators like hoverflies, butterflies and even rare cave spiders.

The Egyptian Avenue is perhaps one of the most iconic parts of Highgate Cemetery, a place of solemn beauty. However, from a biological perspective, the vaults which line it are human-made caves and have become a peaceful sanctuary for rare cave species. They are islands of life surrounded by an ever growing sea of urban development.

One of the most outstanding inhabitants of these urban caves is the humble *Meta bourneti*. This beautiful cave spider is classified as nationally scarce, but I found that it is not only present but thriving in Highgate's historic tombs. The cemetery is therefore a site of remarkable importance in

terms of the conservation of this species. It presents a set of unique study opportunities for scientists like myself, particularly because we know exactly when these urban caves were built and when they became available to these species. The site is so important for this species that it recently featured in BBC's *Countryfile* (Fig.1).

I had the pleasure of visiting to collect data and samples for The Darwin Tree of Life project, a collaboration between biodiversity, genomics and analysis partners including the Zoological Society of London (where I worked at the time) and the Natural History Museum of London (where samples are being processed). This project aims to sequence the genomes (DNA) of all 60,000 species of eukaryotic organisms in Britain and Ireland (animals, plants and fungi) and hopes to transform the way we do biology, conservation and biotechnology.

Fig. 1 The spiders star in BBC's *Countryfile*



As the chair of the Spider and Scorpion Specialist Group, I am ensuring there is the highest possible representation of the animals under my group's remit, and visiting Highgate was crucial towards achieving that goal.

In this early stage of the project the team hopes to analyse at least one representative of each family of organisms. Spiders as an animal order have a sizeable number of different families in the UK,



Fig. 2 Female *Nesticus cellulanus*

in the same way the order of carnivorous mammals has the cat family and the dog family. Although most spider families might not be household names, many do share their house with us, such as the house-spider family (Araneidae), the cob-web spiders (Theridiidae), the garden-spider family (Araneidae) and many others.

Some of these spider families are rather diverse and hold several species (for example, there are 287 different species of money spiders, Linyphiidae, in the UK alone), while other family branches in the tree of life are currently not as diverse in the British Isles. This is the case of the Nesticidae family, which in the UK is solely represented by *Nesticus cellulanus* and *Kryptonesticus eremita*, the latter of which is only known from one population in a mine on Flat Holm Island in the Bristol Channel, found in 2017. Therefore if one is aiming to study all spider families, *Nesticus cellulanus* is the most suitable candidate to represent the Nesticidae. However, because this species lives in mines, caves, cellars and similar habitats, it is not an easy species to find — except in Highgate Cemetery.

Several *Nesticus cellulanus* were found in one of the vaults examined: three juveniles and what appeared to be an adult female, confirmed under the microscope (Fig. 2), and three males which were determined on site to be subadults, and were therefore not disturbed so they may mature and spread the genes of their species.

All the vaults examined in either side of the Egyptian Avenue were home to multiple individuals of *Meta bourneti*, but the species was not just present, it was abundant. All life stages were found living side by side on this single visit, from healthy egg sacs, recently emerged younglings, small to large juveniles, subadult males

Fig. 3 Female *Meta bourneti*

Fig. 4 Male *Meta bourneti*



and adult individuals, both females and males (Fig. 3).

Adult males of this cave species have been previously recorded as late as October, but this was the first record in November (Fig. 4) and, given the number of subadult males, it would not be surprising to find these animals maturing in late November or even December.

My conclusion was that the Highgate population of *Meta bourneti* was reproducing, growing and therefore appears to be thriving. The population was therefore considered to be remarkably healthy from a conservation standpoint. It is recommended that disturbance is

kept limited and that current maintenance procedures are maintained as they have clearly been effective.

Although no other species was analysed, the vaults clearly house a remarkable range of biodiversity not so readily found outside. Among these there were a considerable number of wood lice (which are likely at the base of the food web) but also beetles, snails, centipedes and some remarkable wasps, such as the beautiful *Diphyus quadripunctorius* (Fig. 5), which in spring will feed on moth caterpillars, but in winter will come together for what is scientifically called an 'inactive hypogean ecophase', (hibernating underground) which usually



Fig. 5 One of several *Diphyus quadripunctorius* found overwintering together

Fig. 6 *Amaurobius cf. similis*

takes place in caves.

Several species of spiders were also found, including at least two species of lace web spiders, *Amaurobius cf. fenestralis* and *Amaurobius cf. similis* (Fig. 6), as well as giant house spiders (*Eratigena cf. duelica*), several money spiders (potentially *Labulla thoracica*) and daddy long-legs (Pholcidae, likely *Pholcus phalangoides*).

Highgate Cemetery is a unique site by many accounts but scientifically it presents researchers with a rare opportunity to study cave-like environments in a controlled setting. Therefore, besides its remarkable historical and cultural importance, it can also be seen as a unique laboratory for learning more about how cave-dwelling animals disperse and find such habitats. This is a question which science has yet to answer, but one we would do well to tackle if we want to understand the impact of climate change on the potential migration of these remarkable species.

Because several species were found during this one visit, the list of interesting animals at Highgate is likely to grow if further vaults can be accessed in the future, an endeavour which I believe would be well worth pursuing and recording scientifically. However, this should be done carefully, ideally with considerable time gaps between visits, as it was the limited disturbance of the vaults that allowed for several cave-loving animals to flourish.

Providing a stable shelter for these species will also ensure a valuable scientific resource for generations of researchers to come. ■

Sérgio Henriques is a conservation biologist who specialises in spiders. He has recently been appointed Invertebrates Coordinator at the new Global Center for Species Survival at Indianapolis Zoo.

A historic cemetery for the twenty-first century

Share your thoughts online until 25 April!

Find out more about our plans at highgatecemetery.org/competitions

We have been seeking architects and landscape architects to help Highgate Cemetery deal with the challenges and opportunities posed by climate change, decay and evolving visitor expectations.

Our two competitions attracted some of the leading creative and internationally recognised practitioners in their fields. We have now selected four landscape and six architectural teams to go to the second stage, bringing us a step closer to commissioning a new twenty-five-year masterplan for the site, securing its future and ensuring that it remains a historic, and sustainable, twenty-first century working cemetery.

The landscape finalists have been working on early concept proposals. Over the next few pages are summaries from each competitor in their own words. More information is now available on our website at www.highgatecemetery.org/competitions. There are also short video presentations from each of the teams and we are inviting you to share your thoughts about their ideas online until 25 April 2021.

The winners of both competitions will be announced in May.

Design work for the architectural projects will begin in the summer with the winning team undertaking feasibility work following appointment. Views on those proposals will be invited at a later stage and, of course, through public consultation as part of the planning process.

Any changes in the Cemetery will take place gradually and it will be some time before we start to see work beginning. We are looking forward very much to selecting and working with the winning teams who will share our vision of the Cemetery as a place of enchantment whose carefully-tended natural environment provides sanctuary for those buried here and their loved ones, while improved facilities make it easier and more rewarding to visit and work here. ■

Colvin & Moggridge



'A complex site serving many audiences, Highgate Cemetery deserves a shared vision of realistic and long-term delivery. Our masterplan responds with sensitivity and imagination to its myriad interests and users, to reverse the slow erosion of significance and resolve existing conflicts.

Our conceptual masterplans will evolve in consultation with stakeholders strengthening the recognised character of Highgate Cemetery:

- To the west, a contemplative picturesque woodland with dramatic topography, mis-en-scene with evergreen planting: a sequence of contrast along the journey uphill. Robust theatrical landscape with filtered views through thinned woodlands and the grand reveal of St Paul's. The striking architecture safeguarded against

encroaching trees and ivy yet allowing opportunity for greater biodiversity and ornamental planting.

- To the east, a pragmatic and structured landscape, a core woodland mosaic enclosed by open areas of ornamental planting to better reveal the original grid layout. Woodland 'rooms' build on existing native plant communities creating pockets of seasonal floristic underplanting, flowering shrubs and accent planting beside the woodland edges and paths.

New burials and the interment of ashes will be accommodated in both cemeteries to continue active burial practices and income.

Our vision can be summarised as 'Evolution not Revolution. Bold and Deliverable'. ■

Gustafson Porter + Bowman



'Our vision is to create a topographical exploration and discovery of both Cemeteries. An 'experience plan' that introduces visitors to the inexhaustible wealth of stories held within both Cemeteries that can change and be revealed over time.

The walk up Highgate Hill, starting in the East Cemetery, creates a topographical experience that starts with the original grid of paths and echoes the grid of the surrounding city. We wish to emphasise the major north south paths with new avenues of trees, framing meadows of graves, woodland bosques and mosaics of flowering perennials.

As one rises up the hill, the topography becomes steeper and one is introduced to the arabesque paths of the West Cemetery's picturesque landscape. Here we imagine the woodland opening and closing to reveal glades of sunlight that provide unexpected views, revealing hidden graves and drifts of woodland plants. At the top of the hill within the Circle of Lebanon, and above the catacombs, the planting gets more exotic, representing a paradise on earth, with fantastic views across the Cemetery's planted hillside to the newly restored Chapel entrance, St Paul's and Central London.' ■

J & L Gibbons



‘Highgate Cemetery presents an extraordinary mosaic of culture and ecology. An opportunity to realise a unique collaborative and place-based approach to design and conservation in the landscape. Fundamental to this is cross-fertilising precise analytical baseline information with knowledge embedded in the community, to evolve a set of core design principles that substantiate each action. Every aspect of design and stewardship is interrelated within a vision that is relational, long-term orientated, and incrementally transformative. A vision that cultivates a collective dimension and energy through process driven actions both creative and scholarly.

This is a delicate act of balancing

values; enhancing the living spirit of the cemetery while nurturing the nuanced art of conservation. The cemetery is more than an assemblage of historic monuments, it is a living landscape. An urban forest embracing the dynamics of time, territory and memory. A landscape that now requires radical caretaking, to safeguard the future and integrity, both of specific features and the special character of the whole which are inseparable. An action plan based on the interdependence of all life, structured by above and below ground critical infrastructure; soils, surface water, trees and plants. An ecology of natural cycles and the human experience — growth and decay — profound and serene.’ ■

Periscope



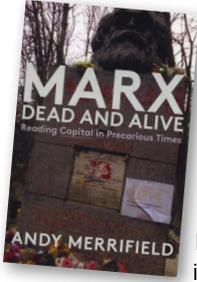
‘Our vision for Highgate Cemetery envisages a place of coexistence for all life and all death – human and non-human, local and global. Karl Marx is joined by the last white rhino; the Victorian mass common graves are accompanied by mausoleums for stag beetles; and contemporary ecological death practices nourish the earth for future generations.

Highgate has long been home to some of the greatest men and women of London’s history. It is also a place where nature has coexisted alongside human burial for centuries, but it has done so coincidentally. In our vision the site will now also be home

to the greatest non-human species and actively managed living systems.

We look to a future of fully integrated natural systems where the cemetery is managed as a circular, zero-waste woodland; to the gradual growth of a future climate-adapted forest; where communities are invited to learn and work with the woodland; and where human death cycles are aligned with ecological life. This is the instigation of an evolutionary approach to stabilise a highly delicate and complex site. At Highgate, we embrace the restorative power of nature in both life and death, for past and future generations.’ ■

News roundup



Reading *Capital* in precarious times

In *Marx, Dead and Alive* (Monthly Review Press, 2020, £16) Andy Merrifield seeks to demonstrate how Marx can reveal our individual lives to us within a

collective perspective, and within a historical continuum. 'Marx spoke to me in dark times in the 1980s,' he writes, 'and he can still speak to us in even darker times now'.

Although its primary concern is a rereading of *Capital*, the book begins with Merrifield's visit to Marx's grave in February 2019 when it had just been vandalised, and ends with his return in November that year once it had been cleaned up but awaited (as now) the return of the damaged marble panel. To read part of the concluding chapter, see mronline.org/2019/11/26/marx-dead-and-alive.

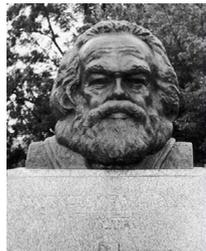
Marx restored

Conservators Taylor Pearce working for the Marx Grave Trust with advice from Historic England have restored the vandalised Marx grave panel using new pieces of marble set 30mm into the surface (*pictured top right*). Where the original inscription was partially obliterated by hammer blows, new lettering has been incised and filled with lead to match. The panel will be re-installed soon, set slightly back from its original position behind a toughened, non-reflective, anti-UV glass screen.



The Plot for Karl Marx

Oral historian and broadcaster Alan Dein made a BBC Radio 3 feature on Laurence Bradshaw's Karl Marx memorial, exploring the remarkable story, and the cultural impact, of what is perhaps the most well-known grave in the world. In this year's Marx Memorial lecture, he will share audio and documents from his research and discuss how Bradshaw's sculpture inspired other bronze versions of Marx's head around the world. To book, visit highgatecemetery.org/events.



The Marx Memorial
Lecture:
The Plot for Karl Marx

Alan Dein

Thursday 6 May 2021
7pm

A dead good job: Gravedigging

Don't miss this talk on 1 May at 5pm: see churchmonumentsociety.org/events ■

Historic cemeteries news

What's on at our sister cemeteries

Covid has made it impossible for Friends groups to offer many of the usual activities. Check their websites and make a donation instead. All information is subject to change.

ABNEY PARK

Abney Park is 'a woodland memorial park and local nature reserve'. The Trust has been holding live virtual events and uploading recordings on its website, along with recordings of birdsong, audio talks on heritage and wildlife, and audio tours. See www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Brompton Cemetery... 'is one of Britain's oldest and most distinguished garden cemeteries'. Tours and events suspended. See brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

'The largest cemetery in Western Europe.'
All walks cancelled. See www.tbcs.org.uk

KENSAL GREEN

Newly billed by its Friends as 'Britain's most prestigious cemetery'!
www.kensalgreen.co.uk

WEST NORWOOD

Events suspended. See www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

The 'least known, but most attractive, of the great Victorian cemeteries of London,' according to its Friends. A programme of monthly walks has been published, but places are limited to 5 and booking is essential. See www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is 'a unique and vital nature reserve and heritage site in East London'. See their website at www.fothcp.org for details of the many online events they are offering.

WILLESDEN JEWISH CEMETERY

'A prestigious burial ground for London's Jewish community since 1873.' The indoor heritage experience is still closed, but the grounds are open.
www.willesdenjewishcemetery.org.uk

ARNOS VALE CEMETERY, BRISTOL

'A unique heritage site in the heart of Bristol' with some great online events. Visit arnosvale.org.uk.

SHEFFIELD GENERAL CEMETERY

'A valuable green space in the heart of the city... now preserved as a mixture of meadow, woodland and monuments.' Guided walks have restarted on the first Sunday of each month. www.gencem.org