

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2022



**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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

With thanks to

Martin Adeney, Brent Elliott, Penny Linnett, Robin Oakley, Stuart Orr, John Shepperd.

The August 2022 issue will be posted on 22 July 2022. Contributions due by 16 June 2022.

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Cover photograph

Highgate Cemetery East in spring
Photo: Ian Dungavell

Chair's note



I am delighted to be able to report that at 11.06am on 24 March 2022 the Highgate Cemetery Bill received the Royal Assent and is now the *Highgate Cemetery Act*.

It is a historic moment. It has taken nearly two and a half years since the Bill was submitted to Parliament and months of previous preparation. But we now have an Act which replaces the old legislation covering the cemetery, the London Cemetery Company Acts dating back to 1836, and formally recognises the role of the Friends.

Most importantly it helps secure the future of the Cemetery as a public burial ground by allowing us to reclaim old abandoned or empty graves for re-use, rights which other London cemeteries already enjoy.

It has been a lengthy progress and I must pay tribute to all those who have contributed.³ They include our two sponsors, Lynne, Baroness Featherstone in the Lords and Catherine West MP in the Commons, and the trustees with special legal and governmental knowledge who served beside me on our own Bill sub-committee, Adam Cooke and Katy Baldwin. But above all, we have our Chief Executive, Ian Dungavell to thank for his meticulous preparation work and his crucial and persuasive public explanation over some hours to committees of both Houses of Parliament.

We have also seen progress on our Conservation Plan. Both our chosen sets of architects have been hard at work developing proposals for landscape and structures based on careful surveys of our trees and monuments as well as drainage and paving. They are thoughtful and imaginative. We hope to share some ideas for comment this summer.

Meanwhile in the Cemetery it has once again been a radiant spring, with relatively little damage from the winter gales.

Do come and refresh and remember.

Martin Adeney, Chair



Mrs. Lilly.

1864.

Queen Victoria's midwife

ROBIN OAKLEY discovers a photograph of Mrs Lilly in the Royal Collection

Mary Dixon Lilly was Queen Victoria's midwife. Over a period of seventeen years, and working alongside the physician Dr Charles Locock, she assisted with the delivery of all nine of the Queen's children, from Princess Victoria in 1840 to Princess Beatrice in 1857. 'Mrs Lilly', as she was known, would then continue to act as the 'monthly nurse' for the 'lying-in' stage that followed each delivery.

After her services were finally no longer needed, Queen Victoria and her family continued to keep in touch with 'Good Mrs Lilly': they sent her gifts and there was the occasional meeting. At her funeral in 1882, when her cortège arrived at Highgate Cemetery gates, it was met by two of the Queen's pages, bearing a wreath and hand-written card from the Queen.

The term 'midwife' was not actually used at the time for Mrs Lilly. She was referred to as a 'nurse', while Dr Locock was referred to as the specialist 'accoucheur', the more prestigious term used by men obstetricians who were trying to take over control of childbirth. However, it is clear from these accounts that Mrs Lilly was for Victoria her chosen companion in the traditional sense of 'midwife' (that is, 'with the woman'), as a knowledgeable and experienced woman whom she could trust and who would help with the personal aspects of the delivery and of childbirth generally.

Mrs Lilly's suitability as midwife to Queen Victoria was assured by the fact that she had previously acted as midwife for her close friend and confidante Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland, who

was also 'Mistress of the Robes'. This was an important role, being the head and principal public face of the Queen's female staff and Harriet, like Victoria, was surprisingly radical in some of her thinking, including befriending Garibaldi and helping to organise an 'English Women's Petition against American Slavery'. How Mary became involved initially in midwifery though remains unclear; maybe her mother had also been a midwife. But Mary would have had plenty of time to gain experience and reputation, as she was already fifty when she joined Queen Victoria.

One famous anecdote records her role in rescuing the Queen from an intruder who had got into her bedroom in the night. Mary was in the ante-room, and heard someone shut the door from the inside. She discovered a boy, who had sneaked into the Palace, hiding under a piece of furniture, and called other attendants who hastily removed him. Though no harm was done, the 'Boy Jones' incident was extensively reported in the press, and Mrs Lilly's courageous intervention was widely praised.

After Mary's husband James died, her son John purchased two adjacent graves in the West side of Highgate Cemetery, just off the Fielding Path. James and later Mary were buried in the left-hand grave, as is recorded on the now rather faint headstone. John, her daughter-in-law Elizabeth, and other family members were buried in the right-hand grave. ■

A longer article on Lilly by Stephen Sowerby appeared in the April 2016 Newsletter.

Left Mrs Lilly, 1864, from Royal Household Portraits, volume 54. Royal Collection Trust.
© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022



Herbert Spencer orders his tomb

The way to ensure you get the tomb you want, BRENT ELLIOTT reveals, is to order it before you die

A certain point in Highgate Cemetery East has long been informally known as 'Marx and Spencer's corner' because opposite each other are two philosophers who virtually divided advanced thought between them at the end of the nineteenth century. Of course Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who regarded socialism as the path to slavery, did not know that one day Karl Marx would be removed from his original grave and placed across the road from him, and still less that the comparative prominence of their monuments would indicate the course of their reputations. For as Marxism became a dominant philosophy of the twentieth century, Spencerism, or as it was more often called, social Darwinism, sank.

Spencer was probably the most

significant advocate of evolutionary theory in the 1850s; it was he who coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest', which Darwin later adopted. In 1868, along with Darwin, he was one of the founder-members of the Royal Horticultural Society's Scientific Committee. But he was not content to devote his life to biological research; while he wrote two volumes of *The Principles of Biology*, they formed just one part of his immense *Synthetic Philosophy*, followed by works of equal length on the principles of psychology, sociology, and ethics. It was Spencer who led the way in deducing the implications of evolution for the conduct of society, and reached conclusions diametrically opposed to those of Marx. Spencer's social theory, as set out in his



book *The Man versus the State*, was quasi-anarchistic, and he rejected any attempt of the government to engage in social engineering. He could probably be regarded as a spiritual forebear of our current anti-vaxxers. In his essay on 'Representative Government', his list of Parliament's offences included: 'Playing the part of doctor, they insist that every one shall use their specific, and escape the danger of small-pox by submitting to an attack of cow-pox. Playing the part of moralist, they decide which dramas are fit to be acted and which are not. Playing the part of artist, they prompt the setting-up of drawing schools, provide masters and models...'. On the other hand, he also declared, in his essay on physical education, that 'the preservation of health is a *duty* ... all breaches of the laws of health are *physical sins*'.

Once you've looked your fill at Marx, turn and look at Spencer's more modest grave. In fact there is nothing particularly modest about it. Spencer was cremated, but he obviously saw no reason why the reduction in the size of his remains should affect the size of his monument. His *Autobiography*, published posthumously in 1904, did not mention that his monument had already been designed, and was being kept in storage by Messrs Millward, the monumental masons, until it was required. In 1908 someone from Millwards decided to tell the world about it, and the story was published in the *Stone Trades Journal*. Spencer planned the monument in great detail, and began by sending drawings of his proposal to masons: 'Mr. Herbert Spencer incloses drawings of sarcophagus and would like an estimate at Messrs. Millward and Co.'s earliest convenience. He thinks it right to say that he will be asking another firm also for one.' He accepted

Above Herbert Spencer's tomb

SPENCER'S INSTRUCTIONS TO MILLWARD

DEAR SIRS, - Subject to the terms of this letter I accept the estimate you sent me the other day for a granite sarcophagus to be placed on the grave space purchased by me in Highgate Cemetery, and numbered 33,292. The amount you name is seventy-four pounds, which is to include rubbing the top of the stone landing and chamfering its edges; and the material to be used is grey Aberdeen granite (Rubislaw), highly polished where seen.

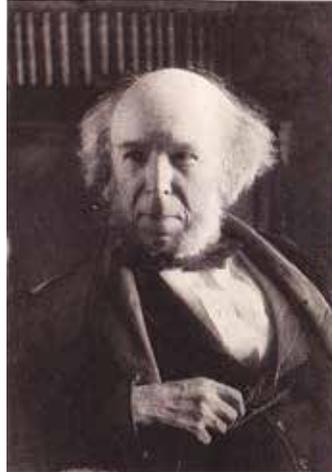
The design and dimensions are generally to be as shown on the drawing sent you; but the recess for the reception of the cinerary chest is to be 20in. in length, 12in. in breadth, and 12in. in depth, instead of the dimensions already given; the space to be excavated being consequently slightly less.

In order to make sure that the thing will be carried out according to my wishes I should like to see your working drawings as soon as you have got them out. When you send them please return the drawing I sent you.

It is of course understood that the centre block is to be solid – not boxed; and that consequently the sarcophagus will consist of three solid pieces – base, centre, top.

Lest there should be any mistake, let me say that each of the four panels is to be sunk three-quarters of an inch in the centre block, and is to be surrounded by a plain bevel, as shown in section on the drawing; the surface of the bevel being at an angle of 45deg. with the surface of the panel.

HERBERT SPENCER.



Millward's tender, and in a letter of 14 September 1899 gave the instructions reproduced in the panel on the left.

I have heard Spencer described as a control freak, but it has to be acknowledged that he was an inveterate tinkerer with basic technology: his *Autobiography* includes detailed plans for an invalids' bed and a flexible joint for a fishing rod. He also specified the content of his inscription: name, dates, and age only. When the news of his death was announced, a campaign was immediately begun for him to be buried in Westminster Abbey, and the list of signatories on the petition includes such scientific notables as Sir Joseph Hooker, the former Director of Kew; Darwin's son Francis, also a botanist; and Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock), who was a botanist and entomologist in addition to being one of the founder figures of English archaeology. The Dean of Westminster, however, very politely refused. In any case, Spencer had already made his arrangements with Highgate Cemetery. ■

The Highgate Cemetery Act 2022

IAN DUNGAPELL explains that this is a momentous event for the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust

The London Cemetery Company (LCC) which established Highgate Cemetery following an Act of Parliament in 1836, definitively ceased to exist on 21 April 2022.

The *Highgate Cemetery Act 2022* vested all LCC's property, and all its rights, liabilities, interests, privileges and functions in respect of Highgate Cemetery in the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, and empowered the Trust to 'do all such things as it considers necessary or desirable for the proper management, regulation and control of the cemetery'.

The LCC had a rather chaotic decline in the 1970s, the directors of its successor company having been found, in a lengthy investigation, responsible for breaches of company law, misleading auditors and the Stock Exchange, and false accounting.

Momentous event no. 1: A couple of brave souls associated with the Friends took the visionary step of purchasing Highgate Cemetery before the LCC disappeared altogether, although such a transfer of ownership wasn't envisaged in the 1836 Act. The status of LCC grants was unclear although unchallenged.

Momentous event no. 2: The 2022 Act not only firmly establishes the Trust as the owners and operators of the Cemetery, it also provides for its sustainable management into the future.

Martin Adeney, Chair of the Trust, said: 'The Highgate Cemetery Act is a game changer for the Cemetery. It secures our future. It will enable us to keep functioning

as a working cemetery. It provides us with the same ability to make use of unused or abandoned graves as local authorities in London already enjoy.'

The 1836 Act was curiously silent on what would happen when, inevitably, all the graves in the Cemetery had been sold and there was room for no more. This seemed so distant a problem that it could safely be left to future generations to sort out.

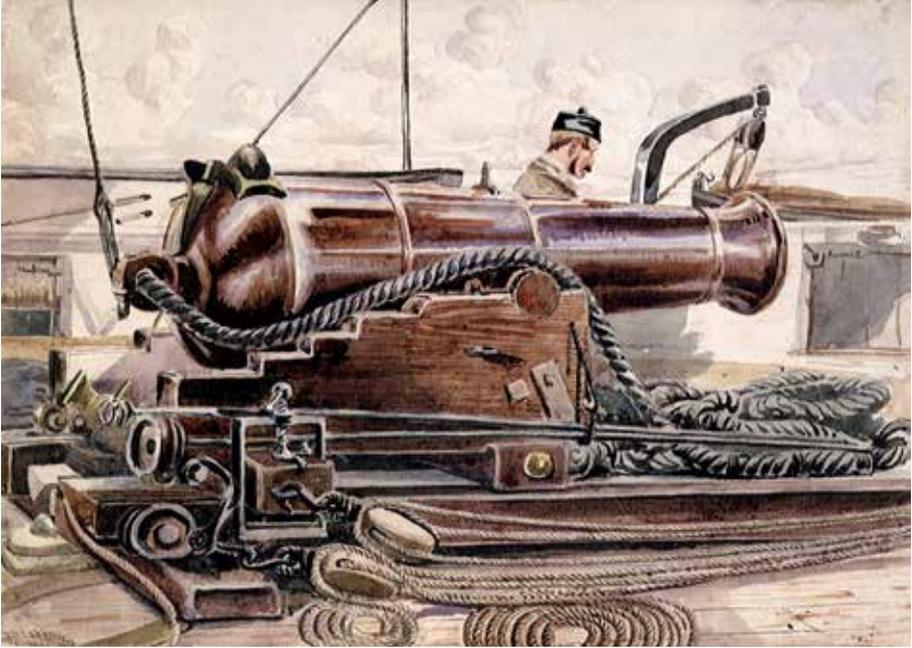
The LCC and, later, the Trust, crammed in burial space wherever they could: narrowing or blocking paths, filling in gardens, and mounding up on top of common graves. The new Act enables a much more sensible approach to be taken: using graves which are no longer wanted by their owners.

A very positive outcome of publicity surrounding the Act is that families have been prompted to register living owners for historic graves. Owners can veto the reuse of their graves, and relatives can prevent the disturbance of any remains which may have been needed to create additional space.

Careful implementation of the Act will help to preserve the character, heritage and memorial significance of the Cemetery, while at the same time allowing it to continue as a valued place of burial for future generations.

We'll look in more detail at how the Act will work in future issues of the *Newsletter*. In the meantime, please email any enquiries to me at ian@highgatecemetery.org. ■

The Act is at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/2022/1.



A naval hero of the Crimean War

MARTIN ADENEY discovers the story of an eminent **Captain**

Squeezed behind the tombs fronting the Dickens path in the West Cemetery, there stands a prominent granite cross. It records the death aged 42 in September 1870 ‘from the effects of exposure’ of the Captain of HMS *Sylvia*, Commander Edward Wolfe Brooker.

It is not clear quite how Brooker came to die – his service record simply says he was invalided out the previous year while his ship was in the South China Sea. But behind the simple inscription is the saga of a multi-talented man from humble beginnings who played a significant part in the Crimean War, was an early locator of Minoan ruins in Crete and a hydrographer who carried out painstaking surveys of Chinese and Japanese waters

still mentioned on Japanese websites. And you can glimpse it all through his own eyes: he recorded it in peace and war in watercolours, some of which remain in the National Maritime Museum.

We have a description of him from one of his junior officers, a snooty well-born Lieutenant: ‘the skipper was an amiable little person who gave himself no trouble about anything under the sun-not even his “h’s” which he left entirely to look after themselves, popping in and out of his mouth like rabbits in a warren.’ Nothing there about his coolness under fire which brought French and Turkish decorations and promotion to the officer class of the Royal Navy. Nothing there about his decisiveness when he took his ship to sea overnight

Above Brooker’s watercolour, ‘Aboard H.M. Gunboat *Snake* in the Crimea’, 1855. © National Maritime Museum, London. Licence: CC BY-NC-ND



to protect that very lieutenant from an investigation of his shore behaviour.

So who was Brooker? He was born in November 1827 and joined the navy at 15 as a master assistant, assigned to the small survey ships responsible for producing the admiralty charts. He saw service first in the North Sea and then, his ability recognised, as an assistant to the Master (the warrant officer responsible for sailing and navigation) of HMS *Rattlesnake*



Above Brooker's cross above the family vault of John Cumberland and James Part, Highgate Cemetery West.



on a celebrated voyage charting the Great Barrier Reef and the waters around New Guinea. The assistant surgeon was Darwin's supporter, Thomas Huxley.

Promoted to Second Master on his return, his time as Assistant Surveyor on HMS *Spitfire* in the Mediterranean was interrupted by the outbreak of the Crimean War where Brooker found himself as master of a steam gunboat in the thick of the action in the Battle of Kinburn. On 14 October 1855, a group of ships was detached to attack Kinburn fort at the mouth of the river Dnieper, following the fall of Sevastopol. Brooker, transferred to HMS *Cracker*, was sent to survey the entrance under heavy fire and plant a series of white buoys to guide the more heavily gunned vessels into position. The following day with the Admiral on board, Brooker led the ships to bombard the fort, which surrendered.

His heroism was recognised in the admiral's despatches which spoke of 'anxious, difficult and dangerous work' 'executed admirably'. As a result he was promoted to the officer class as a Lieutenant. A picture of the engagement painted by Brooker himself shows *Cracker* together with her sister ships and French gunboats effecting the entry under fire.

It was just one of the pictures Brooker painted during the conflict. Another in the

Above Her Majesty's Gun Boat *Cracker* passing the Kinburn Batteries, 15 October 1855 (detail) © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Below Print from an original by Brooker showing H.M. Gunboat *Snake* engaging Russian steamers under Yeni Kali Batteries, 1855. © National Maritime Museum, London. Licence: CC BY-NC-ND



National Maritime Museum depicts life on board another gunboat, the 'Snake' and some of them were even published as lithographs. Painting was a necessary surveying skill – charts usually carried visual impressions of the coastlines to enable sailors to recognise the landmarks. But Brooker was recognised as particularly talented.

After the Crimea, he resumed work in the Eastern Mediterranean under a captain who was fascinated by archaeology and worked with him in identifying Minoan sites in Crete and producing the first detailed map of the island. A further posting took him back to Australasia where he charted Hobart harbour and became Director of Marine Surveys. When he returned to Britain in 1863, a local paper gushed: 'We knew that there was hardly any district of the globe in which he had not merited the high encomiums of the Lords of the Admiralty... that gallant officer will leave many friends behind him in the colony.'

Back in London, he was promoted to Commander and shortly after at St Pancras

he married Anne Alice Part, the daughter of Dr James Part MRCS, of Camden Town. He was given command of a brand-new survey ship, HMS *Sylvia*, then under construction at Woolwich. He saw her launched (promptly at 4 pm on 22 March 1866) before taking her to sea in November 1866 en route for Hong Kong via the Cape of Good Hope where Brooker together with one of his enthusiastic lieutenants painted more watercolours.

Official records of *Sylvia*'s activities in Chinese and Japanese waters depict a constantly shifting programme, carrying out soundings through the Straits of Malacca, correcting previous surveys of Taiwan, surveying the Japanese coast and the Inland Sea and crossing to the Yangtse, where he investigated a reported shoal and two of his officers mapped the river a thousand miles from its mouth.

But then suddenly it all ended. In 1869 Edward Brooker 'was compelled to resign from ill-health and return to England' where, on 21 September the following year, he died. He was buried in the Part family grave at Highgate, number 7764. ■

The ravages of Storm Eunice

?????



Despite being one of the most powerful storms since 1987, Storm Eunice did less damage at Highgate Cemetery than might have been expected (18 February).

Three large trees and a number of smaller ones were upended, but surprisingly often managed to weave themselves between monuments as they fell. Sheer luck!

Unfortunately a number of headstones were destroyed. The London Fire Brigade memorial sustained minor damage.

The picture shows one of our tree surgeons about to begin dismantling a large ash tree which came down in the East Cemetery. ■



From our collection

One of the most exciting acquisitions for our archives over the last few years has been a series of stereoscopic photographs of Highgate Cemetery which we think were taken around 1858. This one shows two men on the main path, just before Comforts' Corner.

The dominating presence on the horizon of St Michael's Church will surprise most of us today as trees now screen it from sight. But in many nineteenth-century images the Cemetery looks more like a giant churchyard laid out at its feet, no doubt the original intention of the designers.

Another stereoscopic view of St Michael's Church was featured on the cover of our booklet, *Highgate Cemetery: Windows on the past* (2017), still available at the Cemetery. ■



News roundup

Wander Highgate Cemetery West

As the experimental opening of Highgate's West side to self-guided visitors during the pandemic has been so well-received, the Trust has decided to make it permanent. New signage and facilities will be introduced as part of the conservation project. Members currently enjoy free entry to the East side only and so will need to buy a ticket at the entrance.

Abney upgraded

The project to improve the landscape and facilities at Abney Park Cemetery is due to be completed by Spring 2023. Funded by Hackney Council (£710,000) and the National Lottery (£4.4m), the chapel will be brought back into use and a new cafe and classroom will be built behind the historic lodge building at the main entrance. The Council hopes the cafe will help fund future

management and maintenance of the site.

The cemetery, now sadly more commonly called just 'Abney Park', will remain open throughout the restoration. The Abney Park Trust, which managed it from 1992 to 2015, are working with the Council on the activity plan. More information at: hackney.gov.uk/abney-park/#restoration.

Cemetery mapping

The Church of England project eventually to map every grave memorial in each of its 19,000 churchyards attracted much attention when it was launched last August.

Atlantic Geomatics, the surveyors behind the project, have also been working to do the same at Highgate Cemetery and link the memorials map to our burials database.

Visitors to Highgate will have noticed the cutting back of overgrowth to allow this to happen. ■

Above The new cafe and classroom at the main entrance to Abney Park Cemetery, designed by Kaner Olette Architects. © Hackney Council.

Historic cemeteries news

What's on at our sister cemeteries



Spring at West Norwood Cemetery

ABNEY PARK

History tour on the first Sunday of every month. £7. Community open day Saturday 21 May, 11am to 3pm. Celebrate their 182nd! See www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Guided tours on every Sunday to 26 June. £10 cash donation is sought. See brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

See www.tbcs.org.uk/walks.HTM. First Sunday of every month. £5 booking required

KENSAL GREEN

Tours 2pm Sundays weekly until November. £12 donation requested. Booking essential. www.kensalgreen.co.uk

WEST NORWOOD

First Sunday of the month: 2.30pm April to October; 11am November to March. Donations welcomed. See www.fownc.org.

NUNHEAD

Tour last Sunday in the month at 2pm. Open Day on 21 May, 11am to 5pm. See www.fonc.org.uk.

TOWER HAMLETS

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

WILLESDEN JEWISH CEMETERY

Guided walks are offered Sundays and Mondays. Booking essential. £5 donation. www.willesdenjewishcemetery.org.uk