

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2020

**HIGHGATE
CEMETERY.**

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Cover photograph

It's time to manage more actively
our self-set trees. Easier said than
done, as trees contribute so much to
the special atmosphere of Highgate
Cemetery. See page 10 for news
about our landscape masterplan.

Chair's note



This Newsletter comes to you as we reach another milestone in the rehabilitation of the Cemetery, with the aim of protecting and conserving it while meeting the demands and expectations of the twenty-first century.

This week we are formally launching an open competition to select landscape architects to help us prepare a Landscape Plan to set out the programme of work over the next twenty-five years. This will enable us to translate the key recommendations of our 2019 Conservation Plan into reality. We are also seeking the help of architects to scope out what building works we might need to meet the practical requirements of our gardening team and the expectations of our increasing number of visitors (more details pages 10-11).

I would like to thank the staff and trustees who have worked tirelessly on the detailed work required to reach this stage, while still grappling with the everyday problems of Covid restrictions.

After the first lockdown our revenues from visitors recovered substantially, primarily because of the popularity of the free range opening experiment with hundreds of people each weekend. But now the rules of the November lockdown explicitly prohibit us from opening to the general public. As for tours, between the two shutdowns we continued to run them (although for six people only) and we will continue to do so once permitted again.

More positively, there are at last signs of movement on our Parliamentary Private Bill which has also suffered from the Covid paralysis. The Lords have assembled a committee for a hearing and we have a possible date in December although it could be affected by the new restrictions.

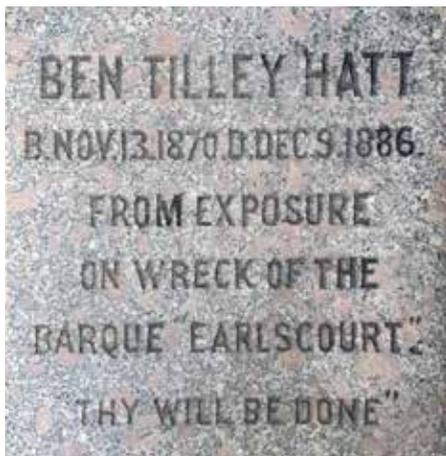
So progress but still uncertainty.

Finally, may I thank you for your continuing support and interest and wish you the very best for Christmas and this very strange festival season.

Martin Adeney, Chair

A Victorian shipwreck

A short inscription can hint at high drama. MARTIN ADENEY discovers a heroic story hidden behind seventeen words



It's only a small inscription, cut in the simplest script onto a corner of one of grandest graves in the East part of the cemetery, the monumental family tomb of W.H. Crossland, the architect of Royal Holloway College and the model housing at Akroydon, lying beneath the dramatic figure of *Lux Perpetua*, bearing the sacred flame. But behind its seventeen words lies a story of heroism, disappointed hopes and family tragedy surrounding a great Victorian shipwreck.

The words are simple. 'Ben Tilley Hatt B. Nov 13 1870 D. Dec 9 1886 from exposure on wreck of the barque Earls court. Thy will be done.'

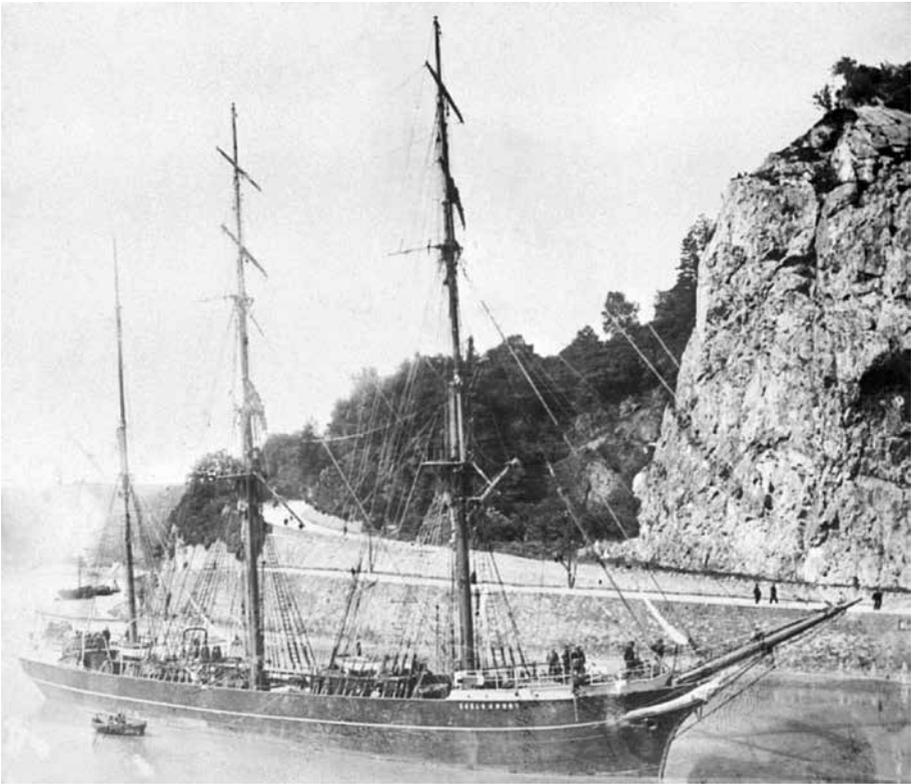
I noticed them this spring when I was walking round the cemetery a few days before lock-down obliged us to close. Intrigued, I wondered whether any record might remain of what must be just one of hundreds of shipwrecks. But to my surprise I found newspaper accounts from both South Wales and Australia, to which the ship was bound, including the inquest on poor Ben.

The *Earls court* was a large iron barque,



Above and **right** The barque *Earls court*.

Photos: Caledonian Maritime Research Trust



that is to say a threemasted sailing ship, square-rigged on two masts, fore and aft rigged on her mizzen, a popular and manoeuvrable rig for clippers. Built on the Clyde, she was just a year old when she set sail for Australia from Newport, Monmouth with a cargo of railway tracks from the Welsh ironworks. The weather worsened as she ran along the South Wales coast and she altered course for an anchorage off Cardiff. But fatally the watch mistook the Mumbles light for the Nash light and came too close to shore.

In the words of the inquest report in the *South Wales Echo*, 'when they saw the

furnaces at Swansea they knew where they were. They saw it would be necessary to weather the Sker rock but...there was no chance of doing this and hence they put up the helm and ran the barque onto the beach. They all then took to the rigging. The wind was blowing heavily accompanied by rain and sleet. It was dark. They had rockets aboard when they left Newport but they were all washed away. They tried to light a blanket by dipping it in paraffin oil but they were unsuccessful. All night they remained in the rigging. One of the boys (Hatt) died in the second mate's arms about two o'clock on Thursday morning.

They got ashore on Thursday morning, the tide having then left.'

It's a brief reference to the youngster but the *Echo* had more. Ben Hatt had been an apprentice, the first step for a would-be ship's officer. He was one of four on the voyage and the newspaper reported that 'all the apprentices on board the vessel are well connected; in fact it was considered rather a privilege to get a youth on board such a vessel as the *Earls court* for the purpose of learning navigation.' His mother, said the newspaper, 'had visited the casualty for the purpose of identifying the body of her son and arranging for its conveyance to London. The lady is said to be the wife of an architect in the metropolis.'

The architect of course turns out to be W.H. Crossland. The lady, Eliza Ruth Hatt, nee Tilley, Ben's mother, was, according to Sheila Binns, the author of a new biography of Crossland, his partner. After the death of his wife they had been living together since the 1870s and she was often known as 'Mrs Crossland'. Ben is officially recorded as being indentured as an apprentice in the merchant navy for four years in Newport on 26 November 1886, a few days before the *Earls court* sailed. In less than two weeks he would perish on his very first voyage.

And there is another revealing link to the Crossland tomb. The second mate of the *Earls court* who provided most of the evidence to the inquest and in whose arms Ben died was James Egerton Crossland, described as a native of Canada. On the other side of the tomb in Highgate is the name of a James Crossland of Dundas, Canada who also died in 1885. He was W.H. Crossland's elder brother who had emigrated to Canada, and it looks as though the second mate was his son.



Indeed the 1891 census records a house guest of W.H. and Ruth Crossland at their Bloomsbury house, a 27 year old James E. Crossland, Canadian-born and a senior 4th officer with the P and O shipping line.

So it looks as if it was because of James that the excited Ben Hatt went to sea on the *Earls court* and why it was James, a sort of step-cousin, who was holding him in his arms in his doomed attempt to keep him warm.

It is a sad story, and there is a further mystery. We know that the *Earls court* did not break up immediately and there were attempts to salvage her cargo. A ship of the same name built in the same year on the Clyde, a 'fine large barque,' is recorded as loading grain for the UK from New Zealand just four years later and survived until being broken up in 1924.

Were the heavy rails removed, and the lightened ship refloated for further service but without Ben Hatt, unlucky to have died as his first voyage had hardly started, one of only four to perish out of a crew of 21? ■

The mysterious Mr Crossland

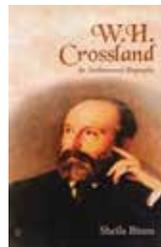
It is his family tomb. He designed it, but he is not in it, and nobody knows where he is!



Rochdale Town Hall. Holloway Sanatorium. Royal Holloway College. William Crossland was the architect of three of England's most impressive Victorian buildings. They should have made his fortune but, alas, his is a story of riches to rags.

The large statue of *Lux Perpetua*, carved by the Italian sculptor Ceccardo Fucigna, marks his family tomb in Highgate Cemetery East. Clearly it meant a lot to him. But he was not buried in it.

Surprisingly, Crossland ended his life in such obscurity that his final resting place is not even known. In this new book, Sheila Binns painstakingly pieces together his life.



W.H. Crossland: An Architectural Biography. is published by The Lutterworth Press, 2020. £30 paperback. ■

Above *Lux Perpetua*, the Crossland family vault in Highgate Cemetery East. Restored by the Friends
Right One of the splendid interiors at Rochdale Town Hall. © Rochdale Borough Council



Shura Cherkassky: 'I just play the way I play'

ROBIN OAKLEY on a legendary twentieth-century classical pianist

Highgate Cemetery East is home to one of the most outstanding and colourful classical pianists of the twentieth century. Russian-born Shura Cherkassky was widely regarded as the last great exponent of the romantic piano tradition established by pianists such as Chopin and Liszt.

Born Alexander Isaakovich Cherkassky in Odessa in the Ukraine in 1909, the child prodigy moved with his family (who were Jewish) to the United States to escape the Russian Revolution. He became a student of the great pianist Josef Hofmann at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia,

who remained his mentor for some twenty years while he developed his career.

Hofmann advised him to practice for at least four hours each day, which he continued to do throughout his life. He also auditioned while young for Sergei Rachmaninov who declared, 'this boy is a genius.'

With his prodigious technique and wide repertoire, Cherkassky toured extensively round America, settling with his family in California in the 1940s, and playing at the famous Hollywood Bowl and on film soundtracks. He also began the continuous

travelling world-wide that he loved doing and was one of the hallmarks of his career.

Following a successful debut at the Wigmore Hall in 1957 he settled in London in 1961, and lived in a hotel in Paddington until his death in 1995.

During his London years he continued to appear in all the great music venues around the world, such as in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Tokyo, and with most of the great conductors. However, given his love of spontaneity, some found it difficult that his performance on the night might be rather different from what had been agreed in rehearsal. He was famous not only for his technique, but also for his expressive style and singing tone.

He made a large number of recordings throughout his career, though many are of live concerts as he did not care so much for playing in the studio. He continued giving concerts and making records right up to his death in 1995.

Many of his most famous recordings can be found on CD on the BBC Legends series, though his work appears on other labels as well. The range is vast, but among the most characteristic of his style are his Chopin and Liszt, and the Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov concertos. Another delight is his 85th birthday recital from the Carnegie Hall in New York: after some scintillating virtuoso classical pieces, he finishes with a barnstorming boogie-woogie by the jazz musician Morton Gould.

In his obituary in the *Independent*, Bryce Morrison wrote that Cherkassky's London concerts were 'red-letter days even in the teeming life of such a musical centre. His audiences were invariably capacity ones, liberally peppered with pianists who shook their heads in disbelief at that extraordinary blend of charm, elfin mischievousness and

transcendental pianism. Single-minded and, indeed, obsessive, Cherkassky never taught ("I could never teach, not for a second, not for a moment") and successfully eluded invitations to appear on the juries of competitions, seeing them as venues of the standardisation he so instinctively disliked... It is no exaggeration to say that few pianists in the history of piano playing have been held in such awe and affection.'

Cherkassky's grave lies on the main path just inside the East Cemetery. Despite his fame, the inscription is relatively modest, merely recording his name, dates and the words 'concert pianist' (with his name repeated in cursive Russian lower down).

A biography by Elizabeth Carr entitled *Shura Cherkassky: The Piano's Last Czar* was published in 2006. ■



Above Cherkassky at the piano.
© Tully Potter Collection.



What will Highgate Cemetery look like in 2045?

MARTIN ADENEY explains our hunt for collaborators who can realise the vision

Highgate Cemetery is one of the world's finest examples of the picturesque garden cemetery. When it opened in 1839 it was in a semi-rural setting on what were then the outskirts of London. Walking its sinuous paths, the visitor would experience a constantly-changing series of views of its various buildings and monuments and occasionally be captivated by longer vistas back towards the smoky metropolis. Before the days of public parks there were few other opportunities for people to stroll in such a beautifully-designed landscape.

Although today internationally famous as a visitor attraction, Highgate remains a working cemetery and is still a very much sought after place in which to be buried.

The landscape has changed considerably over generations reflecting great demand for burial space for many decades followed by declining revenues as attitudes changed. With shortage of money came inadequate

maintenance and unchecked growth of vegetation, while plots of land were sold off to raise funds. Increasingly the Cemetery was abandoned by its private owners until the advent in 1975 of the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust.

Starting out with very limited resources, the Friends adopted a pragmatic policy of 'managed neglect' of the landscape which preserved the appearance of 'romantic decay' so popular with visitors. But even romantic decay is still decay, and with the passage of time the policy has raised significant environmental challenges.

Historic planting has been superseded by dense self-seeded woodland which has eroded the subtlety of the designed landscape, biodiversity has been limited by lack of variety in the planting, and uncontrolled tree growth has caused widespread damage to graves. And there are new concerns relating to sustainability

Above In 1939, the West Cemetery looked more like a park, dotted with trees, but the East Cemetery **right** had sparse tree cover. Few people would wish to return it to such a barren appearance. Aerofilms Collection. © Historic England. EPW061151.

and the climate emergency to be addressed.

Following our 2019 Conservation Plan, we are now launching a competition to find the best landscape architect-led team to produce a landscape masterplan to guide the development of the Cemetery for the next twenty-five years. The plan must preserve and enhance the qualities for which the Cemetery has been appreciated over generations while enabling it to meet the varied demands and expectations of



the twenty-first century. We believe that evolution rather than revolution is the way forward.

Simultaneously we are launching a separate search for architects who can work with us on developing a number of projects. Better facilities for visitors will enhance their ability to access, understand and enjoy the site. Better accommodation for staff, volunteers and equipment will help us look after this remarkable place. And better conservation and continuing care of our heritage assets will ensure that they survive for future generations to enjoy.

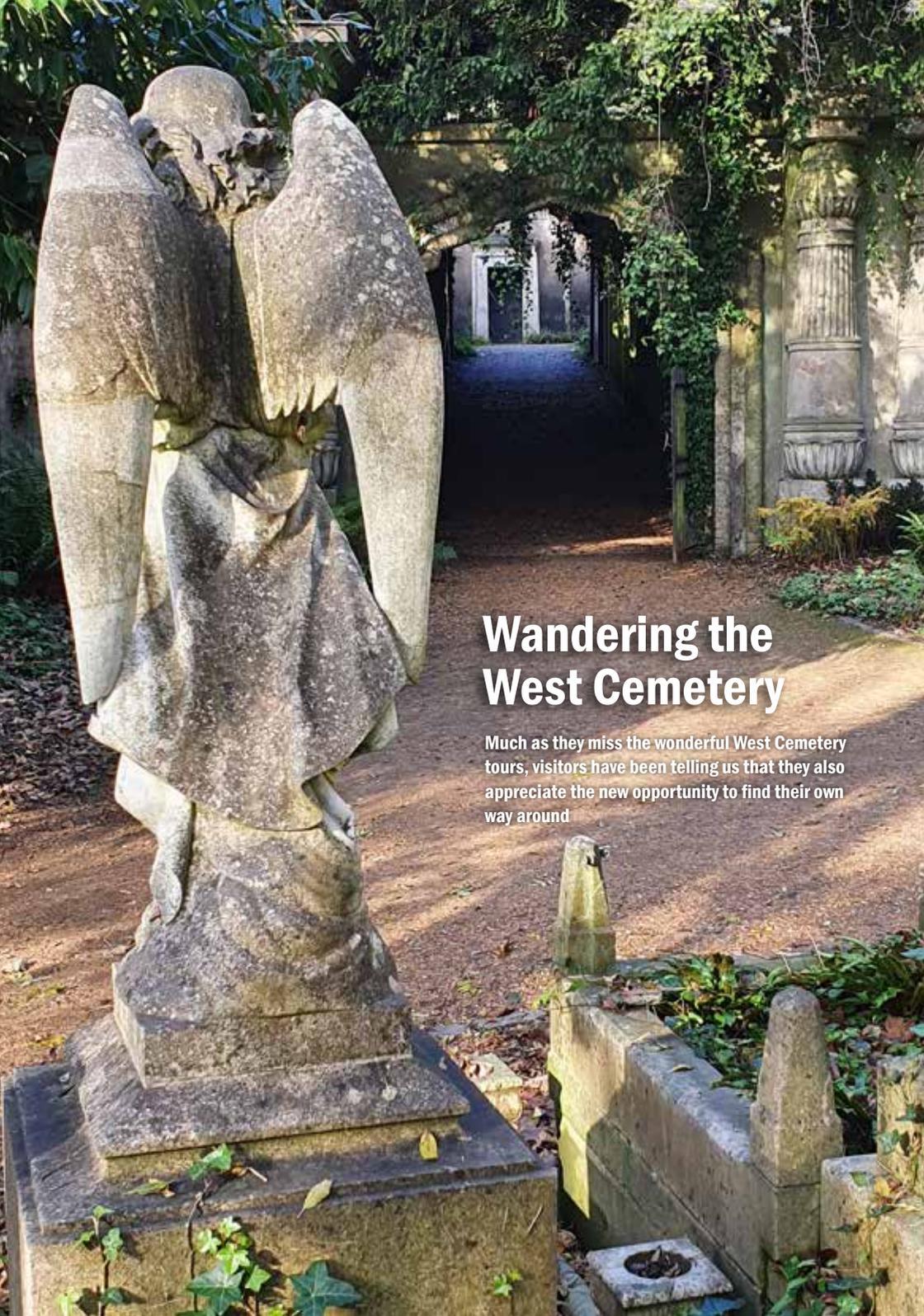
We hope to identify teams to work with us on this journey, talented enough to produce exceptional quality of design, and respectful enough for this to sit happily within our Grade 1 registered landscape and adjacent to our many listed structures.

Such a precious, enchanting site requires outstanding skills. We are confident that through these competitions we will find the outstanding collaborators we need.

We intend to exhibit the final shortlist for public comment. For details including answers to frequently-asked questions, and a short film, see our website, highgatecemetery.org/competition. ■



Above Trees are such a vital part of the atmosphere and ecology of Highgate Cemetery, but their unchecked growth has had a damaging legacy.



Wandering the West Cemetery

Much as they miss the wonderful West Cemetery tours, visitors have been telling us that they also appreciate the new opportunity to find their own way around

Autumn stroll

“An utterly peaceful experience during which I could deeply connect with all the energies swirling around this marvellous place. I was moved and at peace. A real break from the outside world.”

Spectacular

“The cemetery is always spectacular. And I love the fact that volunteers are looking after it. It would have been nice to have a guide, but in general I am happy of my visit there. I will miss it.”

Lovely visit to this beautiful cemetery

“I came here with a friend who, despite living only a mile away, had never been here before. The woman on the cash desk was friendly and helpful and informative, without being pushy. Great start for us!

We wandered around at our own pace, and thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of the place. It is too big to do the whole place in one day but we will be back!”

Fascinating

“The west cemetery is amazing. Visit was a Saturday so no tour booking. Don't understand if this is due to Covid and if it is - why? Buy the guide book. It's a useful read and will encourage you to revisit. Could do with subtle pointers to interesting graves.”

Informative and friendly

“Knowing very little about Highgate Cemetery and deciding to go on a whim as I was staying nearby I wasn't disappointed. I had no idea that it had two sides. The West cemetery, not the one where Karl Marx is buried, is by far the more interesting. Spoke to a couple of the guides who were very informative and friendly. Will definitely do a guided tour next time.”

Fantastic

“Fantastic few hours exploring both East & West Cemeteries. The architecture in the West Cemetery was particularly stunning lots of staff dotted around willing to engage you in conversation & explain the marvellous monuments & their inhabitants.”

Curiosity

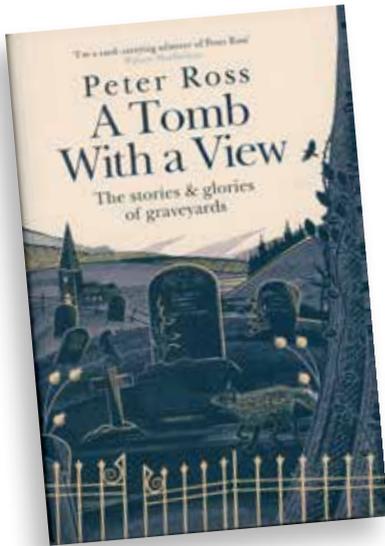
“Very interesting place in how some of the past affluent folk perceive themselves worthy of such grandeur after death. Maybe the entrance fee is a little expensive, I would hope some of the fee is for charity as I'd assume the grounds should already be paid for.

Memorable morning stroll, the guides are very knowledgeable.”

Exceptional experience

“I was really excited to learn that Highgate Cemetery was having ‘free range’ visits in the recent months. My family and I had such a great time discovering the cemetery on our own last Sunday. I've been several times over the past 20 or so years as local Highgate resident, but this was the first time I've seen the cemetery without a tour guide.

As good as the guides are, and many have given us excellent tours, there is no substitute for looking at your own pace, being able to stop and linger, or choose one direction or the other to go in. I very much hope you keep up this new format for visits. Some individuals might prefer a tour, such as first timers, but those of us who know what we want to look at (in our case the tombs of artists and architects), it is more rewarding to go at your own pace.” ■



A tomb with a view

IAN DUNGAPELL enjoys a book about cemeteries which concentrates as much on the living as on the dead

I imagine that everyone interested in Highgate Cemetery will begin reading *A Tomb with a View* as I did, from chapter six, entitled 'Cedar'. It starts, as does many people's first experience of Highgate Cemetery, with a guided tour: 'Let us enter,' says guide Peter Mills, 'the land of the dead.'

The author of this absorbing new book, Peter Ross, is clearly fascinated by the stories he is told. 'I grew up in graveyards,' he writes. 'The dead were my babysitters, my quiet companions.'

But this is no simple catalogue of the great, the good and the gruesome like so many books about cemeteries, although they are not forgotten for a moment. Ross's stories are heavily populated by the living.

In the Highgate chapter, Ross is taken by Frank Cano's solicitude for the now-defunct Cedar of Lebanon, Victor Herman's compassion for the bereaved, Nick Powell's carefully-crafted Marx cookies, and Joseph Burt's choice of music for his own funeral.

Grave owners are not forgotten either. Particularly touching is the story of the young Sonny Anderson and his memorial

on the Mound. His parents chose Highgate because they could hear kids playing football on the estate next door, and 'the genius of the stone... the detail which catches the eye and snags the heart', is the top-left corner where the slate is broken to reveal an inner wall of Lego, Sonny's own bricks. His family place figures on top to mark his birthday and the changing seasons. It is an interactive memorial.

So much goes on in a place that many people imagine to be as dead as its permanent residents. But Ross clearly understands what Martin Adeney means when he says that 'the place is alive.'

Yes, there are other cemeteries and graveyards with stories to tell, and there is so much more to this book than the Highgate chapter. Nevertheless, Highgate is 'Britain's best-known and best-loved cemetery,' and 'the only graveyard in Britain that can be said to be a brand.' But who was the staff member who said proudly to Ross that 'We are the cemetery equivalent of a Mars Bar'?

Published by Headline, 368pp, £20. ■

News roundup



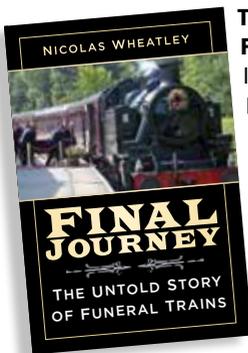
Workers of the world unite

In 1956, a crowd gathered in Highgate Cemetery to mark the unveiling of the Marx memorial with speeches from Communist luminaries including Arthur Horner and Harry Pollitt. This was filmed by renowned cinematographers Wolfgang Suschitsky



(*Get Carter*) and Bryan Probyn (*Badlands*) in uncharacteristically low-key style.

Now the BFI have made this available to watch for free at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-unveiling-of-the-karl-marx-memorial-1956-online>. Notice how bare the East Cemetery is! ■



The Untold Story of Funeral Trains

In his new book, Nicolas Wheatley shows how trains have been used to transport the dead from the Victorian age to the 1980s, as well as how ceremonial funeral transport continues

on heritage railways today.

From royalty, aristocracy and VIPs (not least Churchill and the Unknown Warrior) to victims of accidents and ordinary people, *Final Journey* explores the way in which these people travelled for the last time by train before being laid to rest.

The History Press, 304pp, £20. ■



Celebrating Claudia Jones

On 14 October 2020 the 'Google Doodle' commemorated Trinidad-born activist, feminist, journalist, orator, and civil rights activist Claudia Jones who is buried in Highgate Cemetery East. And now we hear that Highgate New Town residents Paul and Shezan Renny are planning a community mural to prompt people to find out more about Jones's life on the gable end of their home in Doynton Street, just south of the Cemetery. ■

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 have been holding live virtual events and uploading recordings on their website, along with recordings of birdsong, audio talks on heritage and wildlife, and audio tours. See www.abneypark.org

BROMPTON

Tours and events suspended.
See brompton-cemetery.org.uk.

BROOKWOOD CEMETERY

All walks cancelled. See www.tbcs.org.uk

KENSAL GREEN

Until the present lockdown, tours were being offered on Sunday afternoons, in small groups of up to 7 people. £7 per person. Check availability and book online at www.kensalgreen.co.uk/tour_booking.php

WEST NORWOOD

Events suspended. See www.fownc.org

NUNHEAD

The very enterprising Friends of Nunhead Cemetery have already organised their 2021 programme of walks, limiting each tour to 5 people and asking that you book

rather than turn up. See www.fonc.org.uk for the full list of dates and book now!

TOWER HAMLETS

The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park are facing a huge challenge as, unlike most Friends' groups, they actually have responsibility for looking after their site. They face a significant loss of income as they have had to cancel events and businesses have stopped their company volunteering days. See their website at www.fothcp.org or contribute directly at www.crowdfunder.co.uk/friends-of-tower-hamlets-cemetery-park-survival-appeal.

WILLESDEN JEWISH CEMETERY

The new 'House of Life' visitor experience was open Sundays to Thursdays before the most recent lockdown. The Cemetery is well-worth a visit, but in the meantime, they have a number of online events. Sign up for their newsletter at www.willesdenjewishcemetery.org.uk

ARNOS VALE CEMETERY, BRISTOL

Like Highgate Cemetery, Arnos Vale is run by a charity which relies on self-generated income. Much came from weddings and other events, but this has been hit hard by Covid-19. Now more than ever they need your support. All donations will make a difference, no matter their size. Visit arnosvale.org.uk/support.