

Friends of West Norwood Cemetery



NEWSLETTER NO 5: FEBRUARY 1991

Convent Life Unveiled

otherwise

By

Sister Teresa de Chantal

Edith O'Gorman The Escaped & Converted Nun

A COMPETITION

Some of you may have noticed the splendid monument to Edith O'Gorman, who died in 1929 and is described on the tomb as "The Escaped Nun". It lies not far from the monument to John Doulton, founder of Doultons, and is about half-way between the monument of Edward Mappin, founder of Mappin and Webb, and the attractive art deco headstone of the sculptor Henry Leifchild. The Protestant Truth Society recently sent us a copy of Miss O'Gorman's book "Convent Life Unveiled", and it makes particularly interesting reading for us in South London.

By 1928, her book had already sold 343,000: an impressive record! It ends by reprinting a letter summarising her life, published in the "Norwood Press and Dulwich Advertiser" in 1919, and addressed, "To my numerous dear friends whom I have known the past 31 years in Dulwich, Norwood, Herne Hill, Tulse Hill, Streatham, Brixton and other districts of SE and SW London".

She was born in 1842, and entered an American convent in 1862, from which she "escaped" in 1868. She then devoted her life to denouncing in the most fiery language, in books and lectures, the Catholic Church and all its works: indeed, nowadays, she'd probably be arrested for breach of the peace! She married Professor William Auffray in 1870, and in 1888 they came to live at no 1 Sussex Gardens, Thurlow Park Road, West Dulwich. Her husband died in 1893, and rather touchingly, we are told that "his monument in Norwood Cemetery was visible from the windows of her home at Sussex Gardens." In 1910 she moved to 3 Avenue Park Road, just behind Tulse Hill Station, where she died in 1929. This house is still there. But where was 1 Sussex Gardens?

We'd like to offer a small prize: £10 worth of books from the Society's bookstall, to the person who can tell us, by 31st March 1991, where Sussex Gardens was, whether it is still there, and if so, whether one can still see the monument from its windows. If we receive more than one convincing reply, the prize will go to the most detailed and interesting explanation. The Committee's decision is final. Good luck!

SOME FAMOUS RESIDENTS BURIED IN THE CEMETERY

Our recent publicity has brought in a shoal of letters telling us of relatives buried at Norwood, often quite famous people. Here is a selection, in alphabetical order.

WILLIAM BURGESS, Victorian architect (listed tomb no 22). This was cleared of brambles in November, and is in good condition. There is a room in the Bedford Museum devoted to Burgess and his furniture, while the delightful medieval interior of his former house, Tower House in Melbury Road, Kensington, was shown on TV recently. A 600-page biography of him was published in 1990.

WILLIAM CLARKE was a famous cricketer, and a hero to WG Grace when he was a schoolboy. Clarke opened the Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in 1838, and later went on tours of the country with his own teams. He lived at Priory Lodge, Wandsworth Road, where he died in 1856. FOWNC member William Shaw has written a summary of his life, and has now obtained more details about Christopher Pond (Listed tomb no 8), who organised the first English Cricket tour of Australia in 1861. His company, Spiers and Pond, specialised in railway catering in the 1890s.

WILLIAM CUBITT: listed tomb no 15, which has disappeared since its listing in 1981. Cubitt's construction firm became Holland, Hannen and Cubitt. This was bought up by Drake and Skull in 1969, but sold by them to Tarmac Construction in 1975, who have subsumed it. See also Hannen below.

WILLIAM DOWTON of Exeter was a prominent actor at Drury Lane for 36 years, from 1796. He lived to the age of 88, died at Brixton Terrace, Brixton, and was buried at Norwood in 1851. His great-great-granddaughter, Hazel Dowton Pearson, told us about him and has sent us a picture of him. His grandson, also William Dowton, was Mayor of Camberwell in 1913, died in office and was buried in Camberwell Cemetery. The later gravestone survives, but we have not yet found the Norwood one.

ROBERT FRANCIS FAIRLIE (at last: someone whose Christian name was not William!) was a prominent railway engineer. The Festiniog Railway wrote to tell us they have two working examples of Fairlie Patent locomotives - the only ones remaining in the world. They have also sent a splendid photograph of him, taken in the 1860s, and a detailed family tree, all given to them by his late grand-daughter Mrs Dorothy Harvey, whose son now lives in Brighton. Fairlie's tombstone, in good condition, is in square 21.

W.S. GILBERT. From the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society, David Eden has written to say that the Family Vault of WS Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, survives close behind the tomb of Thomas Cubitt (listed no 23). There are no less than nine Gilberts in the vault, and next to it is John Schwenck, a great-uncle of WSG, from whom he got his name William (of course) Schwenck Gilbert. The librettist himself was actually cremated. But five of his Gilbert ancestors were originally buried in Blackfriars, and were transferred to Norwood in 1841. Mr Eden thinks this move may have triggered off in Gilbert's mind, the scene in the picture gallery in Ruddigore, where the figures in the ancestral portraits come to life and start walking around. A fascinating thought!

NB: SUBSCRIPTIONS:

If a tick appears in this box, your subscription for 1991 is now due. Please send your £2 (plus any donation) to our Membership Secretary.



Cemetery under threat

From Mr Nicholas J. Reed

Sir, It is good to read (report, December 27) that a friends' group will shortly be assisting restoration of monuments at Kensal Green cemetery. I cannot agree, however, with the statement that the cemetery "has the finest open-air collection of Victorian memorial sculpture in England". West Norwood cemetery has 44 listed tombs, including those to Tate of the Tate Gallery, Doulton of Doulton Pottery, Dr Marsden, founder of the Marsden and Royal Free hospitals, and William Burges, the architect of Cardiff Castle.

Unlisted memorials include those to Mrs Beeton, Baron Reuter, founder of the news agency, Mr Edgar of Swan and Edgar, and Mr Mappin of Mappin & Webb. Three of England's finest Victorian watercolourists, David Roberts,

David Cox and Samuel Prout also lie there.

Sadly, all these unlisted tombs are in danger, under Lambeth Council's continuing policy of clearance. Bulldozers may be seen at work daily, and of the 140 graves whose occupants appear in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, little more than half now remain. This despite the whole cemetery being a conservation area, which bears out your plea for the strengthening of such legislation in your leading article (December 27).

While Norwood may surpass Kensal Green at the moment, in a year's time Kensal Green may indeed stand unchallenged.

Yours sincerely,
NICHOLAS REED (Chairman,
Friends of West Norwood
Cemetery),
26 Hichisson Road,
Peckham Rye, SE15.

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Cemetery's future

From Councillor Stewart Hunter

Sir, In reply to Mr Reed's letter (January 3), West Norwood Cemetery is *not* under threat; there is no widespread clearance of memorials, nor may bulldozers be seen at work daily. Lambeth Council bought the cemetery in 1966 when its previous owners became bankrupt. Since then the council has made major improvements.

Our current improvement works consist of the cutting and removal of brambles and other undergrowth from areas which have become overgrown and the collection and removal of memorial masonry which has become broken over many years. In the process a small

number of old and dilapidated memorials have been removed from graves that have not been buried in since 1876.

The council is well aware of the cemetery's historical value and with this in mind is meeting English Heritage, the Victorian Society and the Norwood Society so as to ensure that any conflict between cemetery management and conservation can be reconciled.

Yours sincerely,
STEWART HUNTER
(Chairman, Environmental and
Leisure Committee),
London Borough of Lambeth,
George West House,
2 Clapham Common
North Side, SW4.

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Cemetery's future

From the Chairman of the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery

Sir, Councillor Stewart Hunter (January 15) claims there is no widespread clearance of monuments in West Norwood Cemetery. This may easily be refuted by a visit to the cemetery, where cleared areas, with a scatter of upstanding monuments, may be contrasted with other areas, studded with monuments, which are not yet cleared.

We have no objection to the clearance of scrub, but for the last five months this has been followed by the clearance, not just of broken masonry, but of complete headstones, many of them with legible inscriptions. Nor did these stones mark graves "not buried in since 1876": two of them dated from the 1940s. The headstone to the prominent French chemist Alphonse de Normandy (the last burial in this grave being dated 1901) was destroyed despite our express request to save it.

If, as Councillor Hunter says, Lambeth Council is "well aware of

the cemetery's historical value", where are the three listed memorials which have disappeared since 1981? Why are another three seriously damaged — one in the last two months?

While the clearance continues, why does the cemetery insist on smashing all headstones to pieces, without recording the inscriptions, and then dumping them in Dartford, thus making the information irretrievable? Why not place the headstones round the edge of the cemetery?

The current regulations on conservation areas do not require planning permission for demolition of unlisted structures if they are less than 115 cubic metres in size: sadly, this applies to most tombs, no matter how important their historical interest. But this regulation can be varied by the Secretary of State for the Environment for any area he deems necessary.

Yours sincerely,
NICHOLAS REED, Chairman,
Friends of West Norwood Cemetery,
26 Hichisson Road,
Peckham Rye, SE15.

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kind permission of
the Daily Telegraph,
7th February 1991

Eminent Victorians are not allowed to rest in peace

By Robert Bedlow

A LOCAL authority is systematically destroying the last resting place of hundreds of eminent Victorians at West Norwood Cemetery, south London, according to conservationists. Save Britain's Heritage has accused the Left-wing dominated Lambeth Borough Council of wrecking the historical site which includes several listed tombs.

"They are removing thousands of memorials, callously dumping gravestones in skips and carting them off to be lost for good," the heritage group said. "It is more important than Highgate cemetery which has now been saved by those that care."

Some of the greatest scientists, inventors, artists and writers of the Victorian age are buried at the cemetery, including Sir William Tate, the art col-

lector and philanthropist, Baron Paul Julius de Reuter, founder of the international news agency and Mrs Beeton, author of the most famous and enduring book on British cookery.

Many of the graves are marked by beautifully designed elaborate mausoleums and tombstones typical of the age.

The cemetery was designed by Sir William Tite, architect of the Royal Exchange, in 1836 with the surrounding walls and railings high enough to deter body snatchers.

The council said that the clearance was "lawn conversion" and introduced to minimise maintenance costs. It also claimed that gravestones were being removed because more space was

needed for burials. The conservationists said that two other cemeteries in Tooting already had been cleared.

Even though the distinctive cemetery has been designated a conservation area, the tombs remain unprotected and planning permission for demolition of unlisted structures of less than 115 cubic yards is not required.

The group said that those gravestones which are listed and therefore protected by English Heritage are at risk. Three memorials already have disappeared without trace.

Among them was that of Sir William Cubitt, the engineer responsible for building Crystal Palace in Hyde Park in 1851.

Another Grade II listed memorial that marked the grave of Dr Gideon Mantell, discoverer of the dinosaur, lies discarded and in pieces in a corner of the cemetery.

Several more have been severely damaged by careless use of digging machinery, including the Grade II tomb of Alexander Berens who died in 1958, designed by E.M Barry, the architect of the Covent Garden Opera House.

Mr Marcus Binney, president of Save Britain's Heritage, said yesterday: "Over the last 10 years Victorian cemeteries have come to be recognised all over the western world as treasures of Victorian sculpture and craftsmanship.

"Clearing a well-landscaped cemetery of fine memorials just for the purposes of convenience and easy maintenance is as disgraceful as destroying a beautiful country church yard."

Historic tombs 'facing bulldozer'

CONSERVATIONISTS claim historic memorials and tombstones are in danger of being destroyed in a burial ground where many of London's household names are laid to rest.

Under threat are the tombs of Sir Henry Tate, of the Tate Gallery, Baron Reuter, founder of the news agency, and Mr William Edgar, founder of Swan and Edgar.

A third of the 140 graves at West Norwood cemetery whose occupants appear in the Dictionary of National Biography have already been bulldozed, say protesters.

Four of the 44 tombs listed as Grade Two have also gone, officially because they fell down of their own accord.

Lambeth Council denies it is bulldozing everything in sight, but admits it has a policy to "lawn convert" much of the cemetery. The Friends of West Norwood cemetery claim this means obliterating the present forest of cemetery architecture.

Other "endangered" tombs include those of Mrs

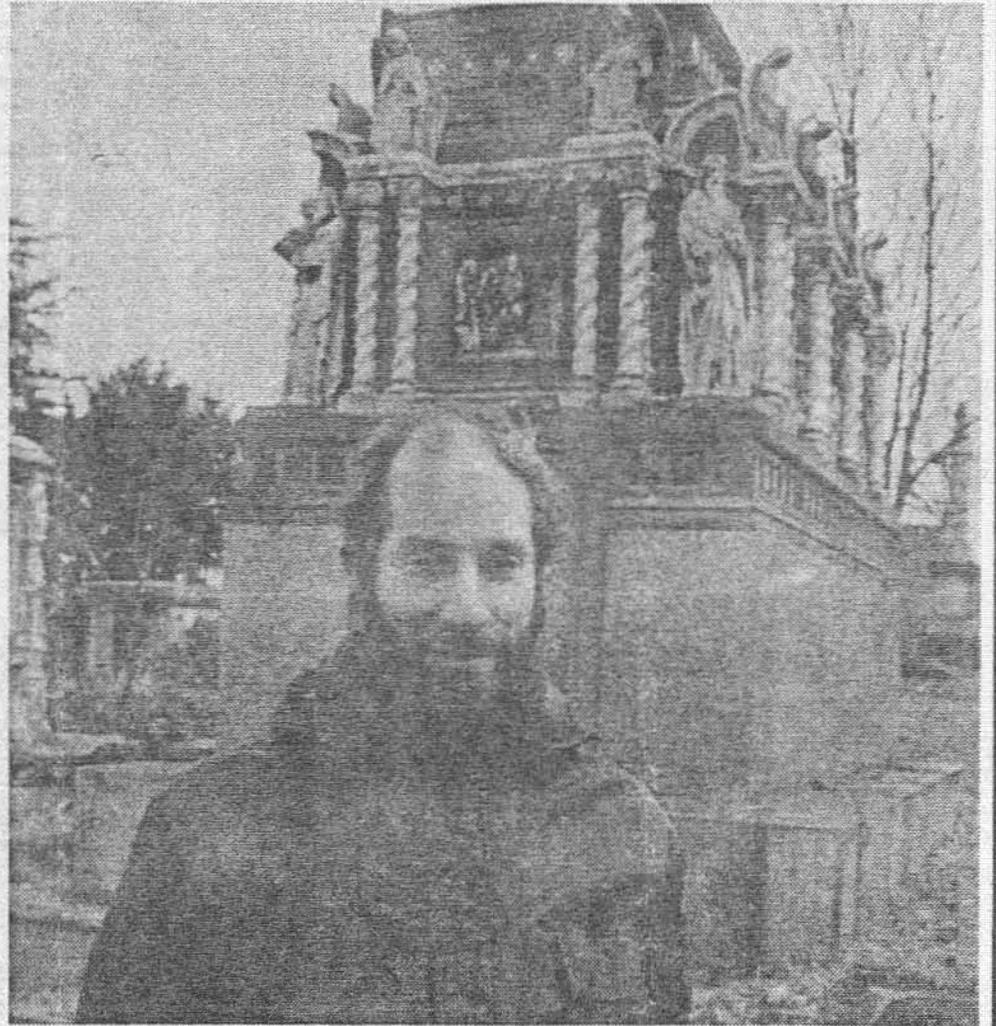
Standard Reporter

Beeton of cook book fame, Sir Henry Doulton of Doulton Pottery and Dr William Marsden, who founded the Royal Marsden Hospital.

Also facing possible destruction are what the protesters judge to be the three finest Victorian Gothic memorials in Britain, a stone one to linen draper Alexander Berens, and wooden and iron ones to Victorians John Garrett and Anne Farrow.

The latest stone victim was the tomb of Gideon Mantell, a 19th century naturalist who distinguished four types of dinosaur. The bulldozers moved in after the Grade Two structure was said to have been demolished by a tree—a claim challenged by conservationists.

Nicholas Reed, chairman of the Friends of West Norwood cemetery, said: "Lambeth Council is getting away with much of the destruction



Nicholas Reed and the spectacular tomb of Victorian draper Alexander Berens

on a technicality which permits objects under a certain acreage to be removed without planning permission. A third of the 39 acres have already been cleared."

A Lambeth Council spokeswoman admitted the historic nature of many tombs, but pointed out that

the cemetery is still a working one.

She said: "We have started to clear some older monuments to make the cemetery safer and more attractive and make more burial spaces available.

"The cemetery is rather full at the moment and there

are only two other cemeteries in Lambeth. We cannot ask old people to travel long distances to visit the graves of their loved ones.

"We are working within the rules and take archive photographs of all memorials we remove. We will keep the most important ones."

Ill. News. July 23rd 1864.

THE LATE DR. NORMANDY.

We have engraved the portrait of the late Dr. Normandy, long known as a practical chemist of reputation and an experimental philosopher who contributed his share to the progress of modern science. He was a Frenchman by birth, but had adopted England as his home. Originally educated for a surgeon, he passed the necessary examinations; but having, in the course of his studies, been led into chemical experiments, he found a greater attraction in their pursuit. While so occupied he formed an intimate friendship with the late Dr. Ure, with whom he was subsequently associated in many important chemical analyses. Dr. Normandy soon attained a high position amongst practical chemists, and became well known for his acquirements in the application of their science. In his examination before the Committee of the House of Commons on the Adulteration of Food his evidence was of the most startling character, as it showed the numerous frauds practised on the public by dishonest tradesmen. Dr. Normandy was the author of several works which stand high in the estimation of chemists. Amongst these we may particularise "An Introduction to Rose's Chemistry" (he also edited an English translation of that work); "The Handbook of Chemistry"; "A Treatise on Agricultural Chemistry"; "Guide to the Alkalimetric Chest"; "The Chemical Atlas," a work of great value to students of chemical analysis; "The Dictionary of the Chemical Atlas." His latest literary labour was devoted to several contributions to the new edition of Dr. Ure's "Dictionary of the Arts and Manufactures." Dr. Normandy had taken out patents for many useful inventions. The most important of these may be said to be his apparatus for the distillation of aerated fresh water from sea water. This invention has proved of the greatest value to Transatlantic shippers, and assumed the position of a practical necessity for passenger-ships and ocean-going steamers. Of an eminently practical disposition of mind and a singular clearness of perception, Dr. Normandy was regarded with high confidence by those with whom he became associated. He died on the 10th of last May, in the fifty-fourth year of his age.



THE LATE DR. NORMANDY, ANALYTICAL CHEMIST.

HISTORIC TOMBSTONE OF ALPHONSE DE NORMANDY DESTROYED

Alphonse Rene Le Mire de Normandy may not be a name which trips off everyone's tongue. Yet he was an important French chemist who invented a method of distilling fresh water from seawater in the 1850s. On the 18th of August our Vice-Chairman, Bob Flanagan, spotted his headstone in the southeast corner of the Cemetery (square 19) in an area otherwise being cleared. He went into the Cemetery office specifically to ask them not to destroy it. They agreed. When he returned two days later, the stone was destroyed without trace, and when we later wrote to ask about its destruction, Mr Day denied it had ever existed! Luckily, Bob had taken two photographs before its destruction. We have now supplied a copy of the photo to Mr Day, and await his official comments.

Nicholas Reed mentioned this destroyed tombstone on a short item on BBC TV News on 3rd January. Even though he had not given his name, he was rung up an hour later by Normandy's great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Morrison. She had done considerable research on her ancestor, had found a photograph of him, and two obituaries (one reproduced here). She had even written to the local history library in Stratford, Newham, who now for the first time realised why there was a street called Normandy Terrace: because Mr Normandy owned a factory just beside it! But she did not know about his gravestone at Norwood, and was very upset to hear it had gone.

Miss Morrison had also obtained a copy of his Will, and some of it makes fascinating reading now. Here are some extracts. "Firstly, the three children herein mentioned are my own children by Miss Louisa Caroline Taynton, and I wish all...to recognise them as such. Owing to my ignorance of the formalities ... I am sorry to say that their birth has not been registered. When I became aware that this formality ought to have been complied with, and application was made by me to the Registrar, I was informed that the delay for doing so had elapsed and the Registration was refused... I bequeath to these children all I may be possessed of... I wish them to live together in the said house in peace and harmony with my own mother... And I caution my children not to have any dealing or intercourse with any member of the Taynton family, who have been the cause of intense misery to their mother and to me, and I know them to be dangerous persons whose society and company I advise them to shun..." (!)

We reproduce here the article and picture published in the Illustrated London News for 23rd July 1864. He came to England when he was 34, which perhaps explains his ignorance of the requirements for the registration of births. His final home was Odin Lodge, Kings Road, Clapham Park, which is the main reason why in 1864 he was buried at Norwood. Incidentally, he left to his daughter Louise his two pianos and all his music: this interest continued down the family: her grandson was the pianist Angus Morrison.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

NB Those marked with an asterisk are organised by the Friends, but we have included others we thought might be of interest to FOWNC members.

- * Sunday 3rd March, at 11 am:
Regular monthly tour. Meet by the main gates.
- * Saturday 9th March, at 2.30 pm:
"The Life of David Roberts, RA", a talk (postponed from the blizzard of 9th February!) by Helen Guiterman, author of two books about this artist, perhaps the most distinguished buried at Norwood. Upper Hall, St. Luke's Church, West Norwood SE27. (The Church is at the junction of Norwood High St. and Knights Hill, and the Hall is approached from the Knights Hill side, up the steps at the back of the church.)
- Wednesday 13th March, at 7.30 pm: "Camille Pissarro at the Crystal Palace in 1871", illustrated talk by Nicholas Reed at Broomwood Methodist Hall, Kyrle Road, Clapham SW11 (organised by Clapham Antiquarian Society).
- Monday 18th March 1991, at 8 pm:
"Some Famous Residents of West Norwood Cemetery": talk by Jill Dudman (Committee Member of FOWNC) to the Streatham Society. St. Leonard's Church Hall, Tooting Bec Gardens, S.W.16.
- Thursday 21st March 1991, at 7.45 pm: "Ruskin in Camberwell", talk by Conal Shields at Camberwell College of Art, Wilson Road Annexe, Camberwell SE5.
- Monday 25th March 1991, at 8 pm:
Talk about FOWNC by Nicholas Reed to the Brixton Society at the Brixton Enterprise Centre, 444 Brixton Road, SW9 (junction with Ferndale Road: in the former Bon Marche building).
- * Sunday 7th April (and Sunday 5th May) at 2.30 pm:
Monthly tour of the Cemetery, but this time including some eminent Victorians not normally shown on the tour.
- * Sunday 14th April at 11 am:
Special tour of Hampstead, particularly the Cemetery, starting at Hampstead Tube. Further details from Jane Shelley-Bollner at 081-670 9107.
- * Saturday 20th April, at 2.30 pm:
"George Cattermole and his artistic family": an illustrated talk by Celia Bailey about another distinguished artist buried at Norwood. Upper Hall, St. Luke's Church. (For directions, see above.)
- * Saturday 11th May at 2.30 pm: "Who killed Charles Bravo?".
We start from the Cemetery gates to visit, for the first time, the tomb of Charles Bravo, resident of The Priory at Balham, and murdered by persons unknown in 1876. After the visit, we shall adjourn to St. Luke's for a talk and discussion about this case. Bring your own theories, if you like! Copies of "Murder at the Priory", by Bernard Taylor, are still available from our Publications Officer at £3.99.

- * Sunday 19th May, at 2.30 pm:
Crystal Palace Worthies: a repeat of our very successful tour, first held in September 1990. Held jointly with the Crystal Palace Foundation.

FOWNC OFFICERS

Chairman and Newsletter Editor: Nicholas Reed, 26 Hichisson Road, SE15 3AL; tel: 071-732 7778. Vice-Chairman and Publications Officer: Bob Flanagan, 79 Durban Road, SE27 9RW; tel: 081-670 3265. Membership Secretary: Rosemary Comber, 170 Knights Hill, SE27 OSR; tel: 081-761 3996. Rosemary's husband David is our Treasurer, but the Annual Subscription of £2 should be sent to Rosemary.