



Friends of  
West Norwood  
**CEMETERY**

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1990~2015

25 Years of  
Research and Conservation





## The Friends of West Norwood Cemetery

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For the last 25 years we have worked to protect and promote the South Metropolitan (West Norwood) Cemetery. This publication explains the importance of the Cemetery, summarises our regular programme, and details recent activities that have aimed to enhance public awareness of the Cemetery on the one hand, and help maintain and restore its monuments on the other.

An exciting stage has now been reached in that with our support Lambeth Council has (January 2016) been awarded a grant of up to £241,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to support the development of proposals to restore and improve the Cemetery. If successful at Stage II, the final bid would see many at-risk monuments repaired, accessibility improved, and educational and cultural outreach channelled through a new visitor centre at the heart of the West Norwood ‘cultural hub’. We are also working with the Council to prepare a conservation-minded approach to the re-use of graves within the Cemetery that would protect monuments inserted before 1965, and at the same time provide for burial space within the Borough and generate income to maintain and enhance the Cemetery in the years to come.

If you are interested in helping with our work, or if you simply want to show support for a precious space that deserves more recognition, please consider joining us. The annual subscription is £5. We organise monthly Sunday tours and additional events. Further initiatives are planned in conjunction with the HLF bid. For more information see our website [www.fownc.org](http://www.fownc.org). Note that all of our Newsletters, which contain contemporaneous reports of our work over the years, can be accessed via our website.

## Why is West Norwood special?

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The South Metropolitan Cemetery, to give it its legal title, is one of the most important cemeteries in the country, not only because of the many eminent people buried here, but also because of its monuments and landscape. One of London's 'Magnificent Seven' commercial cemeteries that opened in the years 1833–1841, the first burial at Norwood took place in 1837.

In time Norwood became *the* fashionable place to be buried in South London and adjoining areas and soon became known as the *Millionaires' Cemetery*, attracting the burials of people such as William Marsden of the Royal Marsden Hospital, Baron Julius de Reuter, of news agency fame, Mrs Beeton, doyenne of cookery writers, and Sir Henry Tate, sugar magnate and benefactor of libraries and galleries. Today the Cemetery contains 69 Grade II or II\* listed structures and monuments in many styles and materials and lies within a Conservation Area. It is listed Grade II\* on the Historic England Register of Parks and Gardens.

Norwood was the first cemetery to be designed in the Gothic Revival style. Set in over 40 acres across the slopes of the former Great North Wood, it was laid out and promoted by architect Sir William Tite. His design included an entrance lodge and two elaborate chapels, all since demolished. However, extensive catacombs and a unique hydraulic coffin lift remain on the site of the Anglican Chapel.



The catacombs are listed Grade II. In 1915 the first crematorium in south London was opened next to the Nonconformist chapel. The present crematorium dates from 1955.

In addition to the chapels for Anglicans and Dissenters, a chapel and necropolis was built for Greek Orthodox burials. Many Greek merchants and shippers settled in London after the Greek War of Independence and their wealth is reflected in their ornate tombs. Most notable is St Stephen's Chapel ('the Greek Chapel'), a neo-classical Doric temple modelled on the Parthenon.



## Protecting the Cemetery

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The Friends were established in 1989 to stop Lambeth Council from clearing the Cemetery of historic monuments. The Council had purchased the site compulsorily from the South Metropolitan Cemetery Company in 1965. The Council began removing gravestones in the late 1960s with the stated aim of creating a Memorial Park ('lawn conversion'), a policy condoned by the Victorian Society. Some 15,000 monuments were removed over the years and no formal records were kept of what had been destroyed. Later the Council started to resell private graves for re-use for new burials and many hundreds of modern gravestones were inserted with no regard to the stated aim of the original policy.

Because most (80 %) of the Cemetery is consecrated, in 1991 the Archdeacon of Lambeth, supported by the Friends, took the Council to the Consistory Court of the Diocese of Southwark in an attempt to stop further destruction. In a historic judgment in 1994, the Court ruled that Lambeth's actions in destroying monuments and reselling private graves were wholly illegal. In effect, the Court decided that the Council was not competent to run its own Cemetery.

In 1997 strategic management of the consecrated area was vested in a Scheme of Management Committee (SoMC) consisting of 4 representatives of the Archdeacon of Lambeth and 4 from the Council. The SoMC draws on the advice of a Management Advisory Group (MAG), which includes representatives of the Friends, Historic England, the Victorian Society, and grave owners. In agreement with the Council, the advice and strategic guidance of both committees is taken to apply to the Cemetery as a whole, although day-to-day Cemetery operations are delegated to the Council. The Friends also take a view on local planning matters since the Cemetery sits in a conservation area.

### Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Bid

Over the years the Friends have built up a substantial body of information on those buried or otherwise commemorated in the Cemetery, and extensive knowledge on the condition of the surviving monuments.

In early 2015 Historic England surveyed the Cemetery's 69 listed structures and monuments and classed nearly a third of the monuments as 'at risk' and thus in urgent need of repair. Some have collapsed foundations, others have stones splitting open, and some have damage from tree roots.

Central to the HLF bid is the repair of these 'at risk' memorials. Plans to save the rapidly deteriorating Greek Chapel include roof repairs, and insertion of electricity and water supplies so that it can again be used for religious services and as a venue for performances and exhibitions. Across the site, extensive

infrastructure repairs are necessary for safety reasons and to improve access, whilst scrub removal will restore and enhance sightlines. The bid also envisages the construction of a visitor centre at the entrance to the Cemetery with interpretative material and exhibitions relating to the Cemetery and to the Victorian funerary industry.

## Restoration

The Friends have worked with many individuals and organisations to help identify ownership of monuments so that they can be considered for repair. If ownership is unclear, restoration requires permission from the Council, and may require a Faculty from the Consistory Court. One of our successes in 2011 was agreeing a protocol to secure these permissions.

Restoration is often a specialised and expensive process, and reinstatement of lost memorials is even more difficult if there is no record of what has been lost. Working with descendants, grave owners, funding and conservation bodies, the SoMC, and the Council, the Friends have facilitated the restoration or reinstatement of over 50 memorials in the Cemetery.



Highlights have included restoration of the memorials to pioneer paleontologist Gideon Mantell, discoverer of *Iguanodon*, artist David Roberts, noted for his watercolours of Egypt and of the Holy Land, dramatist Douglas Jerrold, who coined the name the *Crystal Palace* to describe the 1851 Exhibition Building, sugar magnate Sir Henry Tate ('Mr Cube'), engineer Sir William Cubitt, who was responsible for the construction of the 1851 Exhibition Building, and pottery manufacturer Sir Henry Doulton. In 2015 we were delighted to witness the completion of the extensive restoration of the tomb of merchant Otto Berens – his magnificent tomb cost £1,500 when it was built in 1858.

## Infrastructure and grounds

In 2006 the SoMC required the Council to relocate the Rose Garden on the site of the Anglican Chapel and to cover the site as a temporary measure to protect the Catacombs from further water damage. The Friends and the Council have since worked with specialists to monitor the slow process of drying-out. The new Rose Garden in the north-east corner of the Cemetery, designed in discussions with the Friends and the MAG under the auspices of the SoMC, was opened in 2008, and has proved very popular.



Another feature of the 2014 works was the landscaping of the entrance. Plants such as lavender and magnolia create a welcoming gateway to the Cemetery, and are attractive for bees and butterflies. The Friends consulted historical records and experts at the Royal Horticultural Society to ensure the scheme was in keeping with

Victorian themes and helped with some of the planting. We are also helping to ensure that the plants are watered and pruned.



Many discoveries have been made as old tombs have been revealed during scrub clearance work, such as those of John Colam, who as secretary of the RSPCA 1861–1905 was largely responsible for establishing the financial base of the organization we know today and also helped develop the (N)SPCC, and John Linklater, founder of today’s international law firm.

## Raising the profile of the Cemetery

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The Friends have worked to ensure recognition of the Cemetery as a significant historic site within Lambeth. We are promoting links with London's other Magnificent Seven cemeteries, local history societies and groups such as West Norwood FEAST, the Norwood Action Group, and Norwood Forum that seek to regenerate West Norwood.

There is now widespread local recognition that the Cemetery adds to the 'sense of place' of West Norwood and that its development can contribute to the area. The Friends have spent several years testing out approaches and understanding how to make the Cemetery attractive to visitors on the one hand, whilst maintaining its function as a working cemetery on the other. By encouraging more visitors we aim to increase both appreciation of the Cemetery's history and footfall in the High Street.

### Talks and tours

Since our foundation the Friends have offered talks and tours based on the extensive research undertaken by members and detailed in our newsletters and other publications. We have more than 500 fully paid-up members and some 8,000 people a year visit our website. Through a Twitter account set up in 2014 we can share our news with over 2,000 people a month.

Our talks and tours cover a range of topics, from the stories of individuals such as Eliza James, who became known as Covent Garden's *Watercress Queen*, to the development of whole industries, such as Sir Henry Bessemer – the Bessemer Converter enabled the large-scale production of steel from pig iron, ushering in what has become known as the Second Industrial Revolution. Moreover, speakers from Historic England and the Mausolea & Monuments Trust, for example, help keep us up to date with conservation practices and policies.

Our regular tours benefit from co-ordination with other events such as West Norwood FEAST, Lambeth Heritage Festival, and London Open House. We also run specialised tours on request. For example, with Dulwich Picture Gallery we explored art and artistry, literary connections with the Dickens Fellowship, and the London Open University Geology Society revealed the great variety and origin of stones used for memorials. Sporting and culinary connections, notable Victorian women, engineers and architects, and the history of Greeks and shipping have proved popular too.

Recent visitors have included HRH the Duke of Gloucester in his role as patron of the Heritage of London Trust, and the Mayor of Donetsk in the Ukraine. The mayor laid a wreath on the restored memorial of John Hughes, the Welsh ironworker who set up Ukraine's steel industry in the then new settlement of Donetsk, which was originally called Hughesovka. Similarly, with the Football Association and Surrey County Cricket Club we marked the restoration of the gravestone of Charles Alcock, the originator of sports journalism, the Football Association Cup, international football, and also of the first Test cricket match in England played by England against Australia (1880).



The Friends are members of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends (NFCF) and of the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE). We also have links with academia. For example, in 2012 we hosted visits by experts from the classical antiquities section of the British Museum and from Cambridge University to expand our knowledge of the Greek Chapel and necropolis.

### What we don't do

We respect the Cemetery as a dignified site of burial and commemoration as well as a much cherished green space and haven for wildlife. We do not run ghost tours or promote vampires, Gothic horror, or paranormal events as this does not fit with our ethos of sensitivity towards a working Cemetery and its visitors.

### Bringing our Research to Life

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In recent years the Friends have explored the histories of those buried at Norwood by staging events that interpret their stories in a variety of ways. With the agreement of the Council and the Trustees of the Greek Cemetery, in 2011 we and the South London Theatre hosted Sue Blundell's *Roofing the County of Surrey with Crystal* in the Greek Chapel, an evocative interpretation of the fire that destroyed the Crystal Palace in 1936.

In 2012 also in the Chapel, Janet Haney’s atmospheric production of the Greek tragedy *Medea* held an audience of 80 people transfixed in the evening stillness.

In 2012 an art trail, *Curious*, was curated by local artist Jane Millar, who invited artists to draw inspiration from the Cemetery to devise unique artworks for their chosen spots across the site. Examples included sugar magnate Sir Henry Tate’s mausoleum carved in sugar by Brendan Jamison, a ‘bus stop to the afterlife’ *You are here and you want to be there* by Martin Grover, and a set of ceramic funerary jars by Julian Stair. In 2013, more paintings, sculptures and soundscapes defined a second trail of discovery.

Complemented by talks from the artists, storytelling, performance events, and a Victorian picnic, the *Curious* trails attracted around 8,000 visitors.

*Curious* contributor and poet Chris McCabe went on to investigate the poets buried at Norwood. His findings are part literary criticism, part Gothic fiction and were published as *In the Catacombs: A Summer Among the Dead Poets of West Norwood Cemetery*.

In 2012 the Friends inspired the creation of the *Streetscape Carousel*, a three-metre high illuminated panorama profiling the monuments of the Magnificent Seven London cemeteries. This was one of five cityscape carousels financed by the Mayor’s Outer London Fund to mark the Olympics. The carousel took its cue from a panorama shown in Leicester Square in 1793 and was designed by architects Chloe Leen, Steve Wilkinson, and Theodore Molloy for display in the Greek Chapel.



The carousel incorporated cabling for its lighting, providing an electricity supply in the chapel for the first time and thus making it a much more useable space. The carousel is now displayed in the Portico Gallery at West Norwood and is available for loan to other London cemeteries and sites.

The Friends have encouraged developments in the local area to incorporate cemetery designs. In summer 2015 a 15-metre long ceramic panel was installed under the nearby Tulse Hill railway bridge. The panel takes its abstract design from the detail of tombs in the Cemetery. In a similar vein, a set of shop shutters in Norwood Road feature a silhouette of the Cemetery gates.

### Commemorating the Great War

In 2014 the Friends commemorated the Great War by producing the first in a series of pamphlets on the Cemetery's World War I connections. We also hosted an exhibition of war-themed art, Jolanta Jagiello's *Wrenches, Trenches and Stenches*, which was staged in the mausoleum of Dr Distin Maddick.

Maddick helped promote the film *The Battle of the Somme*, which was filmed on the battlefield and released in August 1916 whilst the battle still raged. It is thought that some 20 million people had watched the film within six weeks of its release, and its reception helped bring David Lloyd-George to power with the aim of ending the war as quickly as possible. From the donations raised from our events and publications, with agreement of the Council we funded repairs to Maddick's sarcophagus and the glass roof of the mausoleum to complement earlier repairs carried out under the auspices of the SoMC.

### A Taste of Victorian History

With volunteers from FEAST, the Friends supported West Norwood's first *Food Week* in 2015 by designing a tour of the Cemetery visiting the graves of people associated with food and food production such as Mrs Beeton and Sir Henry Tate. This was followed by a Victorian-themed supper for 60 in the Greek Chapel. We worked with local gastropub *The Tulse Hill Hotel* to create *A Taste of Victorian History*, offering Bovril and cheese straws, Mrs Beeton's show-stopping cake, and Earl Grey pannacotta.

### Nature Walks

In 2015 the Friends co-hosted bat-spotting walks in the Cemetery with the Council's Community Environment Officer, Dr Iain Boulton. The Cemetery is a rich source of food for bats, which fly through at dusk to skim insects from the trees. It is also home to many types of birds including green and spotted woodpeckers and to bees, which produce delicious honey under the care of a member of the Friends.



We have run several tours with the South London Botanical Institute to survey the plants in the Cemetery. Some of its large oak trees are remnants of the Great North Wood, from which Norwood gets its name, and there are several monkey puzzle trees dating from the early days of the Cemetery, some of the UK's oldest.

## Filming

All commercial filming in the Cemetery must be approved by Lambeth Council and a fee is payable to them. The Friends have helped facilitate appropriate filming that is sensitive to the needs of a working cemetery and we have provided assistance, props and extras.

The site has proved an attractive venue for film crews. It appeared several times in the 1990s TV series *The Bill* and was the subject of the American documentary *Dead Art* in 2007 that featured the rock star Dee Snider. More recently the Cemetery featured in the trailer for Tate Britain's *John Martin* exhibition (2011), the short film *The Day My Nan Died* with Alison Steadman and Paul Copley (2012), the BBC's *A Very British Murder* with Dr Lucy Worsley (2013), Channel 5's *Underground Britain* with Rob Bell (2014), and the Travel Channel's *Secrets and Mysteries* (2014).

## Contact us

Please join us on a tour or get in touch if you have information or research to share, or would like to join the Friends. Our tours on the first Sunday of every month, 2:30 pm April-October, 11:00 am November-March, are open to all.

[www.FOWNC.org](http://www.FOWNC.org) @fownc1837

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Registered CIO No 1172409

## A Brief History of FOWNC

1990 FOWNC begins tours  
and talks  
1991 First monument repair

1992 Joins National Federation  
of Cemetery Friends

1995 *Sportsmen and  
The Dickens Connection*

1997 FOWNC achieves  
charitable status. Joins  
Management Advisory Group

1998 *Musicians and  
Music Hall*

2003 [www.fownc.org](http://www.fownc.org)  
launched

2006 FOWNC joins ASCE

2007 *Norwood Cemetery:  
An Introductory Guide*

2011 Performance in Greek  
Chapel. *Greek Necropolis* guide

2012 *Curious Art Trail.  
Monumental Architecture* guide

2014 FOWNC on Twitter  
@fownc1837  
WWI commemorations

1990

1991 Lambeth Council's  
monument clearance halted

1995

1994 Consistory Court declares  
monument clearances and re-sale  
of private graves illegal  
Cemetery closed for burials  
except in existing graves  
1997 Scheme of Management  
Committee assumes strategic  
control of the Cemetery

2000

2000 Lambeth closes  
catacombs to public

2005

2005 Phase 1 of roadway  
renewal completed

2010

2010 Catacombs reopen for  
tours after FOWNC negotiations

2012 Visit by HRH The Duke of  
Gloucester

2014 Entrance road & drains  
repaired, new landscaping

2015

2015 HLF and BIG lottery bids