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NORWOOD CEMETERY STEERING GROUP

Newsletter No 1: January 1990

by Nicholas Reed

NB Date of next meeting:

7.30 pm on Thursday 18th January 1990, at Centre 70,
138 Christchurch Road, Tulse Hill SW2
(close to Tulse Hill Station) Everyone welcome!

Our Initial Meeting

The meeting on 30th November went very well, with about 30 attending, including representatives of six Societies in Lambeth itself, and another three societies from outside. Following it, two local free newspapers (South London News of 7 Dec, and Comet Leader of 8 Dec) did quite detailed write-ups, though they did seem to attribute everything to the Norwood Society! That should change, once a proper Friends of West Norwood Cemetery is set up (see below). Croydon Property News also did a splendid write-up about the new Booklet, and said they would do a follow-up article about the new Group.

(As I personally do not get any free newspapers through my door, I should be most grateful if people could keep any publicity they see, for me to copy. It is extremely difficult to get copies of free newspapers, even from their offices!)

Following the meeting, I issued a Press Release, saying we had three main aims to start with:

- a) to ask for an assurance there will be no further clearances of monuments without at least consulting us first.
- b) to try to do something about the tree growing out of the Berens memorial (no 10 in Geoffrey Manning's booklet).
- c) To find out if an application had been made to English Heritage for a grant to repair the tomb of Gideon Mantell, which collapsed recently, following a tree fall after the Hurricane. And if it had, with what result.

Note: the Berens memorial has been described as "one of the finest High Victorian monuments in the country". See Hugh Meller, "London Cemeteries", Avebury Publishing Co, 1981, pp. 20 ff. and 210-223, with its seven-page list of eminent people buried at Norwood. He also points out that all iron tombs are rare, but that the finest of them is Norwood's delicate Gothic one to Ann Farrow, dating from 1854 (Manning no 17, Meller pp 33 and 40).

This too needs conservation if it is to survive.

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Initial Results

The day after our meeting, David Comber, from the Norwood Society, and I, had a brief but very helpful meeting with Mr MacKay, the Superintendent of the Cemetery. And I am pleased to report that all three of these initial aims have been achieved.

a) He was able to assure us there are no current plans for further clearance of areas for the time being, and he will let us know, if there are in the future.

b) He will get one of Lambeth's tree experts to look at the Berens tree, to see how it can be removed without damaging the memorial.

c) English Heritage:

The newspapers said that Mr Mackay had made an application for a grant to repair the Mantell tomb. In fact, what happened is that Heritage sent him an application form for a grant, and that has not yet been returned. Meanwhile, I have found out the following from English Heritage.

West Norwood Cemetery is regarded as a priority Conservation Area, which means it is eligible for grants from E.H., and not just for the listed memorials, but others as well. However, E.H. would normally only offer a 25% grant towards repairs, and the minimum grant is £1000. This means we would have to come up with proposals for £4000 worth of work in the Cemetery! Clearly, the Mantell tomb will not cost anything like that. On the other hand, it means the Cemetery Superintendent could come up with a proposed package of repairs for several memorials, with a good chance of a grant: the real difficulty is: where will the other £3000 come from?!

One possibility is 'sponsorship'. Dr E.Inman of Beckenham has written to point out that the Royal Society of Chemistry is having its 150th anniversary: actually in 1991, but perhaps they might honour some prominent chemists (such as Sir Henry Bessemer) by restoring their tombs. And the GPO is having its 150th this year, 1990: one of those buried at Norwood is William Wyon, who engraved the medal of Queen Victoria which was used as a basis for the Queen's head on the first postage stamps. What condition is his grave in?

All this will require research, so at the meeting on the 18th I should like volunteers to join an Executive Committee which can work out the arrangements to set up a formal Friends of West Norwood Cemetery. We shall probably also need various Working Groups: to look at the condition of the memorials, to discuss regular tours, to write to possible sponsors or perhaps local charities, etc. And as the Cemetery has several full-time staff, anything done must of course be with their agreement.

I look forward to seeing you on the 18th.

Nicholas Reed
Chairman of the Steering Group