

# Friends of West Norwood Cemetery



NEWSLETTER NO.14: APRIL 1993

## Chairman's Report - Bob Flanagan

Lambeth's draft Land Management Strategy (the long awaited report) on the future of the cemetery was presented to the Environmental Services Committee at their February meeting and was then to be circulated for discussion to interested parties. Lambeth immediately issued a Press Release highlighting their plan to preserve the cemetery as a 'historic conservation site'. This was swallowed whole by the Dulwich Guardian who ran a front page lead on the report on 11 March.

The South London Press was more cautious (more experienced?) and contacted our Vice-Chairman Nicholas Long who had meanwhile managed to obtain a copy of the document in question. It took Nicholas no time at all to point out the many serious flaws in the Lambeth document and also that it was some 15 years or so late. However, Nicholas did applaud the Lambeth commitment to continued discussion with FOWNC and with the Victorian Society. The South London Press subsequently ran a much more balanced article.

I have still - 28 March - not been sent the report. However, I have managed to have a look at someone else's copy and I must confess that I am not impressed. In my opinion the report only pays lip-service to conservation of the historic interest of the cemetery and lays much more emphasis on the need to 'maintain and develop (West Norwood) as a working cemetery'. I understand that English Heritage were similarly unimpressed when asked to comment before Xmas, as reported in the January Newsletter.

There are many inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the report. Most notably, Lambeth claim that the infamous 'lawn conversion' programme was performed under the 1977 Cemeteries etc. Act. Under this programme 30-50% of the cemetery has been largely cleared of existing monuments. Lambeth have previously always claimed the clearances were carried out under the more sweeping 1955 LCC (General Powers) Act. Moreover, Lambeth have not adhered to several important provisions of even the 1955 Act.

Thus, if we agree to cooperate in formulating future plans for the cemetery whilst believing past actions to be unlawful we could be considered 'accessories-after-the-fact' and thus could be seen as condoning unlawful acts if an action were ever brought.

This is independent of any considerations of faculty jurisdiction - Lambeth have demolished thousands of monuments in the consecrated parts of the cemetery without a faculty from the Church authorities. Again the report makes no mention of this fact and thus there is no discussion of how the situation is to be addressed. We suggest that a map showing precisely the consecrated parts of the cemetery is needed as a first step.

Despite the Lambeth press release emphasizing the historic importance of the cemetery, the report in fact proposes that the Council 'improvement' programme should continue. In one part of the report it is stated that such 'improvements' would be confined to areas beyond the perimeter road. The only remaining such areas which have not been cleared are (i) in the (presumably) unconsecrated section along the east wall, and (ii) along the north side - this latter area is elsewhere marked on a map as 'especially important'. A further, worrying inconsistency is that the possibility of further 'large scale clearance/maintenance schemes' is discussed in another part of the report.

Many pages of the report are devoted to discussion of nature conservation issues. Friends from the South London Botanical Institute have visited the cemetery recently and reported that it contains nothing of nature conservation interest, a view with which I concur. (I myself have some 25 years experience of wildlife issues). The report states that English Nature and the London Ecology Unit regard the cemetery as important yet nowhere are we told what they have actually said. I think this emphasis on nature conservation is a smokescreen to hide the Council's true intentions as to the future of the Cemetery. After all Lambeth are the council which cynically ordered the destruction of the nationally important bee orchid site at Herne Hill sidings a couple of years ago...

Further criticisms are that the report contains no mention of the use of the cemetery as a teaching resource. In addition, there is nothing about consultation on insertion of new graves. For example, new burials have recently been inserted near (in?) the St Mary-at-Hill plot. This area was bought from the cemetery company in 1882 and was an unusual feature in a cemetery of this age. Also, what about protecting grave spaces of important people where Lambeth have removed the monument (e.g. Sir William Cubitt, William Dowton, Frederick Gye, Douglas Jerrold, Alphonse de Normandy, Alexander Parkes, etc. etc.) and where they should have inserted replacement permanent markers under the provisions of the 1955 Act... ?

Clearly there is much to debate with Lambeth in the coming months, months which will also see discussion of the Lambeth Unitary Development Plan. I have ensured that the future of the cemetery will be debated under the statutory provisions of this latter plan. We will do our best to keep members as fully informed as possible during this important period.

### Clearance of Vegetation

As promised in January, the Cemetery Superintendent, Mr Bob Mackay, has implemented a short programme of vegetation clearance. This included removal of the sycamore saplings from the Appold and Dollond monuments, the birch tree from John Lawson Johnston's tomb and pruning the tree beside the Hodgson/Stevenson mausoleum. Our thanks to Mr Mackay and his staff for this.

### Cemetery Boundary Wall

Many members will have seen the damage caused to the (Grade II listed) cemetery wall in the south-west corner of the cemetery. A capstone and several courses of brickwork were dislodged whilst workmen were attempting to remove ivy from the wall. Apparently they just tied one end of a rope to the growth and the other end to a tractor and pulled... ! Lambeth have now (indirectly) approached us with a view to obtaining grant-aid for the necessary repairs! We are puzzled by this since presumably the actions of Lambeth employees/contractors are covered by insurance? Be that as it may, let us hope other attempts at removal of ivy from the wall and from monuments are more cautious...

### James Henry Greathead (1844-1896)

One piece of good news is that we were misinformed as to the fate of the gravestone of the engineer JH Greathead (see January 1993 Publications News). The stone is intact and in reasonable condition. It lies near to the north wall of the cemetery, just behind the grave of the seaplane pioneer John Cyril Porte.

### Richard Bentley (1794-1871)

Quite by accident on Sunday 21 March your chairman noticed the hitherto unremarked grave of the publisher Richard Bentley. Bentley, who is commemorated in the Dictionary of National Biography, employed the young Charles Dickens as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837. Bentley's grave will thus feature on our Dickens Connections tour in July (see FOWNC events list).

### Conservation at Norwood

Committee member Tom Easton (16 St Mary's Grove, Biggin Hill, Kent TN16 3QY. Tel: 0959 574815) has kindly agreed to be our new Conservation/Project Coordinator and takes over FOWNC responsibility for planning and overseeing tomb conservation/restoration projects in the cemetery. He will work in close conjunction with English Heritage (London Division). As announced in the last Newsletter, our founder Nicholas Reed (26 Hichisson Road, London SE15 3AL. Tel: 071 732 7778) has taken on the vital role of Fund-Raising Coordinator.

### Cemetery Tours

Brent Elliott and George Young have kindly agreed to join our panel of guides for our '1st Sunday' cemetery tours. In addition, Brent is to lead an 'Art and Architecture' tour on the Cemetery Open Day (Sunday 20 June) (see Additional Forthcoming Events). In his spare time George has been reading Boase's 'Modern English Biography' first published in 1901. He has discovered some 60 hitherto unremarked notables buried at Norwood and has only researched volume one - there are five more volumes to go... ! At least eight of George's new discoveries also feature in the Dictionary of National Biography.

### FOWNC Officers - 1993

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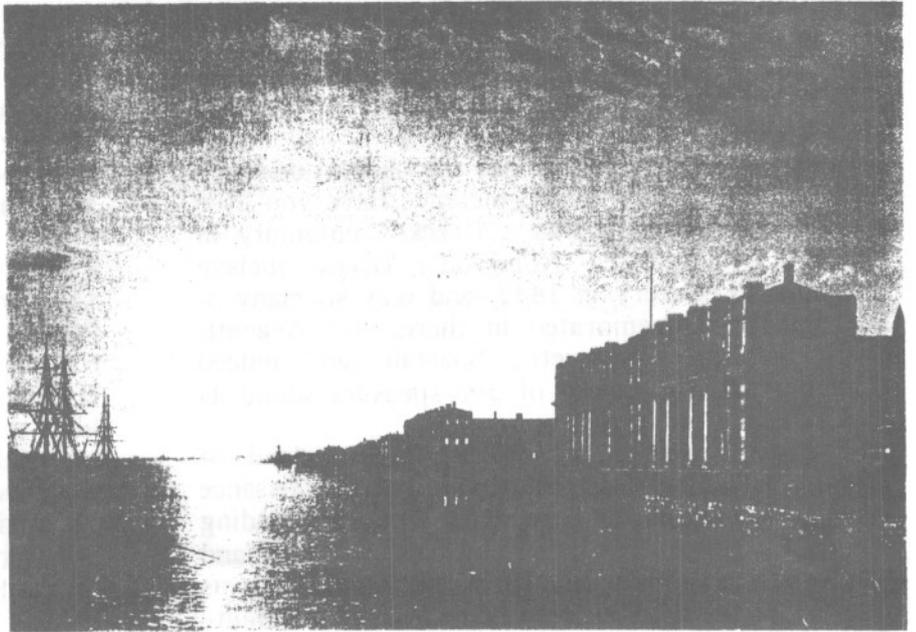
#### *Hon. Treasurer:*

David Comber (address and telephone as above)

## Publications News - Bob Flanagan

**Xmas Card (65 p, includes envelope): Greenwich Hospital by Moonlight. Henry Pether (fl. 1828-1865). National Maritime Museum.**

"Like his father, Abraham 'Moonlight' Pether of Chichester, Henry Pether specialized in moonlight scenes. He was famed for his views of the Thames and this painting of Greenwich Hospital (now the Royal Naval College), seen from the West, is a particularly fine example of his work. The foreground and architectural details are particularly well handled and the moonlight reflected from the Thames illuminates a vista which remains little changed today." So says the legend to this card. Christopher Wood (Dictionary of Victorian Painters) records that Henry was the son of Abraham Pether (1756-1812), 'Old Pether', and brother of Sebastian Pether (1790-



1844), 'Young Pether'. Abraham and his two sons all specialized in moonlit scenes. Henry exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1828-62, and painted views along the Thames and elsewhere in England, and in Venice. Study of the cemetery records reveals that Henry died in 1880 aged 79. He now lies at Norwood in a common grave (grave 17,932, square 30) near to the Greek Section. His unmarked grave is in consecrated ground according to the records - we had always presumed this portion of the cemetery to be unconsecrated.

**Book Review: Mortal Remains - The History and Present State of the Victorian and Edwardian Cemetery by Chris Brooks. Wheaton/Victorian Society, 1989. 186 pages, £10.95 (hardback - reduced from £14.95). Many monochrome illustrations.**

We have acquired a few copies of this important book (now out of print - Wheaton was a 'Maxwell House') which chronicles the creation and, sad to say, in many cases the destruction of Victorian cemeteries such as Norwood. A national disgrace indeed, but nowhere more tragic than at Norwood? A must for cemetery addicts (sorry, perceptive social historians) everywhere. The principal author, Dr Chris Brooks, together with Theresa Sladen of the Victorian Society kindly produced a report on Norwood at very short notice a couple of years ago which Lambeth have now taken some heed of in their Report on the future of the cemetery (see page 1).

**Book Review: The Power of News - The History of Reuters, 1849-1989 by Donald Read. Oxford University Press, 1992. A5, 431 pages, £20.00 (hardback) - 68 monochrome illustrations.**

Baron Paul de Reuter (1816-1899) is one of the best known names commemorated at Norwood. His monument, a pink granite stele topped by a rather awkwardly-proportioned urn, is in the consecrated portion of the cemetery just to the East of the Doulton mausoleum. This exceptionally readable book tells the story not only of Paul and the origins of the news agency which bears his adopted name, but also the subsequent history of the organisation. The third and youngest son of Samuel Levi Josaphat, the future Paul was born at Cassel in Central Germany and given the names Israel Beer. On his father's death 'Young Reuter' was sent to work in his uncle's bank at Göttingen. Here he met Professor Karl Friederich Gauss and became interested in Gauss's work on electric telegraphy and perhaps foresaw the impact this would have on world communications. After a succession of jobs in Germany, he and his wife of 4 days, Ida Maria (-1911), entered England on 29 October 1845. On 16 November he was baptized Paul Julius Reuter at St George's German Lutheran Chapel and the couple went through a second marriage ceremony there on 23 November. Why change his name to Reuter? What led to the opening of Reuters News Agency in London in 1851 (that year again...)? Why did it become so successful (Reuter, Queen Victoria wrote to Disraeli in 1878, was one 'who generally knows')? Where did the title 'Baron' come from? You can find out if you read the book! Paul himself retired as managing director in 1878 and subsequently died at the Villa Reuter in Nice aged 82. His son Herbert, the second Baron de Reuter (1852-1915), succeeded his father as managing director of Reuters and remained in charge until his suicide at his country house near Reigate three days after the death of his own wife, Edith. Herbert's son Hubert, who had earlier declined to participate in running the firm, joined the British Army and died in Flanders in 1916. So ended the family connection with Reuters. My sole criticism of the book is that I can find no mention of Norwood! Paul, Ida, their son Albert Julius (-1863) and daughter Lucy Alice (-1872) all lie here (grave 28,319, square 23) together with George Julius de Reuter (-1909) and Albert Magnus Carl Otto Pontus, Count Stenbock (-1915) - who they? Reuters took over maintenance of the monument in the 1970s - we are grateful to them for their continued interest in their founder.

## Review of FOWNC Events - Jan/Mar 1993

On 16th January Paul Calvocoressi of English Heritage gave, to an audience of about 30 members, a fascinating insight into the background of a little-studied area of the Cemetery. Have you ever wondered why there was a Greek Community in London who created Norwood's Greek enclave within the Cemetery in 1842, and why so many of the names commemorated in there, like Argenti, Ralli, Schilizzi, Cassavetti, Spartali (and indeed Calvocoressi, the family of our speaker) sound as much Italian as Greek?

The answer lies in the small Aegean island of Chios, which was in Medieval and Renaissance times an outpost of the vast Genoese trading empire - hence the Italian influence. The island subsequently came under Turkish control, but was allowed to continue as a wealthy trading community. However, with the rise of Greek nationalism in the early 19th century, the Turkish rulers reacted strongly, and a terrible massacre took place on Chios in 1822 - those wealthy enough to escape abroad did so, and settled in various European cities where they re-established their trading businesses - hence the Greek Community in London.

This talk excellently set the scene for the special tour of Norwood's Greek Cemetery to be held on Sunday 16th May, led by Don Bianco of English Heritage (meet at the main gate at 2.30 pm).

Unfortunately, a rather smaller audience assembled on 20th February to hear an equally interesting lecture by Dr David Leaback, an expert on the history of the chemical industry, about one of Norwood Cemetery's lesser-known names, Alexander Parkes. Born and residing for many years in Birmingham, and working for the metal-crafting firm Elkingtons, Parkes introduced in 1841 the method of electroplating items such as tableware with silver - one of the earliest applications to

industry of the new discoveries in electrical science. Parkes turned his scientific (and artistic) skills to a number of fields, however - picking up on work being done on the nitration of cellulose (to produce an explosive material), he modified the substance to produce the first synthetic mouldable plastic, called Parkesine; articles such as combs made from it were shown and won medals at the 1862 International Exhibition in London. Sadly for Parkes (who had moved to London and settled at 61 Rosendale Road, Dulwich), the factory in Hackney that was making Parkesine for him was less than diligent about quality control of raw materials, and unstable articles were produced that wrinkled and shrivelled; within a few years the enterprise folded, leaving an American manufacturer to produce the first commercially successful form of this plastic, called Celluloid.

Finally, on 13th March we were entertained (literally) by the fruits of Bob Flanagan's extensive research into entertainers of all kinds commemorated at Norwood. This was a wide-ranging survey, covering professions as diverse as actors and theatre managers (George Davidge, David Osbaldiston, Fred Robson, George Conquest); illusionist and scientific entertainer John Pepper; theatre scene-painters (David Roberts); Covent Garden Opera House manager Frederick Gye; musicians (Sir Joseph Barnby, Sir August Manns); and sportsmen (William Clarke, Charles Alcock - respectively the "fathers" of modern cricket and football): to name but a few. Sadly, such is the fleeting fame of many entertainers that at least half of the tombs Bob is researching have already disappeared - members will have read in the January Newsletter about his efforts to get Alcock's memorial restored, and work on this project is now under way. Bob is also compiling a booklet featuring more than forty of the entertainers he has discovered at Norwood, and we hope to publish this later in the year.

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## FOWNC Meetings - April-June 1993

General tours are held on the first Sunday of each month (4 April, 2 May and 6 June). With the exception of the tours to be held on the Cemetery Open Day (Sunday 20 June), all tours start at 14.30 at the Cemetery main gate (off Norwood Road) and last for 2 hours or so. There is no formal charge for any event but donations of £1 (£0.50 OAP) towards conservation in the cemetery are welcome.

**April 18 (Sunday): Special Cemetery Tour - 'Authors': Paul Graham**

This tour will visit the monuments of some of those noted for their published works or contribution to publishing. These include John and Gerald Baldwin Brown, Isabella & Sam Beeton, Richard Bentley (see note above), John Britton, A.H. Forrester (Alfred Crowquill), H.D. Lowry, Dr Gideon Mantell, Robert Moffat, Sir William Napier, William Morley Punshon, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Thomas Stoughton, Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, Sharon Turner, Theodore Watts-Dunton and Dennis Wheatley. Paul is compiling a booklet to accompany this tour - there are getting on for 100 entries so far!

**April 28 (Wednesday): Lecture - 'The Craces, Royal Decorators, 1768-1899': Megan Aldrich**

Joint meeting with the Marylebone Society at **Sotheby's Educational Studies, 30 Oxford Street, W1N** starting at **19.00**. Sotheby's have generously offered to supply refreshments.

For over 100 years the Crace family ran the most prestigious firm of interior decorators in the country. The interiors of the Royal Pavilion at Brighton are perhaps their greatest achievement. The most notable members of this family, Frederick Crace (1779-1859), John Gregory Crace (-1889) and John Diblee Crace (-1919), all lie at Norwood. Dr Aldrich has edited a book which tells the story of this remarkable family. We are grateful to her not only for agreeing to give this talk but also for arranging the venue.

**May 16 (Sunday): Special Cemetery Tour - 'The Greek Cemetery': Don Bianco**

The Greek section is one of the two relatively unspoilt areas in the cemetery (the other is by the Pond mausoleum). No less than 14 Greek tombs are listed. These include St Stephen's Chapel (the Ralli Mortuary Chapel) dedicated to Augustus Ralli (1857-1872) and attributed to John Oldrid Scott (1842-1913), the mausoleum of Eustratios Ralli (-1875), designed by Edward Middleton Barry (1830-1880), and the mausoleum of John Peter Ralli (-1863), designed by George Edmund Street (1824-1881). The present-day Greek Community are actively planning conservation of some tombs in conjunction with English Heritage and ourselves. They are also contributing biographical details of some of those interred here to our files.

**Additional Forthcoming Events**

**Brookwood Cemetery Open Day - Sunday 11 April (all day)**

With the cooperation of the owner, the Brookwood Cemetery Society is organising this event on Easter Sunday. We have been invited to have a presence but transport difficulties will probably prevent this. However, all will be welcome on the day. On a separate topic, it looks as though the proposed rail trip to Brookwood Cemetery and Woking Crematorium will have to be postponed - your chairman just has not got time to do everything...

**Upper Norwood Public Library - 'Personalities of Norwood' Exhibition - 1-31 May. 'Open Day': Saturday 22 May (10.00-16.00)**

A new venture. Crystal Palace Foundation, Norwood Society, UNPL and ourselves are going to try to come up with displays giving details of 24 notable past residents of Norwood. We plan to feature Arthur

Anderson, Thomas Griffiths, Georg Hackenschmidt, William Peek, Charles Haddon Spurgeon and John Withers. The exhibition is scheduled to run throughout May but Saturday 22 May has been designated a 'special day'. Each society will man a sales/membership table in the Library and there will also be a short lecture programme.

**National Federation of Cemetery Friends - Annual General Meeting, Saturday 12 June - York**

The Friends of York Cemetery are hosts to this year's AGM of the National Federation to which we are affiliated. Although strictly a 'delegates only' event I am sure that any FOWNC members who wished to attend the morning tour of the cemetery and other planned events would be welcome - please contact Bob Flanagan if you intend to go.

**South London Local History Book Fair - Vauxhall St Peter's Heritage Centre - Saturday 19 June**

The first fair on this theme was held last year and was adjudged a great success. We look forward to attending the second. The doors will be open from 10.00-16.00. There will be no entry fee and refreshments will be available as well as books!

**West Norwood Cemetery - Open Day - Sunday 20 June (13.00 onwards)**

This year FOWNC will be actively involved in this event for the first time. We plan to offer a choice of two tours: 'Famous People' and 'Funerary Art and Architecture'. Dr Brent Elliott of the Victorian Society will lead the Art and Architecture tour. All tours will commence at the Cemetery main gate at 13.00 or thereabouts. Any additional events will be advertised separately.

**Kensal Green Cemetery Open Day - Saturday 10 July (13.00 onwards)**

This annual event is a happy cooperation between the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery and the management of the General Cemetery Company. There are normally a range of specialist tours and other events, including access to the Catacombs beneath the Episcopal Mortuary Chapel. Unfortunately 10 July is also the day of our Dickens Connections Tour. However, we still plan to have a presence at Kensal Green.

**Lambeth Archives Open Day, Minet Library - Saturday 25 September (all day)**

The theme chosen for this year is 'The Victorians'. We will have a stall/display. Details of the lecture programme should be available in time for the July Newsletter.

## THE CATACOMBS

Founded in 1837 as the South Metropolitan Cemetery, West Norwood Cemetery was designed by Sir William Tite (1798-1873) and is one of the great trio of early London garden-cemeteries along with Kensal Green and Highgate. Both of the latter two cemeteries have retained their mortuary chapels; Norwood, unfortunately, has lost both its Anglican and its Dissenters' chapels which were demolished in 1960 and 1955 respectively following war damage.

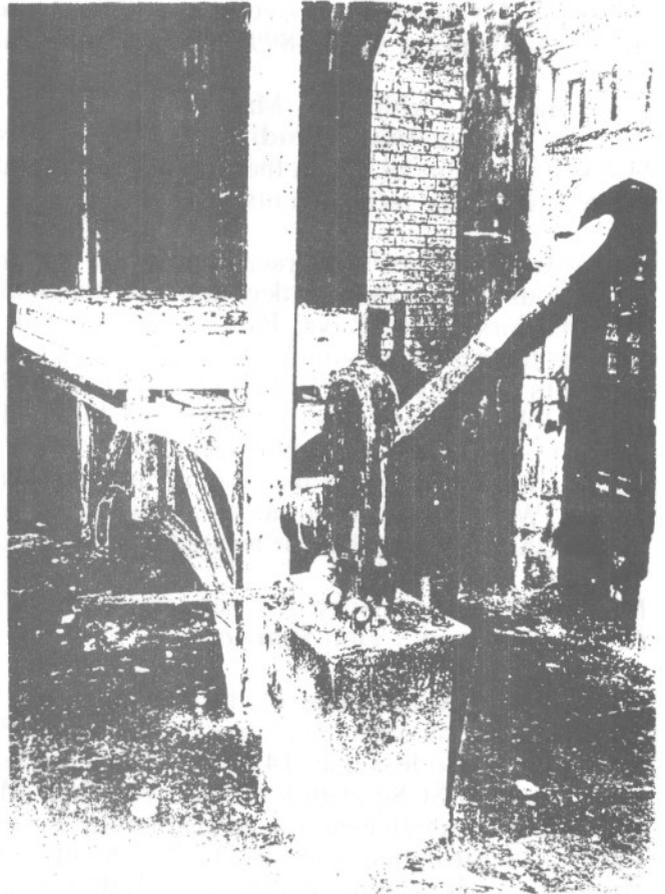
However, one important part of Tite's original work survives which is not at present listed: the catacombs situated below the site of the former Anglican chapel, now occupied by a rose garden of remembrance. Little is visible externally of these catacombs save a curving flight of steps and six semi-circular light shaft openings. Inside, though, is much of great interest.

The catacombs consist of a central axis with six long corridors leading off it, three per side. Each corridor is lined on each side with recesses: these generally contain shelves upon which coffins are placed (some are empty, though, and some have no shelving) and are screened off from the corridor by fine Gothic metal doors; and at the ends of each corridor are light shafts. They are constructed throughout of pale brick and have vaulted ceilings; circular light openings set in the ceilings of the outer corridors have been blocked. The floor was originally paved with stone slabs but these have been taken up revealing bare earth.

On descending the steps into the catacombs, one passes through the entrance (which has been extensively altered) into the central axial hall. The walls are rendered, with scored ashlar grooves; and set into shallow arched niches are private vaults which externally resemble 15th century chantry chapels. They are fronted by cast iron doors which incorporate Tudor badges into their traceried form. Behind these doors the ranks of coffins are plain to see.

The most prominent thing encountered is the hydraulic catafalque situated in the centre of the hall. A plaque attached to one of the upright rails, up which the wheels of the coffin rack ran, reveals that the apparatus was manufactured by Messrs. Bramah and Robinson in 1839. The hand-operated pump is all in place, if somewhat corroded. The method of operation for this catafalque, or coffin-hoist, was outlined in an article in the *Penny Magazine* for 21 December 1839:

In the centre of the chapel stands a kind of high oblong table, covered with black drapery; its purpose is to conceal the very ingenious



machinery which at a given secret signal conveys the coffin placed on its top, slowly down into the vaults below, without the slightest noise to indicate the nature of the agency which is the hydraulic pump. The top of the machinery forming the cover of the apparent table revolves with a slight push, and thus prevents the noise and bustle which would otherwise arise from the corpse-bearers having to turn the coffin round in the chapel.

The only other surviving catafalque machinery comparable with Norwood's is at Kensal Green, below the Anglican chapel: their hydraulic hoist was made by Smith of London in 1837. Bramah and Robinson's machine was clearly inspired by this example which was a great novelty in its day, and is a remarkable instance of the marriage of industrial technology to the traditional business of undertaking and interment. Norwood's catafalque is thus extremely rare.

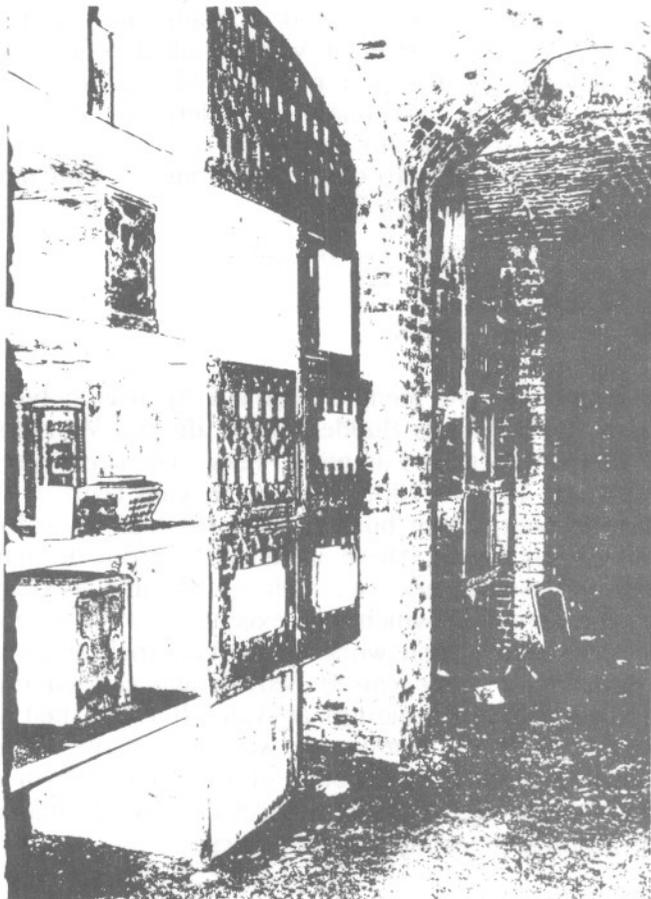
The *Penny Magazine* continued:

Beneath the sacred edifice and its cloisters are the catacombs, which will contain, we understand, 2,000 coffins. They are sufficiently lighted, well ventilated, and perfectly dry.

The chapel has utterly vanished, along with its cloisters. These contained a number of memorial plaques to persons interred beneath; some of these plaques were removed to the catacombs and still

survive, including that of Sir William Tite, whose family vaults are situated immediately to the right of the entrance. Other eminent people interred in the catacombs include Lord Hannen (1821-1894), the judge who presided over the Parnell commission of inquiry; John Collis Nesbit (1818-1862), chemist, who ran an agricultural college at Kennington, and was the father of the children's story writer Edith Nesbit; and Vice-Admiral William Richardson (1785-1864), who had been a young midshipman in the 'Glorious First of June' sea battle in 1794.

Catacombs were never highly popular in Britain; there is still space within the Kensal Green vaults for new interments, and the City of London Cemetery catacombs are only a third full, but Norwood's shelves appear to be fairly near capacity. They continued the tradition of intramural church burial which had long been the prerogative of the upper classes. The expense of this kind of coffin burial was considerable: the corpse had to be lapped in lead, which was then sealed by soldering; this lead casket was then placed within a wooden coffin which might be enriched with leather or velvet covering, ornamental studwork, carefully chased handles (known as "grips"), stamped metal plaquettes with sacred representations and engraved coffin plates stating the former identity of the lifeless form within. Such



elaboration constituted the essential *raison d'être* of catacomb burial, for the traceried iron screens made the coffins open to view. Unlike earth burial, such interment enabled some contact to remain between the mourner and the remains of the deceased and sought thereby to assuage the psychological sense of loss and absence that has long been associated with grief.

Because of the importance of visibility to catacombs, adequate lighting was a prerequisite and it is now difficult to imagine their former atmosphere prior to the filling-in of the circular light openings. It is still possible, however, to inspect the hundreds of coffins and to appreciate the quality of 19th century burial furniture. Such sumptuousness was set within a fairly austere architectural setting: with the important exception of the iron screens, the brick vaults and passages are unflamboyant but still impressive by dint of their scale, regularity and above all their contents.

Other London cemeteries to have catacombs are Kensal Green (grade II), Highgate (the Egyptian avenue and columbarium are grade II\*), Brompton (the catacombs are listed grade II\* as part of the circular arcade), Abney Park (very small), Nunhead (very damaged indeed and emptied of coffins), City of London (largely empty) and Tower Hamlets (chapels destroyed 1968-69: extent of survival of catacombs beneath uncertain).

Norwood's catacombs are thus the earliest, largest and best-preserved *unlisted* catacombs in the country. The interest, in terms of industrial archaeology, of the hydraulic catafalque is considerable; and as funerary archaeology becomes a more studied topic, the historical interest of these vaults can only grow. It is worth adding as a footnote that the catacombs acquired a certain notoriety during the early 1980's when it was discovered that they had been used for the storage of massive quantities of narcotics.

#### SOURCES

George Collison, *Cemetery Interment* (1840), pp.162-68, quoting article from the *Penny Magazine* for 21 December 1839.

Hugh Meller, *London Cemeteries* (2nd ed. 1985).

Information from Julian Litten, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Members of FOWNC will have at least one opportunity to visit the catacombs during a conducted tour later this year: look out for details in the July Newsletter.

## A FUNERAL DIRECTEUSE'S LAMENT

by Celia Smith

At a recent meeting of FOWNC members, a question was asked from the floor:

"Why do Funeral Directors encourage their clients to choose black shiny oblongs all the time? Is it because they are the most expensive?"

"Oh yes!", another piped up, "all their catalogues are full of nothing else".

Well, speaking as a Funeral Director, and some-time masonry salesperson, I must disagree.

**In the first place**, clients generally choose black shiny oblongs because that is what they have been dreaming of buying for some years. It is their choice, and like it or not, they are very hard-wearing and almost maintenance-free. We are really touching on the very subjective matter of taste. I don't personally think rows of black polished granite look attractive, but for the same reason that more people watch ITV than BBC2, many clients choose them.

**Secondly**: The memorial regulations in most cemeteries were written with ease of maintenance in mind. They were also written long after your "Angel of Death", draped urn or broken column were erected. These would not be permitted these days: generally speaking, nothing over 3ft. high, 2ft.6ins. wide or 6ft. long *is*.

Then, the choice of stone is curtailed - here the Church is the culprit. They have a particular "down" on white marble, also on the hated black granite. "Local stone only", they state, but unfortunately for the churchyards of Sussex, that is their local stone! No-one seems now to allow reconstituted stone, although some fine examples of this recycling are to be seen in Kensal Green, as I for one did not realise until told. Their durability and versatility are beyond question.

Certain words and phrases can fall foul of the

Superintendent's pen. You could have "Murdered by the Baader-Meinhof", but not "Died of Cancer". Which, I ask you, sounds the more violent?

**My third point** covers the inference that Funeral Directors steer their clients towards the black granite end of the catalogue, because this is the most profitable to them. Wrong again: just read the principles of the Funeral Directors' Code of Practice. Under General Conduct:-

Part 2: We must never exploit a client in the difficult time following a bereavement.

Part 4: We must avoid suggesting an elaborate funeral, if a simple one is required. We take this to cover monumental masonry as well.

**Now to my fourth point.** Our catalogues are many and varied. They are filled with good ideas, and a client can, within the parameters of the cemetery's rules, design his own if he wishes. I even keep a pets' memorial book. I have a brochure with artist-designed tombstones: they are very beautiful, in slate and eggshell-finished granite; they are not expensive, but no-one likes them except Funeral Directors and stonemasons.

Our masonry manager says that, generally, memorial snobs don't know what they are talking about. They happily pay £14,000 for a shiny black car which lasts a few years, but turn their noses up at a shiny black stone which lasts for decades - and doesn't need polishing all the time!

To conclude, may I amuse you with this apocryphal tale?

A Yorkshire widow ordered a headstone for her husband's grave. After it was installed, she went to check it and found a mistake. She phoned the mason: "On the last line you've left off an 'E'". "Oh, I'm sorry, I'll put that right tomorrow." Two days later she went to check the stone, to find that it now said: "'E, He's Thin"!

**STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS! STOP PRESS!**

On the point of going to press, we have received a notice from FOWNC member **Patricia Spencer-Silver**, informing us of the forthcoming publication in June of her new book **Pugin's Builder: The Life and Work of George Myers** (350pp., 75 illustr., price £14.95, University of Hull Press & Lampada Press). George Myers was one of the great Master builders of the Victorian age. Born in Hull in 1803, he was to gain renown as "Pugin's Builder"; from his workshops he directed his nationwide contracting business and his highly skilled craftsmen. Pugin assured Myers that he should "execute" all his buildings: these included the four Roman Catholic Cathedrals in Newcastle, Birmingham, Nottingham and Southwark, as well as Pugin's famous Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition of 1851 (the interior decoration of which was executed by the Crace family firm, subject of the lecture on 28th April). Myers also did restoration work at the Guildhall and the Tower of London, worked at Windsor Castle, constructed Broadmoor, modernised Bedlam and carried out many contracts for the Government and the Army, including several of the buildings at Aldershot. He died at his home in London in 1875 and was buried at West Norwood; sadly his tombstone was one of the many cleared from the area around the Crematorium. This book gives a fascinating account of the building world of the mid-19th century; it contains hitherto unpublished Pugin drawings and has a foreword by Hermione Hobhouse. Hopefully the FOWNC bookstall will be obtaining a stock of copies in due course.