

Friends of West Norwood Cemetery



NEWSLETTER NO 4: DECEMBER 1990

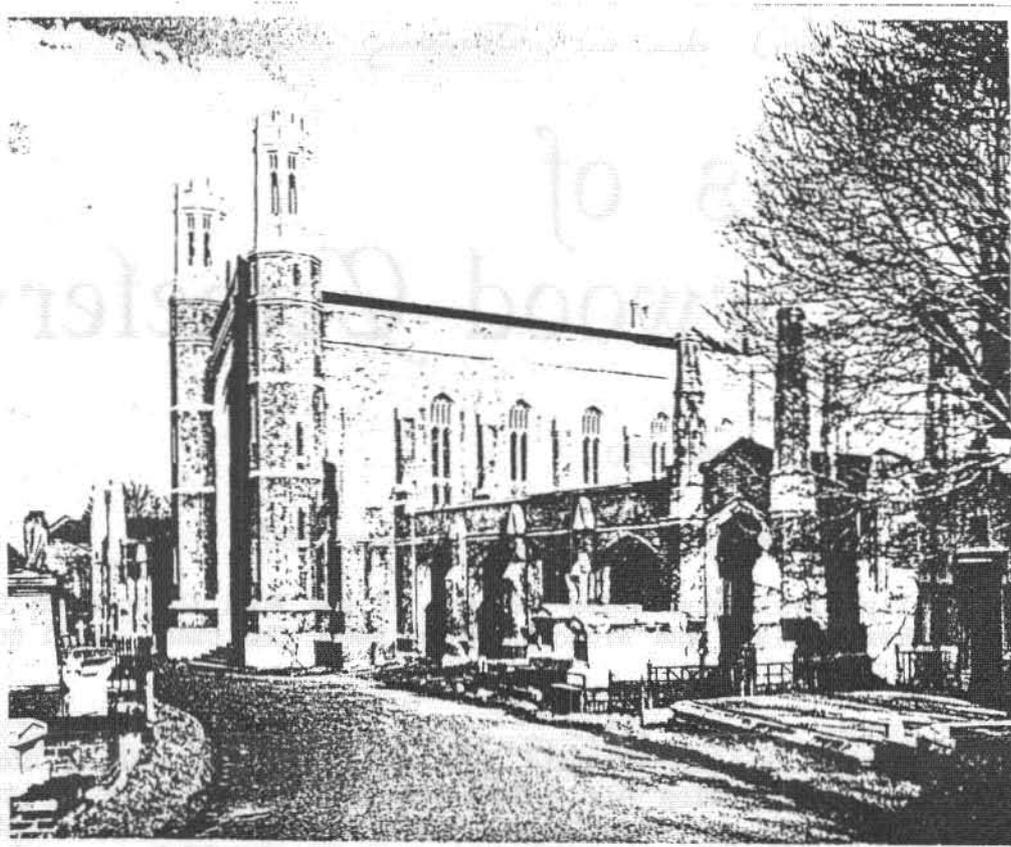
THE MEETING OF LAMBETH COUNCIL, 17th October 1990

At a typically lively and noisy meeting of the Full Council in October, Councillor John Whelan, and Nicholas Reed, FOWNC Chairman, asked questions of two Committee Chairmen.

Councillor Stewart Hunter, Chair of Lambeth's Public Works Committee said his officers were doing a splendid job, and went on to take a completely political stance, accusing his first questioner of wishing to turn the Cemetery back into a private company (something he had never mentioned). Yet in view of Lambeth's apparent eagerness to demolish so much in the Cemetery, simply in order to provide more burial space, and thus increase the revenues received by the Cemetery, one begins to wonder if things are so very different from when the old Cemetery Companies used to maximise their burial revenues. One would have expected such behaviour from capitalist Victorian businesses 100 years ago, but one hardly expects it nowadays from a left-wing Labour Council!

Lambeth declared the Cemetery a Conservation Area in 1978, This makes it also a matter for the Planning Committee, since technically, any changes made to such an area should be notified to, and approved by, the Planning Committee. In her reply, Councillor Anna Tapsell, Chair of Lambeth's Planning Committee, pointed out that many Lambeth Councillors may not be aware of the decisions taken many years ago to carry out "lawn conversion" in the Cemetery. And "in view of the criticisms raised by the Friends of the Cemetery," she is asking for a detailed report on all three cemeteries to be prepared by her officers, after consulting all parties. This report can then be discussed at the Planning Committee. So there is now a sign of some improvement. We would hope that the demolitions apparently threatened by the cordoning off of monuments, will at least be delayed until the Committee has considered the report. But we have nothing in writing agreeing to this, and of course the danger with Lambeth designating a "dangerous structure" is that it can be demolished almost overnight.

In a letter disagreeing with much of our last Newsletter, Mr John Day has asked us to say that the Council's lawn conversion is not being carried out under the Local Authorities' Cemetery Order 1977, but instead under the LCC (General Powers) Act 1955. If Lambeth are able to operate under the earlier Act, and simply ignore the later Act, then they would not need to give further notification of their clearance, or place notices beside the areas to be cleared, as we suggested in our last Newsletter. Well, it is not normal for any body to claim they are acting under an earlier law, and can therefore ignore later legislation on the subject! But we are still trying to clarify the legal situation on this point. In the meantime, we would urge our members to write to Councillor Tapsell, Chair of Planning, at Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton SW2, explaining why they are worried at the continuing destruction in the Cemetery.



This unusual photograph is dated 1956, and shows the Anglican Chapel before its demolition in 1960. It is taken from a very similar viewpoint to the Victorian watercolour shown in the last Newsletter. This view shows the Stevenson mausoleum on the far right, and also the railings which still partly surrounded both that monument and the column to Dr William Marsden. Both the Anglican and non-conformist chapels were slightly damaged during the last War. Instead of being repaired, they were demolished by the South Metropolitan Cemetery Company, in 1960 and 1955 respectively. But their demolition is something for which Lambeth should not be blamed, as the Cemetery was not bought by Lambeth until 1966!

DESTRUCTION CONTINUES

Since our last Newsletter in September, the position appears to be worse. As well as clearance of large areas by bulldozers, which has been going on for the last three months, there is now a more direct threat.

We reported in September that we had raised the money £630 needed to carry out repairs on the Stevenson memorial, and make it safe. Two local firms had this price for making it safe, and we asked the local stonemasons Wilsons to go ahead with repairs. However, the Cemetery has now refused to allow these repairs to go ahead, on the grounds that we are not the owners of the tomb concerned, and there "might be problems" if the owners later came forward. So we now have to imagine that if the tomb was demolished, there would be no problems with the owners: the only problems would arise if the tomb was repaired at our expense!

This objection about ownership has never been raised by Southwark Council, who own Nunhead Cemetery, nor by Hackney Council, who own Abney Park Cemetery. In both those cases, their Friends organisations have raised money and repaired several of the tombs. No-one would dispute that the collection of historic monuments in Norwood is more important than those at either Nunhead or Abney Park: indeed, experts describe Norwood as the finest such collection in the country. Yet it seems we are not even being given the chance to repair such tombs, rather than see them demolished.

We had thought this threat of demolition on "safety" grounds only applied to the Stevenson monument. But in mid-November, the Cemetery cordoned off about six further fine tombs on the grounds they are "dangerous"; they presumably intend to demolish these also. One of them was erected to Alderman William Hunter, Lord Mayor of London in 1851 - the year of the

Great Exhibition. With the £3000 we have already raised, we could probably afford to make this and the others safe too. But no doubt the Cemetery will again object we are not the owners, and use this as an excuse to demolish the monuments.

Some of the money we have raised for restoration comes from firms who would no doubt be happy to look after the tombs of their founders in the future. But we have had little time in the six months of our existence to contact firms such as Tate and Lyle or Dolland and Aitchison (the tomb of George Dolland is particularly fine), to ask if they would help. Indeed, for the first three months we concentrated on finding out more about the important people buried here, such as the architects who designed Billingsgate Fish Market and Tower Bridge: both of them buried in Norwood, but not in listed tombs. Indeed, some of the most famous people buried in Norwood, such as Mrs Beeton the cookery woman, or Baron Julius de Reuter, founder of Reuters newsagency, are not in a "listed" tomb, and anything not listed is equally in jeopardy while the bulldozing and demolition continues.

PUBLICATIONS available from FOWNC: December 1990

- 1) "In Loving Memory of West Norwood Cemetery", by Geoffrey Manning, 1989. Describes the 44 listed memorials, with a photograph of each. Also a list of other notable burials. 24 pages, 48 ill., and a map. £2.25 paperback.
- 2) "Sir Henry Doulton", by Edmund Gosse, 1970. The life of the man under whose aegis Doulton potteries became Royal Doulton. 218 pages, two illustrations in colour. £3.50 hardback.
- 3) "On the Trail of Iguanodon", by Ken Woodhams, 1990. The story of the discovery of the dinosaur by Dr Gideon Mantell in the 1830s, and the identification of its footprints 30 years later. 24 pages, 24 ill. £2.50 paperback.
- 4) "Murder at the Priory", by Bernard Taylor, 1988. In 1876 at The Priory in Balham, Charles Bravo was murdered by persons unknown, and buried at Norwood. This book claims to be the 'definitive' solution to this classic but real-life murder mystery. 276 pages, 32 ill. £4 paperback.
- 5) "John Ruskin's Camberwell", by James Dearden. Detailed descriptions of early Victorian Camberwell, and Ruskin's homes in Herne Hill and Denmark Hill. The author has collected a mass of unpublished material and woven a fascinating story. 52 pages, 28 illustrations and a map. £3.95 paperback.
- 6) "Robert Browning's London", by Mairi Calcraft, 1989. The first 70 pages describe Browning's life in Camberwell and New Cross from 1819 to 1851. Mentions three contemporaries buried at Norwood, though Browning himself is in Westminster Abbey. 134 pages, 32 ill, 3 maps. £5 paperback.
- 7) "Kingswood House", by the Dulwich Society, 1985. Includes a description of the house, now Kingswood Community Centre, SE21, after it was rebuilt by John Johnston, who made his fortune from Bovril, and is buried at Norwood. 20 pages, 7 ill. £1 paperback.
- 8) Sir Hiram Maxim. 1 page broadsheet about the inventor with Crystal Palace and Norwood connections. 30p

Postcards:

Bedhead designed by William Burges, architect and designer (large card) 50p

William Wyon, R.A., medallist and designer of the Penny Black. 30p

All publications are on sale at our meetings or at the end of tours. Orders by post should be sent to the Publications Officer at 79 Durban Road, SE27 9RW (081-670 3265), accompanied by a cheque allowing for p. & p.: normally 50p.

NB Hugh Meller's "London Cemeteries", with its six-page list of notables buried at Norwood, is presently out of print. One book we have not yet seen is "Who's buried where in England", published Nov. 1990 by Constable at £14.95.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Saturday 8th December 1990, at 2.30 pm:

Annual General Meeting of FOWNC, at the Meeting Hall at St. Luke's Church, West Norwood SE27 (two minutes walk from the Cemetery entrance). After the formal business, we have a talk about Victorian Cemeteries by Peter Salter, from the Friends of Abney Park Cemetery.

Sunday 6th January 1991, at 11 am:

Special Scientific Tour of the Cemetery, concentrating on the scientists and engineers. Jill Dudman first gave this tour in September to members of the Great London Industrial Archaeology Society. It proved so interesting we are sure our own members would like to follow it too!

Sunday 3rd February 1991, at 11 am:

Regular monthly tour of the Cemetery, led by Rosemary Comber.
At 3 pm: English Heritage lecture: see below.

Saturday 9th February, at 2.30 pm:

"The Life of David Roberts, RA", a talk by Helen Guiterman, author of a booklet about this artist, probably the most distinguished buried at Norwood. St. Luke's Church Hall, West Norwood SE27.

Sunday 3rd March, at 11 am:

Regular monthly tour, led by Nicholas Reed

NB: From April 1991, the monthly tours, on the first Sunday of the month, will start at 2.30 pm.

Monday 18th March 1991, at 8 pm:

"The Friends 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.

TWO OTHER MEETINGS of interest to FOWNC members:

Sunday 3rd February 1991, at 3 pm: "The Saving of our Heritage", talk by David Gribbin, Conservator with English Heritage, at St. Clement's Church Hall, Friern Road, East Dulwich SE22 (organised by the Peckham Society).

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 (organised by the Camberwell Society).

CEMETERY OPENING HOURS

A reminder that the opening hours are:
November to March: 8-4 weekdays, 10-4 weekends
April to October: 8-6 weekdays, 10-6 weekends

FOWNC OFFICERS:

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Rosemary's husband David is our Treasurer,
but the Annual Subscription of £2 should be sent to Rosemary.