

# Friends of West Norwood CEMETERY

Newsletter No. 89 – May 2017

Free to members

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## Chairman's Report

Bob Flanagan

There has been much progress on developing the Stage 2 Parks for People HLF bid. Not only has Joahanne Flaherty taken up the position of Project Coordinator, but also Harrison Design and Development have been appointed Project Consultants. This is advantageous as Paul Harrison has been working on the grave re-use pilot as discussed below (p. 3) and has proved very conscientious in this role. A project Steering Group has been constituted under the chairmanship of Nicholas Long, Chair of the Scheme of Management Committee. Mr Tony Burton has kindly agreed to represent the Greek Cathedral Trustees and I represent the Management Advisory Group and FoWNC. The other members of the project group in addition to Joahanne and Paul are Kevin Crook, Dan Thomas, Steve Wong, and Nicola Xuereb (all Lambeth), local Cllr Max Deckers-Dowber & Elizabeth Whitbourn (Historic England). The recruitment of a Public Engagement Officer is awaited.

As regards other matters, members may have noticed the progress in the promised scrub clearance (i) in the St Mary-at-Hill plot and surrounding



*Bessemer Family grave (see p. 2)*

area and (ii) around Ship Path. Thanks to Kevin Wallace and his grounds maintenance team for their hard work over the winter months. I'm pleased to say that the team have really enjoyed their work in the cemetery and have been especially grateful for the kind comments received from passers-by. Other areas of scrub will be tackled over the next couple of years. There has been progress too in removing some of the dead/dangerous trees in the cemetery under the guidance of Project Officer Steve Wong, although a lot also remains to be done in this area.

#### *A Blue Plaque for Sir Henry*

City University plan to unveil a Blue Plaque to Sir Henry Bessemer (1813–1898; grave 27,463, square 99) at their campus in Northampton Square on Tuesday 16 May 2017 starting at around 18:00. Science Museum lecturer Dr Susan Mossman will be giving a talk (see FoWNC Newsletter 80, May 2014). Henry lived at No. 15 on the north side of the square in 1833. His father, the inventor Anthony Bessemer (1758–1836), lived with the rest of the family at 8 Meredith Street opposite Northampton Square. Thanks to Sir Henry's great, great, grandson, FoWNC supporter Paul Bessemer, for the notification of this event.



*8-18 Northampton Square, EC1*

#### *FoWNC Constitution*

I am pleased to report that there were no objections submitted either in writing, or at the February meeting to adopting the proposed new constitution. In turn this has been accepted by the Charity Commission as part of our submission to register FoWNC as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the Registered Charity Number 1172409. I have placed the new Constitution on our website and we will transfer the funds from the old FoWNC charity to the new one at the end of our financial year in June. Thanks to our Treasurer Anna Long for taking the lead on the submission to the Charity Commission.

#### *Mausolea and Monuments Trust (MMT)*

The MMT (<http://www.mmtrust.org.uk/>) aims to protect and preserve mausolea and other funerary monuments in Great Britain and Ireland. This year we are to host the MMT AGM on Saturday 8 July. The business meeting at noon will be followed by lunch (£10 donation) and a tour of the cemetery. FoWNC members are welcome, but space is limited – please e-mail me if you would like to attend ([chairman@fownc.org](mailto:chairman@fownc.org)).

#### *Letts and Thomas Memorial Repair*

At last, and after many meetings on-site and elsewhere, a plan to complete the repairs to the 'at-risk' Grade 2 Listed monuments of Harriet (–1841) and Thomas (1803–1873) Letts (grave 249, square 33) and of Israel Thomas (–1842; grave 429, square 34) is nearing completion (see FoWNC Newsletter 86, May 2016). The proposed solution allows for, if possible depending on their condition, the temporary removal of the coffins,

(ii) rebuilding of the vaults, (iii) reinstatement of the coffins, (iv) back-filling with pea shingle allowing some space for further family interments if possible, and (v) monument reinstatement. Sounds simple, but not so easy in practice! This proposal has been submitted to the Diocesan Advisory Committee prior to submission to the Chancellor for approval as (i) the works are extensive and (ii) it is hoped that the proposed solution will be the template for repairs to other collapsed vaults in the cemetery.



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## Grave Re-use at Norwood

Bob Flanagan

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The 1994 Consistory Court judgment ruled that virtually all Lambeth's actions in clearing a large proportion of the cemetery of monuments had mostly been undertaken without regard or adherence to relevant legislation. Moreover, their use of private graves (graves originally bought with exclusive rights of burial) for new burials without the knowledge or permission of the original owners was illegal.<sup>1</sup> Since then a further Court hearing regularised as far as was possible the position of families who unknowingly had bought burial rights in graves that already contained burials and that Lambeth had no right to sell, although the erection of new memorials on re-used graves remains a problem.

In 2001 Lambeth gave formal notice that they wished to extinguish burial rights in all graves that had not been used for burials for at least 75 years, although whether this included burial of cremated remains was not clear. We objected on the grounds that Lambeth would likely then recommence wholesale clearance of monuments, and the Council backed off perhaps fearing that the Court would again find against them.

In the ensuing 15 years much has changed, not least Lambeth's attitude to FoWNC, to the Scheme of Management Committee, and to the Cemetery. Lambeth have at last realized the importance of the cemetery and have co-operated in the restoration and in some cases reinstatement of many important monuments, in scrub clearance, and in repairs to the roads and drains. Our position on re-use has not changed – we have never objected to re-use in the form of 'lift-and-deepen', i.e. reburial of any identifiable remains at the bottom of graves and use of the grave for new burials provided that (i) all pre-Lambeth era monuments in the Cemetery are retained/conserved, (ii) re-use should be confined to clearly identifiable graves as required by current legislation, and (iii) all burials in the grave, old and new, must be commemorated in some way on any new memorial. In addition, all other legal requirements should be met such as the requirement to obtain a faculty for operations on consecrated ground.

Of course, the legacy of Lambeth's dreadful clearance operations from the late 1960s to the early 1990s is still with us in that areas largely cleared of monuments cannot be selected for grave re-use under current legislation. This is because it is not now possible to identify the precise location of individual graves (including some war graves) in these

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmenvtra/91/91m59.htm> for a summary of the situation as it applied in December 2000

areas as the reference points on the ground (the memorials) were destroyed and Lambeth failed to maintain proper plans of the areas they worked on.

In the last couple of years, however, detailed discussions with Lambeth have borne fruit and we have now reached a position on re-use that I and the other Trustees feel deserves support. On the one hand Lambeth have accepted our position as outlined above, and on the other the process of re-use of clearly identifiable private graves means that in the main the process will be confined to graves where a monument survives. Further safeguards are that no listed monuments, war graves, and illegally re-sold private graves will be scheduled for re-use.

All-in-all this brings the prospect of systematically working through the cemetery and cleaning and renovating existing monuments as well as commemorating those buried in identifiable graves where the monument has been lost. It is possible that in time technology will enable the positive identification of individual graves in cleared areas where no memorials exist, although this seems unlikely.

An underlying consideration in all this has to be the long-term viability of the cemetery. It again seems unlikely that crematorium operations alone can sustain the cemetery. Additionally, it would perhaps be wrong to oppose the use of the cemetery for its prime purpose and to deny Lambeth residents the opportunity of burial in the only public cemetery within the Borough.

A concern is that Lambeth will inevitably seek to extinguish existing burial rights in graves scheduled for re-use. However, given (i) the clear commitment to follow proper procedures, and (ii) the undertaking to keep all surviving pre-1965 memorials, and to commemorate all existing burials as well as new burials on any new memorials then it seems only sensible to support the principle of re-use of clearly defined graves meeting all necessary criteria. It is also likely that full control of the cemetery will revert to Lambeth at some stage in the next few years, with the winding-up of the Scheme of Management. Specific safeguards will be incorporated to ensure swift action can be taken if Lambeth defaults on the agreed arrangements.

This being the case it is planned to select some 7 graves (some with existing memorials and some without) in an unconsecrated part of the cemetery (squares 8–10) to pilot the scheme. The area in question lies adjacent to the Eastern wall of the cemetery and has already been cleared of undergrowth as part of Lambeth's commitment to clear scrub, self-set trees, and indeed dangerous and diseased trees, throughout the Cemetery. Apart from testing the method and equipment proposed for 'lift-and-deepen' this will be an opportunity to check the costs of, and demand for, re-used plots. A benefit of this process already has been the revealing of the Skeen and Harrison/Lashbrooke memorials featured in Newsletter 88 (January 2017).

A policy has been drafted together with full procedures, which means that all the graves identified for re-use will be the subject to a process of notification of the existing owners by letter and also by placing details on an internet site for a 12-month period. If the pilot proves successful, and after evaluation of the process and the economics then it is likely that further graves will be selected for re-use in the pilot area before moving on to other parts of the cemetery.

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# Lewes Fossil Festival & Gideon Mantell

John White

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The achievements of Dr Gideon Mantell FRS (1790–1852; grave 273; square 100), doctor, diarist, geologist, and palaeontologist were celebrated on 23–25 September last at the *Lewes Fossil Festival* held in the Linklater Pavilion at Lewes in East Sussex.

The Festival was launched on the evening of 23 September at a reception given by Cllr. Graham Mayhew, Mayor of Lewes. He spoke with knowledge and enthusiasm about Mantell, who had lived in the town from his birth in 1790 until his move to Brighton in 1833. Dr Mayhew had spent some time examining the Mantell archive in New Zealand where Mantell's son Walter had not only become custodian of many of Mantell's fossil finds and papers, but was also a natural historian in his own right and was at one time Minister for Maori Affairs.

The next speaker was John May, the author of a pocket-size souvenir booklet *Gideon Mantell: A remarkable life 1790–1852* published on the occasion of the Festival. Mr May had organised an international Symposium about Mantell at Sussex University on the bicentenary of his birth in 1990. He explained that at the time he had explored the idea of building a life-size model of an *Iguanodon* in the town and read out a letter that he had written to a much younger Dr Mayhew, who had in fact also been Mayor of Lewes at the time, to garner his support.

## *Mantellisaurus atherfieldensis*

Mr May then described how he had met an aspiring forensic geologist and model maker and had shared the idea with him. Through the wonders of the internet May tracked down his erstwhile colleague and suggested he may like to get back on board with the idea. He then introduced Roby Braun to the room, now living in New York, but for some years employed at the Natural History Museum in London. Braun had flown in from Long Island especially for the Festival. He had brought with him a scale model he had constructed of *Mantellisaurus atherfieldensis*. The model will be used in planning the publicity for attracting potential funders to the project to build a life size model and locate it somewhere in the town as a memorial to Mantell.

The evening reception was rounded off with a showing of the Mummer's Play called *St George and the Iguanodon* written by Mike Turner and filmed on location in and around Lewes in 2010.

There were three illustrated talks over the weekend. On Saturday John Cooper, curator of the Booth Museum of Natural History in Brighton, spoke on the finding and naming of *Iguanodon*. On Sunday John Cooper spoke again, this time on *Mantell's Move to Brighton: Why Did It All Go So Wrong?* The failure of his museum in Brighton explained the background to Mantell's sale of his vast collection of fossils and artefacts to the British Museum and move to a doctors' practice on the south side of Clapham Common in 1839.

Debby Matthews in turn presented a short, illustrated talk entitled *A Tour around Gideon Mantell's Lewes*. Debby has been a long-time Mantell enthusiast having discovered when she moved into her present home in what used to be St Mary's Lane that it was Mantell's birthplace. He had lived there with his family until he moved to take up his first doctor's practice with a Dr Moore on the High Street in 1812.

The festival featured several activities for children including a talk *What's so special about Dinosaurs?* with children's author Nicky Dee; a Jurassic forest colouring game; fossil painting; shark's teeth sieving; and a *Dinosaur Treasure Hunt* around the adjacent nature reserve. The highlight of the Sunday were two performances given by *Emerald Ant* theatre company of *The Iguanodon Restaurant*. This play was written specially for the event and commemorated the dinner given by sculptor Waterhouse Hawkins in the cast of an *Iguanodon* at the Crystal Palace at 5 o'clock on Saturday, 31 December 1853.<sup>2</sup>

The play featured a 35-foot model *Iguanodon* based on the Crystal Palace cast. Three actors took the roles of the scientists involved in the *Iguanodon* story, including Anning, Cuvier, Smith, Owen, Darwin, Hawkins, Buckland, and Mantell himself. They performed in perfect weather in the open air before some 500 children sitting on the grass with their parents.



*The 2016 Model Iguanodon*

The model *Iguanodon* had one side open to view and a stage in front. There was a pantomime aspect to the story with the children being encouraged to cheer Mantell (*Oh yes he did!*) [discover *Iguanodon*] and 'boo' Owen (*Oh no he didn't!*) etc., etc. When the play had finished, three children were invited to climb inside the *Iguanodon*, where they were given fine big top hats to wear, and sat down at a long table facing the audience with a large display of (artificial) food in front of them! This brought great delight to the children in the audience and even greater delight to the children at the banqueting table, all accompanied by loud applause from the onlookers!

The *Lewes Fossil Festival* was organised by Debby Matthews and her volunteers from the Lewes U3A geology group, with generous support from the Booth Museum, which supplied a display of authentic *Iguanodon* fossils that could be picked up and handled. The event was a fine example of local community involvement in commemorating one of Lewes' heroes and was great credit to everyone involved. For more on the festival see: <https://gideonmantell.wordpress.com/2016/05/18/the-lewes-fossil-fest/>. Finally, I thank Debby Matthews for checking certain dates and facts in this article.

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<sup>2</sup> There is a famous portrayal of this event in the *Illustrated London News* of 7 January 1854, p. 22

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# Terence Arthur de Marney (1908-1971)

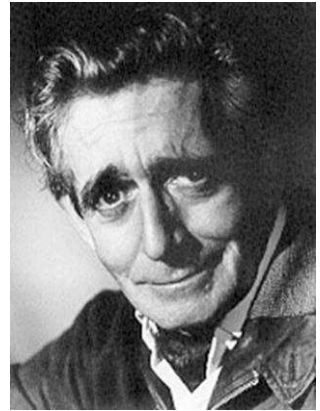
Michael Viner

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Terence de Marney was a prominent film and TV actor. Whilst rarely a leading man, he was nevertheless one of the supporting ‘character’ actors who were the backbone of the UK and US film and TV industries in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. His screen career stretched from the early ‘Talkies’ in the 1930s to *Dr Who* in the 1960s. He was a star, though, of British theatre, where he was a well-known figure for 40 years. Sadly, his life came to a tragic, untimely end on the London Underground in 1971.

I loved vintage horror films as a boy and one that made an impression on me when I saw it on TV in the 1970s was the haunting, dreamlike *Hand of Night* (1968) that featured de Marney as a Moroccan Vampire. During a recent viewing – as a now middle-aged man – of the rare and equally atmospheric 50s Horror gem *Curse of the Pharaoh* (1957), also starring de Marney, I vaguely recalled seeing his name on a list of those interred at Norwood. On checking I found he is buried in an unconsecrated part of the cemetery (grave 41,974, square 56) together with his sister Emren Evelyn (Eileen) de Marney (1904–1973) and his brother, the actor Derrick Raoul Edouard Alfred de Marney (1906–1978).



*Terence de Marney*

Terence was born in Brentford, Middlesex on 1 March 1908. He was already well-known as an actor and as a producer in the London theatre world by the end of the 1920s. Not so blessed with the matinee idol good looks of his brother Derrick, with whom he’s often confused, he was nevertheless a mainstay of both theatre and early British ‘talkies’. Terence married twice. His first wife was Diana Hope Dunbar, his second the actress Beryl Measor (1908–1965), whom he married in 1945. They remained together until her early death aged 57.

One of Terence de Marney’s early films was *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste* (1935) alongside Bela Lugosi, one of the very first Hammer Film productions. Later with his brother Derrick he formed Concanen Productions<sup>3</sup> and produced a number of wartime documentaries on the Polish Air Force, including *The White Eagle* and *Diary of a Polish Airman* (both 1942), as well as Leslie Howard’s film *The Gentle Sex* (1943). Post-war Terence went on to appear in a number of horror/fantasy films starring with Herbert Lom in the outstanding British Film Noir *Dual Alibi* (1947). His voice became familiar on radio as well – he was the first actor to play *The Saint* on radio in 1940. He also achieved success as a writer. His play *Wanted for Murder* about the stigma and torment faced by a hangman’s son was turned into an excellent film starring Eric Portman (1946).

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<sup>3</sup> Their grandfather was the noted lithographer Alfred Concanen (1835–1886)



In the late 1950s Terence went to live and work in the US, joining the ‘Hollywood Raj’ of British actors in Tinseltown – Stewart Granger, Boris Karloff, David Niven, et al. Whilst there he appeared in many of the top TV shows of the time – *Bonanza*, *Wagon Train*, *Maverick*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Peter Gunn*, etc., as well as a number of films e.g. the aforementioned *Curse of the Pharaoh*, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and the better-known *Spartacus* (1960).

In 1963 Terence moved back to the UK and continued appearing in popular TV shows on this side of the Atlantic, such as *Dr Finlay’s Casebook*, *Maigret*, *Z Cars* and *Dr Who*; he starred in the 1966 *Dr Who* adventure *The Smugglers*, with William Hartnell, all four episodes of which are now lost. He was still starring in films at this time, for example the fine horror entry *Die, Monster Die* (1965) based on an H.P. Lovecraft story, alongside Boris Karloff.

Terence remained a regular on the London Theatre scene through the late 1960s and into the 70s, but on Thursday 25 May 1971 tragically he fell to his death in front of an oncoming London Underground train at High Street Kensington. Terence, who lived nearby in Holland Street, had been due to appear on stage in a play that night. Curiously, Ben Nicolson, an acquaintance of noted writer and diarist James Lees-Milne, had died in identical circumstances just ten days before at Leicester Square Station.



Norwood: *The de Marney family gravestone*

Or, if you’ll forgive the cliché, were they pushed? There is absolutely no levity or flippancy intended. In 2015 it was revealed that Kiernan Kelly, a violent, psychopathic tramp, who had already been convicted of two murders, had confessed, before his death, to a further 16 murders, claiming he killed all his victims by pushing them in front of Underground trains.<sup>4</sup> Following the revelations, which appeared in a book by ex-policeman Geoff Platt entitled *The London Underground Station Serial Killer* (Pen and

Sword True Crime, 2015), it was reported that British Transport Police were looking again at a number of further deaths on the Underground in the 70s. Although the names of the deceased were not mentioned, it seems possible that Mr. de Marney was amongst them.

Whether Terence de Marney’s death was murder or a dreadful accident, it was a tragic end to the life of a talented man who was a stalwart of British theatre, an actor involved in a number of fine films, and a man who appeared in some of the most famous TV programmes of all time, in both Britain and in the US.

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<sup>4</sup> He was acquitted on one count of attempted murder – pushing an elderly man in front of an Underground train at High St. Kensington – due to lack of evidence, and also of a charge of murdering fellow vagrant Maurice Weighly, who was found dead in Soho and his face and genitals mutilated



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## William Wright DD (1837-1899) – Part 2<sup>5</sup>

Samuel Wright

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Upon the family's return to Damascus William embarked upon two expeditions, the second of which was to have a major impact on biblical archaeology. He was encouraged in this work by Captain Richard Burton, then British Consul in Damascus.<sup>6</sup> That Burton and Wright hit it off is remarkable given their differing views. Burton, a well-known agnostic, thought that missionaries were badly selected, meddlesome, and ignorant, but nevertheless a mutual respect and friendship grew between these two strong men.

In March 1872 William journeyed, to Palmyra, Tadmor as it is known in the Bible, the ruined city laying some 150 miles to the east of Damascus. Famous in Roman times it had grown rich on East-West trade, reaching its peak in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD under Queen Zynobia, conqueror of Egypt.

William made careful preparations for the journey. A large party was gathered together with an escort of irregular Turkish troops. The party spent four days in Palmyra exploring the Temple of the Sun, the great colonnade of 15,000 Corinthian columns, and the Tomb Towers. William made notes of everything and collected many antiques such as coins and terracotta tablets. His last day in Palmyra was a heavy one climbing ladders to explore tomb towers and falling into an underground burial chamber, where he was imprisoned for an hour in pitch darkness with what turned out to be 1500 Palmyrian skeletons.

### *Return to Damascus*

One of the party was anxious to get back to Damascus and so was William - Annie had been in indifferent health and so the two left ahead of the main group. Not as it turned out a particularly wise move. Managing to skirt unseen around a large Arab encampment during the first night, they were not so fortunate the next morning. Four horsemen armed with long spears, flint pistols, and a blunderbuss blocked their path and demanded that they strip and hand over all their possessions.

William had always claimed that Arabs when spoken to in their own language by an authoritative voice would back down, now decided to put his theory to the test. He told them that he and his colleague had superior weapons and would begin by shooting their horses from under them. Now, little is more precious to a Bedouin than his horse and after a tense standoff the Arabs eventually galloped off, but not before one of them discharged his blunderbuss at William. 'The report of the shot was very loud', William recorded 'and the discharge tore up the ground around us and it seemed to sweep my mare almost off her feet'.

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<sup>5</sup> For Part 1, see FoWNC Newsletter 88 (January 2017)

<sup>6</sup> Sir Richard Francis Burton KCMG FRGS (1821–1890), orientalist and explorer, is interred together with his wife Isabel in a remarkable tomb in the shape of a Bedouin tent in the cemetery of St Mary Magdalen Roman Catholic Church, Mortlake

William had two wounds, one in his chest and the other to his left hand. The nearest town was a five-hour ride away, and he had little choice but to continue his journey. When they arrived in the town one of the projectiles in his chest was easily removed with a penknife, but the others remained with him for a further 13 years before eventually working their way out. They are now family heirlooms!

After resting for only two hours, during which time he appears to have been more concerned for his beloved mare than himself William set off again, this time alone. His banker friend, totally exhausted, opted for what seemed the more prudent choice of waiting for the main party. Injured and very tired, but still facing fourteen hours in the saddle William must have hoped for an uneventful journey, but it was not to be.

Two armed Bedouin confronted him this time, and again he employed the same assertive tactic. But now he was alone and injured. This time the tactic really would have to work! In the event, after a volley of confrontational remarks from both sides, the Bedouin threw down their arms and William invited them to share his biscuits, dates and cheese, to which they added dried olives and nuts. William gave them copies of the Gospels in Arabic, and one of the men remained very loyal to William during the remainder of his time in Damascus.

William rode on through another cold night which he described as the 'longest he ever remembered'. But the dawn came at last and he 'entered Damascus as the sun touched the snowy crest of Mount Hermon and the criers from the minarets called the faithful to prayers'.

### *The Hamath Inscriptions*

Later in the same year William was to make his second and most important journey of exploration. The inscriptions at Hamath, a city 140 miles north of Damascus, were carved on stone and thought to relate to the ancient Hittite nation mentioned in the Bible. Several attempts to secure these inscriptions had been made, but all had failed due to the hostility of the local people.



*William Wright at work*

From a Christian point of view it was important to prove the existence of the Hittite nation for although mentioned in the Bible, secular historians were sceptical that in fact such people as the Hittites had existed. Indeed, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gave credence to that view in its 1872 edition. William's opportunity came when the new Governor of Syria invited him and the British Consul to take part in a tour of Hamath. The Governor was keen to improve the condition of his people and was eager to glean from his two guests any ideas on how this might be done. In return William was able to obtain his invaluable support in securing the inscriptions.

When they arrived, and the locals learned of their intentions there was a danger that the inscriptions would be destroyed so a guard was placed on them overnight. The next day William directed operations. The removal of the stones he says was effected by an army of shouting men, who kept the city in an uproar the whole day. Two stones had to be taken out of the walls of inhabited houses, and one of them was so large that it took fifty men and four oxen a whole day to drag it a mile.

The other stones were split in two and the inscribed parts were carried on the backs of camels. William wanted to make exact copies, so he sent men for gypsum and with the aid of the consul he spent two days brushing and cleaning four large stones, before making two sets of plaster casts.

The stones were sent to the museum in Constantinople and William sent the casts to the British Museum and to the Palestine Exploration Fund in London. With the casts went William's suggestion these were Hittite remains. As practically nothing was known about the Hittites at that time, William's theory was received with ridicule. However, the securing of the Hamath stones was to be the first step in the rediscovery of the Hittite nation. It was not until 1955 that all the hieroglyphs were finally deciphered.

*The British and Foreign Bible Society.*

On the domestic front it seemed for a time that things were going well. Annie's health appeared to be holding up and their fourth child was born in May 1873. But it was not to last and by 1874 her health had again broken down and in December of that year William was forced to take his family to the more congenial atmosphere of Beirut. But by February 1875 it was clear Annie's health was not improving and a return home became inevitable. The workload was also beginning to tell on William and while attempting a final gruelling tour of the mission outstations his health also broke down, and this time he was forced to accompany his wife and family home. The days of William Wright the missionary adventurer were over.



*Annie Wright's grave at Norwood*

In 1876 still aged only 39 William Wright took up the post of editorial superintendent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. This was an important administrative and academic post, which he was to hold for 23 years. During those years 150 translations of the Bible were made. This involved him in an enormous amount of correspondence with translators, scholars, and missionaries all over the world.

William was now at the centre of things in London, and with his friendly and scholarly nature made many friends and became known to a very wide circle. We can imagine what a complete change in their way of life the move from Damascus to London must have meant for William and Annie. I suspect Annie with her indifferent health was better pleased than William to be living in the semi-rural South London suburb of Norwood. But tragedy was to follow.

Their fourth son and fifth child, Charlie was born on 6 October 1877 and soon afterwards Annie died from the tuberculosis that had been so unrelenting in pursuit of the McKee family. William was devastated, feeling deeply the irony of losing his beloved Annie in the leafy suburbs of South London when she had survived childbirth, disease, and danger in Damascus. But the practicalities of life soon began to crowd in and William had five children to provide for. During the difficult time after the bereavement William's niece helped look after the family.

Eventually in 1880 William, now aged 43, married again. His bride, Sophia Davison, was the rich, well connected daughter of a prosperous London solicitor. Writing many years later one of the boys was to describe Sophia as 'English of the English, a lady of great ability, charm and goodness, but without the faintest insight into minds like ours, and constantly horrified at our wild Irish ways'. As for poor Sophia, at 40 and given her genteel background, taking on this nomadic Irish family must have been a tremendous shock. William and Sophia had three daughters, the eldest of whom was the mother of Sir John Biggs-Davison (1918–1988), the erstwhile Conservative MP for Epping Forest.

Added to his five children by Annie this was now a family of eight plus the two adults. Larger accommodation was required and it came in the form of *Woolsthorpe* a large, three storied double fronted house set in its own grounds on The Avenue, Upper Norwood (now Dulwich Wood Road). In the basement there were kitchen quarters and a lower hall where the boys could play. There was a conservatory with a fountain and William had a study on the first floor. The staff



consisted of a cook, a parlour maid, and a gardener. When the girls were young there was a nurse and later on they had a French nursery governess.

### *The Hamath Stones*

In 1873, whilst William was still in Damascus, the casts of the Hamath stones had arrived in London. They caused a great stir, but his claim that they might have been Hittite remains had not been accepted. Now back in London, he wrote an article for the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* expanding his theory. The same year the Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford, The Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce (1845–1933), wrote an article supporting William's interpretation of the finds. Sayce visited parts of Syria in 1879 and came to the conclusion that rock sculptures he found there were also Hittite.

In 1880 Sayce gave an epoch-making lecture on the Hittite discoveries to the Society of Biblical Archaeology. This lecture made headlines in the daily newspapers and the Hittite nation dead and gone for 3,000 years suddenly became a topic of widespread interest. William's deserved recognition came thick and fast. In 1882 he was awarded an honorary DD by Glasgow University for his work in initiating the research. He was also made a member of the Council for the Society for Biblical Archaeology, and in 1886 a Fellow of

the Royal Geographical Society. In 1884 William published *The Empire of the Hittites*. This was the first major work on the Hittites and thenceforth many scholars from many countries were to devote their working lives to this area of study.

### *Final Years*

In 1890 William went to represent the Bible Society at a conference in Shanghai of all the Society's missions in China. Sophia went with him. They called at Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Canton on the outward journey and returned via San Francisco, Chicago, and New York. But this was not a pleasure cruise and William's work at the conference has been described by the British and Foreign Bible Society as his crowning achievement – whilst in China he persuaded the missionary conference there to create an efficient organization for producing union versions of the Bible under five different forms.



*The Wright family gravestone at Norwood (grave 16,899, square 39)*

cessant duties at his office, together with his studies and writing, were beginning to manifest themselves. The Bible Society arranged for him to have two winter holidays on the Riviera at Cannes, but his health did not improve. As he expected the end came suddenly whilst he was at home on 31 July 1899. He was buried in the family grave at Norwood. His widow Sophia died aged 99 in June 1939. William's son The Rev. William David Wright MA (1867–1888), Presbyterian Minister at Kingston-on-Thames, is also commemorated on the family gravestone at Norwood.

Incredibly the incidents that followed William all his life did not desert him in China. A letter written to his son at sea between Shanghai and Nagasaki described his latest scrape:

“A great scaffold had been erected for 450 people. We had just taken our seats upon it when it began to collapse some dreadful idiot shouted ‘Jump, jump’. I sang out ‘Don’t jump, sit still and you will be safe’. My shout was taken up and repeated all along the scaffold and a fearful catastrophe avoided. Only a few were badly hurt, no more than a dozen, I came down gently on top of four fat men but my legs were bent up under the seats and I thought they were both broken, but I was up in time to catch Hudson Taylor as he floated down”.

Back in London, in 1893 William published *The Brontes in Ireland* simultaneously in the US and in England. It was a terrific success and ran into three editions in the same year. *Palmyra and Zynobia* was published in 1894, again on both sides of the Atlantic.

William was now approaching 60 and heart problems, exacerbated by the strain of in-



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# The Rev Charles Mitchell Birrell (1811-1880)

Claire Grey

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Charles Birrell was an influential Baptist minister in Liverpool. His cousin by marriage was the social reformer Josephine Butler née Grey (1828–1906). Charles' youngest son, The Rt Hon Augustine Birrell KC, was Chief Secretary in Ireland, 1907–16. In this post, he was praised for enabling tenant farmers to own their property, and for extending university education for Catholics, but he resigned in the aftermath of the Easter Rising having failed to recognize the threat posed by Sinn Fein.

Born on 12 April 1811 at Kirkcaldy in Fife to Ebenezer, a merchant, and Mary Jane Birrell née Mitchell, Charles was educated at Edinburgh University. Having decided to join the church, he trained at the Baptist College in Stepney<sup>7</sup> where students studied for 4 years and were expected to read Virgil in Latin and the New Testament in Greek. He left the college in 1835 and became a Minister at the Byrom Street Chapel in Liverpool in 1836, the Baptist Magazine describing it as in 'a very low and thickly populated part of the town'.

Charles' younger brother Ebenezer was born on 17 July 1820. He also studied for the ministry at the Baptist College, Stepney, but died of consumption at the home of their sister Euphemia Dunn on Champion Grove, Camberwell, on 13 December 1841.<sup>8</sup> He was in turn buried at Norwood (grave 382, square 40; gravestone laid flat). Charles wrote a eulogy of him called *A memoir of Ebenezer Birrell, late of Stepney College, London – By his brother*. It included a letter from Ebenezer dated 5 March 1839 that describes his 'conversion'. Published for 1s 6d in 1843, it was critically acclaimed.

## *The Grey Family and the Pembroke Chapel*

Charles married Harriet Jane Grey (1811–1863) in Edinburgh on 8 March 1837. Harriet was the daughter of the Rev. Henry Grey (1778–1859) of Stenton, Edinburgh, who campaigned against slavery and for political reform. His wife was Charles' cousin, the intelligent and courageous Margaretta Grey (1787–1858), aunt of Josephine Butler.



*Charles Birrell (photograph from Josephine Butler's album)*

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<sup>7</sup> This became Regent's Park College, London (1856–1927), and was succeeded by Regent's Park College, Oxford

<sup>8</sup> Euphemia had married the educationalist Henry Dunn (1800–1878). They are both buried at Norwood (grave 10,491, square 41)



Margaretta's sister Mary had married the Rev. Lundie and was well known for her memoirs and a book on education. Their son Robert Henry Lundie (1824–1895) was a Presbyterian minister in Liverpool and in time took the memorial services for both Harriet and their son Charles Birrell jnr at the Pembroke Chapel.

In 1838 Charles Birrell led a group who seceded from the Byrom Street Chapel after a new strict Baptist minister practiced closed communion. The Pembroke Chapel was opened in 1839 and was described as 'built of white freestone, with a portico of four columns. The interior is substantial, elegant, and chaste and enlivened with an excellent organ'. It adopted open membership in 1840 so that anyone, including those who had not been baptized, could join. By October 1866 *The Baptist* noted: 'The Pembroke Chapel, Rev. C. M. Birrell, minister, who is also too well known and esteemed to need any remark here. Members 393, Sunday scholars 514, teachers 49'.

Charles contributed to leading Baptist Educational and Missionary Institutions. He was a member of the bible translation society. A book of memorial sermons from the Myrtle Street & Pembroke Chapels by Birrell was published in 1864. On the Sunday after a severe storm he spoke on board the floating chapel of the Port. *The Winds and Waves Subject to Christ* was printed on page 297 of the weekly *Christian Teacher* in 1838. To the modern reader it is not comforting. He paints a dreadful picture of tragedy and uses a disaster as a warning to his listeners to repent their sins.

'How dreadful was that event. Last Sabbath evening many congregations were assembled together in peace, fearing no danger, and anticipating no calamity. Yet at that very time the great Mediator, whose claims had been represented in all his sanctuaries throughout our native land, was preparing to visit us with awful exhibitions of his power... Then suddenly came forth the power of his anger. In the course of about three fearful hours, events of most terrible nature, and of still more direful consequences, transpired. Ships going forth, bearing some hundreds of immortal souls, many of them bound to one another by the tenderest ties of nature, were driven to atoms in the boiling and heaving ocean...

The husband saw the waters close over the pallid face of his wife; while the trembling wife, in another instance, saw her husband launched into the abyss; and again, a weeping infant, we are told, was dragged from the lifeless grasp of its parents, who had both perished by each other's side... Sailors, too, each immortal, each destined to the judgment-seat, were sinking on every hand; and as they sunk, it may be, in some instances, profane language and awful curses faded away upon their expiring lips! O who can contemplate such a scene! Who can meditate on its dread hereafter!'

In October 1859 Charles published a book on the life of the missionary Richard Knill (1787–1857), largely edited from Knill's journals, letters, and reminiscences. When his father-in-law the Rev. Henry Grey died Charles published *Thoughts in the Evening of Life. A sketch of the Life of Henry Grey D.D. and passages from the diary of Mrs. Grey*. In 1865 when John Bunyan's *Ernest Inquirer or the Jerusalem Sinner Saved* was reissued, Birrell wrote a memoir of its author and in June 1874 when a statue of John Bunyan was unveiled in Bedford, he gave a lecture on Bunyan's life and work at the Bunyan Meeting House.

In 1868 his address delivered at Bristol introducing a discussion on the Rev. William Landels' paper on *Ministerial Failures* was printed. Landels had urged ministers against

indolence saying that only by working hard on sermons could men be moved towards God and heaven. In 1871 Charles' address to the Annual Session of the Baptist Union was published as a 12-page pamphlet. Charles also contributed his reminiscences in the introduction to a *Memorial of late Rev W. Best BA*, a book made up of selections of Best's letters and poems (1877).

### *Family Life*

The Birrells were living in Pembroke Place in 1841 with their children Henry, 3, born in Edinburgh, and Charles, 1, and Mary, 4 months, both born in Liverpool. By 1851 they were living at Olive Lane, Wavertree, with their children Henry, 13, Charles 11, Harriet, 6, Emily Grey, 5, Mary Olive, 3, and Augustine, 1. Charles attended the Edinburgh Academy 1853–6, but died in 1858, aged 18.<sup>9</sup> At the time of his death he was living at 18 Holland Terrace, Edge Hill.



*Norwood: Birrell Family headstone*

Charles snr was absent on the night of the 1861 census, but Harriet and their children Henry, 23, Emily, 15, Mary Olive, 13, and Augustine, 11, were living at 18 Duke Street, North Liverpool. Sadly, Harriet died aged 51 in 1863 at 8 Chatham Place. Daughters Emily Grey and Harriet married in 1869, while Mary Olive moved away. Harriet died aged only 27 after the birth of her first child. By the time of the 1871 census Charles was living at 8 Chatham Place with two servants.<sup>10</sup> Mary Olive aged 23 was living with her married sister Emily Grey (–1919) and her husband Edward Medley (also a Baptist minister) in Goswell Street, Clerkenwell.

### *Josephine Butler*

In 1865 Josephine Butler had moved to Liverpool when her husband George Butler (1819–1890) was made Principal of Liverpool College. She later wrote ‘Among our first and best helpers in our own town was my cousin, Charles Birrell, a Baptist Minister – there existed a strong friendship between him and my husband.’ Josephine was mourning the death of her

<sup>9</sup> Charles Birrell and the Rev. F.A. West had opened the Dissenters' portion of the Liverpool Necropolis (Low Hill Cemetery, now Grant Park) in 1856, and Charles jnr was buried there. Other burials there are his daughters Eleanor (d. 19 March 1853 at Olive Lane, aged 10 yr) and Catherine Evangeline Euphemia (d. 19 June 1853 also at Olive Lane, aged 7 months), his wife Harriet and his mother Mary Jane Birrell. All the graves in the cemetery were grassed over in 1919

<sup>10</sup> Chatham Place was the address of Charles' son Henry Grey Birrell (1837–1908), a merchant's Clerk, in 1891 when he was granted probate on his uncle the Rev. Edward John Grey's estate. Charles' mother Mary died at 8 Chatham Place on 27 August 1869, aged 87, probate being granted to Augustine

daughter Eva, who had died aged 5 after falling 40 feet from a staircase the previous year. After discussions with Birrell, she volunteered to work at the Brownlow Hill Workhouse, which Birrell visited regularly. On her first visit she sat on the floor and unpicked old tarred rope with the women there. ‘Picking oakum’ was a punishment used for prostitutes and unmarried mothers, amongst others. She then set up a refuge for such women in 1867; Birrell would give her the addresses of destitute women living in the city.

Josephine believed in women’s education, suffrage, property rights, and equal wages. By 1869 she was campaigning to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, comparing it to the campaign against slavery. These Acts, passed in secret, allowed the government to forcibly examine women for signs of sexual diseases and imprison them if they were infected. Josephine felt strongly this was immoral. If women were the sinners then men were more so. In effect the government was legislating for prostitution to continue. On 18 March 1870 Birrell spoke in her support at a working men’s meeting in Richmond Hall, Liverpool. He said that as a woman she was best able to speak for women and that it was God who impelled her to leave her family to speak for them. However, she was criticized for talking about the matter at all.

### *Final Years and Legacy*

Charles had poor health throughout his life. He had suffered the death of his wife and several children and his own last illness was ‘prolonged and severe’. Despite this and the fiery nature of his sermons his cousin the Rev. Lundie remembered him as a ‘comforter of the sick and sad, having subdued intensity of emotion’.

His ill health forced Charles to retire in 1872 after 36 years in Liverpool. His congregation presented him with a gift of £2,600 and he gave £500 of it to start a fund to help poor ministers. He stayed in Liverpool for a time and then in retirement moved to London to live with his sister. He returned to Liverpool once a year and stayed with his cousin Henry Lundie.

Charles died on 16 December 1880 having suffered from bowel cancer for 6 months. He died at 12 Elliot Place, Blackheath, the home of his sister Euphemia (d. 1879) and her husband, who had died in 1878. He is buried at Norwood together with his brother Ebenezer. His personal estate was valued at £20,000. The family headstone in the cemetery survives, although laid flat.

Charles and Harriet’s eldest son Henry became a banker. Their daughter Mary Olive (1848–1926) was a novelist who wrote books with strong female characters who had paid jobs, smoked cigarettes, and ran away and married against their parent’s wishes.

IN  
Loving Memory  
.....OF.....  
EBENEZER BIRRELL  
STUDENT FOR THE MINISTRY  
DIED 30 DECEMBER 1841  
AGED 21  
AND OF HIS BROTHER  
CHARLES MITCHELL BIRRELL  
PASTOR FOR 34 YEARS  
OF PEMBROKE CHAPEL LIVERPOOL  
WHO DIED 16 DECEMBER 1880  
IN THE 70<sup>th</sup> YEAR OF HIS AGE  
ALSO TO THE DEAR MEMORY  
.....OF.....  
HARRIET JANE GREY  
BELOVED WIFE OF  
CHARLES MITCHELL BIRRELL  
WHO DIED 26 OCTOBER 1863  
AND LIES WITH KINDRED DUST  
IN LIVERPOOL

THANKS BE UNTO GOD WHO GAVETH THEM THE  
VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

*Inscription on the Birrell family gravestone*

She became friends with a group of other independent women, socialists, and activists who met in the British Museum Reading Room such as Annie Besant (1847–1933). Whether her father would have approved of her novels is not known: she published them from 1883–1902, i.e. after his death.

The Birrells' youngest son Augustine (1850–1933) was a Liberal MP, barrister, academic, and author. His reputation never recovered from the shock of the Easter Rising, for which he avowed responsibility, even though his wife Eleanor had been suffering from an inoperable brain tumour that eventually caused her to lose her sanity and which must have affected his capacity for work.<sup>11</sup>

Augustine Birrell was noted for his sense of humour, which was called *Birrelling*. In dictionaries of quotations some of his witty epigrams, for example 'That great dust-heap called history', have achieved fame as 'Birrellisms'. He died in Chelsea on 20 November 1933, aged 83.



*Augustine Birrell KC MP*



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## Recent FOWNC Events

Jill Dudman

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On 18 February cemetery and cremation historian Dr Brian Parsons drew a large audience when he kindly presented a survey of the cemeteries of South London, with views of chapels and of a few major monuments in each. The earliest were of course Norwood (1837) and Nunhead (1840). However, from the 1850s many local authority Burial Boards began to open cemeteries, early examples nearby being Lambeth (1854) and Camberwell Old (1856) Cemeteries, and later Streatham Cemetery (1892). However, privately-owned cemeteries continued to be founded, including Crystal Palace District (now Beckenham) (1876) and Streatham Park (1909).

The first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening of further cemeteries such as Camberwell New (1926), but with the increasing preference for cremation, the emphasis switched to the construction of crematoria within existing cemeteries. Again, the earliest of these in South London was at Norwood (1915, rebuilt 1956),<sup>12</sup> followed by Streatham

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<sup>11</sup> His first wife, Margaret Mirrielees, died in 1879, only a year after their marriage, and in 1888 he had married Eleanor Tennyson, daughter of the poet Frederick Locker-Lampson (1821–1895) and widow of Lionel Tennyson, son of the poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892)

<sup>12</sup> See: *Cremation at Norwood – The Catacomb Railway* by Colin Fenn (FoWNC Newsletter 69, September 2010) and *The Centenary of West Norwood Crematorium* by Brian Parsons (ICCM Journal 2015; 83, No 4: 57–65)

Park (1936), and Lambeth and Beckenham Cemeteries in the 1950s. In 2013, the first new cemetery for many decades, Kennal Park, was opened in 55 acres of landscaped parkland and woodland at Chislehurst.

On 18 March we were pleased to welcome long-time FoWNC member Michael Slater, Emeritus Professor of Victorian Literature at Birkbeck College. He spoke about the Talfourds, father and son: Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795–1854; grave 1,452, square 34), and Frank Talfourd (1828–1862), who is commemorated on the grave, but is not buried in the vault, having died at Mentone in the South of France. Sir Thomas enjoyed great esteem as a literary figure in his time and was a close friend of Charles Dickens, who dedicated *The Pickwick Papers* to him. Michael read from his poetic drama *Ion*, successful and popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but largely forgotten today. Sir Thomas is remembered more for his legal work and as an MP, notably for his promotion of the *Copyright Act* (1842); copyright was an issue close to Dickens' heart. Frank was a Bohemian character, and writer of classical burlesques. The famous actor Fred Robson (1822–1864; grave 9,307, square 79 – monument destroyed) gave his first notable performance at the Olympic in Talfourd's *Macbeth Travestie* on 25 April 1853. All-in-all Michael gave us a fascinating insight into the Victorian theatre, and the effect of only two establishments being allowed to perform serious drama regularly, the rest having to introduce comedy or musical elements into their performance.



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## Forthcoming Events

**May–September 2017**

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**Introductory tours** will be held on the first Sunday of each month (7 May, 4 June, 2 July, 6 August, 3 September), starting at the cemetery main gate off Norwood Road at 14:30, and lasting for about 2 hours. These tours coincide with West Norwood Feast ([www.westnorwoodfeast.com](http://www.westnorwoodfeast.com)). There is no formal charge, but we welcome donations. To receive notifications of additional events, including occasional members-only tours of the Anglican Catacombs (advance bookings only), please register an email address at [secretary@fownc.org](mailto:secretary@fownc.org) or a telephone number at 020 8670 5456.

### **Saturday 16 September: Open House London**

Tours will start at the cemetery main gate (Norwood Road) at 14:00, 14:30, and 15:00. Visit [www.openhouselondon.org.uk](http://www.openhouselondon.org.uk) for details of other local venues.

### **Other Events**

### **Saturday 20 May, 11.00–17.00: Friends of Nunhead Cemetery Open Day**

Linden Grove, SE15 ([www.fonc.org.uk](http://www.fonc.org.uk)).

### **Saturdays 15 July & 9 September, 11.00-17.00: Brompton Cemetery Catacombs**

Fulham Road, SW10 ([www.brompton-cemetery.org.uk](http://www.brompton-cemetery.org.uk)). Tours (£5) every 30 min from 11:00–16:30. There will also be general cemetery tours (£6) at 14:00 on these days.

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## A Bit of Mystery – Bob Flanagan

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In December last, Deputy Chairman John Clarke pointed out that a postcard that featured the Tite Arch and the original cemetery lodge was for sale on e-bay. I immediately noticed that the mausoleum visible through the arch (grave 30,511, square 124) is no longer there, its site now being covered by cremation plots. The postcard was published by F.A. Hedger of Knight's Hill, printed in Saxony, and appears to date from c. 1905. The cemetery records show that the grave was purchased on 14 April 1903. Those who were interred there were Sydney H. Bott (1903), Caroline Bott (1916), and John Bott (1922). The coffins were removed under Home Office Licence to Catacomb Vault 91 on 24 November 1930 and the ownership of the mausoleum reverted to the Cemetery Company. I wonder when and why the mausoleum was demolished?



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