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FONC News



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The Kersey Monument (with cross) in Nunhead Cemetery 2010. See page 8

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*The Quarterly Journal of the
Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, Nunhead, London, SE15*

MEMBERS' INFORMATION

Subscription and supporter information: Membership of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery costs £2 pa (overseas members pay £10 to cover the cost of sending four copies of *FONC News* abroad each year) renewable on the 1st April each year. We ask members to pay their subscription on this date to avoid sending out individual reminders throughout the year. Donations are always welcome. *New members receive an initial membership card. UK taxpayers are encouraged to sign a Gift Aid declaration.* Please advise FONC if you change your address or, for Gift Aid, you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax equal to the tax FONC reclaims on your donations. Data is held by FONC to help us to send members their copy of *FONC News* and also for the purpose of reclaiming tax. **Contact the Membership Secretary, publications@fonc.org.uk**

Information about FONC and Nunhead Cemetery can be found on our excellent website produced and managed by webmaster Simon Quill at: **www.fonc.org.uk**

Cemetery Opening Times: 8.30am to 4.00pm daily. The cemetery stays open later during the spring and summer months. ***All times are subject to change.*** The cemetery may be closed without notice for safety reasons, for example the danger of injury to visitors during windy and stormy weather. Please contact the cemetery staff on **020 7732 9535** for latest information.

Publications and Enquiry Desk: A wide range of books and leaflets about Nunhead Cemetery are available and on sale at FONC's Portakabin every Sunday from 2.00pm to 4.00pm (except December, January and February when we are only there for guided tours) weather and volunteers permitting.

FONC Meetings and Events: Committee meetings take place on the *3rd Thursday of each month (except August when there is no meeting).* *Committee meetings are open to ordinary members who may attend in a non-voting capacity.* Meetings are currently taking place in the Function Room at the Old Nun's Head pub, Nunhead Green, LONDON, SE15 3QQ. If you would like to attend a meeting please email publications@fonc.org.uk for details. Occasional talks, walks, presentations, and all forthcoming events are announced in *FONC News*.

Nunhead Cemetery Rangers: The ranger gardeners may be contacted on **020 7732 9535**. Their Portakabin is located just inside the Limesford Road entrance.



Season's greetings to all our readers

Editor: Ron Woollacott

Subeditor: Gwyneth Stokes

Contributors to this issue: Rex Batten, RGS Hunter, Paul N Rossi,
Carol Stevenson

All other text is by the editor

FONC's CHRISTMAS SOCIAL & LECTURE

Thursday 16th December 2010 at 7.30pm

Old Nun's Head pub (function room - upstairs)

15 Nunhead Green, London SE15 3QQ

YOUR GREATEST FEAR: BEING BURIED ALIVE

*Few people can contemplate this ultimate of
horrors without being chilled to the marrow*

An illustrated talk by Robert Stephenson

Seasonal refreshments will be available

Donations to offset costs most welcome

The Old Nun's Head Pub

15 Nunhead Green, LONDON, SE15 3QQ

It is our aim is to create an all inclusive local pub so please come along and have a nose. We are now open at midday with a new lunch menu, tea, coffee and cakes.

Hope to see you soon. Cheers, Lou and Dan.

James John Berkley (1819-1862) **Monument in Camberwell Old Cemetery**

by Paul N Rossi

Visitors to Camberwell Old Cemetery must be struck with the large number of impressive monuments. They are a reflection of the wealthy and successful people who lived in Victorian South London.

One monument that cannot be missed is over the grave of James John Berkley, a civil engineer responsible for some of the most remarkable feats of railway construction in India. The monument, which was paid for by subscription from friends, is on a corner plot, about 150 yards from the main entrance. Although the railings that once surrounded the monuments have gone and the effects of weathering are obvious, it still dominates.

Berkley was born in Islington of a wealthy middle-class family. He was educated at King's College, London, and then became articled to



James John Berkley's monument in Camberwell Old Cemetery. Photo: Paul N Rossi

a civil engineer. In 1839 his career took off when he became assistant to, perhaps, the greatest railway engineer Robert Stephenson. He helped build the lines to Northampton and Peterborough, and then the Staffordshire lines through the Churnet and Trent valleys.

He must have so impressed Stephenson that the latter recommended him for the post of chief resident engineer to the Great Peninsular Railway. Berkley took up the appointment in 1850. At that time, the central lowland of India, called the Deccan Plateau, was isolated from Bombay and the west coast by the rugged and formidable mountain range called the Western Ghats. Berkley surveyed, planned and engineered the main railway routes that would cut across the mountains from Bombay, and link Bombay to Allahabad to the north east, and Hyderabad in the south east, and eventually to the east coast. The construction of the inclines at Thal for the NE line and at Bhore for the SE line were regarded as astonishing engineering achievements.

The construction of these railways claimed the lives of many thousands of Indian workers, and Berkley himself did not live to see the lines across the Western Ghats completed. Exhausted by his work and illness, he returned to England and died at his home in Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham, on 25th August 1862. He was 43 years old. ■

NB: Camberwell Old Cemetery is in the care of the London Borough of Southwark, along with Nunhead Cemetery and Camberwell New Cemetery, and is well worth a visit. It is situated in Forest Hill Road, London, SE22, about a mile from Nunhead Cemetery, and was established in 1856 by the Vestry of the Parish of Camberwell because the chairman of the newly set up burial board disliked the profit-making private cemeteries such as those at Nunhead and Norwood. Ed.

Mrs Mary Lewis

FONC Member No 168

**Mrs Mary Lewis of New Cross, London SE14,
a valued member of FONC for over 26 years,
sadly passed away on the 4th August 2010**

~ Rest in Peace ~

IN MEMORIAM - BERT BARNES

by Rex Batten

Bert Barnes, who died on the 31st July 2010 after a long illness, will be remembered for his immense contribution to the memory of the Walworth Scouts who lost their lives in the Leysdown tragedy in 1912.

Bert was for many years a councillor for Leysdown in Essex and we owe him a great debt. He organised a memorial service to the Scouts in Leysdown and went on to his great achievement which was the erection of a permanent memorial, a three ton piece of Kentish ragstone, on which is a bronze plaque bearing the names of the boys who lost their lives off the Kent coast. The stone stands in the cemetery overlooking Warden Point where the tragedy occurred.

The stone and the lych-gate, erected as a war memorial, were dedicated on the 6th August 1995 in a splendid service attended by members of the British Legion and local Scouts who laid crosses at the foot of the memorial, one for each of the boys drowned.

Kim Mayo and I represented FONC. It was fitting that Kim, who as a boy watched the funeral in 1912, and later became a Scout Master for Nunhead, was asked to perform the unveiling.



*Memorial erected at Leysdown in 1995 to the memory of the Walworth Scouts
Photo: Rex Batten*

The Friends of Nunhead Cemetery pay their tribute to Bert who ensured that an important piece of scouting history will be remembered, and extend our condolences to his wife, daughter and son. There could have been no better final tribute to Bert than the scattering of his ashes around the memorial stone.■

Rex Batten is the author of 'The Leysdown Tragedy - an account of the tragic deaths and spectacular funeral of eight Walworth Scouts who were drowned at Leysdown in 1912', which was published by FONC in 1992. The eight Scouts, together with a boy from the Training Ship Arethusa who died in the same incident, were buried at Nunhead. Rex's later publication, 'The Walworth Scouts', published by FONC in 2003, is a souvenir booklet of the dedication of the replica plaque from the Sir Giles Gilbert Scott Memorial installed in the chapel at Nunhead 'The Leysdown Tragedy' is now out of print, but copies of Rex's souvenir booklet 'The Walworth Scouts' are still available from FONC's publications stall in the cemetery and on line. Ed.

WEST NORWOOD CEMETERY HOSTS NATIONAL FEDERATION AGM 2010

Report by Carol Stevenson

The 2010 Annual General Meeting of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends was hosted by the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery on 31st July. Jeff Hart, Carole Tyrrell and Ron Woollacott attended on behalf of FONC. Also in attendance were FONC committee members Gwyneth Stokes, NFCF Secretary and Carol Stevenson, NFCF editor. Something like 75 delegates from 25 Cemetery Friends groups attended. Many delegates started the day by visiting St Luke's Church (one of four 'Waterloo' churches) opposite the cemetery and attending the official opening of its memorial garden.

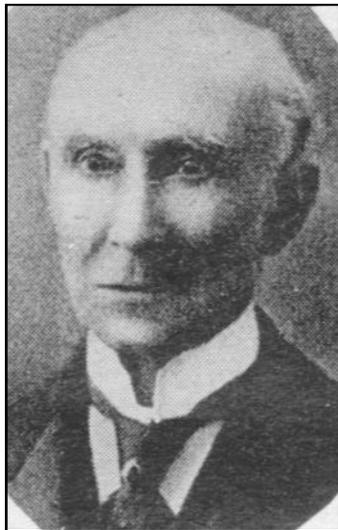
The Mayoral party then crossed over the road for a civic welcome to the NFCF at Nettlefold Halls. Illustrated introductions to the cemetery's history and highlights were followed by a talk on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens by Dr Brent Elliott. West Norwood has many impressive monuments and the included visits to the catacombs and the Greek chapel.

The AGM (chaired by FOWNC's Bob Flanagan in Arthur Tait's absence) followed lunch with proposed changes to the constitution being accepted but the definitions of membership being returned for further consideration. Next year's AGM will be at Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth, on 11th June 2011. ■

~ *BURIED AT NUNHEAD, No 14* ~
ROBERT KERSEY OF HURST LODGE, LEE
Footwear Manufacturer & Entrepreneur
by Ron Woollacott

Occupying a prominent position on the right side of the central avenue leading to the Anglican chapel, stands the impressive monument to Robert Kersey of Hurst Lodge, Lee (see cover photograph). Robert Kersey, son of Robert Kersey senior, boot and shoe maker of High Street, Deptford, was baptised at St Nicholas, Deptford, on 2nd August 1818. He married Caroline Charlotte, daughter of Richard Osborn, fisherman, at St George the Martyr, Southwark on 23rd January 1838. By the age of 21 Robert junior was running his own boot and shoe manufactory in the Borough and at 46 High Street, Deptford. His father, Robert senior, died at his residence, 6 Florence Road, New Cross in 1858, and was buried in the Dissenters section at Nunhead, where his wife Mary had been laid to rest some 12 years earlier.

Having made a small fortune from the family footwear business, Robert junior decided to broaden his horizons. He founded the Globe Permanent Benefit Building Society and the English Land Investment Company, whose offices were situated in New Cross Road, Deptford. He also founded the Bexhill Water and Gas companies.



Robert Kersey Jnr (1818-1904)

In about 1880 Robert junior bought Hurst Lodge, a handsome Georgian mansion at High Street, Lee (then in Kent). His wife, Caroline Charlotte, died in 1885 aged 69, and was buried at Nunhead. Robert junior died on 14th October 1904, aged of 86, leaving a personal fortune of £234,623. He too was buried in the family vault at Nunhead.

Walter Robert Kersey, the elder son of Robert Kersey junior, a solicitor, and a partner in the firm of Sandom and Kersey of 52 Gracechurch Street, London, EC, died on 27th August 1923, aged 85 and was buried at Nunhead.

Hurst Lodge was sold in 1924 and became the administrative HQ of Patterson Edwards Ltd, pram and toy manufacturers,

and, later still, a warehouse for Decca, the record manufacturers. Hurst Lodge was pulled down in 1983 and Halley Gardens housing development now occupies the site.

The Kersey monument (grave number 17937, square 109) was badly damaged during the blitz in 1940 when a bomb exploded on the main avenue destroying a lime tree, a mausoleum and several small monuments on both sides of the avenue. The secretary of the London Cemetery Company wrote to the owners of the grave informing them of the damage, but the letter was returned marked 'gone away'.



Arms of Robert Kersey Jnr

Happily, the Kersey monument has since been restored with the help of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2000, and the cross surmounting the monument, which was damaged beyond repair, has been replaced using matching granite.■

WAR GRAVES IN NUNHEAD CEMETERY

FONC member Edward Barclay, accompanied by Ron Woollacott, chairman of FONC, and committee member Malcolm Collins, met at Nunhead Cemetery on Thursday 23rd September 2010, together with Avril Kirby, manager of Southwark Cemeteries, and two officials from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). All four main war graves plots in the cemetery were visited.

The officials were shown the site of the First World War British war graves in squares 74 and 89, where over 270 servicemen lie buried. FONC has suggested that this area, which is currently a heap of rubble and scrub, should be cleared and marked by a memorial. The officials agreed to report back on the matter. They also agreed that the Australian and Canadian burial plots were not being maintained to the CWGC's usual standard.

Edward Barclay suggested that individual marker stones should be placed on the Second World War plot which is currently occupied by the 1980s First World War monument.

The officials were aware of several servicemen buried at Nunhead who were not yet commemorated on the official war memorial. They took notes of all our concerns and promised to see what could be done.■

AT THE GRANGE - A RANGE OF FAME THE GRANGE CEMETERY, EDINBURGH (Part 1)

by R G S Hunter

I suggest the title for this series of articles because of the variety of reasons why some of those that rest in the Grange Cemetery at Edinburgh achieved fame or, in at least two instances, had fame thrust upon them.

Spiritual matters are well represented. Here we have the memorial to the Revd Dr Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), leader of the 'Disruption' in the Church of Scotland. He was born in Anstruther, Fife, the sixth child of a ship owner and dyer, and even at the age of three he wanted to become a minister. Graduating from the University of St Andrews, he was licensed as a preacher at the age of 19. After a time as a lecturer in mathematics at St Andrews, he was ordained a minister in 1803. His skill as a preacher was such that congregations would assemble as much as four hours before a service to ensure a place to hear him speak.

Lord Cockburn, a close friend, described Thomas Chalmers thus: 'He is awkward and has a low, rough and husky voice, a guttural articulation, a whitish eye and a large dingy countenance. It would not be difficult to find him ugly. But he is saved from this by singular modesty, kindness and simplicity of manner, a strong expression of calm, thought and benevolence. The magic lies in the concentrated intensity which agitates every fibre of the man'.



Grave of the Revd Dr Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) Photo: RGS Hunter

In 1843 Thomas Chalmers and 470 other ministers left the Church of Scotland, strongly believing that ministers should be appointed by local congregations and not by wealthy patrons as was the custom of the time. Thus, dramatically, was born the Free Church of Scotland. In 1845 Dr Chalmers became Principal of the Free Church College, but time did not allow him to make a major contribution in this important appointment as he passed away peacefully at his home after Sunday service on 30th May 1847.

Nearby is the resting place of a great friend of Dr Chalmers, Hugh Miller (1802-56), a dominant figure in both science and religion, regarded by many as an early and dedicated environmentalist. He was born in Cromarty, a sparsely populated area of Scotland, so was free during his childhood to wander round close to nature and appreciate the rocks, the sea, the plants, and their effect on life in the area. During his apprenticeship as a stonemason from the age of 16 he developed an interest in geology, especially in fossils, making important discoveries of fossil fish in the Devonian rocks of Scotland. His articles published in *The Witness* magazine were collected in his book *The Old Red Sandstone*. As a pioneer of popular science books he combated Darwinian evolutionary theory with his books *Footprints of the Creator* (1850), *The Testimony of the Rocks* (1857), and *Sketchbook of Popular Geology*, published posthumously in 1859.

He came to Edinburgh in 1824 and was shocked at the squalor in the city. He detested the mean self-interest of those he met while working as a mason during the construction of Niddrie House. Later he returned to Edinburgh as editor of the evangelical Christian paper *The Witness*, and under his leadership its circulation increased rapidly. As a friend and ally of Dr Thomas Chalmers he supported the Free Church of Scotland after the 'Disruption', his outlook confirmed by his numerous publications including his autobiography *My Schools and Schoolmasters* (1854).

But Miller's brilliant mind was also his downfall and paranoia replaced his genius. In his home area there had been a number of violent attacks at night, and he feared that burglars might steal his valuable geological collection displayed at his Portobello home. He began to carry a revolver at night in case of an attack, and kept a dagger and a claymore at his bed-head. He became obsessed with the idea that his brain was disintegrating as he confided in his doctor. After one nightmarish evening he seemed to recover and finished the evening happily with his family, but next morning he was found dead on his study floor killed by a bullet from his own revolver which was found in the bath nearby. On the table was a sheet of paper with the message

continued on next page



Grave of Hugh Miller (1802-1856) Photo by RGS Hunter

‘Dearest Lydia, my brain burns. I must have walked and a fearful dream rises upon me. I cannot bear the horrible thought. God and the Father of Jesus Christ have mercy on mefarewell’. A post-mortem did indeed reveal that Hugh Miller had been suffering from a brain disease.

Unhappily, this was not the end of the tragedy. The revolver which had rusted in the bath was taken to the gunsmith who had supplied the weapon to ascertain how many bullets had been fired. The gun was handed over to the foreman Thomas Leslie with the warning ‘Mind - it is loaded’. Leslie examined the rusty safety catch, held the revolver up to his eye and lifted the hammer to count the bullets, and in an instant the gun went off blowing his brains out. A terrible end for someone who had worked with guns for 25 years. He left a wife and eight children, and was buried in the Grange Cemetery on the same day as Hugh Miller.

Left of Miller’s grave is that of Thomas Nelson (1780-1861), the founder of the publishing firm of Thomas Nelson and Sons, which made its name by reissuing inexpensive editions of established authors. Next to him is his son, also Thomas Nelson (1822-1892), who worked in the family firm and invented the rotary press in 1850 which made high speed printing possible.

to be continued

LONDON OPEN HOUSE WEEKEND & 'HERE LIES ART' EXHIBITION

We have taken part in the London Open House Weekend for several years now, thus enabling visitors to view the crypt in the Anglican chapel and climb the spiral staircase to the top of the carriage porch. Both attractions are usually closed to the public except on our annual Open Day in May and Open House Weekend in September. This year's Open House event took place on Saturday and Sunday 18th and 19th September. Tours of the cemetery were arranged for both days and were well attended. Publications and postcards were on sale as usual, as well as a limited supply of 'Chez Elliott Honey' from Nunhead Cemetery's very own beehives which rapidly sold out.

A special attraction this year was 'Here Lies Art!', a public art exhibition of Victorian Funeral Traditions held in the Anglican chapel and curated by Jolanta Jagiello. Around 28 works, including the poignant exhibit shown above, were on display. ■



'Veiled Lady' by Kath Cottee

**Exhibit in the Anglican Chapel,
Nunhead Cemetery, September 2010**

Photo by Carol Stevenson

~ *More Articles Wanted* ~

Why not jot down your favourite memories of Nunhead Cemetery or let us know why you support FONC. We are interested in all the stories you have to tell including those about your ancestors who may rest at Nunhead, and about the other cemeteries you think will be of interest to readers. *We look forward to hearing from you soon.*

NUNHEAD'S NOTABLES

IN 'THE DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY'

by Ron Woollacott

When I began compiling my list of notable men and women buried in Nunhead Cemetery way back in the early 1970s, at least fifty had entries in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, although not all were known to be buried in Nunhead Cemetery.

Since the publication of *Nunhead Notables* (1984) and *More Nunhead Notables* (1995) by FONC, followed by the expanded edition of *Nunhead Notables* in 2002, several 'notables' whose potted biographies first appeared in our publications, have since been 'promoted' to the latest edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. These include: Ada Blanche [real name Ada Cecilia Blanche Adams] (1863-1953), singer and actress; James Breen (1826-1866), astronomer; John Burnett (1842-1914), trade union leader; Jenny Hill (1848-1896), music hall entertainer known as 'The Vital Spark'; Sir Polydore de Keyser (1832-1898), hotelier and politician; Frederick Rogers (1846-1915), bookbinder and trade unionist; Sir John Thwaites (1815-1870), first chairman of the Metropolitan Board of Works; and Thomas Tilling (1825-1893), horse bus pioneer. ■

FONC News - Extra

NUNHEAD CEMETERY has now been added to south London's Green Chain Walk and posts have been installed to indicate the route through the cemetery. Signposts are being installed near both entrances and a leaflet is in preparation as we go to press.

TIM STEVENSON led a party of National Art Fund members on a tour of Nunhead Cemetery on the 11th September 2010. Members of the group were also treated to tours of the chapel and crypt and views of London from the top of the tower. Malcolm Collins and Gwyneth Stokes sold publications and provided light refreshments. The tour raised £320 plus a further £124 for publications sales and donations. We also recruited eight new members!

JEFF HART led a well received reciprocal tour of Nunhead Cemetery for members of the Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery Tunbridge Wells on the 18th July 2010.

~ DIARY DATES ~

► FONC's CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Thursday 16th December 2010 at 7.30pm. YOUR GREATEST FEAR - BEING BURIED ALIVE: Few people can contemplate this ultimate of horrors without being chilled to the marrow - illustrated talk by Robert Stephenson. Old Nun's Head, Nunhead Green, London SE15 3QQ (upstairs). Seasonal refreshments will be available. Donations appreciated.

► GUIDED TOURS OF NUNHEAD CEMETERY

General tours of the cemetery take place on the last Sunday in every month at 2.15pm Meet at the flint circle just inside the main gates. There is no need to book, just turn up on the day. Tours usually take approximately two hours. Publications will be on sale weather and volunteers permitting.

► NUNHEAD CEMETERY ANNUAL OPEN DAY 2011

Saturday 21st May 2011 from 11am to 5pm. Please make a note in your diary. We need more volunteers to come forward and help the regular stalwarts on the day, especially to set up stalls in morning and dismantle stalls at the close of the event. The more helpers we have the easier it is for everyone to enjoy the day.

► VOLUNTARY WORKDAYS

Voluntary workdays take place on the first Sunday in the month from 10am to 4.30pm. New volunteers are always most welcome. Meet at the FONC Portakabin, to the right of the Linden Grove entrance. Stay an hour or two or all day - it's entirely up to you. Appropriate clothing, including sturdy footwear, is essential.

► MONUMENTAL INSCRIPTION RECORDING

Transcribing the inscriptions in Nunhead Cemetery is an important and on-going task. Volunteers meet at the FONC Portakabin near the Linden Grove entrance. *For dates and more information please email publications@fonc.org.uk.*

~ CONTACTS ~

Please send all letters, news items and feature articles for publication to:
publications@fonc.org.uk

COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE: 20th January 2011
(Copy received after this date may be used in a future issue)

Friends of Nunhead Cemetery (FONC)

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www.fonc.org.uk

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member of the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE)

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