

Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

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Newsletter

Popes and Bishops

A Pope, a Bishop, and a Pope who married a Bishop share one grave at Woodbury Park Cemetery. A lukewarm admirer once compared the Revd William Law Pope to a pouter pigeon. Circumferential challenges and homeliness fortunately did not hamper his forty-nine years of energetic ministry at King Charles Chapel. His first task after he took over in 1829, six

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months before the new Holy Trinity Church opened its doors, was to mend the roof and commission from Decimus Burton designs for new candelabra to improve lighting and enable evening services to be held.

Interior of King Charles in Pope's time, with Decimus Burton's candelabra in foreground,

David Bushell is giving a talk about Pope and his circle at King Charles Hall on Saturday November 14th 7.30pm. All are welcome. He has dug out much new information about the life and friends of this leading Victorian citizen of Tunbridge Wells. He has also traced the linked lives of Pope's younger sister Louisa married to his close friend from Oxford days, the Revd Henry Bishop. The Bishops lived in Grove Hill (now called Grove Hill Gardens) and loyally supported Pope's pastoral and educational work.

Grove Hill in 1840 (from lithograph by C. H. Dodd).

Frederick Joseph Barraud

Another new publication since the last Newsletter is David Wakefield's booklet about this eminent Victorian watch and clockmaker. As chronometer supplier to the Navy Barraud contributed to Britain's mastery of the seas, and the mercantile network that became the British Empire. His timepieces

are collectors pieces today. A Barraud clock overlooked from the Sebastopol Admiralty some of the bloody battles of the Crimean War. Another on the observatory at St Helena enabled ships to calibrate their instruments and General Middlemore to make a safe landfall as the island's first Governor and guardian of Napoleon's remains. The Master of the Clockmakers Company came on September 4th to commemorate with us and with the Mayors of Tunbridge Wells and Southborough the 150th anniversary of Barraud's death.

Its purpose is explained in the booklet.

William Willicombe

Dr Philip Whitbourn's booklet on William Willicombe was a hot seller during the Heritage Open Days at Willicombe House and to visitors to the cemetery for the three guided walks we arranged. At our September meeting at the Camden Centre Dr Whitbourn gave us a fascinating overview of Willicombe's heritage in Tunbridge Wells. He brought into sharp perspective how much is being lost as the handsome stuccoed villas and leafy gardens are replaced by blocks of totally unmemorable concrete flats.

Green Flag Mark II awarded

One of the fruits of our Saturday volunteers hard work was the capture of a second coveted Green Flag for Woodbury Park Cemetery following the May inspection reported in the last issue. As in 2008, the contribution of the Friends to this was highlighted in the judges report. We also feature in the "Saving Cemeteries" handbook published in the summer by the National Federation of Cemetery Friends as a case study of good practice.

Vandalism again

Less happy news was the smashing at the end of August of four gravestones and a section of wall bounding the wood. At least £2000 of damage was done. Two memorial stones are beyond repair but we hope to reassemble the remnants of the others flat on the ground.



Parts of broken headstones and the damaged wall.



The Ashby memorial as it was.

One of the lost stones to Nicholas Ashby was a last link with Christchurch history, where the minister the Rev Joseph Ridgeway (he is buried at the top of the cemetery) was Publications Secretary for the Church Missionary Society. Ashby was a CMS clergyman in Jamaica

who came to England aged 39 after developing health problems and worked under Ridgeway at Christchurch. The inscription – now totally destroyed – read:

In memory of the Revd William Nicholson Ashby, Assistant Minister of Christchurch Tunbridge Wells: who, prematurely for his hearers, but not for himself, closed his ministry and his life March 17th 1856 aged 40 years. 'And they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.'

Photographic and other records



Our Chair with Mr Bligh and Councillor Bullock. Note our new "pull-up" display banner.

This sad and pointless destruction underlines the importance of our photographic record of every memorial, a magnificent effort by Michael Devonshire. Three volume sets of pictures — and a user friendly CD — were presented to the local history archive and to Councillor Bullock at a handover ceremony in the reference library. A copy of the CD was also presented to Stuart Bligh, KCC Archives and Local History Manager at Maidstone.

At the same occasion we presented the "Discovery Box" now available for primary schools to borrow for projects at the cemetery. This combines the well tried practicality of clipboards and bug boxes with a memory stick for teachers to download material for class use.

Also now available for public use in the reference library is the first batch of mini-biographies compiled by Jan Holly and her team. Anyone interested in helping with this research and mapping where in Tunbridge Wells they lived is most welcome to join this group. Other projects are correcting transcription errors in the burial records and drawing up a reference list of curates in Tunbridge Wells during the nineteenth century. Conducting funerals in the pouring rain in muddy cemeteries was a task normally delegated to the now forgotten curates.

Autumn Colour



It won't have escaped your attention that this autumn has seen a particularly fine display of berries. The yew hedge planted last spring beside the chapel is settling in nicely as is the rose against the chapel wall. This winter will see more planting along some of the vulnerable boundaries to deter intruders and act as a screen from prospective unsightly developments beyond. This will be much helped if we can persuade the Council to reconnect a tap to allow watering.



The moth trapping evening this year was held in September rather than midsummer in order to record some of the later hatching moths and another is planned for next spring. We are gradually building up a record of a wide range of "smaller wildlife". Any member of the Friends – or a friend of a Friend – who is interested in plant and wildlife recording would be a most welcome addition to our team.

Memorial conservation work

We sadly miss the advice and encouragement of Brian Hayward, Heritage Officer at TWBC, who died in July. One of the last things he did for us, shortly before that, was to confirm a partnership grant from the council where they match funds we ourselves raise to conserve memorials. The major item we plan to tackle this year is the collapsing tomb of Canon Hoare, so that those who come to gaze up at his gothic monument now being repaired at the end of Culverden Park will be able to continue down Woodbury Park Road to pay homage at his actual grave without breaking a leg in the process. Descendants of

Canon Hoare have contributed generously to make this possible.

Repairs on the Cripps memorial are now complete and a ceremony is planned for Saturday 30th January to celebrate his life. Cripps Harries Hall, the legal firm which he founded over 150 years ago, will unveil a new foot-stone which they have commissioned in his honour.

Lecture on Victorian Funerals

The other date to have firmly in your diary is Wednesday 3rd February, when we are joining forces with the Friends of the Museum for a lecture in the Art Gallery on *A grave business: Victorian funeral costumes and customs in Tunbridge Wells*. Brian Kempster will be contributing our part of the evening, and Jo Wiltcher the Museum Curator the other half using clothes and objects from the museum. Numbers have to be limited because of fire regulations: telephone the museum on 01892 554171 to book your place.

Publication prices

The new Pope and Barraud booklets referred to above are £3 and £2 respectively. Either buy your copies at a meeting, or send a cheque made out to FWPC (adding 50p per item for postage) to the Secretary at Bridge House, Culverden Park Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN4 9QX.

Plants wanted

After the great success of our plant sale last June, we plan another at the end of May. Can you help by growing a few plants or cuttings for sale? If so, contact Angela Swain on 01892 541881.

Ideal Christmas gifts

Do buy some of our WPC tea towels as presents for your friends, £4 each, or £10.50 for three, with a choice of green, blue or brown. On sale at our events, or ordered direct from Angela Swain (angelaswain@tiscali.co.uk or 01892 541881).



WPC Burials

5. General Middlemore (1770–1850) and Napoleon

The simple tomb of General Middlemore and his wife Phillis Sophia gives little inkling of his colourful career as a soldier.

His last posting in 1836 was as Governor of St Helena, a key staging post for ships sailing via the Cape. It was also the scene of Napoleon's captivity and his grave.

This was no sinecure. The Honourable East India Company had heavily subsidised the island for over 100 years. Now, London orders were to slash running costs by disbanding the St Helena Regiment and most of the HEIC staff. Needless to say this created much hardship and bitterness towards Middlemore.

In 1840 it was agreed to repatriate Napoleon's body to France. When the Prince de Joinville arrived with his entourage, Middlemore was too ill to greet him personally, deputing that task to his son and aide-de-camp Lieutenant Middlemore. Following meetings at Plantation House, it was announced the transfer would take place on 15th October, exactly twenty five years after Napoleon first set foot on the island.

But first the body had to be checked to ensure this was indeed Napoleon. It took nine hours of excavation by torchlight in pouring rain to open the heavily sealed grave, after which Middlemore came from his sickbed to the cemetery to be present as the four encasing coffins were opened, and the contents verified. Resealed and placed in two further sarcophagi sent from France this huge weight was then hoisted onto an elaborate carriage for its two hour journey down a steep rocky road. Middlemore followed the cortege on foot.

In a contemporary account:

At 3.30, in driving rain, with the citadel and Belle Poule firing alternate gun salutes, the cortege slowly moved along under the command of Middlemore (despite his being very old and ill). A detachment of militia lined the route and during the march down the forts fired their cannon once a minute. Reaching Jamestown, the procession marched between two ranks of garrison soldiers with reversed arms. At 5.30 the funeral procession stopped at the end of the jetty. Middlemore walked painfully over to Joinville, with their brief conversation in French approximately marking the point at which the remains were officially handed over to France. With infinite caution, the heavy coffin was placed in the launch, the French ships (up until then showing signs of mourning) hoisted their colours and all the ships present fired their guns.

The Prince noted in his Journal "General Middlemore was dropping with fatigue".

However the tough old soldier survived to end his days in 1850 among the gentler hills and breezes of Tunbridge Wells. When his widow made her will four months later, she was living with five daughters at Rosehill on London Road, but later moved to Southborough where she died in 1854.



Napoleon on St Helena.



The exhumation.



Handover at the quay-side.



Departure.