



Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

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Newsletter

Cake and canapés



This magnificent cake was provided by the Mayor and Mayoress for a November tea party at the Town Hall to celebrate the Friends' third birthday and to thank all those who clear brambles and ivy, record memorials and research Victorian lives. The butterflies and ladybirds represent the care that is being taken to conserve the cemetery's unique collection of old field plants and wildlife.

A frosty but sunny January morning saw another anniversary celebration, this time at the memorial of William Charles Cripps, newly repaired with the help of Cripps Harries Hall, the law firm he founded in the 1850s. Mulled wine and canapés at the firm's office rounded the event off nicely.

Among other distinguished guests at the ceremony was this interesting visitor, with its remarkable eyes, one green and one blue, like a ghostly representative of all the animals on whose behalf William Cripps used to take prosecutions on behalf of the Tunbridge Wells RSPCA in the 1870s.

A booklet about the lives of three generations of the Cripps family in Tunbridge Wells through nine reigns is now available, price £2.50 .



Woodbury Park in bloom

There is currently a good showing of the snowdrops, primroses, scillas and wild cyclamens planted by our working parties. But there is still plenty of room for many thousand more snowdrops if you care to bring along your own spare bulbs "in the green" and a trowel on a Saturday afternoon. These plantings are a part of our contribution to "Royal Tunbridge Wells in bloom".

And to help your own garden to bloom this summer, be sure to write into your diary Saturday 22nd May from 10.00am to 3.00pm. That's the date of our plant sale outside St John's Church. The success of last year's event showed how people appreciate homegrown stock.

This year's special offers will include some plants grown by the new TWBC Parks and Gardens Director, Mel Henley. We warmly welcome his enthusiastic interest and that of William Benson, our new Council Chief Executive, both of whom have recently toured and admired "the hidden jewel of Tunbridge Wells". All sale proceeds will go towards our memorial repairs work.





Woodbury Park 1876

An exciting find in the Library archives was this picture of how the cemetery looked in 1876 when its memorials were newly erected. Note the handsome wrought iron railings and chains firmly marking out family territory. We now know exactly when all these disappeared. An indignant letter from W C Cripps the younger, dated July 1942, demanded compensation from the Council for the damage done by clumsy workmen to the kerbstones of his family's grave – the one we have just restored – when its railings were removed as scrap to make munitions. Being both a lawyer and former Town Clerk, he got his money.

In this old picture the cedar tree is still little more than a sapling and the ornamental shrubs embellishing individual plots have yet to grow into today's dense greenery. Beyond the headstones lining the lower path – many of which still stand – are glimpses of the open fields that once surrounded the cemetery.

Fire and Ice

Snow and frost are poor friends to sandstone and lime mortar, and some illegal tobogganing down the chapel slopes has not helped. Another recent casualty – this time from fire not ice – is the big clump of pampas grass near the Rev William Pope, though we have rescued and replanted a scorched remnant for posterity. This year's

repairs programme has had to await an improvement in the weather, but is now getting under way again with seven tackled so far.

We shall also have to give more thought to the condition of the paths where the greatly increased number of visitors and dog-walkers, welcome though this is, is causing a lot of wear and tear.

Raising the spirits

First time visitors to the cemetery should be able to find their way round more easily with the help of two new information boards now in preparation by a professional artist. One will replace the temporary display at the gate, with improved space for the Friends notices; and a map marking a suggested walk round 20 of the memorials. The other will be located below the Chapel, beside a new log bench and rubbish bin, and will focus on natural history. Both boards will contain a symbolic small blue butterfly like the holly blues, that those with good eyesight can see fluttering around the tops of the conifers. Besides representing the fragile ecology of the cemetery, the butterfly also signifies a spirit rising to God – an appropriate motif we felt for this area of consecrated ground.



History

The number of mini-biographies lodged in the Reference Library continues to grow – there are now over 100. We plan to post up on our website a list of those so far covered.

You will also find in the Library a file by Jan Holly's history team detailing the clergy who officiated at WPC funerals or who are buried there themselves. One unfortunate curate, the Revd Edward Woods, presided over no fewer than 787 burials in his years attached to Holy Trinity.

The research and transcription work is continuing, and is a real contribution to the local and county archive records, besides being fascinating in its own right. Helpers are most welcome, so do contact Jan Holly on 01892 514833 if you have a few hours to spare for this.

Talks and walks

Our February joint event with the Friends of the Museum "A grave business: funeral customs and costumes in Victorian Tunbridge Wells" was so popular that we couldn't accommodate all those who wanted to come to hear Jo Wiltcher and Brian Kempster.



If you are interested in visiting another Victorian cemetery – on a much larger scale than WPC – we are planning a guided tour of the 56 acres of Nunhead Cemetery in south London on Sunday 18th July. This is one of the Magnificent Seven constructed in the 1840s to replace the old overflowing parish churchyards of London. A group from the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery toured WPC last August and have kindly invited us back. Let June Bridgeman (jbman@btinternet.com or 01892 525578) know if you would like to join in this summer outing. Once we know how many are coming we shall work out the travel details.

At the AGM on 21st May we shall be hearing from Mike Hinton and Lisa de Garston about some Tunbridge Wells Victorians from different walks of life under the title "Rich and poor".

A separate notice about the AGM is enclosed, when we shall elect our Committee to plan events and projects for 2010–11. Have you thought of putting your name forward?

We should also warmly welcome nominations for our panel of expert advisers to whom we turn for ... yes, expert advice about our projects and our finds. In particular we should welcome a botanist or biologist to help us write up our work on the flora of the cemetery. Maybe a teacher in a local school? Do think about this.

Publications update

Recent publication:

William Charles Cripps & Son: Solicitors serving Victorian Tunbridge Wells (£2.50)

Others in print:

Twenty noteworthy people commemorated in monuments set in WPC (£1.50)

Frederick William Barraud: Victorian Clock and Watch Maker (£2)

Jacob Bell – a useful and honourable life (£4)

William Law Pope & Henry Bishop: two clerics in Victorian Tunbridge Wells (£3)

The story of Clayton Stanford Willicombe (£1.50)

William Willicombe – the Cubitt of Tunbridge Wells (£3.95)

The smaller wildlife of WPC (£2)

The trees of WPC – a walk (rev. & illus. edn, £1.50)

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.

Dates for your diary

Fri. 14th May: Moth trapping evening with Keith Palmer
9pm, Woodbury Park Cemetery

Fri. 21st May: AGM, followed by *Rich and poor*, talks by Lisa de Garston and Mike Hinton
7.30pm, Camden Centre

Sat. 22nd May: Plant sale
10am to 3pm, St John's Church green

Sun. 6th June: Children's mini-beast safari, with Dr Ian Beavis
2.30pm, Woodbury Park Cemetery

Fri. 2nd July: Tree walk with Chris Reynolds
7.30pm, Woodbury Park Cemetery

Sun. 18th July: Visit to Nunhead Cemetery

See our website, www.fwpc.org.uk, for later information.

WPC Burials

6. Lieutenant-General Thomas Molyneux Williams KH (1793–1871)

As you walk round the cemetery, you can't miss the handsome granite fountain commemorating Thomas Molyneux Williams. It arrived here by grace of Kent Highways after they replaced it with a mini roundabout on its original site outside the United Reformed Church. The town's loss of one of its few distinctive street monuments was definitely the cemetery's gain.

The Hon F G Molyneux, leading citizen and town benefactor, inaugurated the fountain in 1871 with a eulogy of his kinsman, the General, and a ceremonial sip of water from its iron cup. The Gazette does not record which dog first sampled the canine water bowl below.

Thomas Molyneux had been born in New Brunswick, son of an army officer who in later years became General Sir Thomas Molyneux, Bart. Entering the Royal Navy in 1805 at the age of 12 as a midshipman, Thomas was immediately plunged into the sea battles of the Napoleonic Wars. Like many others he caught a dangerous fever at Walcheren – malaria and typhus were rife – and at the age of 17 was discharged by the Admiralty.

But as soon as he recovered, he became an ensign in the 4th Foot, in Wellington's army in the Peninsula. His army record lists the bloody battles in which he took part during the next three years "without being a day absent from his regiment". He later served in Ireland and Jamaica before going onto the half pay list and securing a steady series of promotions, eventually to Lieutenant General in 1858. In 1834 William IV appointed him a Knight of the Hanoverian Order of Guelph – hence the initials KH after his name.

Around this time he added the suffix Williams, on marrying Annabella Williams. She was a rich widow, 16 years his senior, who owned Penbedw Hall in Flintshire and its iron and lead mines. He settled down as a country gentleman, serving as High Sheriff first of Flintshire then of Denbighshire. In 1852 they sold Penbedw and moved to Geneva where,, among other things, they helped establish Holy Trinity, modelled on an English village church. After Annabella died in 1862 Thomas returned to England. There he married Eliza Bradshaw. They settled in 1, Hungershall Park, Tunbridge Wells, but must have maintained the Geneva connection as Eliza erected this memorial commemorating his "untiring zeal" there, as well as the fountain to his "loving memory" in Tunbridge Wells.

One puzzle in researching his life was why he did not succeed to his father's baronetcy in 1840. The answer it transpires is that his parents did not marry till after 12 of their children were born on account of the lady already having a husband. So the title went to George their youngest and only legitimate son.

