



Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

Newsletter

April 2025 ISSUE No 25

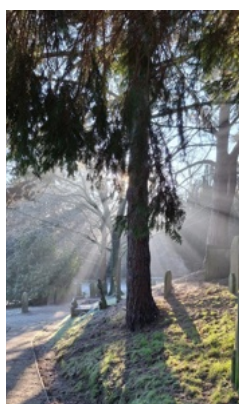
Gardening Team Report by Mike Higgins

Towards the end of 2024 the gardening volunteers spent hours raking up leaves which will be turned into mulch for use later in the year. Planted 400 bulbs to add more spring colour to the cemetery.

Cut off low hanging branches to open up sight lines and removed brambles to uncover some hidden headstones.

Our small enthusiastic gardening team continues working all year round, weather permitting. Planting, weeding, pruning, grass cutting and raking to protect the beauty of this historic Victorian mortuary garden.

Call For Volunteers: We really need some more help on a Saturday afternoon to help please contact:
mikehiggins1407@gmail.com



The large Leylandii which was blocking light into the old Warehouse has been cut down by the Council. This opens up the area round the Jeffery Hale bench and will give the Canadian Maple space to grow.



The steps at the back entrance of the cemetery have now been completed, and they look wonderful. They provide much-needed safety during the slippery months and significantly enhance the appearance of the area.

The Cemetery is consecrated ground and dogs should be kept under control on leads. This helps to protect the wild flowers, wildlife and volunteers. THANK YOU

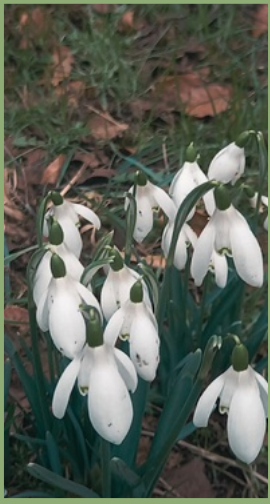
All links are active

Photo Credits
GARDENING TEAM

Design features: Jeanne Pope
Editor: David Bushell



Spring Awakens the Cemetery



The arrival of snowdrops in late winter is seen as a sign that spring is on its way. Their white hue is also thought to symbolise purity, innocence, spirituality and sympathy. Snowdrops increased in popularity in the 19th century thanks to 'floriography' (the unique language of flowers) becoming a popular hobby. However, since they are often found clustered in graveyards and cemeteries many people believed that if a snowdrop entered your home it was an omen of death and bad luck. Over time, the sight of snowdrops carpeting churchyards and in bouquets came to represent new beginnings, hope, rebirth and the capacity to triumph over challenges. **Emma Vidler**



Spring Message from the Chair

Walks around the cemetery are ever popular. Whether it is to hear about the history, study aspects of ecology or just to appreciate the calm of the beautiful environment. This year we have a broad range of groups visiting – from participants in the Heritage Weekend in September to two visits from the Jane Austen Society of North America ([JASNA](#)) or a City of London Livery Company. JASNA will be coming twice – in May and July. They will be looking at Henry Austen's gravestone. Henry as you may remember from a talk a couple of years ago, was a favourite brother who encouraged her to write. The Livery Company – the Worshipful Company of Lightmongers – are keen to know what Woodbury Park Cemetery is all about.

So, if you know a group that would like to make a planned visit with a talk just drop us a line [here](#). **Margaret Ginman - Chair**



PHOTO CREDITS - MIKE HIGGINS

ABRAHAM CYRUS GORDON
(1826 - 1865)



BY DAVID BUSHELL

In Memorial number 107 lies Major Alexander Cyrus Gordon. While not related to General Charles Gordon of Khartoum fame, he also came from a long-established military family, serving with the Honourable East India Company from his cadetship in 1843 until retirement on a sick certificate in 1862. Unfortunately, his tombstone is broken and face down and partly submerged in the grass but his footstone showing his initials and year of death are plain to see. From his entry in the Woodbury Park Cemetery monumental inscriptions file his headstone ended with the phrase: Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection.

Abraham was born on 15 March 1826 in Cork, Ireland, third son of Captain Frederick Gordon (1783 - 1876) and his wife Elizabeth (1785 - 1867), second daughter of James Murdoch, a wine merchant based in Madeira. His father's family originated in Bawtrey, Yorkshire, grandfather Gordon being his grandson's namesake, Abraham Cyrus Gordon (1758 - 1832) a Captain in the 91st Regiment of Foot, his grandmother Elizabeth Locke, daughter of the Revd Robert Locke who held the living of Farndon, Cheshire from 1766, moving to Long Bennington with Foston, Lincolnshire in 1776 until his death in 1808. Grandfather Gordon's own parents were Abraham Gordon (c 1722 - 1808) a Doctor of Medicine and Anna McDonnel (c 1733 - 1818) who after nearly 55 years of marriage died in Stirling.

Abraham was educated at Barnstaple Grammar School before joining the Honourable East India Company as an infantry cadet in 1843. He was designated for the Madras Staff Corps which was a branch of the Indian Army during the British Raj and was used to provide officers for the native regiments and for the staff and army departments. Abraham was commissioned as a Lieutenant on 28 February 1850, serving as an officer of the 32nd Regiment of Native Infantry. He was present when one of the units supplied the mutineers at Lucknow who murdered their officers in the Indian Mutiny of 1857. From 1858 he served as Deputy Commissioner at Seeone and Nursingpore until taking a sick certificate and returning to England in 1862.

Abraham's time in India coincided with others also buried in Woodbury Park Cemetery although we do not know if their paths crossed in that vast sub-continent. These others who served the Honourable East India Company included Major-General Laurence Fyler (of the 12th Lancers); Lt Colonel John Sims Freshfield (1st Madras Cavalry); William Panton (Physician General in the Bengal Service); and Jenkin Honfray Llewelyn (surgeon with the 8th Hussars).

Photo by David Bushell

Continued:

An 1894 monthly review of the Nineteenth Century edited by James Knowles gives a vivid description of Narsinghpur (formerly Nursingpore).

It is buried in the centre of India and is little known because no European lives there, except the officials who are obliged to do so and three or four missionaries. But the native town is of some size, and the district is fertile and populous... it is really Anglo-Indian life amongst the natives, the officials carry on their business entirely in Hindustani... we soak in their manners and customs without knowing it and we see a side of life wholly unknown to the visitors. The town, now in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, contains many sacred sites and has a river and main line railway passing through. In those days any Europeans were drawn to the railway station on the day the English mail passed, often solely to look into the carriages and see perhaps two or three white faces.

Seone (today called Seoni) was also in Gordon's patch of authority. Originally set in the Aravalli Hills of Rajputane (now Rajasthan) where the first rebel rising occurred on May 28, 1857, Kipling's Jungle Books changed location by the time of publication to the Seone Hills perhaps to break the link with the Indian Mutiny. Yet this does not distance the story from the Mutiny as Kipling drew extensively from Robert Armitage Sterndale's Seeonee, or Camp Life on the Satpura Range: A Tale of Indian Adventure (1877), an autobiographical novel that details the life of a district officer who resides in the Seoni jungle during the Indian "Mutiny" of 1857.

Following his departure from India on sick leave, he married Emily Bruce on 15 July 1862, at St Leonards, East Sussex. Emily was the third daughter of discount broker James Bruce, a family based in Paddington, London, as evidenced by the 1851 census. By the 1861 census Emily was a visitor in Tunbridge Wells, staying with her eldest sister, Janet and her husband, Thomas Ackland Lawford, a stockbroker living at 14 Calverley Park Gardens (Carter House in 2024). By 1881 the Lawfords were living at 23, The Leas, Folkestone. Two of their children achieved national notice: the Lawford's youngest son, General Sidney Turing Lawford, by his third wife, was the father of Peter Sidney Lawford the American actor who married Patricia Kennedy, sister of President J F Kennedy; the Lawford's eldest daughter, Jessie Bruce Lawford, became the second wife of Hartley Williams, later Sir Hartley, who retired to England in 1903 having served as a judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria, Australia.

It is not certain how much time Abraham spent living in Tunbridge Wells although newspaper reports (Tunbridge Wells Weekly Express) noted him arriving as a visitor (to 6 York Terrace) in July 1863, departing the town in September of the same year. But as his sister Janet was well established here, it can be expected he was a frequent visitor.

The later eminent family connections via his wife's family were unknown to Abraham as he died on 26 December 1865, in Tunbridge Wells, buried in Woodbury Park Cemetery. His death certificate gave the cause of death as Albuminuria (kidney disease) and exhaustion. He left no children, just his widow who inherited his estate of less than £200, living, at the time she received probate of Abraham's estate in March 1866, at 16 Queen Street, Mayfair, London.



The Harris family: “In thy presence is fullness of joy”

by Emma Vidler



Photo Credit: Emma Vidler

Henry Harris 1841 - 1916
Mary Ann Harris 1836 - 1909
Annie Louisa Homan Harris 1867 - 1867
William Henry Blenkarn Harris 1870 - 1883
George Albert Harris 1879 - 1883

The large headstone of the Harris family was placed ‘In memory of three beloved children of Henry and Mary Ann Harris’, namely Annie, George and William. They all predeceased their parents who were later buried with them. Henry and Mary’s 3 other daughters and 2 sons rest elsewhere.

Henry was born in Brenchley, Kent, to John (a labourer) and Mary Harris and was baptised on 17 October 1841. Mary was born in Beverley, Yorkshire, to Thomas (a shoemaker) and Ann and was baptised on 8 April 1836. They married in late 1865 in St Saviour parish, Southwark.



As a teenager, Henry worked with his father and 3 brothers as an agricultural labourer in Brenchley. He is first listed in Tunbridge Wells in 1867, working as a greengrocer. Mary was previously the housemaid to the family of retired Naval Captain Orbell Oakes at 4 Cambridge Terrace, Dover, Kent.

Sadly, Henry and Mary’s first born child Annie died aged 3 months on 2/3 September 1867 of infantile diarrhoea and convulsions (her death certificate records 2 September as her date of death whilst the headstone gives 3 September).

Their 2 sons who are named on the headstone died 20 days apart in June 1883. George passed away on 10 June aged 4 years of Enteritis (inflammation of the small intestine caused by infection) and intestinal obstruction with 12 year old William dying on 30 June, also from Enteritis.

Henry was well-known in the fruit-buying sector and traded as a fruiterer and potato merchant in Camden Road, being described as a pioneer of the distribution of Irish potatoes and foreign produce. His early work as an Agricultural Labourer seems to have been influential on him too as his Will also describes him as a farmer of Sherenden and Hale farms in Capel, Kent.



1884

Additionally he was concerned with property. In 1884 he placed an advert for a house and shop to let. It had a plate glass frontage, large cellar, six rooms and would suit any trade. When he wrote his Will in 1914, he had acquired a large property portfolio in the town, owning premises at 71, 73, 75, 93 and 95 Camden Road, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 Beech Street and 16 and 18 Western Road.

In December 1896 he was called as a witness to the theft of a basket containing 37 oranges from his shop. Henry described how Alfred Charles Wood entered his shop when he was having his supper and took the basket of oranges.

Henry followed defendant to the top of Camden Road where defendant stopped and offered to pay for the goods. Henry refused and said that he knew the defendant, describing him as a great nuisance to the public who 'did no work but for the brewers and publicans'.

Alfred pleaded guilty but said he did not remember the circumstances. The Chief Constable commented that the defendant was very much addicted to drink. He was subsequently sentenced to 10 days' hard labour without the option of a fine.

In the later years of Henry's trading, Mary was an assistant in his shop before she died aged 73 on 27 July 1909 from a non-malignant brain tumour (5 years), Hemiplegia (paralysis of 1 side of the body) (2 years) and Asthma (1 month).

Seven years later on 2 February 1916, Henry died of pneumonia aged 74. His interment in Woodbury Park Cemetery took place at 2.30pm on 7 February.





Lichen Walk & Talk with Keith Palmer



This meeting was enhanced by the presence of Dr Ian Beavis. A good turnout considering the weather.

Lichens Walk – 12 October 2024 by David Bushell Photos by Mike Trudel

On a damp and dull mid-October morning a group of Friends were treated to an expert walk led by Keith Palmer, examining the lichens found on some of the tombstones. Observations were enhanced using hand lenses which had x10 magnification.

We heard that lichens are unique organisms in nature, being combinations of fungus and alga. They can be found growing on trees, wooden fences and various rocks and stones. In a cemetery context lichens vary whether growing on acid stones (such as sandstone and granite) or on alkaline stones (such as limestone and concrete). Examples of lichens on acid stones include Verdigris Powder Lichen and Yellow Cauliflower Lichen while alkaline stones attract lichens such as Scurfy Orange Ball Lichen and Brown Crazy-Paving Lichen.

Not only lichens were observed and explained, but also a few fungi and insects while many leaf miners were found on overhanging trees, information on the latter amplified by fellow walker and small creature expert, Ian Beavis, Research Curator at the Amelia Scott Centre.



Recent Restoration and repairs by Burslem Memorials
which has over 160 years of experience in creating, constructing and restoring memorials

Photos by Mike Taylor

Each year, Burslems Monuments carries out the restoration of several tombs for the FWPC. Here are the beautiful results from our work in 2024.

This year, the list is already growing, as the upkeep of these monuments is paramount.



Dates For Your Diary

Stalls on the Green - Spring Fair

Saturday 31 May 2025 - 11:00 – 2:00pm

St John's Church Green

Royal Tunbridge Wells

TN4 9LG

AGM

Wednesday 21 May 2025

7.30pm

St John's Hall

Book Launch - 175 Anniversary of the Cemetery

by Emma Vidler with Talk

Film and Talk on John D. Engleheart

By Andrew Bailey



OUTING

13 August

West Norwood Cemetery - 'Magnificent Seven'

More information to follow



HERITAGE OPEN DAY ACTIVITIES

8th September - 21 September Exhibition

Curated by Emma Vidler and Laura Humphrey

Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery and Trinity Heritage

10 - 5pm daily

17 September - Trinity Theatre Cinema

Three Short Documentaries with Q&A

Curated by Jeanne Pope

Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

5 - 6.30pm

21 September

10am: Walking Tour in Cemetery with Emma Vidler

