

How Things Work Group – Highgate West Cemetery Visit.

7th March 2023

We had an excellent turnout of 22 for the trip despite the freezing weather.

The West cemetery is only accessible to the public by guided tour and our guide, Peter John Mills, brought the whole experience to life being both informative and amusing.



We were taken back to the Victorian era and learned about their attitude to death, the afterlife and the amazing lives and deaths of the characters buried there.

The Cemetery was opened in 1839 the third of seven private cemeteries that were set up to cope with the overcrowding of the traditional graveyards, the spread of disease and to curb 'grave robbing'

In total there are currently 53,000 graves and 170,000 bodies interred; some very grand and some unmarked pauper mass graves.



Entrance. Chapel & Courtyard



First Grave. June 1860

Mary Anne Webster Aged 16



Most famous 1865 – Thomas Sayers

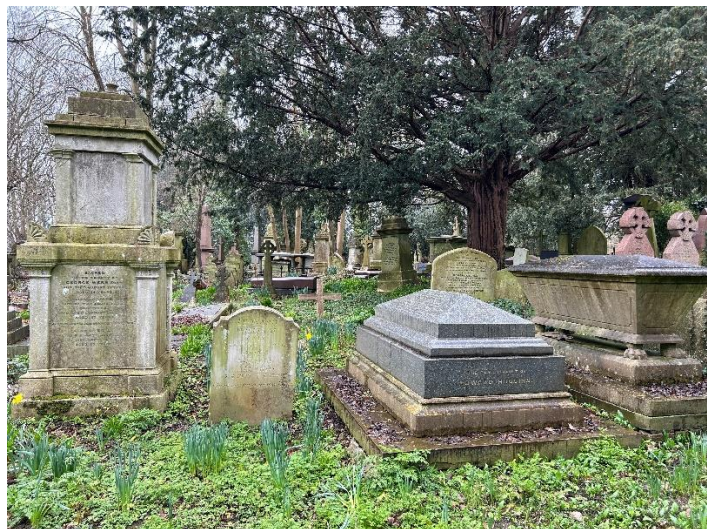
Prize Fighter – Dog 'Lion'

We were taken into the catacombs and saw lead lined coffins still in their niches just as the Victorians had left them.

Even here the class distinctions so important at the time were evident with the more opulent memorials at the top of the hill and the social status of the occupants reducing as you go down .



Egyptian entrance to catacombs



'Middle class graves'

The cemeteries are still in use with famous recent burials - George Michael in the west cemetery. Malcom McLaran 2010 (Impresario and rock star), Bruce Reynolds 2013 (mastermind of great train robbery in 1963) in the East. Our ticket enabled us to walk around the East cemetery on our own with a map, which most of us took advantage of.