

Local community gathered at Horton Cemetery

11 October 2023



On **World Mental Health Day** 10th October on a working and un-seasonally hot day, young and old gathered in commemoration of the 9000 patients buried in Epsom's abandoned Cemetery.

The events were the climax to a year long project of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, supported by **Kings College** and **Dr Alana Harris**, local resident and Reader in History at the University. Entitled "Out of Sight, Out of Mind", the project raised awareness throughout the Borough of the lives of 9000 patients buried between 1899 and 1955. In their memory nearly 1600 ceramic flowers were uniquely painted by hundreds of concerned citizens as they contemplated the stories and photographs of individual patients.



Hardy poem reading



Faith leaders read a committal together

The celebration started in a private field provided for the day by local farmer Mr Seymour Bourne and located right next to the five acre Cemetery. The largest asylum cemetery in Europe. Under a blazing Autumn sun the gathering was addressed by the charity's secretary **Mr Lionel Blackman**, who called for a rejection of a local council categorisation of the Cemetery as "amenity woodland". The Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, **Cllr Robert Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) spoke of Epsom's historic connection to the five psychiatric hospitals in the Borough.

Patron of the charity, **Chris Grayling** MP sent a message, read by Horton Ward Cllr **Kieran Persand**: *"It's easy not to realise, as you drive past, the piece of history that lies behind the fence. Thousands of people lived in the old hospitals, lived and died mostly anonymously. They have no gravestones to mark their final resting place. And disgracefully the cemetery has been allowed to rot by its current owners. It is a credit to the work of the **Friends**, and of people like **Alan Carlson** who raised the money for a memorial, that their memory has not been lost. I hope one day that the cemetery can be taken back, and turned into a real garden of remembrance for those who passed so much of their lives here."*

Theresa Keneflick, a trustee of the charity and head of St Josephs Primary School spoke and brought a school choir who sang "True Colours" by Cindy Lauper.

The following each read a verse from Thomas Hardy's 'Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard':

Rosie Spence, relative, on behalf of her great, great, great grandfather. **Allen Price** from Love Me Love My Mind. **Carmen Nel**, NHS Clinical Practitioner. **Audrey Ardern-Jones**, local poet and project volunteer. **Charles Wood**, former Nurse at Manor Hospital and Horton Hospital. Kevin McDonnell, Friends of Horton Cemetery Trustee and lead researcher of the lives. **Timothy Folkard**, project volunteer.

Then voices from the Cemetery were spoken by **Epsom Players** representing the lives of Enid Barnet and Richard Waterer.

Dr Alana Harris explained the symbolism of the ribbons everyone had tied for the day to the fence near the Cemetery.

Rev Nick Parish and Judith Mitchell (St Martin's Church of England); Fr Stephen O'Brien (St Joseph's Catholic Church); Pastor Josh Selfe (Epsom Methodist Church); Clerk Frances Touch (Epsom Quakers) said in unison:

"We are gathered to remember these 9000 souls who lived and died in Epsom - to remember them and to make representations that they might have dignity and rest in their death.

To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose on earth. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted. A time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up.

We affirm our mutual commitment to honour the residents of Horton Cemetery and to work for their memorialisation. Amen."

Finally a trumpet solo 'Marking the Unmarked' - was performed by its composer **Erin Symonds**.

The gathering then followed Scots Piper **Bob Ash** to the former Horton Chapel where a Memorial Garden of the ceramic flowers was unveiled. The audience was addressed by Patron of The Friends of Horton Cemetery, **Baroness Sheila Hollins**, who once worked in the St Ebbas Hospital in Hook Road, Epsom. Dr Harris concluded speeches with an overview of the project and its significance and meaning.

'In Memoriam' a film created by Cameron Cook, Jack Daly and Mica Schlosser of Kings College simply rolled the 9000 names to suitable music. The audience was spellbound.

Company Concentric performed a dance 'Garden Unlocked' and led the audience to the Memorial Garden unveiling. This

involved the planting of final flowers within the Forget Me Not installation by **Sue Littleboy** planting for James Poppelwell (great grandad, 1867-1914, d.Long Grove, grave b977); **Nari Fairbanks** (by proxy as resident in NT, Australia) - planting for Charles Holdgate (great, great, great uncle, 1854-1932, d. Long Grove, grave 1105a); **Iveta Goddard** - creator of the ceramic flowers used in the memorial garden and **Lauren** of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School.

Joining the 200-odd strong audience beside Horton Cemetery were Liberal Democrat PPC **Helen Maguire**, Chair of Epsom and Ewell Labour Party **Mark Todd** and **Gina Miller** the True and Fair Party PPC for the constituency. And as ever on her push-bike, Cllr. **Alison Kelly** (LibDem Stamford) and **Janice Baker** a leader of the local Green Party. Two Residents Association Councillors appeared including Cllr Phil Neale (Cuddington Ward) and another.