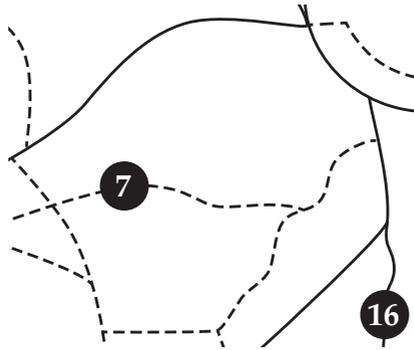


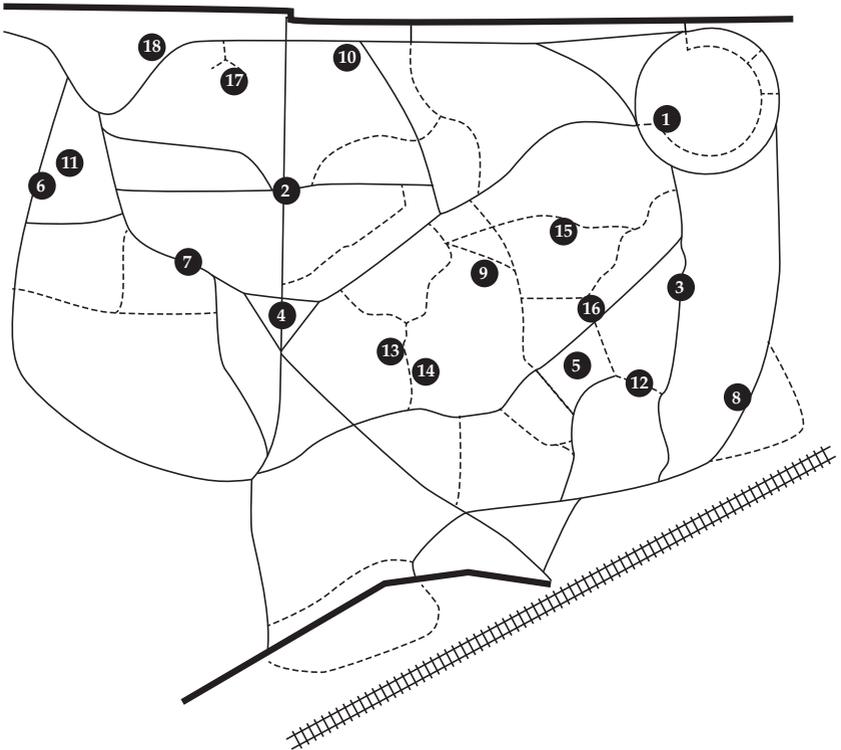
What's In Tour?



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The numbers on this map refer to pages of this book. Each page contains a direct transcript of things people have said in conversation within the bounds of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. Some relate directly to the mapped locations and some do not. This alternative tour is self-guided and non-linear.

Main
Entrance



Naked Somewhere

Every day is different, there's always a surprise. Mind if we just sit down for a minute? I've been on my feet all day. One of the most curious days. One I remember, that was a real piece of situational humour, we had found a gun. Now, we've found guns on several occasions, when clearing, generally wrapped, carefully wrapped in a blue plastic bag and hidden in the ivy. Because people don't want them to be traced to them, or whatever. Anyway, when clearing we found one and we had phoned the police to say we've found a gun so they can come and look at it and take it. But that same morning, there was a report of, it may have been when St Clement's Psychiatric Hospital was still operating I think it was, and patients would occasionally get out and do strange things. One of them was apparently dancing around the place naked somewhere. And, the police had been called about both things; the gun, and about this man. So she stood at the junction and when the police came in and she said, "Gun that way, naked man that way!" She genuinely didn't know what they'd come for. You'd never get that repeated.

Collections

I don't if they're doing it now, because people move on and pass on, or their dogs die and they don't come walking in here anymore, or they die, but they'd got somehow informally into the habit of, when they found some strange little creature, whether it was a little plastic incredible hulk or a few artificial flowers or something, they would put them on one particular monument, not chosen for any special reason, and they'd build up these eccentric little collections of decorations. I don't think anyone's doing it at the moment, but we just like to think that people can... Our philosophy is that people can use the park in any way they want to, that's the kind of general philosophy about the place.

Hurricane wood

This bit of woodland here bears the name Hurricane Wood. In the tremendous storm which did reach hurricane force winds on the 15th October 1987. This was tall plane trees mainly, very tall, very high, quite bare underneath because there wasn't much light. It was just about completely knocked down on that night, just knocked down. So it was natural to call it Hurricane Wood.

Enough 'Dog'

They sometimes say to me 'Have you got a pet? You quite like dogs... You got a dog?'. No, I haven't got a dog, and I'm never going to get a dog, because I don't need a dog as an excuse to take a walk for a start, which a lot of people do. They march around the playing field three times a day, they wouldn't do it without a dog. I say, I get quite enough 'dog' from other people's dogs. Stroke them and all that, I don't have to feed them, or clean them or house them or worry about what to do with them when you go on holiday. The general thing about creatures is I'm quite happy to provide the context in which they can live and let them sort it out for themselves.

Barbecue

I had a big party over here one time. I'm embarrassed by what I'm going to tell you. One of them said we need to build a barbecue, and people started running around and coming back with bits of grave stones and things... And built it up with bits of stone... Stones that were broken. And I was the barbecue man. There was about 50 people over here, children, women, it was a brilliant night. But I missed it all. I was the barbecue man. But we had a lovely night. See my father, my old family, 'you can't do that with gravestones!'. People here love it, the people underneath, these people. The way I look at this, if I was dead and buried, would I like people doing that over my grave? I'd love it. Enjoy yourselves. But he came over and he stopped it. He came on the scene, he went 'no more fires, no more of this'. And that stopped. If you want a little barbecue, you've got to build these little things...

Crowbar

We actually caught the person doing this. They were whacking at it with a crowbar and when we asked them what they were doing, he goes 'oh, I wanted to have a look inside'. So, someone's family vault, we don't know who the Jackson family are. Nothing to do with the famous Jacksons, but that's someone's grave and he wanted to have a look, so he decided to smash the bricks up. All we could do was put them back in. So this would be a grave you might consider restoring, putting those bricks back properly, rather than just bunging them in, like we've done crudely. We're not stone masons, we don't know anything about managing stones.

Bees

Interesting. Now, sometimes that can happen. How many are there? Now that is a lot. What often happens is that they're up somewhere in a tree and some bird is predating them. Sometimes you'll find there's no body, in some cases the body's been there a while... That appears to have a body. I'm not sure. Actually it may not have a body, I think its guts have gone. The most likely thing is that something's been up there. That tree up there is an unusual tree called a Silver Lime. You get ordinary common lime trees, they actually finished flowering a week or two ago. But when I look at that, I think it's still in flower. See those sort of paler things hanging? It looks to me that there's a bumble bee working up there. It may well be that if a lot of bumble bees have been drawn to that then a bird that can catch them is up there, saying 'right, this is where dinner comes from'. You can see that on a much larger scale sometimes. Bumbles bees caught by, even by the hundreds.

A Man Of Some Age

Sorry to interrupt. Have you gents happened across a chap who is perhaps acting a bit strangely or is unwell at all? That is literally all the information I have. There was a call to the ambulance service. Someone had called, themselves, saying they were somewhere in the cemetery and felt they'd had a seizure and were lying down somewhere. It's obviously a vast area to search. There's only two of us at the moment, unfortunately. Don't worry... It may well be a hoax, or not as it seems. But, we're just having a look around, asking people. We've been trying, but it's either not answering or going to voicemail. It's not an issue, just wondered if you'd seen anyone. If you were to, I'd suggest just give us a call or give the ambulance service a call. A man of some age.

The Everyday

Here on our right is all our public graves. Of all the Magnificent Seven Cemeteries, that we're a family of, we are, of all of them, we were very much the cemetery of the everyday. We weren't the place where the wealthy and the well-known got buried. This is where people who couldn't afford to buy a plot got buried. These are people just like you and I, the everyday folk who lived their lives here in London and couldn't afford a grave so they shared their grave with unrelated people. This particular patch is where people who died in the Bethnal Green tube disaster are buried. We've only got thirty-odd of them here. Over a hundred people died. Britain's worst wartime civilian disaster.

Friday Night

We've got a grave in here and I can't remember the chaps first name, but his middle and surname is Friday Knight, so it's a fantastic grave. You just think it's lovely because people did have a sense of humour in the past, they weren't these serious Victorians. I love the fact of his parents, Friday night was still a night that you saw at the end of the week and you looked to the weekend and yeah, I can't remember his first name but it's Knight like a medieval knight, with a 'K'. It's on the north side of the park. We've got three kissing gates along our boundary with Hamlet's Way. If you come in through the middle kissing gate, it takes you straight ahead up a footpath and it's to the left of that footpath. You can't miss it, it says 'Friday Knight' there. It's a great little grave, but you walk past things like that all the time and go 'I've never noticed that before'.

Faraway Tree

I wouldn't normally take people here. Not for any reason other than it's hard to get in. It's a book about a tree that is so tall and big, that you could climb it and at the top there were people living there. So, down there, you see the very tall tree with the the big thick trunk with all the ivy on? Right down there, that's the one we call the Faraway Tree. It seemed to have a little door in the bottom that we said the slide from the top of the tree came out of. Down there. We'd go there and see if we could climb it, but we never could.

All Kinds Of Things

We find guns, I've found bullets, we found paraffin bombs, we found belongings from burglaries, we found men in their underpants chanting in the woods, we find people playing musical instruments in the woods, it's all kinds of things really in here.

Relatives

If I was to say half-a-percent of the graves are tended, I'd probably be generous. It's hard to say how many we've got because we haven't counted them all and family history isn't something everyone's interested in. Also, East London is the place where people start their lives, but they don't necessarily finish them here, so a lot of people don't always know they've got relatives here. People aren't always interested in their pasts. People have got and families have got fragmented and divided for whatever reasons. We do have graves tended, but most of them are, they usually go, sometimes go back to the 1930s, but most of them are quite recent, the last half of the 20th century. The last 20 years of our activity, so we tend to get a lot of interest for mainly public graves. We get loads of inquiries for graves in there.

How Am I Going To Know?

I've stumbled across adults having sex in here. I've stumbled across teenagers doing it. We meet people drinking and smoking weed and doing that kind of stuff all the time. But a lot of that stuff happens at night, when we're not here, and y'know what, as long as they don't leave a mess and they are considerate, I don't mind. We do have a fairly open-minded attitude towards things, because we do realise the high-density living in this borough. A lot of people want a sense of space, they want some privacy, so they will come here to do things that they might not be able to do at home, because they have got loads of extended family members living in the same place. So we say 'look, guys, it's none of my business what you're doing, but it is my business if you set my bin on fire, you're abusive to other park users, you leave your litter everywhere, leave your condoms and your tissues and your wipes and your lube. You leave all that around then you've got my attention. But, if you pick it all up and remove evidence of you being here, how am I going to know?'

Al Fresco

That was one of our 'al fresco' loving couples. That was a male and female older couple, looked like they were both pushing in there 50s. They just went to the, I call it the 'McLovin Spot' from the movie. It's just silly. It's for me, no one else, I only say them for myself.

Komodo Dragons

I was working with a woman and a couple of other people along the main path. The woman was saying how she had a lodger who had done research work on Komodo Dragons. It was the first conversation I'd ever had in my life about Komodo Dragons and a chap comes around the corner wearing a T-shirt with Komodo Dragons on it. So I stopped him and said 'have you got any connection with them?' He said, 'oh no, it's just a t-shirt I picked up from somewhere'. Just the very idea of that kind of coincidence, that you've never had a conversation about that before and you've never seen a t-shirt with them on before, then you see both at the same time!

Horse Chestnut Tree

I've got four of my friends that have died in the last few years and all their ashes are around that Horse Chestnut Tree. I put their ashes there, my friends' ashes. 28 years round here. The Horse Chestnut Tree, that's a special tree. There are a lot of friends, alcoholics, drinkers and they're all underneath that tree, all their ashes... And he knows that, but he don't care. He's a lovely guy. Listen, he's a lovely guy, but my last friend hated him. He's the best thing that ever happened here. Believe in that. Even though he stopped us lighting fires and that, he did the right thing. Well he had no choice, he's not a bad man. We can still go over there and do a barbecue. We used to get the logs and burn them, we had bonfires until he turned up.

Rusty

He would not leave this place, he loved it and he is still there. Rusty the ghost is still there. He came out after two weeks in hospital. He sat there in the wheelchair. He'd lost his keys, then he got in there and the next day he was dead. Three weeks in hospital and the very next day, he was found dead. He wasn't meant to leave there, and he's still there. I believe his ghost is still there.

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