



3 hours

Honor Oak Park Station
SE23 1NX

END

Nunhead Library
SE15 5RW

START

Explore the hidden treasures and symbols in Nunhead cemetery, the Oak of Honour and the possible site of a beheading.

1 Nunhead Green
In the 1680s a pub stood here called The Nun's Head. A legend has arisen that the Green was the site of a convent, and during the reformation Henry VIII's men executed the Mother Superior and displayed her head on a pike. The current pub, in its present building since 1905, has a representation of her above the door with an unorthodox spiky hairstyle.

2 Linden Grove
Charles Dickens had a famous long-term affair with the actress Ellen Ternan. In 1868 he rented Windsor Lodge at 31 Linden Grove for her, where he was a frequent visitor. Indeed it has been said that Dickens actually died there in 1870, but his body was moved to Gad's Hill to avoid a scandal. The source of this story was said to be the caretaker at Linden Grove Congregational Church, but it is not generally accepted by biographers.

3 Nunhead Cemetery
One of London's "Magnificent Seven" suburban cemeteries created following new laws in 1832, once derelict and now partly managed as a nature reserve. It is also rich with Victorian symbolism. They loved double meanings and secret codes.

Here are the top 10 symbols to be found in Nunhead, with possible interpretations:

- **Downturned torches;** can be found on the Daniels' monument near the chapel. A Greek symbol which means 'life extinguished'.
- **Mourning women;** also found on the Daniels' monument, another symbol borrowed from Ancient Rome.



The Old Nunshead (Street Art), photographs by Robert Larkin-Frost

- **Ouroboros/snake swallowing its own tail;** found on top of the pillars at the Limesford Road entrance. An ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life.
- **IHS/ aka 'dollar sign';** found on the Symes memorial. It stands for 'Iesus Hominum Salvator' translated as 'Jesus the Saviour of Man.'
- **Shaking hands;** several examples in Nunhead, but a particularly striking example is on the Edward Mullins vault. There are several interpretations: it could mean 'farewell', marriage, a close bond lasting until death, reunification or simply 'see you soon'; not as comforting as it sounds given the Victorians' high mortality rate.
- **Celtic Cross;** the Mills cross near the Chapel is especially lovely with its fine carving of passion flowers with the motto 'Thy Will be Done'. The flowers symbolise the Passion of Christ on the cross, with five stamens representing his wounds and filaments said to be the crown of thorns.

- **Urns;** can be found throughout Nunhead. An ancient Roman symbol related to cremation.



Accessibility

The paths around the cemetery are fully accessible for wheel and pushchairs with no steps, although there are some steep inclines. The path up to Honor Oak Park Station via One Tree Hill contains steep inclines, is unpaved and has steps; please follow the dashed red line for an alternative route to Crofton Park Station, which has step free access.



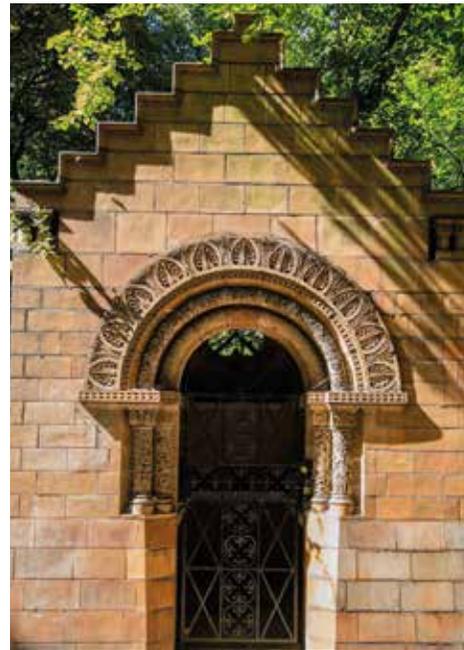
- **Flowers;** the language of flowers is something that we've lost but to the Victorians it was of great importance. Ivy is an evergreen and means 'everlasting memories' and the weeping willow has obvious meaning in the context of a cemetery.

- **Angels;** can be found on the Hershel tombstone and the Williams' vault. There is a whole mythology around angels and what they are carrying in their hands, open to many interpretations.

- **Broken column;** Nunhead has several examples and at first it can look like deliberate vandalism. These could mean mortality, the support of life being broken and maybe the grave of the head of the family.

4 The Leysdown Tragedy

In the summer of 1912 tragedy struck for families of Walworth when boys from a local scouting troop died at a camp in Kent. Sailing down to the Isle of Sheppey, they were two miles off-shore when their boat was caught in a sudden gale and capsized. Due to several acts of selfless heroism, especially by Scoutmaster Sydney Marsh, many lives were saved. But eight scouts drowned. The tragic loss of such young lives struck a chord with the nation, and Winston Churchill MP, then First Lord of the Admiralty,



Stearns Mausoleum, John Allan's Sarcophagus, photograph by Uschi Klein

arranged for a destroyer to transport the bodies back to London. 100,000 were reputed to have attended the lying in state of the boys and a bronze scout was put up in 1914, paid for by public donations.



John Allan's Sarcophagus, photograph by Uschi Klein

Sadly it was stolen in 1969, but this replacement memorial was unveiled in 1992.

5 Stearns mausoleum, John Allen's Sarcophagus and Vincent Figgin's Tomb

This is the only mausoleum in Nunhead Cemetery and a Grade II listed building. Although, as Mrs Laura Stearns' remains were moved from it and reburied in 1931, it can't be called a mausoleum anymore.

John Allan Sarcophagus

This elaborate memorial for the shipbuilder John Allan is based on the Payava tomb at Xanthos discovered in 1830. A bronze relief portrait of Allan is on the rear of the tomb.

6 Brenchley Gardens

Between 1809 and 1836, a canal ran through the park as part of its route from New Cross to Croydon. The canal was replaced by a railway line after 1836, and this now forms part of the line between London Bridge and Croydon. The remains of the embankment of this line can

still be seen, forming part of Brenchley Gardens.

7 The Oak of Honour

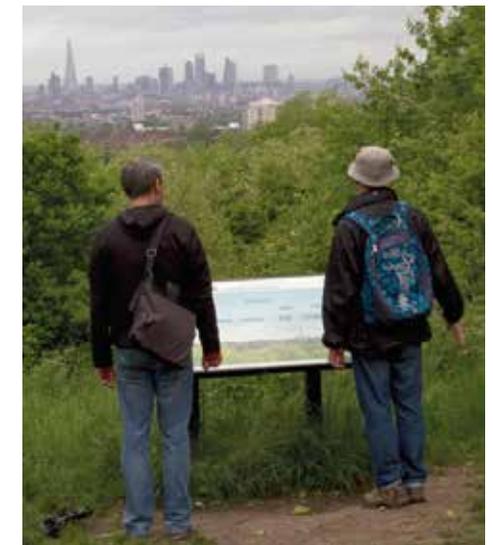
The name originates from Oak of Honour Hill, or One Tree Hill. The legend is that on May Day in 1602, Elizabeth I picnicked with Sir Richard Bulkeley of Beaumaris by an oak tree at the summit of a hill in this area. The tree came to be known as the Oak of Honour. The current tree was planted c.1905 as a successor to the historic one.

8 One Tree Hill Summit

The beacon at the summit was erected to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of King George VI in 1935. It was subsequently used for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, her silver and golden jubilees and also at the Millennium. Beacons have been used on this site since at least 1500, used to give warning of invasion by the Spanish and later the French. The Hill was also the site of Watson's General Telegraph; a relay system established in 1841 linking London with shipping in the English Channel. During World War I a gun emplacement was built against the threat of raids by Zeppelin airships.



Entrance to Nunhead Cemetery, photograph by Uschi Klein



View from One Tree Hill, photograph by Sara Moiola