

P.O. Box 50004, RPO Fairfield Plaza, Victoria, B.C. V8S 5L8
Telephone: (250) 598-8870

E-mail oldcem@pacificcoast.net

Web Site: <http://www.oldcem.bc.ca>

May-June 2020

A Tribute to Pat Lydon

Gudrun Leys

Dr. Patrick Lydon's connection with the Old Cemeteries Society stretches back a dozen years or so. As a long time member of the Vancouver Island Placer Miners Association and having a personal interest in looking for gold near Leechtown, Patrick developed an interest in finding Peter Leech's burial place in Ross Bay Cemetery. Inspired by Yvonne van Ruskenveld's detective work which discovered that Peter Leech's name was misspelled on his grave marker, Pat got the idea to place a new stone on Peter's grave and the celebration of this inauguration was presided over by our Lt. Governor in 2014. In the course of this process, Patrick gathered a great deal of local, historical material on Peter Leech which he then published in the book: "The Gold will speak for Itself".

Shortly thereafter Patrick joined the Board of the OCS and in this position he remained very active. He initiated the creation of the society's pin, which we sell to our members, and he managed to persuade the Scotia Bank to donate special aprons for the use of the tour cashiers. During the summer Pat has frequently lent a strong hand when we clean gravestones in the RBC just as he has always helped organize and set up the summer picnics for our members.

But, Patrick's most memorable achievement while on the board is the celebration of the centenary of Nellie Cashman, the competent, brave and most inspiring 19th century woman of Irish origin. Also in this case did Patrick organize a new commemorative stone, which was inaugurated by the Lieutenant Governor and to further inform the public about Nellie, he wrote a booklet about her life and work which is available from the OCS office. During his years on the Board, Patrick has indeed been a warm-hearted and productive member and we shall miss him greatly.

On a final, personal note, I thank you, Patrick, for having introduced me to the poetry of Robert Service.

A Tribute to Sharon Welsh

Linda Richards

Sharon Welsh has left the Board! Sharon joined the O.C.S. in 2008 and became a Board Member by 2010. A very welcome addition! She was always willing to help out and to take on tasks that needed to be done or fill in if someone was unable to do what they had signed up for. Sharon organized the ticket takers and was available when some one was ill or away, often putting her own plans on hold to take the money and hand out brochures and stickers, always with a warm smile.

Page | 2

in 2013 Sharon took over the organization of the cleaning of the stones and she was often the only one who showed up for cleaning. She cleaned and talked to people that walked by and gave out brochures.

She helped with the re-printing of "The Old Burying Ground Booklet" in 2016. Sharon also helped out with the Ghost Bus Tours, sometimes for two or three nights in a row. Sharon was very helpful, not only with the Ghost Walks but also with the Halloween Patrols. We could always count on her to step up and help out.

In 2016 Sharon helped to organize, and research our Information Table at the Bay Street Armoury 100th Anniversary. That was a huge event and Sharon was there the whole time. When we had the Garden Party, Sharon would show up with the most wonderful punch. It went very quickly!

We are going to miss her kind personality, quick wit and dedication to the O.C.S. She is a wonderful addition to the Society and hopefully when the tours start again we will see her. Thank you so much for everything you have done for the Society! I am sure that there is much more that you have helped out with, but all I know is that you will be missed on the Board.

A Tribute to Bente Svendsen

Gerry Buydens

Bente Svendsen joined the Old Cemeteries Society in 2010. She was looking for a group where she could volunteer some time. In 2013, Bente joined the executive and spent 7 years on active duty until 2020 when she decided to step down. Bente has taken on a number of smaller projects which have been very helpful. She completed an inventory of our T-shirts and sweatshirts. For the first time we had an excel spread sheet with all the details, color, size and number of articles. We have since reduced our inventory to zero. We no longer have the storage space. Bente is a photographer and on a number of cases acted as the official photographer for OCS. She was a regular on the [Saturday](#) morning cleaning bees. She would assist on our Ghost walk tour and was a regular on security brigade over the Halloween period. Bente was always offering to help at our summer diners & other activities. I am sure I have missed a few activities that she took part in. She has been a regular tour guide at the Provincial Museum on

Sundays. She was known to raise a few interesting questions at the executive meetings and conducted some research on various topic of interest for the executive. We will miss Bente but we are sure she will keep busy & we will see her at some of the OCS functions. We wish her a good retirement.

A Tombstone Tourist at Large

Wilf Bruch

Page | 3

Oysterville WA

Next time you take a drive down the Washington coast on highway #101, look for the quaint little village of Oysterville. It has a fabulous little cemetery.

Oysterville is about four and a half hours drive from Port Angeles and 15 miles from Long Beach, Washington on the Long Beach Peninsula. Its current population is about 20 souls. As its name suggests, it was founded as a shellfish harvesting community. Before Oysterville was



given its English name, it was the site of shellfish cultivation and harvesting by Indigenous people. Katie Kettle Gale, a Coast Salish woman, married a newcomer, John Douglas who had emigrated to the Pacific Coast around 1841. Katie Kettle Gale and her relatives taught him shellfish farming. The community was founded and named in 1854 by J. A. Clark and today is listed on the National Register of Historic Places .



William Head Quarantine Station

During the influenza pandemic of 1918/19, William Head served as a quarantine station and has its own small graveyard. Twenty-six of the people buried there were Chinese men who were part of the United Kingdom Chinese Labour Corps on their way to perform labourers' service in the First World War. There is a list of these men on our website www.oldcem.bc.ca .

However, not all who died there are buried there. While wandering around Ross Bay Cemetery I came across the grave of Seishiro Ishii (N027WH). Seishiro, a 20-year-old native of Japan, was a crew member on the SS Canada Maru, and while docked at William Head Quarantine Station succumbed to influenza on April 20, 1919.

As we deal with the latest pandemic, we should pause to remember that this has happened before and that it to will pass. Stay safe.



A Little Mystery

This item is from the Colonist newspaper of May 5th 1919. Things were different back then. Or were they?

“Found dead in his bed May 17, 1919 at 843 Johnson Street, Victoria, British Columbia, Charles Smedley, aged 38, a returned soldier, by his companion Walter Day. The latter, on awakening, discovered his friend had passed away during the night. Day promptly notified the police and the body was removed to Thomson Undertaking Rooms pending inquest. Day told police that Smedley was apparently in good health when they retired. Deceased leaves wife, 2 children Resident of 521 Simcoe Street to mourn his death.”

Charles Smedley was buried with full military honors and rests in Ross Bay Cemetery Block W plot 009 West of Row 45.

However, on July 10th, 1919 a follow up article appeared in the same newspaper:

“Commonwealth War Grave Commission. Jul 10- the Government will not prosecute the Victoria medical man who was charged by representatives of the Victoria branch of the People's Prohibition Association with having prescribed 1 qt of rum to a returned soldier, Charles Smedley, alleged to have died as a result. This was announced yesterday following investigation carried out by A-G's Department. Decision was largely based upon a coroner's report, which claimed that death was due to asphyxia and that rum was not responsible.”

I will leave the questions and answers to you and your imagination. Thanks to Leona Taylor and UVIC for indexing the newspapers of early Victoria <http://www.victoriasvictoria.ca>

Down the Rabbit Hole of Death

Yvonne van Ruskenveld

The expression “falling down a rabbit hole” aptly describes what happens when we start pursuing a topic on the Internet and discover one interesting site after another. Two sites worth “falling down” for anyone interested in cemeteries, mortality and culture are both “death positive” opportunities for exploring a wide range of related topics. “Ask a Mortician” (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCi5iiEyLwSLvlqnMi02u5gQ>) is a series of short videos featuring a young (yes!), female (yes!) mortician and funeral home owner, Caitlyn Doughty, on topics both historical (What happened to Titanic’s dead?) and current (Handling the coronavirus dead in New York). Doughty is funny and irreverent but always respectful of the dead. She has interesting views on the traditional funeral industry. Doughty is also the founder of “The Order of the Good Death” (<http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com/>), dedicated to “making death a part of your life.” The website has a wealth of information through its blog, videos and podcasts, again on topics both historical and contemporary.

A pandemic is a disease that is prevalent over a whole country or over the world. Throughout history pandemics have generally ravaged mankind every few centuries.

Around 165 AD the Antonine Plague afflicted Asia Minor, Egypt, Greece, and Italy. The true cause is unknown, but it is thought to have been either smallpox or measles. The disease was brought to Rome by soldiers returning from Mesopotamia. It would kill more than five million people and would devastate the Roman army.

In 541 and 542 AD the Plague of Justinian is thought to have killed perhaps half the population of Europe. This outbreak of the bubonic plague afflicted the Byzantine Empire and Mediterranean port cities, killing up to twenty-five million people in its year long reign of terror. Generally regarded as the first recorded incident of the bubonic plague, the Plague of Justinian left its mark on the world, killing up to a quarter of the population of the Eastern Mediterranean and devastating the city of Constantinople, where at its height it was killing an estimated five thousand people per day and eventually resulting in the deaths of forty percent of the city's population.

From 1346 to 1353 an outbreak of bubonic plague ravaged Europe, Africa, and Asia, with an estimated death toll between seventy-five and two hundred million people. Referred to as the Black Death, it's caused by *Yersinia pestis*. It most likely jumped continents via the fleas living on rats that infested merchant ships. Ports, being major urban centers at the time, were the perfect breeding ground for the rats and fleas, and thus the insidious bacterium flourished, devastating three continents in its wake. The plague is believed to have begun in China, where it killed approximately twenty-five million people before migrating west to Constantinople. From there, Italian merchants brought it to continental Europe.

1347 was the beginning of dark times for the City of London. Rumours mingled and grew about a plague from the continent. By 1348, people began to display the symptoms: swollen lymph nodes, blackened fingers and toes, fever, and vomiting blood. For eighteen months it spread through the city, killing forty-thousand people, or nearly half the people in London. The plague virtually shut down the city as many stayed in their homes and trade halted. There are accounts of grass growing in the streets and the pandemic halted campaigning in the Hundred Years War.

Deaths from the plague began to subside around 1350, but they caused irreversible social effects. The high mortality rate amongst the working classes led to a rise in wages and the eventual abolition of serfdom. Unfortunately, while the worst seemingly had passed, the disease would flare up every twenty to thirty years, killing twenty percent of the population each time. London instituted the first regulations to deal with the plague in 1518. Infected houses had to hang a bale of hay on a pole outside for forty days, and the people who lived there had to carry a white stick when they went out. Additional

rules included painting a cross on the doors of plague-infested houses and burying people at night. Another plague struck in 1563 and killed almost one-quarter of the city's population.

In 1665 "The Great Plague" ravaged London. A growth in the city's population meant that even more people were killed, this time around one hundred thousand Londoners, or twenty per cent of the population. The tradition then, as now, was for burying the dead in individual graves, but faced with the massive number of deaths, mass graves or "plague pits" became the new norm. One of these was found in London in 1995. Anyone with money fled the city for the country in hope of avoiding infection. The city began to keep weekly records of those who had died, known as "Bills of Mortality". The greatest of these mortality bills in September 1665 recorded the names of 7,165 people.



A Plague Pit



A Plague Poster from 1665

After that September, deaths slowly began to fall and those who had fled the city began to return in December. By February, King Charles II and his entourage returned to London. In fact, the deaths of so many in London made it a destination location as a

place to start over and seek one's fortune. The city was not safe for long, but this time it was from a different threat. The Great Fire of London struck the city in September 1666. Between these two events, London experienced both a great rebuilding and influx of people from the country to the city. London grew in a way that would forever change it, becoming a city of life instead of a city of death. An excellent description of both the plague and the fire is contained in Samuel Pepys' diary for the years 1665 and 1666. Between 1918 and 1920 a disturbingly deadly outbreak of influenza tore across the globe, infecting over a third of the world's population and ending the lives of as many as fifty million people. Of the five hundred million people infected in the 1918 pandemic, the mortality rate was estimated at between ten and twenty percent, with up to twenty-five million deaths in the first twenty-five weeks alone. What separated the 1918 flu pandemic from other influenza outbreaks was the victims; where influenza had always previously only killed juveniles and the elderly or already weakened patients, it struck down hardy and completely healthy young adults, leaving children and those with weaker immune systems alive.

Science and technology have given us some advantages in coping with the covid-19 pandemic; e.g., better understanding of the disease process, better mass communications and the promise of a vaccine, but there are still some similarities. The report of mass burials of coronavirus victims by prison inmates on Hart Island in New York hearkens back to 1665 London. New York was now the epicenter of a global pandemic.



Virtual Cemetery Touring

Yvonne van Ruskenveld

Are you missing our weekly cemetery tours? I certainly am — missing both attending and presenting them. I had a new symbolism tour designed for Easter and was looking forward to talking about the American Civil War on U.S. Memorial Day weekend in May. Those will have to wait for next year but in the meantime, we can indulge our interest in historic cemeteries by exploring those elsewhere in Canada and the world. Let's start with a couple of Canadian examples.

Beechwood Cemetery in Ottawa is designated as Canada's National Cemetery. Being in Canada's capital, Beechwood has long been the final resting place of many prominent Canadians, including prime ministers, generals and scientists (<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/639416/famous-memorials?page=2#sr-8867910>). Today, you may have heard of Beechwood as the burial place of armed forces personnel who died on duty, of veterans and of RCMP members. This video gives a good overview of the cemetery: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mkcgTjmvXPw>. Beechwood is probably one of the few cemeteries in the world that has its own poem. Archibald Lampman's (1861-1899) beautifully evocative words reflect the essence of old

cemeteries everywhere (<https://melodicverses.com/poems/4426/In-Beechwood-Cemetery>).

Of course, all our major cities have old cemeteries, sometimes several, but not all unfortunately display them to advantage online. Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery in Montreal has some remarkable large grave markers but you'll have to hunt a bit online to find a good selection of images. The cemetery's own website gives just a sampling (<https://www.cimetierenotredamedesneiges.ca/en/funerary-heritage-and-points-of-interest#>). If you're looking for modern celebrity burials, Rene Angelil, husband of Celine Dion, is buried in Notre-Dame-des-Neiges.

Page | 8



Mourning angel in Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery

Now let's head south to some of the impressive American cemeteries. Founded in 1831, Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is famous as one of the earliest "garden" type cemeteries in North America (<https://mountauburn.org/virtual-ways-to-enjoy-the-cemetery/>). In New Orleans, the above-ground graves, made necessary by the high water table, are a tourist attraction (<https://nolacatholiccemeteries.org/360-virtual-tour>). Thanks to OCS member Diane Persson for telling me about the beautiful Glenwood Cemetery in Houston, Texas — somewhere I'd never have thought to look (<https://glenwoodcemetery.org/explore/photo-gallery/>). And for something different, check out Colma, California, California's City of the Dead (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/06/sports/football/the-town-of-colma-where-san-franciscos-dead-live.html>).

Next up, we're off to the UK for some of my favourite cemeteries. You may have heard John Azar's and my talk at the OCS AGM about Brompton Cemetery in London (<https://brompton-cemetery.org.uk/cemeterygallery.html>). One of the so-called Magnificent Seven cemeteries that ring London (<https://blog.billiongraves.com/londons-magnificent-seven-cemeteries/>), Brompton is often used as a movie set. Highgate Cemetery is, I think, the most magnificent of the

seven, with its nature preserve and still-active section (<https://highgatecemetery.org/visit>). A less well-known London gem is Bunhill Fields. Dating back to the 17th century, it's within the City of London (<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/city-gardens/visitor-information/Pages/Bunhill-Fields.aspx>). Famous names include William Blake, Daniel Dafoe (author of *Robinson Crusoe*) and John Bunyan (author of *Pilgrim's Progress*). Only 4 acres (Ross Bay is 27.5 acres), it is estimated to contain about 120,000 bodies (compared with Ross Bay's almost 30,000)!



The grave of suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst in London's Brompton Cemetery

South of London, Brookwood Cemetery (<http://www.tbcs.org.uk/>) was the largest cemetery in the world when it opened in 1854 on 500 acres (<http://www.tbcs.org.uk/>)

Morticians in the Movies

[Diane Persson](#)

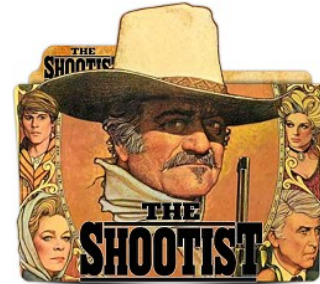
If you're spending more time at home watching more movies, you should know there are some delightful films about death and the role of the undertaker/mortician/funeral director. Last fall I attended a Before I Die Festival <https://beforeidienm.com/> and learned about the 'fun' in funeral planning. The sessions on entertaining films for funeral planning and the funeral director on film were most enlightening. Here's a list of what's worth watching.

The Loved One (1965) is a black-and-white comedy about the funeral business in Los Angeles. It's based on a short satirical novel by Evelyn Waugh and drew on Jessica Mitford's book *The American Way of Death*. Newly arrived in Hollywood from England, Dennis Barlow (Robert Morse) finds he must arrange his uncle's interment at the highly-

organized and very profitable Whispering Glades funeral parlour. His fancy is caught by one of their cosmeticians, but he has three problems- the strict rules of Blessed Reverend Glenworthy (Jonathan Winters), the rivalry of embalmer Mr. Joyboy (Rod Steiger), and the shame of now working at The Happy Hunting Grounds pet's memorial home. Liberace has a cameo appearance as a wonderfully smarmy funeral director.



The Shootist (1976) is about J.B. Books (John Wayne, in his final film role), an aging gunfighter diagnosed with cancer who comes to Nevada at the turn of the 20th century. Renting a room from widowed Bond Rogers (Lauren Bacall) and her son Gillom (Ron Howard), Books is confronted by several people of questionable motives, including a man seeking to avenge his brother's death and a few who are looking to profit from Book's notoriety. Not wanting to die an isolated, painful death, Books devises a plan to go out with a bang. Not only was this Wayne's farewell film, but his final words were "Of course I know who you are. You're my girl. I love you." It's a western worth watching.

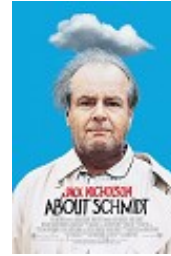


The Big Lebowski (1998) is a crime comedy film. Jeff 'The Dude' Lebowski (Jeff Bridges), a Los Angeles slacker and avid bowler, is mistaken for Jeffrey Lebowski, who is The Big Lebowski, which explains why he's roughed up and has his precious rug peed on. In search of recompense, The Dude tracks down his namesake, who offers him a job. His wife has been kidnapped and he needs a reliable bagman. He is aided and hindered by his pals Walter Sobchak (John Goodman), a Vietnam vet, and Donny (Steve Buscemi), master of stupidity. This film remains a classic. If a man has a roof over his head, fresh half-and-half for his White Russians, a little weed, and his bowling buddies, what more, really, does he need?

Undertaking Betty (2002) is a British dark comedy. Stuck in a marriage that's killing her, Betty (Brenda Blethyn), thinks the only way to break from her two-timing scoundrel of a husband (Robert Pugh) is to fake her own death. With the help of her rekindled old flame, the local undertaker (Alfred Molina), a quiet funeral is planned down to the smallest detail. But nothing goes as planned when a flamboyant competing funeral director who is determined to revolutionize the undertaking business through the innovation of 'theme' funerals, Frank Featherbed (Christopher Walken) jumps in. He is determined to give Betty a send-off no one will ever forget. This is a quirky, charming, and eccentric film you won't forget either.



About Schmidt (2002) is a comedy-drama about Warren Schmidt (Jack Nicholson), a man leading a life of quiet desperation. He's an ex-insurance actuary, unhappily married to Helen and brooding over the forthcoming wedding of his daughter Jeannie to Randall Hertzfel (Dermot Mulroney). When Helen suddenly dies and he finds love letters to her from his best friend, he is inspired to try to stop the wedding, but standing in his way is Randall's feisty mother Roberta (Kathy Bates). Slowly he realizes he must make the most of his remaining life. If you like the combination of humor and pathos, check it out.



Departures (2008) is a Japanese film that won the 2009 Academy Award for best foreign language film. Soon after buying an expensive cello, Daigo Kobayashi (Masahiro Motoki) learns that his orchestra is disbanding. Daigo and his wife move back to his hometown in northern Japan, where he answers an ad for what he thinks is a travel agency but is a mortuary. As he learns and carries out the rituals used in preparing the dead for their final rest, Daigo finds his true calling in life. The rituals surrounding death in Japan and the importance that the dead receive a proper send-off make *Departures* bittersweet and heartwarming.



Get Low (2009) is a movie spun out of equal parts folk tale, fable, and real-life legend about the mysterious, 1930s Tennessee hermit who famously threw his own rollicking funeral party... while he was still alive. When much-feared hermit Felix Bush (Robert Duvall) comes to town with a wad of cash and announces his intention to preside over his own funeral, fast-talking mortician Frank Quinn (Bill Murray) smells a big payday in the air. Frank sends his young apprentice, Buddy, to charm Felix and win Felix's business. As the day of the unusual event approaches, Buddy uncovers a long-held secret involving the hermit, a local widow (Sissy Spacek) and an Illinois preacher. If you want to enjoy your own funeral and hear what folks might say about you, this one's for you.



Death at a Funeral comes in two flavours – the 2007 British comedy drama and the 2010 American comedy remake with a black cast. In the first version, a dysfunctional British family gathers for the patriarch's funeral. Tensions rise, old conflicts are uncovered and, when a man arrives who says he's the dead man's gay lover and threatens blackmail, drastic measures are taken. The American version has an urban spin with similar themes of a dysfunctional family gathering for a respectful funeral that quickly turns into an all-out fiasco. Between the two movies there are very



few discrepancies. The major difference was that the British version is an all-white cast, whereas the US version is an all-black cast. See them both and decide which version you prefer.

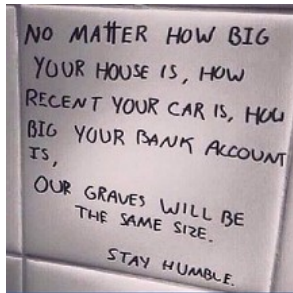
Bernie (2011) is a dark comedy based on a real-life event. Assistant funeral director Bernie Tiede (Jack Black) is one of the most-beloved residents in the small Texas town of Carthage. Sunday-school teacher, choir member and creator of spectacular funerals, Bernie is a friend to everyone, including Marjorie Nugent (Shirley MacLaine), a rich but nasty widow whom no one else. When Marjorie is found shot to death and stuffed in a freezer, Bernie is charged with the murder, and concerned Carthage citizens immediately spring to his defense. While making a comedy out of a murder may seem like a bizarre mocumentary, it's worth watching.

Page | 12

These 10 movies are available on several streaming services such as Amazon Prime, Hulu, Netflix, and Vudu. And this is just a sampling; more are listed at 64 films about grief and loss (<https://whatsyourgrief.com/64-movies-about-grief-and-loss/>). There are many great movies about death you need to see before you die.

Tombstone Oddities

Thanks to Mark Turner



Last Words

King George V

1865-1936

After a 1928 recuperative visit to the south-east coastal town of Bognor he was petitioned to rename the town Bognor Regis in commemoration of his visit. He is famously said to have replied "Bugger Bognor", and these have been widely and falsely recorded as his final words. After his death eight years later his physician reported that his final utterance was "God damn you", said to his nurse when she administered a sedative.

