



Written by Rick Glanvill, Chelsea FC Historian.

Many thanks to Robert Stephenson, Alan Doyle, Catherine Cooper and the Fleet Air Arm Museum, Yeovilton.



PLEASE TAKE CARE WHILE WALKING AROUND,
AND RESPECT THE SPIRIT OF THE CEMETERY.



Final Whistle:

The Chelsea Football Club Trail at Brompton Cemetery

A guide to the rich history shared by a
world-famous club and its much-loved neighbour.



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Welcome...

... to this booklet that reveals, for the first time, the significant links between Chelsea Football Club and the Brompton Cemetery. It aims to entertain and inform. Whether you are joining a guided tour or walking home from work, there is hopefully something here for you.

Founded by an Act of Parliament in 1838, Brompton Cemetery has been home to the dearly departed of SW6 and further afield since its consecration by the Bishop of London in June 1840. It is nondenominational and still accepts burials.

In 1905 it suddenly acquired a noisy new neighbour just across the railway tracks. Formed on March 10 in the Rising Sun pub (now the Butcher's Hook), Chelsea Football & Athletic Club moved into the adjacent Stamford Bridge sports ground, and soon became one of the best-supported teams in the land. Record crowds of 82,905 against Arsenal in 1935, 100,000 for the visit of Moscow Dynamo ten years later, and the 42,000 who now pack the stadium on Champions League nights, have thronged through Brompton on their way to the game. (Many of them used to sneak into the stadium without paying via the railway tracks!) Just like the commuters on their way to West Brompton tube, they were blissfully unaware of the strong associations between certain occupants of the cemetery and the club next door. In fact they strode past Chelsea heroes buried along the way: founders, directors, war heroes, Olympic stars.

Here, we reveal the hidden stories behind the gravestones...



1 WILLIAM CLAUDE KIRBY

Chelsea FC Chairman, 1905-35

As chairman for its first 30 years, Battersea-born shipping clerk Claude Kirby enjoyed the longest sustained influence over Chelsea football club of all our Brompton Cemetery inhabitants. Prior to 1905 he had been in the territorial army (King Edward's Horse), and a fine runner at all distances, winning over 100 prizes before becoming an official of the London Athletic Club (LAC), previous occupants of Stamford Bridge for 35 years.

Kirby was present in May 1905 – extremely pessimistic, like someone 'waiting for the hangman' – at the Covent Garden meeting where the new Chelsea club was voted into the Second Division. He went on to become an influential and innovative committee member within football as well as the key man at Chelsea. His acquaintance with the Prince of Wales meant the future King Edward VIII graced Stamford Bridge for a cup-tie in February 1920.

Over his three decades of service, Kirby (on the left, opposite with manager Leslie Knighton in 1932) was rarely pictured without a Homburg hat and a cigarette in hand. He died aged 67 in October 1935 at his home, 8 Durrell Road, Fulham.



Having pioneered numbered football shirts at Chelsea in 1928, it was Claude Kirby who originally suggested to Arsenal FC those famous white sleeves. He was struck how smart a golfer looked out on the links one day, with a sleeveless blue sweater over a longsleeved shirt. Chelsea's board had rejected the idea.

2 JOHN ERNEST CLAUDE BUDD

Chelsea FC Director, 1931-52

The gravestone words describe Jack Budd, born 1899, as the ward of Claude Kirby, 32 years his senior. Kirby had for many years been a lodger with the Budd family and when Frederick and Minnie, publicans who ran the Cleveland Arms in Paddington, died, Kirby became Jack's official guardian. They already shared a middle name. Six feet seven inches tall (the same as former Chelsea season ticket-holder Peter Crouch), Jack was a brilliant swimmer who could cover 100 yards in 63 seconds and a water polo player who represented Fulham clubs (Marcians and Penguins at Fulham Baths), skippered England, and represented Great Britain in two Olympic finals.

At Paris in 1924 the GB team was knocked out in the first round, but by Amsterdam in 1928 Budd had converted from back to forward and enjoyed more success. He was noted for his 'swift and adroit passing' and scored in the first round 4-2 win over Czechoslovakia, against Holland in a 5-3 win, and once more in the semi-final. This was lost 5-8 to Germany (unsurprisingly). Through his guardian's associations Budd joined the Chelsea board in 1931 following the death of Alfred Janes (see p6). After the war he became vice-chairman of the club to Joe Mears (Gus's nephew, and chairman 1940-66), a post he held until his death in 1952.

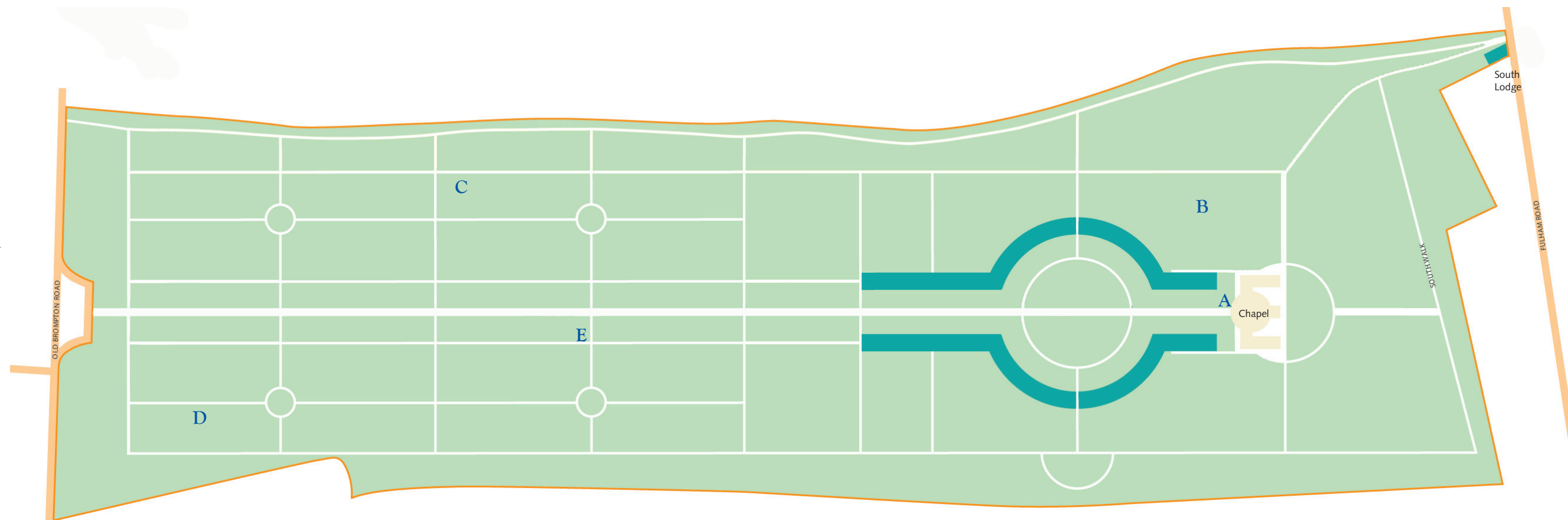


TRUE STORY

“He was sitting next to me Jack Budd, charming fellow, and he pulled out a packet of cigarettes half way through my interview, and offered me a cigarette. He was a great friend of mine. He was always, you know, friendly.”

Chelsea club secretary John Battersby on meeting Budd during his interview with Chelsea in 1949

CEMETERY MAP



A Kirby & Budd
Located on the corner, near
the Chapel.

B Janes
44th row from the corner,
eighth grave in from the path

C Maltby
15th row from the corner,
fourth grave in from the path

D Chelsea Pensioners
Large monument, easy
to find.

E Mears & Mears
Front row, second from
the corner

Please take care while walking
around and respect the spirit
of the cemetery.

3 ALFRED FREDERICK JANES

Chelsea FC Director, 1905-26

Wealthy local publican Alfred Janes was born in Blackfriars in 1857. He ran the Rising Sun, opposite the main gate of Stamford Bridge. Alfred is also the only Chelsea director who was thought to have haunted a building. In the late Twenties he lived in one of the last remaining big old Victorian properties, 'Chesterfield', on Streatham High Road. He was pressured to sell for years, but refused. In his dotage in 1929, Janes finally – and reluctantly – sold up and moved to Clapham. An Astoria cinema, one of London's first talkies, was built there (it stands to this day) and opened in June 1930. Late on Christmas night three years later the cinema's fireman was doing his rounds when he saw a figure in the darkness. His torch revealed an old man in a white hooded gown. All at once the figure moved through two heavy fastened doors, floated over the orchestra pit and stood in front of the curtains wailing, in a strange husky voice, 'I won't sell, I won't sell!' When the story broke, the spectre was 'identified' as Janes, who had died in July 1930 – though the Chelsea connection was only discovered in 2004.

The early simultaneous deaths of the two very young Janes children point to a personal tragedy. Dysentery, measles, scarlet fever and whooping cough were the big killers in greater London that year.



The scene 15 minutes before kick-off in November 1913 before Chelsea played Middlesbrough. On the right is the Rising Sun pub, and perhaps that is the landlord's wife, Ellen, peering over the balcony onto the throng below.

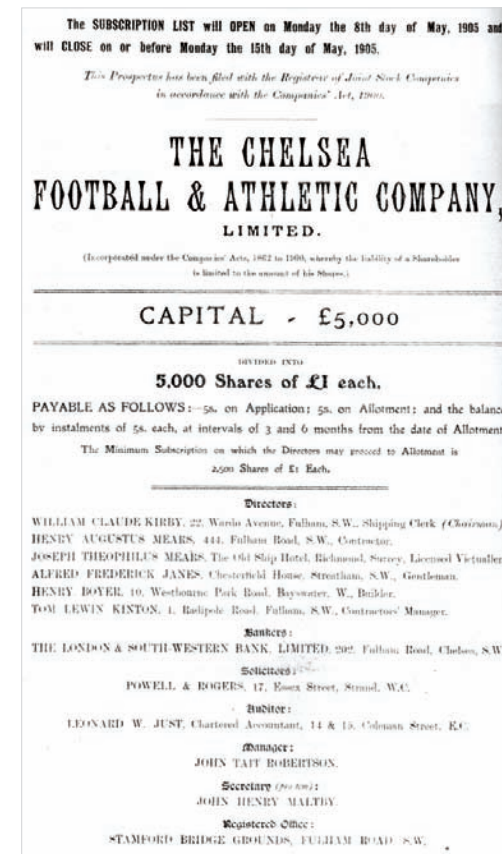


4 JOHN HENRY MALTBY

Chelsea FC Director, 1905-26

It was John Maltby's hand, literally, that set in motion the formation of Chelsea FC. As clerk to the solicitors acting on their behalf, he launched the first 5,000 share issue at the Rising Sun on March 10 1905, and handed out half the bills of sale that first evening. The club retained Maltby he became a founding director. The position was proof to John that he really had made it, despite a potentially disastrous start in life. His father, unusually, left home soon after he was born. He was raised by his single mother Catherine and her supportive family, the Sewells, greengrocers in affluent South Kensington.

On the Chelsea board Maltby was very much a rubber-stamper and the Mearses' man. In common with many Chelsea directors then, over-indulgence in alcohol was a failing and his family life was troubled. Son Edgar used to try and steer him past the Conservative Club in Shorrolds Road and the Red Lion in Fulham Broadway, two of his favourite drinking haunts. The story went that Maltby knew it was time to go home when the Red Lion's tail was wagging. His wife Marion once threw his dinner at him when he came home the worse for drink again. Edgar eventually had a great falling out with his father, who evidently favoured his daughter Kathleen – he often took her out with him in preference to his own wife! He died in 1941 aged 75. Buried with him are his wife, Marion, and mother Catherine.



The original flyer for the issue of 5,000 further shares, securable with a five shilling down-payment, in Chelsea Football & Athletic Club. The Henry Boyer mentioned, another contractor, was married to the Mearses' sister Beatrice; Tom Kinton worked for J.T. Mears.

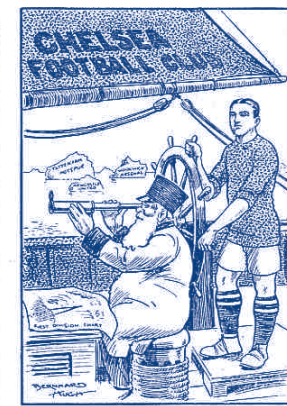


5 CHELSEA PENSIONERS

The elderly gentlemen in scarlet jackets sitting in the grandstand have been a feature at Stamford Bridge since early days, when they were first handed free match tickets by the board. The fame of the ex-servicemen from nearby Royal Hospital led inexorably to the team's nickname, despite resistance. 'We all honour the grand old Chelsea Pensioners,' the match programme of 14 October 1905 protested. 'Still, we agree with the "Star" that the "Pensioners" is rather suggestive of the lights of other days.' Alternative monikers also drew on Chelsea associations: the 'Buns' or 'Chinamen'.

Proud as the club became of the connection, it created an easy target for satirists (see cartoon right, 1912). In Brompton Cemetery, one of the most impressive monuments was erected to honour the 2,625 Chelsea Pensioners buried here between 1855 and 1893. An array of battle colours, roaring lion and (sadly diminishing) stack of cannon balls help commemorate battles from the Crimea and elsewhere. The last interment here was, 12 years before Chelsea FC was founded, but the link remains.

The Pensioner Cruises in First Division Waters.



The Pensioner (to Captain Cameron at the Wheel)
"Now, my boy, steer clear of these icebergs, some of 'em look dangerous, and we don't want another disaster."



6 HENRY AUGUSTUS MEARS

Founder of Chelsea FC



Known universally as Gus, Mears, the young *bon vivant* son of a wealthy builder, owned a lucrative contracting business along with his brother Joseph Theophilus (known as J.T., buried at Richmond). He lived at 444 Fulham Road, roughly where the Britannia Gate of Stamford Bridge is now.

The brothers were enthusiastic sportsmen and Gus jumped at the chance to buy the land on which the London Athletic Club meetings were held: Stamford Bridge. Whether it was to develop the stadium as he did, or to realise it for housing and shops we may never know. By June 1904 Mears was in negotiation for Fulham FC to lease the ground, but it came to nothing and he mulled over selling up to Great Western Railway for goods yards. It was only while walking his dog on the land with a friend and LAC official, Frederick Parker, one Sunday that autumn, that disillusioned Gus was persuaded to launch his own football team. Parker was arguing unsuccessfully for such a move until Mears's dog suddenly bit through Parker's cycling stockings, drawing blood. His friend's calm reaction to the savagery convinced Mears to go with him. On March 10, at a meeting above the Rising Sun public house opposite, the decision as made to call the new team Chelsea FC. The club was accepted into the Football League Second Division and played its first home game, a 4-0 friendly win over Liverpool, on September 4 1905; Mears's eldest son Augustus performed the kick-off. Gus's motto was "never mind" (a useful one for supporters who had to wait 50 years for the first meaningful silverware, the league championship). He died aged just 37 of kidney failure on 4 February 1912, and as the funeral cortege – a hearse, flower hearse and seven horses – passed the gates of Stamford Bridge, it paused in the rain to bid farewell, watched by hundreds of mourners.

The freehold of the ground passed eventually to his brother J.T., so that the Mears dynasty owned and ran Chelsea FC for 75 years. Gus's parents, Joseph and Charlotte, are also buried beneath this grand red granite headstone, along with wife Harriet.

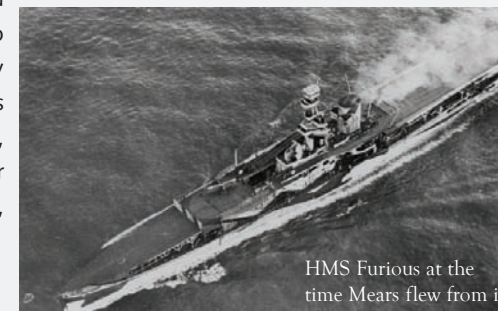


7 LT. HENRY FRANK MEARS

Son of the Founder

Although only 18, the late Gus Mears's second son Henry was a pioneer too. When he was accidentally killed on 29 April 1918 – 'lost speed turning sharply in gusty wind and crashed' – he became one of the first fatalities of the Royal Air Force, newly formed on the 1st of that month. Mears, a 'very good' flyer, was in a Sopwith Ship's Strutter biplane from the world's first aircraft carrier or 'aerodrome ship', HMS Furious, refitted for the purpose in June 1917. Unless converted for bombing, a Strutter had a crew of two, a pilot and observer. A Capt. Gilbert Millar died in the same accident, but Henry is likely to have been the pilot.

In April 1918 Furious was training ship-board flyers in the Firth of Forth. Their work was high risk – displacement currents and hot furnace gases from her funnel made landing a canvass-and-wood craft on deck notoriously tricky. The first successful flight of a two-seater from any British warship had only taken place on 4 April. German Zeppelins were a constant threat to shipping and civilians, though, and biplanes to dogfight with too. Young Henry had enlisted a month after his 18th birthday in July 1917, having previously worked for the contracting firm of his uncle, the owner of Stamford Bridge.



HMS Furious at the time Mears flew from it.