

Secularists celebrate restoration of Charles Bradlaugh's grave

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A new bust of National Secular Society founder Charles Bradlaugh has been unveiled at a ceremony to mark the restoration of his grave.

More than 60 people attended the ceremony at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey to commemorate the restoration, which was funded through an NSS appeal.

The mayor of Woking was among the attendees, who also included supporters of the fundraiser and Bradlaugh's descendants.

Bradlaugh was a 19th century political activist who argued for the abolition of the blasphemy law and for religion to be separated from the state.

The project was jointly coordinated by the NSS and the Brookwood Cemetery Society.

The ceremony

At the ceremony, Brookwood Cemetery Society chair Kim Lowe gave an emotional address explaining Bradlaugh's significance. She said Bradlaugh was "a man of the people, and a man for the people."

NSS council member Robert Forder also read a description of Bradlaugh's funeral from [*Dare To Stand Alone*](#), a biography of Bradlaugh by Bryan Niblett.

The mayor of Woking Liam Lyons and NSS president Keith Porteous Wood laid wreaths at the grave.

Posies were also laid on the grave by Rosa and Ada Burch, age 6 and 4, to symbolise the continuing and growing relevance of the issues which Bradlaugh represented.

The project

Bradlaugh died on 30 January 1891. In 1893 a monument was erected over his grave incorporating a substantial bronze bust by Belgian artist François Verheyden.

The monument suffered theft and vandalism in 1938 and 1968, when the bust was stolen and not replaced.

The NSS launched an appeal for funds to restore the grave in June.

The restored grave will also feature an information panel, detailing Bradlaugh's achievements to visitors to Brookwood Cemetery – a grade 1 listed historic park and garden.

Charles Bradlaugh

Bradlaugh founded the NSS in 1866 and faced a prolonged [struggle to enter parliament as an MP](#) in the 1880s, as he was barred from taking his seat because of his atheist beliefs.

He finally took his place in parliament in 1886 and was instrumental in bringing about a change in the law, giving all MPs the right to affirm rather than swear a religious oath.

He was [prosecuted](#) after publishing rudimentary information about birth control and he also argued for the end of the monarchy.

His funeral on 3 February 1891 was attended by several thousand mourners who arrived by special trains from Waterloo on the 'Necropolis railway'.

NSS comment

NSS chief executive Stephen Evans said: "Bradlaugh was the greatest radical politician of his era. The principles of equality, freedom and secularism he championed are more relevant than ever today. Restoring his grave and bust is one way we can make sure his remarkable legacy is recognised and remembered far into the future.

"Restoring the grave to its former glory is a great achievement and I'm so grateful to Brookwood Cemetery Society and all our members and supporters who gave so generously to our appeal to make it happen."

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What the NSS stands for

The Secular Charter outlines 10 principles that guide us as we campaign for a secular democracy which safeguards all citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion.

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