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LONDON

## Tracking down some old relatives

By AL LEWIS  
Special to The Okanagan Sunday

I have always held the belief that a person's character is a compilation of genetic traits extending back through untold generations. As a small boy, I vividly remember sitting with my grandfather on the wrap around veranda of the old red Saskatchewan farmhouse, listening to stories of his early years growing up in Victorian England. I was captivated and curious. With this in mind, I couldn't resist the opportunity to create a little adventure, courtesy of one of north London's oldest cemeteries. After confirming locations with my cousin, Shelley, our resident genealogist, my mission was set — find the gravesite of my great grandparents, John and Isabella Garden. Disease and death prematurely knocked on their door within eighteen months of each other. Both were in their early 40s. By the year 1895, at the age of 15, my recently orphaned grandfather along with his siblings would set sail for Canada and start a new life as a pioneer in the harsh Canadian

prairies. My search would take me across London to a gnarled old cemetery in the suburb of Tottenham. This was my chance to connect with family. A very helpful concierge at the hotel photocopied a map of the area and provided me with the necessary underground subway and bus connections. "Take the tube to Kings Cross from Baker Street, change trains, proceed to the Seven Sisters stop, hop a bus and then walk about six blocks north and three blocks east — you can't miss it," he joked. "I hope you have your best walking shoes with you, mate." Within a couple of hours, I had arrived at the cemetery. It was already getting late with a February chill in the air. The grounds turned out to be much larger than I expected and there were hundreds of dilapidated old tombstones, seemingly growing out of Mother Earth. Many were twisted and angled from the invasive roots of neighboring trees, resembling something from an old Vincent Price movie. Luckily, I was able to make contact with a resident groundskeeper. "Would there be anyone who might be able to help me locate the gravesite of my great grandparents," I asked hopefully. The maintenance worker replied with a stiff Cockney accent: "Not too likely guvnor, the director is off today and he's the only one with a map. Besides, I'll be closing the gates in 25 minutes." With an unexpected sense of urgency, I was left to rely on good fortune and minimal hunting skills as I moved as fast as I could, scanning the weather beaten inscriptions with humility and respect. The sky darkened and the air chilled as the pervasive London fog began to move in. I began to suspect that I may have to be satisfied with just being in the setting itself. I only had 10 minutes or risk being locked inside the grounds all night. I didn't like that idea. Before me lay a main tributary road leading to an exit.



Al Lewis found the gravestone of his great-grandfather and great-grandmother in a gnarled, old cemetery in the London suburb of Tottenham.

AL LEWIS/Special to The Okanagan Sunday



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Lewis also visited No. 12 Townsend Road, the former home of his great-grandfather and grandfather, in one of North London's roughest neighbourhoods.

Without warning, a sudden gust of wind accompanied by swirling leaves seemed to interrupt my exit plans. For no obvious reason, I felt I was being led in the opposite direction. I chose instead to jump over a five foot spiked fence, walked straight about 20 yards and made a sharp turn to the left until I came face to face with an ornate and stately stone that stopped me in my tracks. The inscriptions were clear: John Garden, died December 19, 1893, aged 42 years and Isabella Mary, died August 27, 1895, aged 43 years. At first glance, I couldn't believe what I had found. With the light of day running out, I had goosebumps running up and down my arms. Even though my moments of reflection would be brief, there was a wonderful feeling of personal triumph. I had answers, but I also had questions. What was behind the intervention that allowed such fulfillment to this very personal search? Could this be a haunting reminder that perhaps we are more connected to our past than we realize?



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Photo: Poet's Cover - Cruising the Gulf Islands

## Ceremony marks 125th anniversary of national park

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, Calif. — The 125th anniversary of Yosemite National Park has been marked by a ceremony in Yosemite Valley. The National Park Service says about 1,500 people attended Thursday event, which included a Native American blessing and a

portrayal of John Muir, the naturalist who worked to preserve Yosemite and other parts of the Sierra Nevada. Legislation creating Yosemite National Park was signed by President Benjamin Harrison on Oct. 1, 1890. — The Associated Press






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