National Federation of CEMETERY FRIENDS

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

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Bedford Cemetery Friends greet NFCF with piper at AGM

The NFCF AGM on Saturday 8th June 2024 coincided with the beginning of National Cemeteries Week. Hosted by the Friends of Bedford Cemetery in the Chapel at Foster Hill Road Cemetery, the attendees included 40 representatives on behalf of 19 cemetery Friends' groups.

Being greeted by a bagpiper on arrival was a nice touch and got the day off to a good start. The welcome and introduction to the cemetery including the work of the Friends was delivered by Bob Ricketts, Chair of the Friends and Councillor John Wheeler, Speaker of Bedford Borough Council. Attendees were then invited to participate in a guided tour of the cemetery which was led by Adrian Bean and supported by several volunteers attired in period style costume.

The guided cemetery tour
Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the NFCF.
All material by the editor unless otherwise attributed.

Established by the Borough of Bedford, the cemetery was opened in June 1855. It occupied 18 acres of land which had been secured by the founder of *The Bedford Times* James Wyatt, then serving as the Borough Treasurer. Local architect Thomas Jobson Jackson designed the Gothic style red brick entrance lodge and the original chapel layout (image right) consisting of linked Anglican and Non-conformist chapels, as well as the layout of the cemetery with the assistance of John Usher. The cemetery was extended in later years to cover an area of 37 acres.

View towards the red brick entrance lodge
Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

View towards the chapel
Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

Over 100,000 individuals have been laid to rest in this beautiful cemetery. The interments include those of James Wyatt (1816-1878) and Thomas Jobson Jackson (1820-1894) mentioned above; the leader of the Bedford based Panacea Society, Mabel Barltrop (1866-1934), a soldier of the Polish underground army during World War II, Danuta Gruszczynska-Alasinka (1924-1953), and the interment of 33 men from the Highland Division, who were billeted in Bedford for nine months from August 1914, training and preparing for war. It is thought around 130 men died as a result of infectious diseases such as measles, scarlet fever and diphtheria during the winter of 1914/15. Whilst most were returned to home locations for burial, 31 (of the aforementioned 33) were interred at Bedford Cemetery.

Left: In the foreground the grave of Mabel Barltrop
Right: The Cross of Sacrifice and military graves
Photographs by Ann Wilkinson

After lunch, the formal AGM business took place, and details can be found in the minutes sent to members. Any members who have not received a copy of the minutes please contact Ann Wilkinson: secretary@cemeteryfriends.com

Thank you to the Friends of Bedford Cemetery for their hospitality, making it an enjoyable and memorable day.

The next NFCF AGM will be hosted by the Undercliffe Cemetery Charity, Bradford on Saturday 14th June 2025.

If any Member would like to host the AGM in 2026 (or beyond) please email: secretary@cemeteryfriends.com

Prestigious King's Award for NFCF member

In November it was announced that the Friends of Farsley Rehoboth Burial Ground in Leeds had been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAVS). The KAVS is equivalent to an MBE, and is the highest Award given to voluntary groups in the UK.

Congratulations to the Farsley Rehoboth volunteers.

National Cemeteries Week (NCW) 2024

by NCW coordinator, Emer Seamark

Our special nine-day 'week' was held from 8th to 16th June 2024 and, as in previous years, aligned with Caring for God's Acre, Love Your Burial Ground Week.

We would like to thank all those who registered to be part of NCW this year and hope the weather favoured your events: the Editor welcomes any photos or details. Thanks also to those who were unable to fully participate but placed posters in their local area. The aim of NCW is to raise awareness of cemeteries in general and your own in particular. NCW is also a good time to call for volunteers and is not confined to Friends groups; churchyards and associated groups and organisations are welcome to take part. The number of participants is steadily growing, and we hope to maintain this trend. Thank you again.

The following groups held events this year:
Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust
Dockyard Graveyard Trust
Econet's Friends of Reading Old Cemetery
Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery
Friends of Brockley and Ladywell Cemeteries
Friends of Chapel Street Cemetery
Friends of Farsley Rehoboth Burial Ground
Friends of Flaybrick Cemetery
Friends of Hull General Cemetery
Friends of Hawkhead Cemetery
Friends of Heene Cemetery
Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery
Friends of Lister Lane Cemetery
Friends of Loxley Cemetery
Friends of Mill Road Cemetery
Friends of Morningside Cemetery
Friends of Nunhead Cemetery
Friends of Ocklynge Cemetery
Friends of St John Baptist Churchyard
Friends of Syston Barkby Road Cemetery
Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park

Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery
Friends of West Norwood Cemetery
Friends of York Cemetery
Willesden Jewish Cemetery
Friends of Zion Graveyard

This year National Cemeteries Week will take place from Saturday 7th to Sunday 15th June 2025 and will again coincide with Love Your Burial Ground Week (see below).

Caring for God's Acre – 2025 Love Your Burial Ground Week

from Prue Dakin, Office Manager

As part of National Cemeteries Week, Saturday 7th to Sunday 15th June 2025, NFCF will again be partnering with Caring for God's Acre's, Love your Burial Ground Week to investigate and celebrate the wildlife to be found in these special places.

Nearly 20 cemeteries across the country registered via the Caring for God's Acre website in 2024 so that their event appeared on their map, and we are hoping that even more will join in 2025. Registration for events will open in mid-March 2025, and signing up this way will give you the chance to request some useful resources to help you engage with and enthuse the people who come along to take part. Wildlife finds can be recorded using the iNaturalist app, and in 2024 an amazing 6,500 records were submitted.

NFCF website: help us make this your own

Members have their own unique 'Members Page' on the NFCF website and are invited to check that contact details and web links included on their page are up to date by visiting the website at: https://www.cemeteryfriends.com/members

If not already done so, Members are invited to include on their page a photograph and some descriptive text about their cemetery and their Friends group. Guidance on photograph size, content for the descriptive text, and submission of updates and content can be found at: https://www.cemeteryfriends.com/news/member-pages

A five-year project finally finished!!

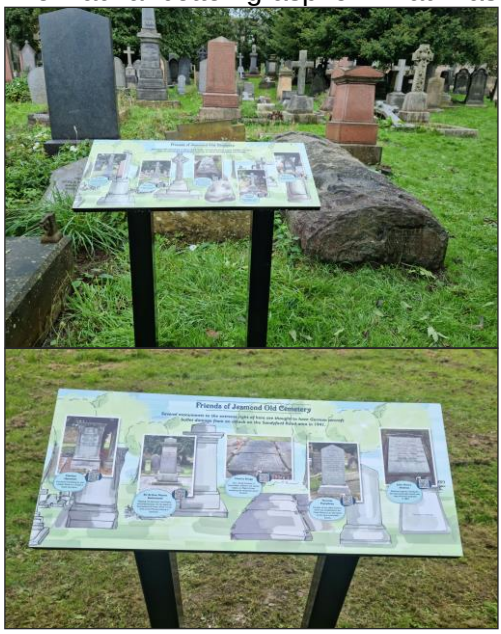
forwarded by Ray Hayes, Secretary of the Friends of Jesmond Old Cemetery, Newcastle upon Tyne

Way back in the pre-2020s, we had a germ of an idea to introduce 'Interpretation Boards' into our beautiful Jesmond Old Cemetery (JOC). Why, I hear you ask? Well, why not, is the obvious but flippant answer; however, the real answer to the question is that on our numerous visits to other cemeteries throughout the U.K., it became clear that the overall quality of the visitor experience was enhanced by the addition and inclusion of those informative little founts of additional knowledge and information that we now know to be called 'interpretation boards'. So, having witnessed first-hand (or eye) the positive impact of these artistic, inspirational and information giving signs, we decided to have them installed throughout JOC – but where to start?

Money, as ever, was our first thought. Or, rather, lack of it!! So, we set about raising some money to help fund our project, but not before having first of all carried out a little research to find out what our financial target might be; a quick Google search revealed three companies who we thought looked good in terms of their 'on-line' presence. Having given a very brief outline of what we had in mind to each company, we received three quite different quotes in terms of price, ranging from the low single £1,000s to five figure £1,000s. Anyway, the received quotes only served to illustrate how much money we needed to raise (quite a lot) and that we had a lot of work to do in order to meet our intended target. So, we adopted a dual approach to raising money, involving a 'walk and talk' strategy i.e. walking tours of JOC and talking presentations to community groups, and also engaging with local individuals and companies who might be able to offer us some financial support. Funnily enough, this 'dual approach' resulted in an almost 50:50 split in terms of the monies raised, with half of the eventual total of £10,500 being raised by our walks and talks, and the other half being kindly donated by the Chapman family, the Fenwick family, Muckle LLP and Newcastle City Council.

The fundraising activity was, perhaps, the main factor in our project taking up five years of our lives but, additionally, the actual decision-making process took up an inordinate amount of time as ideas, counter-

ideas, themes, counter-themes, drafting, redrafting, having debates (arguments), gaining consensus (twisting of elbows), spell-checking, grammar checking, fact checking etc. etc. were all endured…. I mean enjoyed!! Anyway, the point being that the pathway from initial idea to end product is, necessarily, time consuming if you want to get it right – and we think we got it right. However, we did not do all of this on our own; in the initial stages, we had invaluable help and advice from both Chris Mearns from Historic England, and Simon Parkin, from Newcastle City Council. Once we had a better grasp of what was required, we contacted our preferred 'provider', Border Signs and Graphics, who are based in Dumfries, and they collaborated very closely with us, particularly one of their staff, Rachel, who is BSG's Graphic Designer.



Two of the new interpretation boards
Photographs courtesy of Ray Hayes

An interesting 'design' experience subsequently developed, due mainly to the bulk of the creative work being conducted 'on-line' and via email; this was a new and novel approach for an owld fella like me, who is used to live 'face-to-face' interaction but, I have to say, it worked perfectly. So, we sent Rachel rough sketches, doodles and vague notions of what we were after in terms of an overarching theme and, over time, she was able to translate our broad brushstrokes into absolute works of art.

As well as the artwork, we really wanted to have a connection with our website content, hence the use of QR codes, where a one-step scan via a smart phone takes the interested visitor to a detailed biography of their chosen individual from the interpretation board. Technology at its best, for sure.

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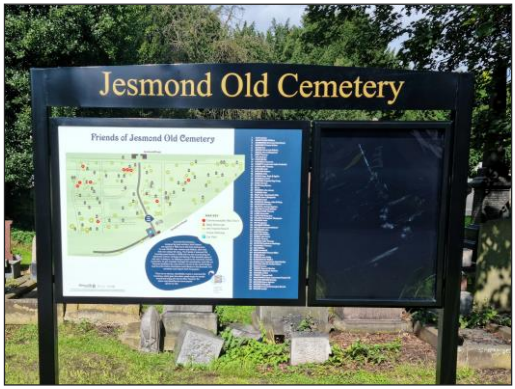
Which brings me to another aspect of the design process – how do you choose which individuals, of the over 22,000 who are buried in JOC, to be included on our interpretation boards? Cue a range of polls, questionnaires and gender considerations i.e. how to get a balance when there are so many more male than female orientated monuments and inscriptions – quite an insult to modern day norms, really. We also had to agree on geographical locations of the boards within JOC, trying to ensure that chosen monuments were relatively close together and that the interpretation boards were appropriately spaced throughout JOC. So, again, an indication of what a difficult job we had in trying to accommodate a range of variables. Thankfully, we had our 'Welcome Board' list of names to help make sure that any 'non-inclusions' on the interpretation boards were still found a place of prominence.



Welcome Board
Photograph courtesy of Ray Hayes

Did I just mention the 'Welcome Board'? How could I forget that beauty.....again, another collaborative work of art, where we provided the outline of a map and Rachel produced the detailed version, complete with geographically accurate placement of trees. Our Welcome Board has pride of place, adjacent to the South Lodge, near the Sandyford Road entrance to JOC.

So, that is a quick overview of our Interpretation Board project – what a journey it has been for us - a true labour of love. Hopefully, you will find our five years of effort has been worthwhile and that on your visits to JOC, you will experience the same positive impact of these artistic, inspirational and information giving signs that we did, all of those years ago.

The Friends are happy to advise any fellow Friends group who may wish to develop a similar project. Please contact Ray Hayes, email: hencotesray5@gmail.com

Enhancing cemetery preservation:
The benefits of joining the Society of One-Place Studies

by Steve Miller
Webmaster, Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds

Cemeteries are more than just resting places for the deceased; they are vital historical repositories that offer insights into the past lives of a community. Friends of cemetery groups, dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of these hallowed grounds, play a crucial role in safeguarding this heritage.

Joining the Society of One-Place Studies (SoOPS) can significantly enhance their efforts in various ways.
(See website: https://www.one-place-studies.org/)

1. Holistic historical context
SoOPS focuses on the study of all aspects of a particular place, including its history, geography, and demography.

For cemetery groups, this holistic approach provides a broader context, enriching the understanding of the lives and times of those interred. This can lead to more comprehensive and meaningful preservation projects.

2. Access to expertise and resources
Membership in SoOPS connects cemetery groups with a network of historians, genealogists, and researchers. This access to a wide array of expertise can help in unravelling complex historical narratives, conducting detailed research, and uncovering previously unknown stories about the community and its residents.

3. Enhanced research skills
SoOPS offers resources and training that can enhance the research skills of cemetery group members. Learning advanced techniques in data collection, archival research, and historical analysis can improve the accuracy and depth of the group's work, making their preservation efforts more impactful.

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4. Collaborative opportunities
Being part of SoOPS opens opportunities for collaboration with other one-place study groups. These associations can lead to joint research projects, shared resources, and a greater collective impact. Working together, groups can tackle larger projects and gain insights that might be difficult to achieve independently.

5. Increased visibility and support
Joining a well-regarded organisation like SoOPS can increase the visibility of a cemetery group's work. This can attract more support from the community, local government, and potential donors. It also lends credibility to the group's efforts, making it easier to secure grants and other funding.

6. Preservation and documentation techniques
SoOPS provides guidance on best practices for documenting and preserving historical sites. Cemetery groups can benefit from learning advanced methods of cataloguing graves, maintaining records, and using technology to create digital archives. These techniques ensure that the cemetery's historical value is preserved for future generations.

7. Community engagement
SoOPS emphasises community involvement in historical projects. By adopting these practices, cemetery groups can engage local residents, schools, and organisations in their work. This fosters a sense of community ownership and pride in the cemetery and its history.

Conclusion
For friends of cemetery groups, joining the Society of One-Place Studies offers a multitude of benefits that can enhance their preservation efforts. From gaining access to expert knowledge and resources to improving research skills and fostering community engagement, SoOPS provides invaluable support that helps transform a cemetery from a mere resting place into a vibrant historical landmark.

The NFCF moving forward

by Melvyn Hawkins

We are pleased to announce that our application was successful, and the Federation is now a Community Interest Company.

On 21 October 2024, **The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC** was registered at Companies House as a not-for-profit Community Interest Company limited by guarantee.

As we are a member organisation that does directly serve the general public, we could not register as a simple charity. The best alternative is a Community Interest Company (CIC), a type of limited company which, instead of generating a profit for shareholders, retains any surplus income for the benefit of the 'Community'. Our community is 'individuals and groups of individuals who have an interest in the appreciation, preservation and conservation of cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds within the United Kingdom'. As part of the application process, we produced a 'Community Interest Statement' which outlines what the company will do, which is essentially a list of what the Federation is already doing.

The Federation's constitution will be replaced by a new document called the 'Articles of Association', which controls the way in which the company operates. Drafts of this were circulated to members previously and these have now been adopted, with minor technical amendments imposed by Companies House. The Articles will be added to the Federation website in January when the company goes live.

In January all existing members will be invited to continue their membership but now as members of the new CIC. Each member of the company will undertake that, in the unlikely event of the company's financial collapse, they will donate £1 towards the debts. That is the 'guarantee' referred to in the name. Other than that £1, members will have no other liabilities in regard to the company.

There will be three types of membership:

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Group membership will be available to groups who have an interest in one or more specific cemeteries. It is the group that is the member, rather than an individual, although groups will be asked to nominate an Authorised Representative who will represent the group, this is likely to be the person who is currently the principal contact with the Federation. The 2025 subscription will continue to be £20 for groups with 25 or more members or £10 for smaller groups.

Corporate membership will be available to organisations that have interests in sympathy with the aims of the Company. This will include local councils, Bereavement Services departments and others who are currently Associate members of the Federation. The 2025 subscription will be £10.

Personal membership, available to individuals who have personal or professional interests in sympathy with the aims of the Company. The 2025 subscription will be £10.

To simplify the finances and membership processes, the committee decided that the existing Federation will continue until 31 December 2024 and the new company will remain dormant. On 1 January 2025 we will activate the company and close down the existing Federation.

The existing committee of the Federation will become the directors of the CIC, with the same roles. Although the identity and logo of the Federation will continue to be used, we are required to use the legal name of the company on formal documents, so you can expect to see that added to membership documents, newsletters and the website. Apart from that there will be no change in the way the Federation operates or presents itself.

Changing the structure of any organisation is a big step that needs to be thought through carefully. The Federation has existed for over 40 years as an unincorporated organisation, and the temptation might have been simply to carry on like that. However, as the Federation has grown in size it has become increasingly significant on the national stage. The Federation represents its members at government level and with a range of local authorities. Although the Federation is not a lobbying organisation and has no political affiliations or leanings, it does act as an advisor and a ‘critical friend’ on many occasions. Our members often seek advice and

support with their campaigns and projects. Officers of the Federation regularly work with member groups in discussions with developers, local authorities, cemetery owners and the clergy.

Work of this type is valued by our members but, inevitably, it sometimes means we have to point out things that some people do not want to hear. The committee have felt for some time that the Federation should protect itself against potential litigation as a consequence. These fears proved well-founded when, earlier this year, a member of the committee personally faced legal action for their work on behalf of a member group. However, we have been cautioned to be guarded about speaking publicly about it. The issue has only recently been finally resolved, with the Federation having to dig deep into its legal 'war chest' to take legal advice and pay legal charges to avoid escalation of the action. Perhaps this is an unfortunate indicator of how much the Federation's involvement is now recognised. The action was taken against the individual personally because the Federation, as an unincorporated association, could not be taken to court. The new CIC exists as a legal entity in its own right, separate from its officers, and had that structure been in place at the time we would have been in a stronger position to fight our case without risking one of our committee facing substantial personal financial penalties. This was a major factor in our decision to incorporate the Federation. The other main driver was the committee's desire to ensure that the Federation is protected legally to allow it to operate securely in the future.

At the start of the incorporation journey, the committee considered a number of options. The most obvious route might have been to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), however this was not available to us as the work that we do is not considered 'charitable' or 'for the public good' by the Charity Commission, even though we support groups who are considered charitable and have themselves become CIOs. Another option was to become a Limited company with shareholders, but it was felt that this did not fit in with the ethos of the Federation. We looked at converting to a Community Benefit Society (CBS) but the committee felt that this would not be appropriate for the Federation either. A CBS is a legal entity often used by Provident societies or an initiative which has the general public as members, such as a community pub or shop.

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CBSs are regulated by the FCA as a consumer financial matter, rather than being relevant to the 'trade association' role of the Federation. The committee were in agreement that becoming a CIC was the most appropriate solution, offering the legal protection of being a limited company, but retaining a focus on the membership who have a say in how the organisation is run.

From the point of view of our members, nothing will change. The Federation will continue as before, offering the same support for members, National Cemeteries Week, newsletters, AGMs, 'Saving Cemeteries' and whatever new initiatives develop in the future. What we will have is a legal framework which provides security both for the directors and for the company itself to ensure that the Federation can continue in the future as the driving force that it has become.

University of the Third Age – British Cemeteries Group

from Kevin Gordon, Chairman of the Friends of Ocklynge Cemetery, Eastbourne and organiser of the u3a British Cemeteries Group

The University of the Third Age (u3a) was established in 1981 to provide education and activities to older people. The idea originated in France and has now spread throughout the world. In the UK there are over 1,000 groups with a membership of over 450,000. It is a misnomer that the u3a is just for retired people – it is open to anyone who is not in full-time employment and wants to learn for the fun of it, indeed the motto of the u3a is 'Learn, Laugh, Live!' Meetings are not only held all over the country but also on-line and there are dozens of Interest Groups Online (IGO).

The British Cemeteries Group IGO holds eight meetings throughout the year with a diverse range of cemetery related topics. During recent meetings we have learned about Sheffield Cemetery, the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral and pet cemeteries. If you are an existing u3a member, do consider joining the on-line cemeteries group. I would also ask that if you are a Cemetery Friends Group and are able to provide a talk about your cemetery and your work please contact me at: kevinsussex@btinternet.com

More information about the u3a can be found at: https://www.u3a.org.uk

Heritage Open Days weekend – 7th & 8th September 2024

forwarded by Felicity Brown, Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery

The national theme for Heritage Open Days (HODs) this year was Routes – Networks – Connections. The Friends celebrated HODs weekend with an exhibition in the Chapel at Tunbridge Wells Cemetery entitled 'Global Connections'. It was most rewarding to have good attendances both days and feedback was exceptionally exciting. Many visitors were happy to stay and enjoy refreshments and discuss the exhibits with members of The Friends.

Individuals researched by the Memorial Inscription Group told of some remarkable journeys these people had made in their lives. When one considers the years during which these journeys were made, it is quite remarkable how they came to be carried out given most were by ship, often taking months, overland transport and, of course, trekking through often rough terrain. Their stories are most interesting and arresting. Amazing to think these people had travelled to distant countries only to be found resting in our Tunbridge Wells cemetery.

The following people were researched and make fascinating reading:

- Lemuel Bangs came from New York and was the London representative of an American publishing house.
- Enriqueta Smail was born in Peru and married a Scottish doctor.
- George William Featherstonhaugh mapped part of the Canadian / North American border.
- Richard Henry Leary, born in the UK, emigrated to New Zealand where he became mayor.
- Jane Blissett Bardsley went to India as a missionary. A school was named after her.
- William Clarke was born to a father from Guyana.
- Edward de Mattos bought Brunel's ship SS Great Eastern.
- George Nuttall was an American bacteriologist.
- George James Lewis went to seek his fortune in Australia.
- Lewis Fraser was born in Singapore, founded a tin mine and has a hill named after him.
- Theophilus Harris Davies went to Hawaii as a young man.
- Thomas Harvey was a South African Colonial Merchant.
- Refugees came from Belgium in WW1.

Cirencester's Burial Grounds

by John Tiffney, Friends of St John Baptist Churchyard

When the Romans arrived in AD 45 they built a fort which eventually became a city called Corinium. Romano-British burial practice required cemeteries to be sited outside the town boundaries and alongside approach roads to the east and the south (Watermoor) and to the west between Tetbury Road and the amphitheatre (including where St. James's Place offices are located). A good display of artefacts and headstones can be seen in the Corinium Museum.

The Romans left Britain in the 5th Century and subsequently an Anglo-Saxon church was built with a graveyard in what became the centre of the town. In 1117 King Henry 1 granted permission for the Augustinians to build the Abbey of St. Mary leaving the townspeople to build their own parish church dedicated to St. John Baptist around 1157.

Of course, the population were all Roman Catholics until King Henry VIII fell out with the Pope and created the Church of England in 1539. Not everyone was happy with the new order and Roman Catholics met secretly, and over time Unitarians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Strict Baptists and Quakers all established meeting places and chapels in Cirencester, some of which allowed burials within their buildings and in the grounds. Burials naturally continued within the Parish Church and in the adjoining churchyard until it was declared closed in 1872. The Town Commissioners had purchased a field in Chesterton Lane, and this continues to be used today as the Town Cemetery.

When Holy Trinity Church was built in Watermoor Road in 1847-51, it was unsuitable for a graveyard due to the high-water table and so only cremated remains have later been interred there. A graveyard for non-conformist use was also created in Watermoor Road (now closed) and the Quakers buried their members in the rear of their Meeting House in Thomas Street, built in 1673. Similarly, the Baptists used their chapel (built 1856-7) in Coxwell Street for a few burials, and a larger number of burials took place at the Unitarian Chapel in Gosditch Street, founded in 1672.

Many people could not afford to erect tombstones in memory of the departed, but wealthy wool merchants and other townsfolk spent large sums on memorials both inside the Parish Church and in the churchyard. Chest tombs were fashionable in the 17-19th centuries and although many have disintegrated over time some 25 chest tombs in the Parish Churchyard have been listed as Grade 2 by Historic England and another nine in the former Unitarian graveyard nearby in Gosditch Street.

St John Baptist Churchyard
Photograph courtesy of John Tiffney

In the 1990s a group of volunteers led by Don Harris and with the support of CAHS painstakingly recorded all the graves and tombs in the Parish churchyard and these records are available on application in the Church and at the Bingham Library.

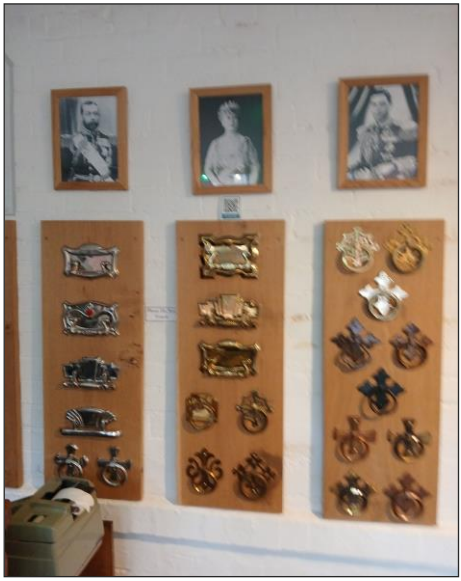
In a new initiative during the past year or so, Mike Timbrell, a Cirencester Civic Society member and surveyor, has been busy surveying and cataloguing all the town's graveyards, except the Chesterton Lane Cemetery. For the first time we now have an accurate set of plans and a catalogue of all the names of the deceased in the Parish Churchyard, the Unitarian Chapel, the Baptist Chapel, the Friends Meeting House, and the Non-conformist Graveyard. The cremated remains in the Parish Church and Holy Trinity churchyards are also accurately mapped.

Plans are afoot to create a self-guided trail around the Parish Churchyard and to offer guided walks during Heritage Open Days and in the Cirencester History Festival later this year (*2024*). Family Historians should find the information invaluable in their researches, and so discussions are underway to see if the completed project archive might be housed at the Gloucestershire Family History Centre at Gloucestershire Archives. Sadly, many of the listed chest tombs continue to deteriorate due to weathering and so the Friends of St John Baptist Churchyard who maintain the graveyard there are hoping to raise c£35k to enable some of the stonework to be restored.

Newman Brothers' Coffin Works

by David Bushell, Secretary of the Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery, Tunbridge Wells

Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter includes the only "coffin museum" in the UK. Founded by the Newman family in 1882 and originating from the metal trade, the firm manufactured all the prerequisites for a burial except the wooden coffin itself. Its customers were funeral directors who bought their coffin fittings such as handles, breastplates, screws and ornaments; also, the "soft" goods such as linings, frills, cushions and funerary gowns.

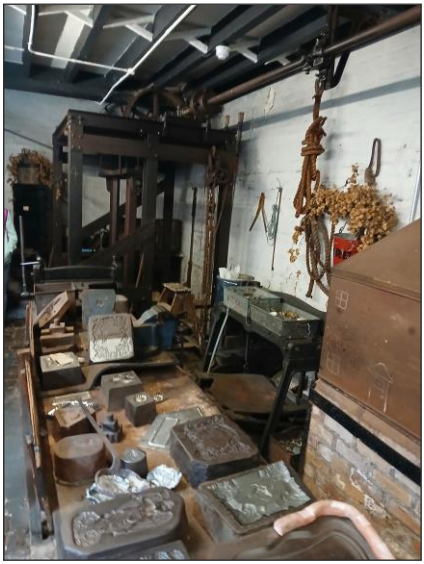


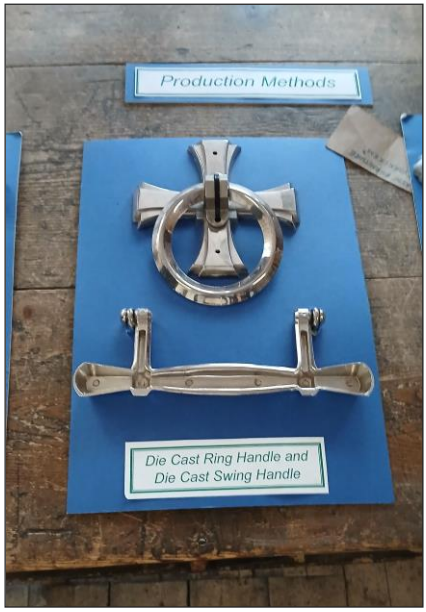
Photograph by David Bushell

The Newman Brothers made the very best, their fittings adorned the coffins of British royalty from George V to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, also politicians such as Winston Churchill and Birmingham's own Joseph Chamberlain. The firm adapted to the challenges of the changing times, from the high demand for their goods in the era of lavish funerals before 1914, the drop in demand in World War I as British troops killed in France and Belgium never returned for home burial, and the restrictions on coffin linings and shrouds in World War II leading to that part of the operation closing in 1941.

The predominance of cremation over burial in later years, and the requirement for fittings to be of a combustible nature, saw a move to also offering plastic handles coated with a metallic finish. The firm eventually closed in 1997 following the death of the Newmans, the remaining director ensuring the works buildings were saved from development by acquiring a Grade II* listing, and then establishing a

trust to finance its future as a museum (and hireable meeting rooms) from 2014.





Photographs by David Bushell

The premises tour reveals some of the many manufacturing processes necessary to produce the coffin goods, including the stamp shop which has four pieces of heavy machinery of different weights, stamping shapes into sheets of metal, producing items from small ornaments up to breastplates engraved with the names of the deceased. The casting workshop made solid sand-cast brass handles until the 1950s, examples being on display as well as dies, tools and sample products left in situ from the day of closure. Lighter work on the upper floors shows the sewing machines, crimper and other tools needed for the linings and shrouds. There is also a large leather case full of examples of the funeral wares on offer, used by the firm's commercial travellers employed to sell to funeral directors around the country.

An unusual and fascinating place to visit for those interested in cemeteries and their related activities. The museum has a website for further details: https://www.coffinworks.org/

RHS Yorkshire in Bloom – Platinum Award for the Friends of York Cemetery

by Clive Dawson, Chairman of the Friends

In February 1987 York Cemetery Trust bought York Cemetery from the Crown Commission for £1.00 which included 24 acres of land and buildings.

The cemetery was a private cemetery and had gone into liquidation in 1969 and left to the ravishes of time, vandalism, and nature. The chapel roof had collapsed with part of the walls and floor.

The Crown Commissioners laid down three conditions:

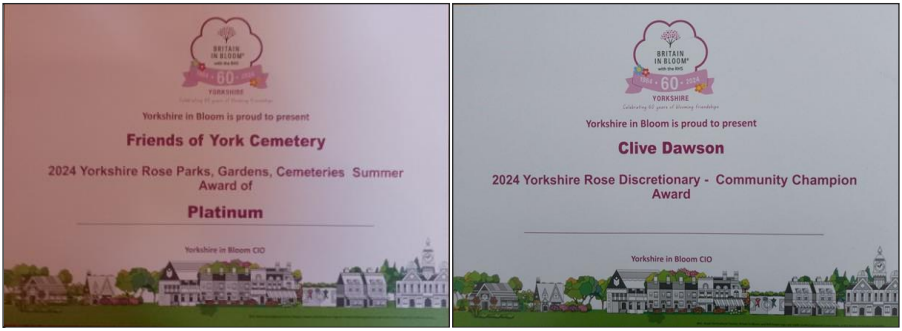
Burial must take place, and they still do.
The buildings had to be in a usable state. A grant was achieved to make good the chapel, a Grade II* listed building.
The cemetery to be used for educational purposes, which the Friends of York Cemetery took on through walks and talks, lectures, concerts, genealogy, gardening, weekend wardens, collaborating with schools and universities and the public.

2024 where are we now?

The York Cemetery Trust have done an excellent job in maintaining and improving the cemetery. The chapel heating is operated by an air pump in the catacombs which keeps the chapel warm and protects the fabric of the building; a ramp has been added to make access easier. The Gatehouse, the cemetery office and staff room with the top floor let off to local charities. The Harriet Centre is a new building used by volunteers and hired by local groups.

The Friends of York Cemetery have this year been awarded a Platinum Award from RHS Yorkshire in Bloom for the fourth year in succession and Clive Dawson, Chairman of the Friends and volunteer gardening coordinator was awarded a 2024 Yorkshire Rose Discretionary – Community Champion Award.

The Platinum Award was judged on three criteria of horticulture, environment, and community.



Left: The Friends - Platinum Award certificate. Right: Clive's Discretionary - Community Champion Award certificate
Photographs courtesy of Clive Dawson

Horticulture: working with the Trust and staff, more trees have been planted; there are approximately 2,000 trees in the cemetery. A dedicated team of volunteers are revamping and labelling the Fernery, and another major project is replanting the Scented Walk approximately 150 meters long. This was planted out 30 years back for the benefit of partially sighted visitors but a large number of the plants have died off; over the next 2 years they will be replaced and return Scented Walk to its formal glory.

To the environment criteria, the cemetery is ecofriendly, so no chemicals are used and each year a large chipping machine is hired. Buddleia is cut back and dead wood goes through the chipper and returned to the land over the year.

The cemetery comes into its own with the community, with 500 Friends of York Cemetery and 70ish volunteers, Weekend Wardens patrol the site at weekends and Bank Holidays, helping visitors, gardening, litter picking or just enjoying this lovely and peaceful place.

There are several walk leaders for the 20 public walks given during the year and not forgetting the catering volunteers who help with refreshments on walks and at concerts.

Continued over page

A dedicated team of genealogists open their office each Friday for visitors looking for graves, they will receive a lot of information and a grave visit, enquiries are also dealt with online.

The volunteer gardeners turn up for Task Day on the first Saturday of each month and there are usually 25 plus. At 1200 noon, everyone stops for homemade cake and tea, a must for a chat and refueling.

York Cares, a charity at York University encourages employers in the city to give their staff time off to work in the community which means the cemetery have groups of 10 to 20 volunteers for a day from the major employers, a number of the groups return on a regular basis.

The cemetery also encourages the 4 local primary schools to make use of the cemetery, especially for nature walks and about 200 helped with planting 1,600 purple crocus corms in the front lawn.

The drama class from the local comprehensive school comes in once a year to perform a living history reenactment of people buried in the cemetery. An excellent performance by the students who also write their own script and produce the costumes.

York University MA students make use of the genealogy database for research on their thesis which is associated to the cemetery and beneficial to the cemetery. York St John University use the cemetery for an away day with volunteers taking them on a tour and explaining how the cemetery is run and maintained, manually and financially.

In December each year there is the Cemetery Carol Concert with Trustees, Friends and Staff coming together and inviting people from the community to an excellent concert finishing with homemade mince pies and fruit punch. It is free but a ticket must be booked. as only 120 can be seated and it is usually overbooked.

Well, that is what the cemetery does and RHS Yorkshire in Bloom considered it good enough for a Platinum Award.

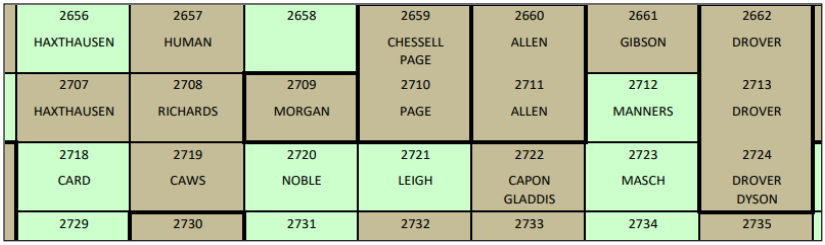
How do *you* represent plot maps on your website?

by Jon Matthews, President of the Friends

The Friends of Northwood Cemetery (FoNC) in Cowes on the Isle of Wight was formed in 2008 as a voluntary organisation; it has since enjoyed much success along the way:

- It bid for, and implemented, a £1.6m Lottery funded grant as the lead partner (the other partner being the local authority, the landowners) to underpin and restore its two Victorian chapels - as well as over 20 other visible ground improvements.
- Over time, it has developed a very comprehensive website which has a search facility for the 17,000+ souls interred within, which has proved to be a boon to family historians looking for the final resting place of their relatives.
- It has been granted seven annual (and counting) consecutive Green Flag Awards® for the management of its 17-acres of green space; and
- It has forged strong links with the local community, young and old, through its fund-raising activities, schools' liaison and weekly well-attended coffee mornings.

Now a *Charitable Incorporated Organisation* (CIO,) having migrated from a Registered Charity in 2018, FoNC is exploring ways it can enhance the maps of its 45 plots. Northwood Cemetery benefits from being laid out in an easy grid-based structure and, in 2008, produced maps based on Microsoft Excel, (saved as PDF files and presented on its website: https://www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk/records/plot-maps/).



Section from one of the cemetery plot maps produced using Excel
Image courtesy of Jon Matthews

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These have served their purpose pretty well – but we know they are not perfect and need an overhaul to reflect what is *actually* on the ground.

Can NFCF members recommend other software products that are better suited to this application – or even customised solutions that could be adapted to suit the needs of other cemeteries? Indeed, there may be other Friends' groups amongst the NFCF membership similarly placed and would ask the same question - ? If you know of a better solution, we would love to hear from you; thank you in anticipation. Please contact Roger Williams, Chairman, Friends of Northwood Cemetery, chairman@friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk, mobile 07812 850858

New Members

Friends of Bebington Cemetery
Contact: Steve Morgan, stevenjohnmorgan58@gmail.com
Website: https://www.fobc1868.uk

Friends of Mansfield Cemetery
Contact: Edward Baginski, ed.baginski@outlook.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/501604542315352

Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries (see Page 25)
Contact: Sue Adams, susan.adams21@yahoo.co.uk
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/shrewsburycemeteries

Ballast Hills Burial Ground, Newcastle upon Tyne
Contact: Myra Giesen, myragiesen@yahoo.co.uk
Website: https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/ballast-hills/

Canterbury City Council (see Page 27)
Contact: Jonathon Kreffer, jonathon.kreffer@canterbury.gov.uk
Website: https://www.canterbury.gov.uk

Leeds City Council, Climate, Energy and Greenspaces
Contact: Michelle Glover, michelle.glover@leeds.gov.uk
Website: https://www.leeds.gov.uk

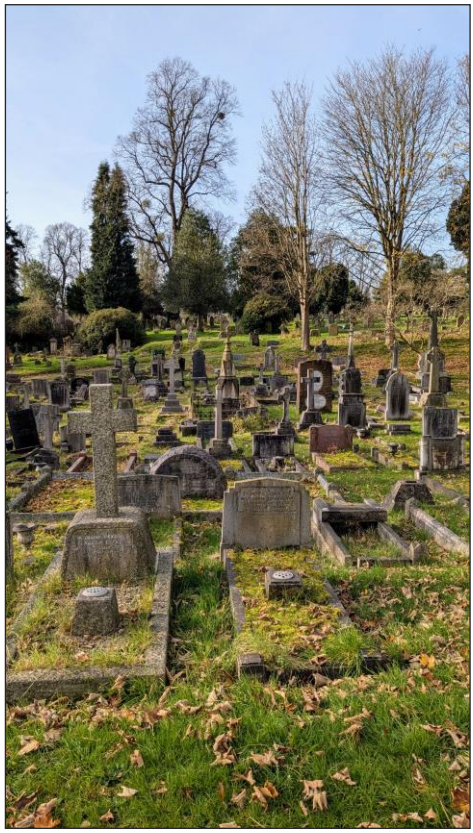
Dr John Fitch, email: johngfitch51@gmail.com

Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries

by Kirsty Stevens, Heritage to Inspire Project Manager

A kilometre south of Shrewsbury town centre lies the Victorian splendour of Longden Road Cemetery, laid out as a garden of remembrance in 1856.

In January 2024 a new project, 'Heritage to Inspire' was launched at the site as the result of a successful National Lottery Heritage Fund grant. This was awarded to the Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries, a longstanding group of volunteers who undertake conservation management to enhance the biodiversity of the site and also run regular monument recording activities. Other project partners are Shrewsbury Council, owners of the site, and Caring for God's Acre, who are employed as project manager.



Photograph courtesy of the Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries

Although the site is within walking or cycling distance of a large proportion of the population of Shrewsbury, and also has good public transport links, it remains something of a hidden gem. The Heritage to Inspire project aims to invite people into the site to enjoy both the biodiversity and the rich social history within this beautiful and accessible green space.

Continued over page

The monuments at Longden Road reflect the diverse history and prospects of the people of Shrewsbury; some gravestones small and humble, others ornate pinnacles of marble with blind arcades and columns of polished granite. In particular, the gravestones in the most prominent position, directly in front of the chapel, form a spiky skyline of architectural grandeur in an assortment of ornate styles.

One most notable 'resident' is author Mary Webb (1881-1927), whose famous novel, 'Precious Bane', is set in rural Shropshire during the Napoleonic wars. Her grave, a simple white cross, is regularly maintained by the Mary Webb Society.

The graves rise out of what is essentially an extensive meadow, which buzzes and hums with life throughout the spring and summer, until it is cut in autumn. The cemetery has been designated as a Local Wildlife Site on account of its wildflowers and fungi, but its biodiversity is further reflected in the 370+ wildlife records for the site, including birds, mammals, trees, moths and other invertebrate species. Search: Burial grounds:"Shrewsbury Cemetery" | Occurrence records | NBN Atlas

'Heritage to Inspire' is funded until January 2027 with the aims of: restoring, interpreting and celebrating the rich social heritage and biodiversity of Longden Road Cemetery. The project will run regular outreach sessions and free, public events, develop new signage, research targeted species reintroductions, restore a prominent monument, enhance existing conservation management and continue recording monument inscriptions.

If you would like to get in touch about either the cemetery, or the project, please get in touch with Sue Adams, Chair of Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries (email on Page 24) or Kirsty Stevens: kirsty@cfga.org.uk

Correction to Newsletter No. 53

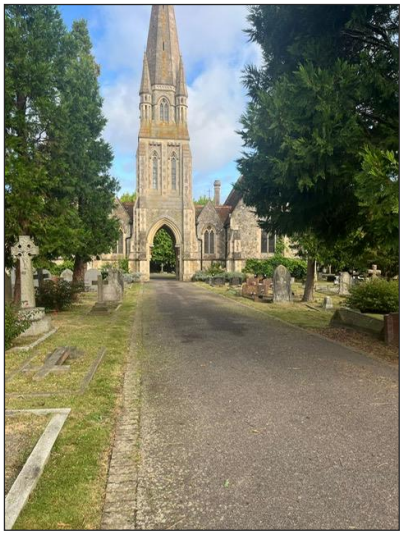
With reference to Ronald Frank Delderfield mentioned in the Sid Vale Burial Research Group article on page 16. His year of birth should be 1912 and not 1812 as quoted.

Thank you to Lynne Monckton for drawing our attention to this.

Canterbury City Council

by Jonathon Kreffer, Cemeteries Manager

Canterbury Cemetery opened on 4 July 1877. Upon entry, the site features an impressive main building with a double chapel and a 110-foot spire. It has been thought that this is likely the only true spire in the city. This period was particularly busy for its architect, John Green Hall (1835-1887), who resided on St Margaret's Street. In addition to designing this chapel, Hall was also responsible for the RC church in Burgate, completed in 1875, and the Congregational church in Guildhall, finished in 1877. Alongside these projects, he served as the City Surveyor and Architect.



The main entrance
Photograph courtesy of Jonathon Kreffer

The cemetery originally covered 12 acres, with an additional 8 acres added in 1923. The chapels are faced with rag stone and adorned with Bath stone dressings. Upon entering the area between the chapels, visitors are greeted by small stone heads, adding a unique architectural detail to the site.

To date, the site has overseen over 29,000 burials. Nowadays, the cemetery accommodates approx. 100 burials a year, including ashes burials, as cremation has become the prevalent choice for the local community. The cemetery is also well-used and enjoyed as a public space for commuters and exercisers and celebrated by local societies for its rich history. The site also houses over 300 trees of any rare and interesting variety, as well as associated wildlife.

We have made efforts to reconnect the cemetery with the local community through public open days, as well as setting up an arrangement with our local community service officers who help with basic groundworks at site.

Continued over page

The cemetery is home to several significant gravestones:

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924): The celebrated writer, born in Ukraine and later a British citizen, has a Grade II listed monument [Section N].

Thomas Byrne VC (1866-1944): Dublin-born Victoria Cross recipient for bravery at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898. He later fought in the Boer War, and his residence in Notley Street is marked with a blue plaque [Section MJ].

Cecil Northcote Parkinson (1909-1993): The author known for 'Parkinson's Law'.

War Graves: The cemetery contains numerous war graves, including about 146 from World War I and 54 from World War II, along with a standard Cross of Sacrifice [Section V].

Kathleen Rosa Raines: Canterbury's youngest World War II victim, killed at age 13 by enemy action on 20 April 1941 [Section XM].

E J Stanford (1903-1919): A 16-year-old naval trainee who died in a Spanish influenza outbreak while stationed at HMS Impregnable.

Harry Bloom (1913-1981): A South African journalist and anti-apartheid activist, later a lecturer at Kent University and father of photographer Steve Bloom. His second wife, Sonia, is the mother of actor Orlando Bloom.

Silver Lime Tree: Planted to commemorate the death of Gordon of Khartoum [Section B].

Let us know

Please keep sending the newsletter editor your news stories and events (contact details are on the back page). You get publicity for your events, a place to trumpet your successes, and a chance to air your woes. We get the articles to fill and update our pages.

Members News

A selection of news and events from Members newsletters and websites

Abney Park Cemetery, London

Following the completion of restoration work, it was announced in November that the Grade II registered Abney Park Cemetery, Stoke Newington and its Grade II listed Chapel has been taken off Historic England's – Heritage at Risk Register.

Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds

The only listed memorial at Beckett Street Cemetery belongs to the Galli family. It was fenced off some years ago following collapse of one edge of the grave and the concern it may become unstable. Whilst there has been no sign of instability, the impact of self-seeded sycamore and buddleia on the memorial has raised concern. Working with the council, the go ahead was given to clear the vegetation around the memorial enabling an inspection of the grave to be carried out.

Heene Cemetery, Worthing

The Friends have launched a new website and produced a series of A3 colour posters for display on the cemetery noticeboard outside the gates.

Jesmond Old Cemetery, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Jointly with the National History Society of Northumbria (NHSN), the Friends held a 'BioBlitz' event in July. The intention was to find out what crawls, flies, grows, grows and walks in the cemetery. With the help of visitors, over 200 different species were collected and identified including 7 species of butterfly, 70 plants, and a host of insects. Information collected on the day will contribute towards the NHSN's Gosforth's Wild Web project and will help the Friends in creating a family friendly nature trail around the cemetery.

Continued over page

Kensal Green Cemetery, London

The section of HS2 between Old Oak Common and Euston would entail tunnelling under the cemetery. In advance of the proposed work HS2 has undertaken measurements of the seasonal rise and fall of the ground levels to assess the impact of tunnelling as it would progress under the cemetery. Ground settlement of up to 2cm is anticipated, commencing with tunnelling and continuing for a time after construction of the tunnels. Monuments and drainage runs considered to be at risk from such settlement have been identified, with the possibility that some monuments may have to be dismantled in advance.

Margravine Cemetery, London

The cemetery was re-awarded a Green Flag Award, and achieved the award of Level 5 - Outstanding in the It's Your Neighbourhood category of the Royal Horticultural Society and London in Bloom.

Northwood Cemetery, Cowes, Isle of Wight

The cemetery achieved a Green Flag Award for the 7th consecutive year and was the only site on the Island to achieve this status.

A defibrillator unit supplied free of charge by the British Heart Foundation has been sited on the outside wall of the toilet block. The local charity, Isle of Wight Defibrillators, who service the unit have provided training sessions.

Rectory Lane Cemetery, Berkhamsted

The cemetery achieved a Green Flag Community Award for the fourth consecutive year. It has also been recognised as one of this year's top ten favourite Green Flag Award parks and spaces as voted for by the public at the Green Flag Award 2024 People's Choices Award.

A Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone has been installed to mark the grave of Private Albert Dollimore, who served in the Army Service Corps. He died a few days after the Armistice on 18th November 1918, aged 24.

Salford Cemeteries Trust

Agecroft Cemetery retained its Green Flag Award status in 2024. At Swinton Cemetery, a programme of improvements includes repainting of boundary railings. Funding has been secured to paint the fence lines on Cemetery Road, Westminster Street and Mulgrave Street.

Sheffield General Cemetery

Sheffield General Cemetery was another to achieve Green Flag Award status this year.

The Mausolea and Monuments Trust

Two grants have enabled the Trust to undertake repairs on two of the mausolea they own. The parapet on the Sacheverall Bateman Mausoleum, Morley in Derbyshire has been repaired, and the Heathcote mausoleum, Hursley in Hampshire has undergone repairs to the cornice and repainting of the mausoleum door. Due to the generosity of a member, further work to be carried out to address where the lettering is disappearing on the Samuel Heathcote monument attached to the south side of the building.

Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford

In June, the Cemetery Charity held an event hosted by Christa Ackroyd to launch their new Cemetery Trail. This consists of 20 trail boards spread across the cemetery, with each board covering a different subject, such as Sporting Greats, Company Graves and Worstedopolis.

The Cemetery's groundwork team have received a generous donation of equipment including a Bolens Mulching Deck.

Reclamation of a large area of unused land in the Consecrated 1 Section has been greatly aided by Thomas Crompton Demolition Ltd, who have assisted with clearance of surface material and overgrowth. In time, the Cemetery Charity intend to make available over 100 new burial plots.

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

Directors

Chairman**:** Robert Stephenson (07794 007870)
chairman@cemeteryfriends.com

Vice Chairman**:** Colin Fenn (020 8670 4146)
vicechairman@cemeteryfriends.com

Secretary and Newsletter Editor: Ann Wilkinson
secretary@cemeteryfriends.com

Treasurer: Melvyn Hawkins
treasurer@cemeteryfriends.com

National Cemeteries Week: Emer Seamark
ncw@cemeteryfriends.com

Lynda Kitching
rogerandlynda@guiseley.co.uk

John Moffat
flaybrick.m.garden@ntlworld.com

Stuart Wilkinson
stuartwilkinson@blueyonder.co.uk

Website: https://www.cemeteryfriends.com

Webmaster: James Slattery-Kavanagh (01825 723943)
webmaster@cemeteryfriends.com

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