National Federation of CEMETERY FRIENDS

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

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Home at Last!

by John Moffat, Secretary of the Friends of Flaybrick

When I founded the Friends of Flaybrick in 1993, I never imagined that it would take 32 years to find a place of our own. One by one, hoped for stone built options disappeared before it became apparent that the answer lay in obtaining a portacabin from a company called, 'Cabin Containers', of St Helens. We worked out that we needed space to accommodate meetings of up to 20 people and on a twice weekly basis and provide mess space, with toilet and kitchen facilities, for our volunteers. Our initial thoughts were for a 32ft x 12ft portacabin.

The new 'Home'
Photograph courtesy of John Moffat

The first step was to secure a lease from the council for the land, surprisingly this meant our trustees signing two pre-lease agreements before the final one arrived from the council. Rent was on a peppercorn basis and the council kindly agreed to connect the utilities. They also offered to pay bills, providing they were not excessive. Connection to utilities can be difficult in cemeteries, fortunately the council had existing extensive facilities for the cemetery staff in Flaybrick's works depot, so connections would be made from their accommodation unit to ours alongside. I liked that this adjacency further reinforced us in working as one team with the council.

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All material by the editor unless otherwise attributed.

We were still left with funding the project, but luckily we have had considerable involvement with the Duchy of Lancaster, due to our Kings Award for Voluntary Service. They had said that they would look favourably on a grant application for accommodation, so an application was made for £7k. Although the application succeeded, only half that amount was awarded. Fortunately, we had already concluded that we would not have enough funds between ourselves, and the Duchy grant to pay for the £16k a portacabin costs. The answer lay in a 32ft x 10ft shipping container which could be fully fitted out to our specification at a cost of £7k plus VAT. It would also provide a secure building which would give us lower insurance costs. The unit was ordered and transport costs, of (£250 plus VAT) were paid. A final hiccup was the council's insistence on a concrete base. Cabin Containers came on site for a pre check and said that all that was needed was a reasonably level hard core base with corner paving slabs.

Finally, one icy day in early January, our new home arrived on the back of a big wagon which lifted the unit over the cemetery wall, as we all watched nervously. The driver's final job was to adjust the levellers on the unit, and we were then able to enter our new accommodation.

The first meeting in January 2025
Photograph courtesy of John Moffat

At the end of January we had our first meeting, and with its inbuilt heaters we found it warmer than any temporary accommodation we have used in the past. Not only that, it turned out to be big enough for our needs despite our initial fears.

Remembering many in unmarked graves

by Stuart Wilkinson, Vice Chairman of the Friends

In August last year, West Yorkshire Stonecarving Association generously donated the stone and carving of two memorials commemorating those buried in unmarked public graves and infant vaults at Lister Lane Cemetery, Halifax. One memorial of a cherub's head (image left) sits near the area where many of the infant vaults are located. The other, a stone head (image below) was installed in an open area in the cemetery's lower section where many of the public graves are located.

A donation from a descendant of former cemetery manager and monumental mason Simeon Bottomley Cordingley (1827-1880) was put towards the purchase of over 1000 spring bulbs. The bulbs planted last autumn by Community Payback in the public graves area, looked magnificent this spring.

Photographs by Ann Wilkinson

NFCF NATIONAL CEMETERIES WEEK
and Caring for God's Acre Love Your Burial Ground Week with
Churches Count on Nature
7th to 15th June 2025

NFCF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Hosted by
The Undercliffe Cemetery Charity at Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford
Saturday 14th June 2025

Honoured Citizen Award for the Friends of Welford Road Cemetery

forwarded by Chris Powis, Vice Chair of the Friends

The Right Worshipful the Lord Mayor of Leicester, Councillor Bhupen Dave, invites

The Friends of Welford Road Cemetery
to Afternoon Tea & the Presentation of an Honoured Citizen Award

on Wednesday 9 April 2025 at 3pm – 5pm
at The Lord Mayor's Parlour, Town Hall, Leicester LE1 9BG

Dress: Smart Casual

The Mayoral invitation
Courtesy of Chris Powis

The Friends of Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester are very proud to have been recognised for their "outstanding contribution to the city" with an Honoured Citizen Award from the Lord Mayor of Leicester at a ceremony in the Town Hall on Wednesday 9th April.

We were put forward for an Honoured Citizen Award after the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress visited our Remembrance Day service and talked to us about our work, which includes helping with the maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery as well as preserving the historical significance of the site.

The Lord Mayor of Leicester, Cllr Bhupen Dave, said: "We were so impressed with the work of the Friends of Welford Road Cemetery when we visited them, and especially with the length of time these volunteers have committed to their roles. I'm very pleased to be able to make them Honoured Citizens in recognition of their unwavering dedication to the cemetery - which as well as being an important historical site, is a real haven for peace and for wildlife right in the heart of the city. I congratulate all of the Friends on their award."

Alan Brown, bereavement services manager at Leicester City Council, added: "I'm so delighted that the fantastic work of the Friends of Welford Road Cemetery has been highlighted and recognised in this way. Their efforts over quarter of a decade are hugely appreciated and they have made a real difference to many people in Leicester, so it's wonderful that they have received this award."

The Lord Mayor of Leicester,
Councillor Bhupen Dave
with the volunteers from the Friends group
Photograph courtesy of Helen Evans

Our Chairman, Richard Taylor, welcomed this recognition of all the hard work done over the years by the many volunteers past and present, it has been a privilege to help so many people from Leicester and abroad find out about their ancestors and to learn the many stories they have to tell. He said, “We are a strong group and hope to carry on promoting this special site for many years to come.”

Eleven of our longest serving volunteers, all having volunteered here for over 10 years, attended the Lord Mayor’s parlour at the Town Hall for afternoon tea and receive the award on behalf of the Group. After the presentation we were served afternoon tea and given a guided tour of the Town Hall including the Council chamber and old court rooms.

Voluntary Service Days
by John Tiffney, Chair of the Friends

Since we formed the Friends of St John Baptist Churchyard in 2019, we have been fortunate to have had at least one annual Voluntary Service Day. Cirencester’s largest employer - St. James’s Place Financial Services plc has supplied small groups of up to ten staff working for a day on variety of tasks. This year we have discovered that the Royal Logistics Corps based at South Cerney Barracks has a Community Engagement Officer who arranged for three teams of five soldiers to spend a total of three days working in the churchyard. They were amazing - helping lay hoggin to raise a path, using a hired wood chipper to clear a huge pile of tree branches and old Christmas Trees and lifting massive headstones. It is well worth enquiring if you have an Army or RAF base near you if they have a Community Engagement Officer!

The grave of infant Leslie John Methold

forwarded by John Bickle of the Woodvale Volunteer Group

Woodvale Volunteer Group is named after one of 6 council controlled cemeteries in Brighton and Hove: Woodvale (c.1857, 20.5 acres), Extra Mural Cemetery (c.1851,16.5 acres), City Cemetery (c.1868, 31.5 acres), Hove Cemetery (c.1882, 50 acres), Lawn Memorial Cemetery (c.1963, 36.5 acres) and Portslade Cemetery (c.1872, 7 acres).

On Friday 14th February 2025, we stumbled across this (image right). I imagine many of you will have come across similar graves in your own cemeteries. This is the grave of Leslie John Methold, born 6th February 1900, died 21st July 1901, aged 17 months. Very clearly this grave has not been visited for many years and was not far from being completely lost. In fact, if we had not started a dedicated mowing campaign in June last year, I seriously doubt this poor babe's grave would ever have seen the light of day again.

The gravesite of infant Leslie John Methold Photograph courtesy of John Bickle

Now, and here's an important bit, we have teamed up with the Ministry of Justice, and every week we have a team of workers supplied through the Community Payback scheme. These are people that have fallen foul of the law, but it does not mean they are ne'er do goods. The team that joins us do a considerable amount of valuable work, and on this occasion, they were entrusted with the project of restoring this child's final resting place. Pause for a moment to consider a team of 8 Community Service users grouped round this grave, and the reaction from them when we discovered the truth of who was buried there. There were lumps in the throat all round, not to mention the odd damp eye or two.

So, the work commenced. The entire top level of turf was removed from around the edges of the kerbstones both inside and out. The kerbstones were carefully removed ensuring that no metal tools made

contact with the stone. This is very important, even the smallest metal trowel can leave a permanent mark on the stonework. The turf has been set aside to fill the edges once the stones have been reset

Uncovering the grave and kerbstones
Photographs courtesy of John Bickle

Sadly, the left-hand stone (image top right) was not in one piece, so was taken into our workshop for repair. The other stones were set aside for cleaning. We do not try to make the stones look new, after all, this grave is nearly 125 years old, so water and light detergent are all they get. It's not unusual, but a considerable number of lead letters are missing: these will not be replaced in this instance because, once again, there is no realistic way of making the letters match the current existing letters.

New foundation to raise the stones above the turf line and repair to stonework
Photographs courtesy of John Bickle

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Once the site had been established and the old foundations discovered, it was obvious that we would need to build a new foundation to raise the stones to a respectable height above the turf line. The team built a soft wood frame which was staked into the ground in preparation to pour fresh concrete. We use soft wood, untreated, because you don't need to remove it from the ground afterwards. It will naturally rot down and turn to soil within a fairly short period of time. Ballast stone was added, and the concrete was mixed and poured.

We use a product called Tenax to repair stonework. It is a two-part epoxy resin available in different colours, although we only use the clear. We clean the surfaces that need to be bonded with a wire brush and ensure they are completely dry prior to glueing. If you get to a stone with a fresh break, the join can be virtually invisible. This one has had a hard life, as you can see from the picture (above right), and I would wager it has met more than one lawn mower blade over the years. With different fillers, you could repair all dents and scratches, polishing the stone to a near perfect finish. This is a time consuming and expensive process; only really viable if the grave owner is invested in the ongoing maintenance of the grave.

Kerb set bonded to the foundation
Photograph courtesy of John Bickle

The kerb set is bonded to the foundation (image right) using plain cement mortar, no sand. Cement on its own is very fine and a superb gap filler to remove any unevenness in the surfaces. It also has the benefit of being easy to wash or brush off the visible surfaces of the stone. Without sand, pure cement mortar can be separated with minimal effort, so if you need to, you can take things apart and start again. When you are working with an old grave it is unheard of for all parts to fit together in perfect symmetry, so a dry fit and lots of minor adjustment are required to make it look the best you can. Most people will view the grave from the front.

Finally, we fill the surface with 20mm shingle and replace the turf around the edges, hiding the overlaps of the foundation. We use 20mm shingle as a cost effective alternative to coloured slate, panda stone or other similar decorative aggregates. Obviously, the ground around the grave will be well trodden for a few months, but that will soon come back to life. The finished result (image left) is a grave that should certainly be around for another 125 years, has cost us under £20 pounds to restore and has instilled a sense of pride and worth in a team of Community Payback workers who owned the mini project from start to finish. One of the team announced, halfway through the job, "This is going to be the best child's grave in the cemetery."

The finished result
Photograph courtesy of John Bickle

If you have not considered using your local Community Payback service to help you in your cemetery, I would really encourage you to give it a go. Even if you start with simple litter picking and path clearing, it will give you the opportunity to build on a relationship that could become something of huge benefit in the future. If this is something you think could benefit you, please visit the Community Payback Government website, where you can submit an application online to 'Nominate a Community Payback project' at: https://www.gov.uk/nominate-community-payback-project

Members News

A selection of news and events from Members newsletters and websites

Ballast Hills Burial Ground, Newcastle upon Tyne

The official launch of the project was held on 22nd March 2025 at Newcastle City Library. Presentations given by project team members included an overview of the project's historical context and about people who were interred at Ballast Hills. The event was supported by music and poetry from *Beneath this Ground* performed by its creators, musicians Marina Dodgson and Maurice Condie, and poet Harry Gallagher.

Continued over page

Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds

The unveiling finally took place on 5th December 2024, of the headstone erected on the unmarked family grave where 18-year-old munitions worker, Elsie Martha Atkinson was laid to rest. Elsie died in an explosion at the Barnbow Munitions Factory, Crossgates on 5th December 1916. The headstone incorporates the carving of the 'On War Service' logo associated with the badges issued to munitions workers at the time.

Billing Road Cemetery, Northampton

The Friends celebrated the first anniversary of their official launch on 25th January. The day started at the cemetery with the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. In the afternoon, the Friends hosted an event at Christ Church Hall, Abington with displays and activities. Visitors included the Mayor and Mayoress of Northampton, Cllr Paul and Mylissa Joyce and members of 'It's Your Neighbourhood' groups' with whom the Friends are hoping to work closely with in the future.

Brandwood End Cemetery, Birmingham

The Friends are focusing on specific projects to mark their 20th anniversary. This will include photographing and recording memorial inscription of graves in the cemetery's older Section 16 and raising funds to purchase and plant trees, replenishing the cemetery's tree stock which has suffered the loss of over 150 trees in recent years. With the help of members of Fruit and Nut Village, the Friends kick started their tree planting project on 6th April by planting 5 (3 hazel and 2 walnut) trees. The trees had been donated by Fruit and Nut Village

Brompton Cemetery, London

Seven people took part in Brompton's 2nd End of Year Wild Flower Hunt held at the cemetery on 30th December. 2024. This was inspired by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland's New Year Plant Hunt which encourages people to venture out, recording any wild plants flowering midwinter. Twenty-nine flowering species were found in the cemetery.

Lancaster Cemetery, Lancaster

The Friends were awarded a grant of £1000 from the 3R Foundation. The funding has been used to purchase tools and equipment that will make work in the cemetery much easier.

Public consultation - Standard Rules Permits for cemeteries

forwarded by Tommy Lowden, Senior Advisor, Environment Agency

The Environment Agency (EA) has opened a public consultation on Standard Rules Permits (SRPs) for cemeteries which may be relevant to some NFCF members, particularly for any prospective cemetery developers. EA cemeteries guidance states that new cemetery developments must do one of the following:

- meet all the criteria in the exemptions for low environmental risk cemeteries
- operate under a standard rules permit (when made available)
- operate under a bespoke permit

SRPs are suitable for activities where the generic risks are well understood and mitigated, and so a site-specific risk assessment is not necessary. SRPs are beneficial to cemetery operators because they are cheaper than bespoke permits and are usually issued in far quicker timescales.

The public consultation closes 24th June 2025. It can be accessed at: https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/standard-rules-consultation-no-30-gw-activities/

The proposed SRPs, associated generic risk assessments and the consultation document can be found in the Related section at the bottom of the page. To respond to the consultation, click on the box that says 'Give us your views'. If you have any queries on this consultation, please contact: national.groundwater@environment-agency.gov.uk

New Members

Friends of Malvern Wells Cemetery
Contact: Tim Kidwell, kidwelltg@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/522303600479444

Friends of Shankill Graveyard (Lurgan), Northern Ireland
Contact: Isobel Hylands, isobel.hylands@btinternet.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/212493416297688

Woodvale Volunteer Group, Brighton (see Page 6)
Contact: woodvalevolunteergroup@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61551051801110

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

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