National Federation of
CEMETERY FRIENDS

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

NEWSLETTER No. 56 Winter 2026
Editor: Ann Wilkinson ISSN 1753-075X

National Federation President Gwyneth Stokes

from Melvyn Hawkins

We were saddened to hear that the National Federation's President and former longstanding secretary, Gwyneth Stokes, passed away on Sunday 2nd November in Croydon University Hospital at the age of 93 following a short illness.

Photograph courtesy of Jeff Hart

Gwyneth was born in 1932 in Hartlepool, her father served at the turnstiles of Hartlepool United FC, although we don't believe that Gwyneth herself was a football supporter! We believe that much of Gwyneth's working career was spent in medical administration, including a period working on *The Nursing Times.* She also spent time working in Australia. She later moved to South Croydon and, relatively late in life, married Peter Kimble, a retired Royal Navy officer, on a beach in Hawaii. Sadly, Peter died in 2014.

Of her many and varied interests, Gwyneth continued participating in poetry discussion groups and was passionate in continuing to maintain her large garden, regularly hosting garden parties there at which guests were invited to enjoy drinks and a buffet lunch followed by a tour. Gwyneth always set time aside in June to watch tennis at Wimbledon and in August for the Proms, she was a big lover of choral music.

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

Gwyneth was a stalwart of the cemetery community for many decades. Her first recorded involvement was as a committee member of the Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, in London, near to where she lived at the time. She remained as a trustee of Nunhead until standing down in 2022. As her interest in Victorian cemeteries grew, Gwyneth was part of the group which established the National Federation of Cemetery Friends in May 1986 and was a committee member, initially using her journalistic skills as newsletter editor and subsequently as secretary up until her retirement in June 2023. At the June 2023 AGM, held at Brompton Cemetery, Gwyneth was presented with a range of gifts from the Federation, including commemorative crystal glasses and, of course, Garden Centre vouchers. The committee was delighted to inform members that Gwyneth had accepted the honorary position of President of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends, offered in recognition of her many achievements and commitment both to the Federation and to the cemetery community in general. When the new CIC was formed at the end of 2024, the Directors were pleased that Gwyneth accepted their invitation to become President of the new company. Since then, in her nineties, Gwyneth continued to act as proofreader for the Federation's newsletters.

For many members, Gwyneth was the 'face' of the Federation. As secretary she was the first point of contact for groups applying for membership, and she was the person that members called if they needed advice or support. Gwyneth regularly represented the National Federation on national bodies and attended every AGM until 2024 to tour the host cemeteries and meet up with the many friends she had made through her passion for cemeteries. Gwyneth was universally appreciated as a voice of moderation, kindness and good sense, always looking for the best in people and seeking to lend her support wherever needed. She would, however, argue her case strongly when necessary. She regularly encouraged people to visit cemeteries and was ardent in extolling their virtues. During more than four decades of involvement, Gwyneth built up a vast wealth of knowledge of cemeteries and was constantly called upon by groups for advice and guidance which she was always very happy to share. She edited two editions of 'Saving Cemeteries' and contributed much of the content, and more recently, had started preliminary work on writing a history of the Federation.

The cemetery community is poorer without Gwyneth, and she will be very sadly missed.

(with acknowledgment to Jeff Hart, Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, for additional information)

Undercliffe Cemetery Charity host the NFCF AGM during Bradford's year as the UK City of Culture

The Undercliffe Cemetery Charity hosted the 2025 NFCF AGM on Saturday 14th June during Bradford's special year as the UK City of Culture. The AGM was also the NFCF'S first as a Community Interest Company. Fifty representatives on behalf of thirty-one member groups joined members of Undercliffe Cemetery Charity at St Augustine's Church, Bradford. The day began with a warm welcome and an introduction to the cemetery from Undercliffe's co-vice chair and trustee Jacqui Ambler. Attendees were then invited to participate in a guided tour of the cemetery.

Looking along the central promenade towards the Joseph Smith monument
Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

A group of Bradford businessmen established the Bradford Cemetery Company which in 1851 purchased 26 acres of the Undercliffe Estate for £3400. Located on the elevation of Undercliffe Hill, the site to the north and west had long distance views over the Bradford area.

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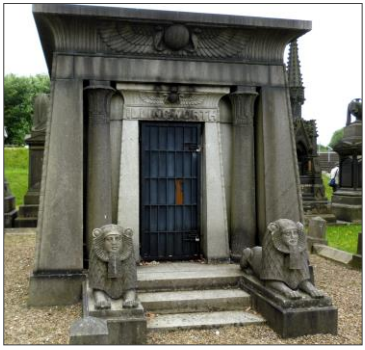
The Company engaged William Gay (1814-1893), then registrar at Leicester Cemetery to design the layout of the cemetery. This incorporated a central promenade running east-west through the cemetery, connecting to the main entrances at the north and south through a series of pathways. The larger Anglican section to the west of the cemetery was consecrated by the Bishop of Ripon in 1854. The smaller nonconformist section to the east includes an area for Quaker burials. The original mortuary chapels erected in 1854, were replaced by larger chapels in 1878 designed by the firm of Lockwood and Mawson. These were demolished in the 1980s. Lodges at the north and south entrances were demolished in the 1970s. However, a lodge of the same period brought from another site and re-erected at the south entrance now serves as a base for the Charity and the present-day cemetery registrar.

The first burial took place in March 1854, and by 1928 the number of interments had reached 105,000. As interments declined over the years, the Cemetery Company experienced financial loss and went into liquidation in 1977. The cemetery was purchased by a property developer in 1980. However, there was concern over how the site was being maintained and the Friends of Undercliffe Cemetery was formed. Bradford Metropolitan Council compulsory purchased the site in 1984, making it a conservation area and sponsoring a community programme to start on the restoration of the cemetery. With Council backing, a new Cemetery Company was established in 1985, and having achieved charitable status became The Undercliffe Cemetery Charity. The Charity has done much to preserve and promote the cemetery and oversee its continuance as a place of burial. There have been 123,000 individuals laid to rest at Undercliffe.



The Illingworth Monument
Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

The cemetery, designated Grade II* listed in the Register of Parks and Gardens, has many impressive grave monuments, six of which are Grade II listed. These include the 30ft grey granite obelisk erected in memory of the former Cemetery Company's land agent Joseph Smith (1860 – 1858) which stands at the western end of the promenade. Another

The Swithin Anderton Monument Photograph by Ann Wilkinson

is an Egyptian inspired granite monument belonging to the Illingworth family, founders of one of Bradford's largest spinning mills. This monument, which is a columbarium features above the entrance the emblem of a winged sun disc with two uraei. Two sphinxes stand either side of the doorway. A third is the Gothic styled monument erected for former woolstapler and Justice of the Peace, Swithin Anderton (1803 - 1860).

After lunch, the formal AGM business took place, and details can be found in the minutes sent to members. Thank you to the Undercliffe Cemetery Charity for their wonderful hospitality on the day. The next NFCF AGM will be hosted by the Friends of West Norwood Cemetery in London on Saturday 13th June 2026.

St John's Churchyard, Nelson

forwarded by Kath Stewart, Treasurer of the Friends

St John's churchyard opened in 1848 and acted as Nelson's cemetery until the closing years of the nineteenth century when a municipal cemetery was opened in the town. The churchyard at St John's is extensive; there are 17,000 people buried in 7,000 graves situated on 6.5 acres of land. The memorials, ranging in style from the elaborate to simple small headstones, reflect the lives of a wide range of people from all socio-economic groups in the town's past.

Nelson was one of the most rapidly growing towns in England in the mid to late nineteenth century. Driven by the demand for cotton textiles the town grew as people moved from all parts of the country to find employment and housing. Many of the people buried in the churchyard were born many miles away, having travelled to find work and secure a better life in the growing town of Nelson. Their stories provide us with a rich and diverse historical resource; a heritage which has been largely forgotten.

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Churchyard view towards Pendle Hill
Photograph courtesy of Kath Stewart

Sadly, as the twentieth century progressed, families moved away as the textile industry declined. The churchyard became overgrown and the memorials largely inaccessible. In response to this The Friends of St John's Churchyard was set up as a registered charity in 2005, dedicated to the restoration of the churchyard and to raising public awareness about those buried within its walls. A great deal has been achieved including the creation of a Remembrance Garden, a Memorial Garden commemorating the town's war heroes, information boards and two websites but the sheer size of the site and lack of funds have been limiting factors in the charity's progress. The group is passionate about making the site safe and accessible for all. Looking to the future, we want to promote the churchyard as a green oasis and heritage resource whilst developing the interest and engagement of local residents and visitors by highlighting our history, enjoying exercise, volunteering and learning about local nature in heritage surroundings.

An update on the project of the Friends of St Mary's Churchyard, Whyke, Chichester

from Dr John Fitch

Over the past two years, the research team of the Friends has compiled 'potted biographies' of the roughly 1,930 individuals buried here since 1888. In addition to data gleaned from Ancestry, some photographs have been provided by family members. You will find all this material, along with a history of the churchyard, on the Whyke Burials website: https://www.whykeburials.com

Professor James Stevens Curl

from Melvyn Hawkins

Some members will be aware of the work of Professor James Stevens Curl. The architect, artist, architectural historian, academic, writer and renowned authority on all things architectural sadly died on 5th November 2025 at the age of 88.

Born in Belfast in 1937, Professor Curl acquired a taste for the accoutrements of death while at Campbell College, Belfast, where he was "fascinated by crumbling, ruined abbeys and friaries, with their graveyards almost submerged in nettles dripping under the muttering rain". He was similarly poetic when recollecting how he "often doffed my cap as long, horse-drawn funeral processions clattered by on roads of granite square-setts, the hearses magnificent with their etched glazed sides, the black steeds elegantly accoutred with ostrich feathers and impeccable harness".

He taught at a number of universities in Northern Ireland and was a prolific author of academic treatises on architecture and, latterly, cemeteries. Among Professor Curl's published works are *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (1972 and 2004), *A Celebration of Death* (1980), *Funerary Monuments and Memorials in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh* (2013), and studies of funerary monuments by Sir Francis Chantrey and others. He contributed to, and edited, the major study of the General Cemetery of All Souls, Kensal Green, London (2001). In 2019, he published and wrote a new Foreword for *On the Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries; and on the Improvement of Churchyards* by J.C. Loudon, of which the National Federation and a number of our members were subscribers. Professor Curl's final book, *The Life and Work of Thomas Downes Wilmot Deam (1777-1853), Architect to HRH The Duke of Clarence* was published in April 2025.

Laurence Goff

Also saddened to hear the news from Marian Quant, Secretary of the Friends of Newark Cemetery about the loss of Laurence Goff, who passed away on 13th January 2026. Laurence, who was a current Newark Town Councillor and former Mayor, did so much for the Friends and the people of Newark, and will be missed by many.

News from Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds

from Lynda Kitching, Secretary of the Friends

Beckett Street – YouTube Videos

Our talented webmaster Steve Miller has not only transformed our website, but over the summer, he trained to acquire a drone licence. The footage gives us a wonderful new perspective of the Cemetery. Steve coupled the drone with some instructions to AI, and the results can be seen in 3 videos he has produced, under the Yorkshire Pudding 'label'. Check them out on YouTube via our website: https://www.beckettstreetcemetery.org.uk Scroll down to 'Quick Links' for 'Videos'. There you will find 'To Prove I'm Not Forgot' (the title of our founder Sylvia Barnard's book), 'It's Written in the Stones' and 'Children of Beckett Street'. I hope you are as amazed as we were!

A special anniversary celebration

Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds celebrated their 40th anniversary in 2025, the group being founded in early 1985 by the late Sylvia Barnard. Our Annual General Meeting held in April was dedicated to Sylvia and those early Committee and working-party members, who researched, documented, photographed and publicised the Cemetery, which had been in danger of being partially grassed over with headstones moved to the edges to make way for road-widening.

The 40th anniversary cake
Photograph courtesy of Lynda Kitching

After the formal part of the meeting, we heard from Sylvia's husband David, who recounted those early days of animated meetings, numerous phone calls and growing piles of paper spreading across the living room floor! Computers and spreadsheets were around but no internet, emails or mobile phones. There followed a slide show of photos from the Archives and more reminiscences, topped off with a presentation to Alun Pugh and Lynda Kitching for their 20 years' service as Chair and Secretary respectively, from when Sylvia stepped down. The meeting finished with Members

mingling for refreshments - a highlight being the special cake! - a small exhibition of newspaper cuttings and other memorabilia.

Some Members may recall the Friends hosting NFCF's 2015 AGM, our 30th anniversary, at which Sylvia Barnard spoke about a familiar cry across the country in the 1980s, i.e. each cemetery needing a group who would speak up for it. That led to her being a co-founder of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends.

National Cemeteries Week 2025

National Cemeteries Week (NCW) in 2025 ran from 7th to 15th June and for the third-year running was aligned with Caring for God's Acre, Love Your Burial Ground Week. Altogether twenty-eight cemetery Friends' groups and non-member organisations (see below) registered their interest. Thank you to all who took part and to Emer Seamark for co-ordinating the event.

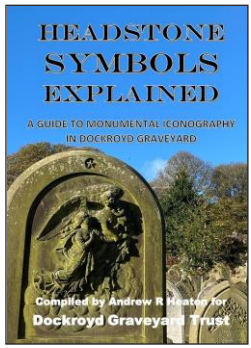
NFCF members: *Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust, Bristol; Ballast Hills Burial Ground, Newcastle upon Tyne; Dockroyd Graveyard Trust, Keighley; Friends of Bebington Cemetery, Wirral; Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds; Friends of Billing Road Cemetery, Northampton; Friends of Brockley and Ladywell Cemeteries, London; Friends of Chapel Street Cemetery, Bradford; Friends of Farsley Rehoboth Burial Ground, Leeds; Friends of Hawkhead Cemetery, Paisley; Friends of Heybridge Cemetery, Essex; Friends of Lancaster Cemetery; Friends of Lister Lane Cemetery, Halifax; Friends of Loxley Cemetery, Sheffield; Friends of Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge; Friends of Mansfield Cemetery, Nottinghamshire; Friends of Margravine Cemetery, London; Friends of Nunhead Cemetery, London; Friends of Ocklynge Cemetery, Eastbourne; Friends of Philips Park Cemetery, Manchester, Friends of Shrewsbury Cemeteries; Friends of St John Baptist Churchyard, Cirencester; Friends of West Norwood Cemetery, London; The Sheffield General Cemetery Trust and Willesden Jewish Cemetery, London*

Non-members: *The Victorian Cemetery, Marlborough; St John's Church Preservation Group, Dudley and Twickenham Cemetery.*

This year NCW will take place from **Saturday 6th to Sunday 14th June** and will again align with Love Your Burial Ground Week.

Headstone symbols explained

by Andrew Heaton, Chairman of the Dockroyd Graveyard Trust



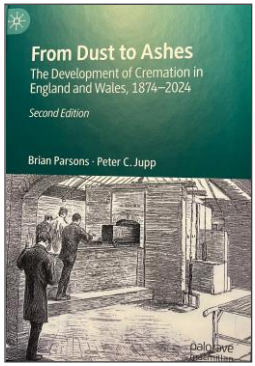
Front cover
Courtesy of Andrew Heaton

Here at Dockroyd Graveyard in West Yorkshire we are often asked by volunteers and visitors alike about the cultural and religious context of the symbols on headstones and monuments. So, I have done something about it, researched the subject and published a book with all the answers!

The book, 'Headstone symbols explained – a guide to monumental iconography in Dockroyd Graveyard' has 100+ full colour photographs, is A5 pocket-sized and wiro bound for 360° opening, ideal for using whilst browsing around graveyard monuments. As headstone symbols are largely similar in all graveyards throughout the country, the book will be of interest and relevance to your volunteers and visitors for guided/self-guided tours. Copies are available from our website priced at £10.00 + £2.00 p&p per copy to a UK address. For NFCF member groups who order five or more books, I am offering a special discounted price in recognition of all the good work you do. Please get in touch for details.

Email: peelpark@btinternet.com or secretary@dgt.org.uk
Website: https://www.dockroydgraveyardtrust.org.uk

From Dust to Ashes: The Development of Cremation in England and Wales, 1874-2024



Front cover
Courtesy of Brian Parsons

This second edition by Brian Parsons and Peter C. Jupp recently published by Palgrave Macmillian, provides an update on the history and contemporary practice of cremation, investigates the reasons for a sudden and widespread change in death customs in England and Wales and analyses the social, economic and political pressures that facilitated the adoption of cremation.

The book can be purchased with a 20% discount using the code: PALAUT from Springer Nature: https://link.springer.com/book/9783031884108

New Members

Group Members:

Friends of Aberffrwd Cemetery, Mountain Ash, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Wales
Contact: Geraint Lewis, aberffrwdcemetery@gmail.com
Website: https://sites.google.com/view/friendsofaberffrwdcemetery/home

Friends of Darfield Cemetery, Barnsley
Contact: Lorna Wilkinson, friendsofdarfieldcemetery@gmail.com
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61578274252508

Friends of Saron, Merthyr Tydfil, Wales
Contact: David Collier, davidcollier00@gmail.com
Website: https://friendsofsaron.wordpress.com

Friends of St John's Churchyard, Nelson (see Page 5)
Contact: Elaine Butterworth, friendsofstjohnschurchyard@gmail.com
Website: https://www.friendsofstjohns.co.uk

Friends of Stoney Royd Cemetery, Halifax
Contact: Krzysztof-Piotr Pawel Wojtyla, Geordiek1982@gmail.com
Facebook: https://facebook.com/groups/780210337756844

Hermon Cemetery Trust, Nantyglo, Gwent, Wales
Contact: Alison Griffiths Lewis, veryalimary@gmail.com

Herne Bay Cemeterians, Herne Bay, Kent
Contact: Mandy Boxall, mandyboxall@aol.com
Facebook: https://facebook.com/hernebaycemeterians

Save Our Green Space, For Belle Vue Cemetery, Shrewsbury
Contact: Brenda Fairley, sogs.sy3@gmail.com

St Mary Magdalene Cemetery Working Group, Prudhoe
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Personal Members: Michael Broadley (Cemetery Supervisor for City of York Council); Fiona Nixon; Robert Orchard and Edward Playfair.

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Copy date for next issue: 31st March 2026

Published by The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC is a Community Interest Company
Limited by Guarantee
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Directors: Colin Fenn, Melvyn Hawkins, Lynda Kitching, John Moffat,
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