National Federation of CEMETERY FRIENDS

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

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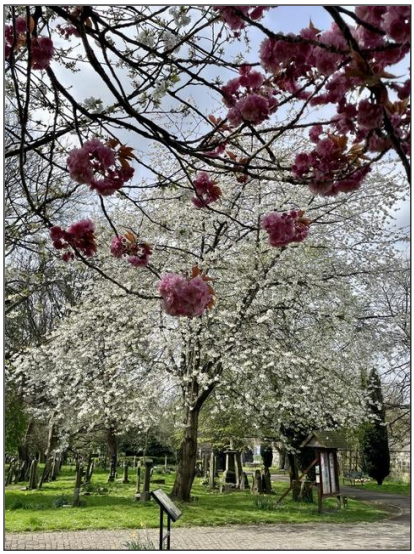
Blossom at Beckett Street Cemetery

from Jeanette Bolton, Friends of Beckett Street Cemetery in Leeds

In 2019 Leeds took part in the Sakura Cherry Tree Project to celebrate 150 years of friendship between Japan and the UK, and Leeds was gifted many trees planted around the city which are now coming into their own.



Left: Memorial Way towards the main entrance and right: North lodge entrance
Photographs by John S. Colley

In Beckett Street Cemetery we are fortunate that we did not have to wait for a special project to be launched as we have enjoyed many of our trees for decades. Leeds in Blossom' 2026 is a city-wide initiative and celebration of spring, running from late March through April, featuring

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All material by the editor unless otherwise attributed.

community events, nature trails, and cultural activities focused on the blooming of thousands of cherry trees across the city. Organised primarily by Love Leeds Parks with support from the National Trust's #BlossomWatch campaign, it aims to connect communities with nature. We were pleased to have had the opportunity to take part in this. Throughout April, we were proud to showcase the cemetery by attaching blossom-related poems (see Jeanette's poem below), blossom and bloom-related epitaph information, botanical history and haikus to our blossom trees offering a self-guided cemetery tour to discover them.

Poem attached to a blossom tree
Photograph by John S. Colley

The cemetery and its Friends have also been invited to participate in as many events as we can this year during the Leeds 400 Celebration – celebrating its 400th anniversary, marking four centuries since King Charles I granted its first Royal Charter on 13 July 1626. It is our hope that it will bring new visitors to the cemetery and a greater appreciation for this Historic England Grade II listed Park and Garden (listed in 2002 because of its special historic interest).

Blossoms for a Place of Rest
by Jeanette Bolton

In the hush of iron gates and sculptured stones,
Where names lean gently into time,
The blossom trees arrive like breath—
Unannounced, but perfectly in season.

Pink spills first—
A blush against the grey insistence of grief,
Petals trembling in the cool spring air
As though they've heard the stories buried here.

And white follows—
Not absence, but a quieter presence,
A soft illumination
Settling on weathered dates and lichen-script.

They do not mourn as we do.
They bloom.

Briefly—
Oh, so briefly—
They become everything at once:
Memory, promise, and the fragile now.

Then the falling—
Petals loosening their hold on sky,
Drifting down like whispered confessions,
Like confetti from a celebration no one planned.

They gather on memorials of the forgotten,
Trace the edges of carved sorrow,
And in their gentle surrender
Say what stone cannot:

That endings are not empty.
That beauty does not ask to stay.

Each year, they return—
Not the same, never the same—
But faithful to the rhythm
That turns loss into something almost like peace.

And so, the cemetery breathes—
Not only of death,
But of blossom and becoming,
Of life daring, again,
To be briefly, vividly seen.

Free online illustrated talk

Continuing its programme of online talks on cemetery-related topics, the National Federation of Cemetery Friends has arranged a free lecture to be given by Dr Roger Bowdler on the theme of '***The Mirror of Mortality: Charnel Tombs of the 17th Century***' on Tuesday 23rd June 2026 starting at 7.00pm via Zoom and will last around an hour.

The age of the Metaphysical Poets witnessed the arrival of some of the most harrowing depictions of bodily decay to appear on funerary monuments. This talk looks at a group of times, mainly in Southeast England, from the 1620s onwards which featured intricately carved reliefs of jumbled bones. This allusion to charnel houses stressed the inevitability of death and the disintegration of the body as a prelude to resurrection and the life to come. A London workshop made a particular specialism of these panels: that of the Christmas family, based in Cripplegate, which had a particular reputation for carving. This talk introduces some remarkable tombs and sheds light on attitudes to mortality and on patterns of patronage and influence.

Tomb of Thomas Marsham †1638, Stratton Strawless, Norfolk.
Photograph courtesy of Roger Bowdler

All members of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends are invited to attend. To book a place, please email the treasurer, Melvyn Hawkins at: treasurer@cemeteryfriends.com You will be sent a Zoom access link a few days before the event.

Dr Roger Bowdler FSA is a historian of tombs and buildings. He studied history of art at Cambridge and completed a PhD on macabre 17th century church monuments in 1991. He was formerly Director of Listing at English Heritage, and is now a heritage consultant, lecturer and author. He is a former chairman of the Mausolea and Monuments Trust, a Commissioner of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and a Research Associate at the University of London's Institute of Historical Research.

The book entitled *The British Cemetery: Architecture, Landscape, Sculpture,* co-authored by Brent Elliott and Roger Bowdler is the first comprehensive history of British cemeteries, concentrating not on social or legal history, or on the biographies of their occupants, but on design and form. The hardback edition consisting of 544 pages was published at the end of April. For further information and to purchase, see: https://liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/book/10.3828/9781836245964

NFCF's NATIONAL CEMETERIES WEEK
6th to 14th June 2026
and
Caring for God's Acre Love Your Burial Ground Week
with Churches Count on Nature
See: https://www.cemeteryfriends.com/

NFCF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Hosted by
The Friends of West Norwood Cemetery, London
Saturday 13th June 2026
This year members can attend in-person or join the AGM business meeting starting a 2.00pm by Zoom
Please contact the NFCF chairman for further information on booking
chairman@cemeteryfriends.com

New interpretation board commemorating servicemen

by Pauline Martin, Friends of Jesmond Old Cemetery,
Newcastle upon Tyne

Last year, at Jesmond Old Cemetery, we installed several interpretation boards, which Ray Hayes wrote about in the NFCF Newsletter 54, Winter 2025. Following on from that successful venture, the idea of installing a board remembering the soldiers commemorated on family graves, along with the 10 Commonwealth War Graves, was born. However, we were keen for it not to be another 5-year project!

The new interpretation board listing soldiers commemorated on family graves and the Commonwealth War Graves
Photograph courtesy of Pauline Martin

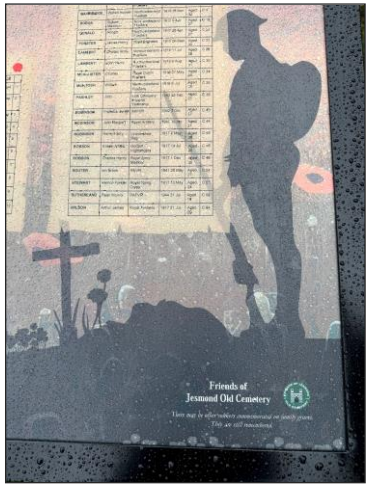
I have been a volunteer at the cemetery for 5 years and during that time whilst working in the cemetery noticed some of the names, made note of them, and did some research. So, I had a starting point!

As I mentioned, we have 10 Commonwealth War Graves in the cemetery. Four of them are recognisable as war graves, the other 6 are buried in family plots. In addition to the Commonwealth War Graves there were 70 casualties mentioned on family graves. Several families lost more than one son, some within days or weeks of each other. As you can well imagine the personal stories of these men and their families were incredibly sad.

Contacting Bereavement Services to ask their approval was the first step, they have always been very supportive of what we do. Border Signs and Graphics in Dumfries was the obvious choice to carry out the work required. Rachel had been our designer on the first project, so we were delighted she was able to work with us again. We were lucky enough to have the help and support of Newcastle City Council, Joseph Richmond & Sons Memorials and the TSG Foundation.

Design ideas were discussed, rough ideas sent to Rachel, a first draft, and we had something to build on. Each draft needed careful checking and tweaking. Logos were provided for our sponsors, a QR code was generated to link to the website. The final draft having been agreed upon, production commenced.

On the 14th of January the board was delivered and installed, its location having previously been agreed with Bereavement Services. It looked fabulous, we have had some great feedback and have been contacted by family members. The project had taken us just three months from the idea to the reality! Although the research took much longer it was both humbling and insightful to put together.



Close-up showing one of the panels with detail of grave location, name, regiment, date of death and age at death.
Photograph courtesy of Pauline Martin

Of course, it is always possible that names had been missed. They will not be forgotten

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.

A Warmer Welcome at Flaybrick

by John Moffat, Secretary of the Friends of Flaybrick

At one of our committee meetings there was a proposal to improve how we welcome our visitors, a welcome board. I have to say, I had thought that the name and opening hours notice plus a notice board detailing our events was sufficient. However, we all agreed that it was a great idea and got behind it to the extent that from decision to installation was done within two months.

Left and above: The new Flaybrick Welcome board
Photographs courtesy of John Moffat

The board itself matches our existing interpretation boards in size and colour. In fact, to maintain continuity in Flaybrick, the same, red colour is used on memorial plaque and QR posts (one just visible bottom left in the right-hand photograph above). The work involved the fabrication, shot blasting, painting, graphics and postcreting, amounting to £700 in total. Not cheap but the favourable responses indicate it was worth it.

Members News

A selection of news and events from Members newsletters and websites

Ballast Hills Burial Ground, Newcastle upon Tyne

The Ballast Hills Burial Ground Project has won a Newcastle University Engagement and Place Award. The project was the winner of the category Engaging for Cultural Benefit.

Billing Road Cemetery, Northampton

In January, volunteers recorded 17 bird species in the cemetery as part of the 2026 RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. Some 20 plus goldfinch were recorded along with a green woodpecker, a blackcap, a redwing and the brief sighting of a bird of prey which may have been a marsh harrier.

Last October, with the aid of a small grant, the Friends purchased native wildflower varieties, such as betony, bluebell, cowslip, wild daffodil, field poppy, fox glove, red campion and yellow rattle. Some 200 bulbs, 30 plus plants and countless seeds were planted/sown in the area of the former gate lodge at the main entrance. Whilst the daffodils failed to bloom this year, there have been some successes from the wildflower planting. The Friends are hoping to extend the wildflower planting. to include autumn crocus, varieties of forget-me-not and orchid.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission have undertaken sowing of wildflowers along the three sides of the War Memorial replacing a formal box hedge damaged by the box moth.

Brandwood End Cemetery, Birmingham

One of the projects undertaken by the Friends to mark their 20th anniversary year has been to raise funds to purchase and plant trees, replenishing the stock of mature trees which have been lost. On 9th February this year, the Friends with the assistance from several groups including staff and pupils from St Albans RC Primary School, Deutsche Bank staff and Birmingham Tree People, planted 15 large standard trees.

Brompton Cemetery, London

Due to an infestation of Nudularia pulvinata, which is a species of scale bug originating from the area of southern Europe and the Mediterranean, 43 holm oak trees in the southern part of the cemetery are being felled and removed to prevent the insects spreading. The substantial cost involved with this process is being met by the Royal Parks. The Friends will pay for replacement planting of trees. It is unknown when the holm oaks were planted originally. Ageing by counting rings of felled trees has not proven to be easy, but the best guess is that the larger trees are around 100 to 120 years old, indicating they were not part of the cemetery planting plan of the 1840s.

Continued over page

Cathays Cemetery, Cardiff

It was recently discovered that World War II Swedish Merchant seamen buried in the Upper Cemetery did not have gravestones. The Norwegian War Graves Commission have commissioned and erected a gravestone honouring these men.

An information panel about the Welsh artist Thomas Henry Thomas (1839–1915) has been installed near to his grave. In addition to his art works, Thomas's other interests included botany, geology, history and archaeology. He was one of the founders of the National Museum of Wales and served as president of the Cardiff Naturalists Society.

Darwen Cemetery, Darwen

In April, the Friends unveiled a new memorial seat located in the Ashes and Memorial Garden in memory of the adults and children who were buried in unmarked graves in the cemetery. In the presence of Trustees, members, close family and a few invited guests, the Reverend Terry Young undertook a dedication service and the MP for Rossendale and Darwen, Andy MacNae unveiled the seat.

Hawkhead Cemetery, Paisley

This year, the Friends received a donation of £500 from LegacyComps and funding of £550 from the Glasgow Airport FlightPath Fund.

Heene Cemetery, Worthing

Volunteers of the cemetery have set up a Bee Walk transect connecting between the cemetery and Marine Gardens. The transect consists of three parts passing through varying habitats: Part 1 starts with one lap of Heene Cemetery; Part 2, a residential walk along roads leading to Marine Gardens, and finishing with Part 3, one lap of Marine Gardens. Heene's first Bee Walk took place on 21st March. The walks should be undertaken monthly through to October with the bee data collected along the transect uploaded online.

The BeeWalk Survey Scheme is part of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's national recording scheme to monitor the abundance of bumblebees on transects across Britain. More information can be found on their website at: https://beewalk.org.uk

Nottingham Road Cemetery, Derby

In October 2025, The Victoria Cross Trust undertook professional cleaning of the grave of Adeline Rivers, who died 1st March 1937, aged 80 years and was interred at Nottingham Road Cemetery. Adeline's son Private Jacob Rivers, 1st Battalion Sherwood Foresters was killed in action at Neuve Chapelle, France on 12th March 1915, aged 33 and was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery. He has no known grave but is remembered on his mother's headstone. The Mayor of Derby, the Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire, representatives of the Mercian Regiment and descendants of the Rivers family were amongst those who had assembled on 12th March 2026 for rededication of the refurbished grave.

This was followed by another gathering on 18th April for the dedication of two identical plaques remembering babies and children buried in the cemetery with no memorial of their own.

Sheffield General Cemetery Trust

In February, the Trust launched a monthly Supper Club in association with Ammi's Kitchen. This is a ticketed event held in the Samuel Worth Chapel, aimed at bringing people together through food, culture and shared experience.

Willesden Jewish Cemetery, London

Willesden Jewish Cemetery has been recognised by the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe as a 'Significant Cemetery'.

New Members

Group Members:

Canterbury Cemetery Friends
Contact: Dr Adrian Adams, infocanterburycemeteryfriends@gmail.com
Website: https://www.canterburycemeteryfriends.org

Friends of Greyfriars Kirkyard, Edinburgh
Contact: Mark Hatton, Mhatton304@aol.com
Website: https://www.friendsofgreyfriarskirkyard.org

Personal Member: Caroline Gerard

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends CIC

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