



## Editorial!

Welcome to the first edition of the Cathays Cemetery Friends newsletter! It is hoped its publication will become a regular mouthpiece for the Friends group. We need your help, so please any members with stories of interest regarding the cemetery [especially any tales of their antecedents buried within its walls] please let us have them - they will be most welcome.

## Open Day in July

This was evidently regarded as a great success and we have received several complimentary or encouraging comments.

Cllr Margaret Jones:

"It was a day to be remembered and a privilege to be part of it."

Cllr Freda Salway:

"A Big Thank You to all the friends of Cathays Cemetery for your efforts over the years in getting the chapels re-roofed. Keep up the good work".

David Melding A.M.:

"I enjoyed the event very much and was delighted by the obvious interest the project has generated".

Dr Ian Dungavell [the Victorian Society]:

"Good news about all your work at Cathays Cemetery! Very pleased to hear about the progress."

Mathew Saunders [the Ancient Monuments Society / Friends of Friendless Churches]:

"Glad to hear City Council did the right thing."

## From the Archives

THEFT FROM A CEMETERY.—George Sutton was charged with stealing five stones from the cemetery near Cathays, the property of the corporation. A police constable concealed himself in the graveyard at six o'clock in the morning of the 14th of last month, and in about half an hour afterwards defendant came down with a donkey and cart and took the stones. The accused said the stones were outside the wall of the cemetery, and in taking them he did not think he was committing a felony. The Bench, taking that view of the case, cautioned the man and discharged him.

Western Mail 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 1877

## Cathays Cemetery Station

Various Friends have attempted to verify the past existence of a railway station at the Cemetery. Rumour has it that the platform was sloping making it easier, in some ways, to transfer coffins from a train to a horse-drawn hearse. An email from a Paul Jeffries goes a long way to proving such a station existed. I quote:-

In those days of multitudinous different railway companies there was a body called the Railway Clearing House, which existed basically to facilitate traffic passing between companies. As part of this role it published a **Handbook of Stations**. These are not regarded by railway historians as accurate as information was at times years out-of-date, but it is interesting to find that a Cemetery on the Rhymney Railway first appears in the 1872 handbook [suggesting that it was probably provided right from the opening of the line in April 1871], and that an amendment list dated May 1898 states that it "has been closed". The station never appeared in Rhymney Railway timetables, i.e. it never had any regular service, hence would only ever have been used by special arrangement with the company, presumably at a cost likely to have deterred the majority of funeral parties. In fact no documentary evidence that it was ever used has come to light.

Many thanks to Mr. Jeffries for his help in solving this mystery.

## Acknowledgements

Belatedly we acknowledge the contribution from Mr Jim Lister who provided the details of Stoker John Cleal included in our book *Cathays Cemetery on its 150th Anniversary*.

## Walking for Health

Four members of the Friends have attended the necessary training course and are now certified to lead "Health Walks". It is necessary to 'recce and risk assess' the proposed walk(s), to ensure that appropriate documentation is in place and has the approval of the Project Co-ordinator. It is expected that this step will be a formality. A programme of walks will be needed and this will need to be publicised locally, as a primary aim is to reach people who would be likely to benefit, but who might otherwise not consider this form of activity or lack the confidence to give it a try.



A typical walk should be  $\frac{1}{2}$ -2 miles and last 30 to 45 minutes. It would not be like the sort of walk that we have been used to, which is punctuated by frequent stops to talk about the points of interest. In this case the key factor is the health benefit, which means keeping up a steady, albeit, modest pace. This would not preclude perhaps one stop to talk about one or two points of interest ... and this could be different on each walk - a distinct advantage for those coming on the walk regularly.

Other factors to consider are convenience for public transport, a dry place to start and ideally a café, or something similar, conveniently near the end to encourage socialising. Walks are normally, but not exclusively, circular. In view of these criteria, initial thoughts are to use Cathays Library as an initial assembly point, which should be convenient for a café/pub in the Crwys Road/Whitchurch Road area at the end. On this basis, a fairly straightforward loop around the cemetery as far as the chapels would be about a mile in length.

### Walks begin 10 November

Meet every Tuesday outside Cathays Library at the end of Fair Oak Road at 10.30am. For further information, contact Jane Williams on 2087 3633, or Ivor Lippett on 079 72 74 75 78, or email <janewilliams@cardiff.gov.uk>.

## Geocaching

The cemetery geocache has now had 60 logged finds, in about two years. As cachers often operate in pairs or as families, this implies that around 100 people have been attracted to the cemetery by what is still a young, but growing, hobby.

The following is a selection from recent logs:

*Great cache, loved the history and a stunning day as well. Amazing history once again on our doorstep, I've passed this place so many times and never stopped to look. Thank you.*

*Didn't know graveyards could be so much fun, what a lot of interesting facts.*

*Don't let the title put you off. Must be one of the best geocaches we have done so far - very interesting.*

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## Cardiff Cemetery wins Award

Thornhill Cemetery & Crematorium has won the National Association of Memorial Masons' Cemetery Operatives of the Year Award at the **2009 Cemetery of the Year Awards**. This new award celebrates the service provided by the staff of Bereavement Services for their hard work and commitment maintaining Cardiff's burial sites.

Bereaved families are offered a number of options throughout its sites including cremation, traditional graves, lawn burial graves, environmentally-friendly woodland burials and cremated remains burials as well as numerous other memorial options.

The Cemetery of the Year awards, now in their 12<sup>th</sup> year, aim to raise standards in burial grounds and encourage choice for the bereaved. It is a nation-wide competition for cemeteries, crematoria, green and pet burial sites.

**Don't forget to let us have your bits of news or other items for future issues!**

Contact the editorial team on 2062 7848  
or email <doricwales@o2.co.uk>

## **Forthcoming Events**

### **OPEN MEETING Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October:**

Talk by Nick Davey, member of Friends Group and chairman of Glamorgan Family History Society. Nick's talk & PowerPoint presentation will be on The History of Cathays Cemetery and will be held in the Mess Room at the Depot in the New Cemetery [at the southern end, near the War Memorial section], entry in Allensbank Road. Members arriving by public transport or on foot please wait at the cemetery gates and they will be picked up just before 7pm and taken to the mess room.

The plan on page 89 of the Anniversary book shows the location of the Depot.

### **BRAMBLE CLEARING:**

The next onslaught will be on **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November** at **10am**. Please meet at the Fair Oak Road entrance. We can supply loppers, gloves etc., but if you have your own favourites please bring them. It would be good to see some new faces at what is an enjoyable and friendly way to spend a Saturday morning. Got to be better than Tesco's!

These **Work Days** continue throughout the year, the first one in 2010 is on **30<sup>th</sup> January** - again a Saturday at 10am.

### **AGM**

This will be held at the Briwnant Chapel, Thornhill on **Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> January**, starting at **2.30pm**.

Our first **Open Meeting** next year will be on **9<sup>th</sup> February**; the speaker and the venue to be announced nearer the date.

### **Council Events**

Cardiff Bereavement Services will be holding their annual **War Graves Walk** in Cathays Cemetery on **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October**. Meet at Fair Oak Road entrance at **2 pm**. An easy walk of about 1½ hours, exploring the various regimental insignia found on headstones from both World Wars and learning how Second World War bombs damaged the cemetery.

The chapels will be open to view the interior and the Friends Group will be selling copies of their 150th

Anniversary book.

On the subject of books, we had a table at this year's Family History Fair held at Cardiff City Hall. A very well-attended event organised by Glamorgan Family History Society under the Chairmanship of Nick Davey [a member of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery]. We sold 2 dozen books bringing in £168.

The **Christmas Memorial Service** this year is on **Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December** at **2pm**. To be held at the Wenallt Chapel, Thornhill. Refreshments to follow the service.

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## **Hobbies & Interests**

*[This article was first printed in The Pensioners' Association magazine of the HSBC Bank]*

I find the diversity of individuals' hobbies and interests particularly interesting. From potholing to pottery, photography to philately, the list is endless.

One of my personal interests is death. Obviously I haven't tried it yet but it all began when I retired and returned to University, this time on courses I wanted to do and did not have to do for my profession. I chose an Arts degree which included sculpture, both doing and researching, Greek, Egyptian, Medieval and Modern sculpture in stone, wood and bronze. Included in this was Victorian Mock Gothic and on a visit to a cemetery to look at some beautiful Victorian Mock Gothic tombs, I met a man who acted on behalf of the descendants of an extremely wealthy family. He was meeting workmen to open access to a family tomb for bi-annual maintenance, particularly to the underground vaults and he invited me to accompany him.

After reassuring myself that he was not too pale and unaffected by sunlight or garlic, I descended into what can only be called an underground catacomb about the size of a small bungalow, superbly constructed with the capacity to hold over 60 coffins in individual shelved niches. The tomb only contained 3 cast iron coffins, each decorated with ornamentation, two of which were covered in red velvet and all were lead lined. The condition was excellent considering that the last burial was in 1857.

I thought what a fascinating subject to research and I was proven to be correct. Would you / believe believe that in early Victorian times drivers of horse-drawn hearses were instructed to drive slowly

through upper class areas, at a quicker pace through middle class areas and quicker still through working class areas? I also discovered that in the late 1700's through to the late 1800's there were 5 forms of burial: from the most expensive being interred near to the centre or by the side of a main thoroughfare in a burial ground to the placing of the body in a communal grave.

In early Victorian times there was a fear of premature burial to such a degree that various systems were developed so that if the buried person awoke they could sound an alarm. These included a wire thread, tied to a finger, passing through a small hole in the coffin leading up to a bell mounted on the grave stone. Just imagine the wind blowing the bell in the night! An extreme solution to the avoidance of premature burial was detailed in the membership of a church who gave members the right after death for a Church official to cut a main artery prior to the coffin being sealed.

I was sorry to see some excellent stone carving had deteriorated but my research found that some stone masons offered stone of various hardness and durability so that as the stone wore away, the memories of the lost became less painful.

There were also 'Death Savings Clubs' founded to pay for both the funeral and the mourning clothes for the family. These clothes were particularly required, as I understand it was traditional for families to visit the cemetery after church on a Sunday to promenade.

There were many fascinating images, ornate patterns and inscriptions. One of my favourites reads:

Here lies Betty underground  
Making not a single sound.  
Married forty years to Harold Wyatt,  
First time he has had some quiet!

I did quite a lot of research into sculpture and as a bonus I can now hold a conversation with an undertaker in deadly earnest!

*Our thanks to Mr. Alan Lee for his permission to use his article.*

## ***The Garden***

Sarah tried to clean the window with her sleeve, looked out at the back garden and sighed. Struggling to open the patio door, she said. "This door needs oiling or something. It's stiff, hasn't been opened in weeks". She turned back into the sitting room, grabbed her husband and took him into the garden. "You must admit, dearest husband, this is a mess. If it gets any more overgrown the BBC will be filming wildlife documentaries out here. Look at the grass, it used to be a lawn, your pride and joy, remember? Cut it every few days you did, it was like a bowling green, now it looks like a field some farmer's forgotten."

Sarah paused. The faint smell of a barbecue drifted up from a few gardens away, a mixture of charcoal and burgers mingling with the sound of people enjoying themselves, the clinking of glasses, children laughing. "I bet they won't burn the sausages like you always do" she said. "You reckon it's a tradition, burnt food, wouldn't be a good evening without incinerated sausages, you reckon".

Waving away a raiding party of wasps Sarah continued. "Do you remember the time you got so drunk you fell into the pond? Look at it now, the water's all gone green and the fountain's broken, blocked with dirt, all silted up." She bent down and pulled a broken bean stick from what had once been the vegetable plot. Using it to half-heartedly attack the rampant weeds, she went on "It's like a jungle out here. Look, just look at that tree, it's gone mad, needs a good pruning".

Sarah turned back towards their house. "It's cutting out the light to the kitchen. A dismal enough room without this b\*\*\*\*y jungle". She did manage to pick a few end-of-season marigolds. "There, Dear, your favourite flowers, I'll put them in a vase on the sideboard. Nice and bright. Perhaps they'll cheer us up" she said. They went back into the house, past the piles of unwashed dishes & empty ready-meal cartons. Past the ever increasing mound of unread newspapers & unopened post. Sarah put the marigolds in water and placed them on the sideboard.

She put her husband's ashes next to the flowers, bent down and kissed the small wooden container. "I will always love you. You know that, don't you"? She re-arranged the yellowing sympathy cards and sat down.

*Eric R Fletcher*

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