



March 2010 Issue N° 2



The cemetery has worn a winter coat quite frequently this winter: this view is looking around the east side of "the heart" from beside the chapels.

## **The Missing Piece** *by Tricia Sewell*

A chance remark made during a guided walk at Cathays Cemetery about two years ago set the wheels in motion for a memorable meeting on January 14<sup>th</sup> this year. On that walk I mentioned that my cousin, John Howard Davies, was buried in Cathays Cemetery. John was drowned in July 1949 at Sully Island near Barry. He was a member of a party of Boy Scouts who got into severe difficulties when a return to the mainland went disastrously wrong. John rescued a fellow scout who was in danger of drowning and in doing so lost his own life.

Recently the Boy Scout who was saved and had been in



school with John, returned to Cardiff to visit his sister. Luckily she had kept an article about John that had been printed in the South Wales Echo; the full account is one of the stories in Cathays Cemetery Anniversary book.

As a result, on a clear day with snow covering the head-stones I met Michael Glossop, the Scout whom my cousin had rescued. Now the final piece that was missing from our family jigsaw has been fitted gently into place.

## **Not Quite Tree o'clock**

As part of National Tree Week, Tree O'Clock was a world record attempt to plant the most trees in one hour, in multiple locations, on **Saturday 5th December**, between 11am and 12 noon. The aim was to break the Guinness World Record™, which stood at 653,143. There was no restriction on the number of sites or people participating ... and thousands did!

The attempt was coordinated by the BBC and Bereavement Services participated by planting 30 Rowan trees in Cathays Cemetery. The Friends led the volunteers who carried out the planting and had their trees in the ground, supported and protected by plastic sleeves well within the allotted time.



Although the record was not broken, about half a million trees were planted in the hour, all across the UK, leaving lasting benefits for native wildlife, people and the environment.

## **Bid for Charitable Status.**

The success of our activities last year means that we are now eligible to apply for Charitable Status. So the Committee are looking into this, as it is felt that it will bring advantages, including greater access to further funding.

If there's anyone who's had previous experience in applying for Charitable Status, we'd love to hear from you.

## Walking for Health

Since these walks started, virtually every Tuesday morning has been greeted with rain, sleet, snow, freezing weather ... or a combination of these!



Despite this, we consistently attract a group of 8-12 walkers determined to brave the elements or, perhaps, justify their caffè latte in the café afterwards. Newcomers to the cemetery are clearly surprised by the pleasant environment and the interest generated by the memorials and several have joined the Friends or bought the book, or both.

Walks normally last 40 minutes to an hour, taking a variety of routes meandering around the southern section of the cemetery although, recently, on one of the better weather days, we made a longer excursion to the northern section, to see the Chinese graves and war memorial with its plot of First World War graves.

While the normal intention of these walks is to maintain a continuous steady pace, the distractions which abound in the cemetery usually mean that the pattern is short brisk walks interspersed with pauses for exploration and discussion - or is it the other way round?

Along with the weather, the temporary closure of Cathays Library for renovation may have deterred possible walkers, so we are hopeful that numbers will pick up as the weather improves, spring shows its pretty face and the library re-opens to provide a sheltered place to convene.



## Green Flag Award

Coincidentally, the first health walk took place on the same day, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2009, as Cllr Nigel Howells, Executive Member for Sport, Leisure & Culture, raised the Green Flag at Cathays Cemetery. Helping to celebrate the occasion were school children from Allensbank Primary School and members of the Friends and the walking group. Pupils from years 3 and 4 of the school were not deterred by persistent drizzle and took great pleasure in planting crocus & wood anemones, with assistance from Councillor Howells and the Bereavement Services Gardening Team.



Councillor Howells said:

"Achieving a Green Flag Award for the first time is outstanding and I am delighted that the flag is now flying high for all to see. Cathays Cemetery is a much loved landmark and we appreciate the help of the Friends Group and local schoolchildren in helping to make it even more attractive for residents and visitors."

The Green Flag Award which began in 1996, is the national standard for parks & green spaces in England & Wales, creating a benchmark of excellence in recreational green areas. The award is a sign to visitors that a green space has met strict criteria, which among other things require it to be a clean, safe and welcoming place to spend time.

Independent assessments of the cemetery took place in June. Judges examined the Council's management plans and policies for the cemetery and were satisfied that areas such as access, safety, environmental policies, conservation and heritage, community involvement and good overall management were in place. The award had been presented by Michaela Strachen at a special ceremony in July, just after the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.

## ***Forthcoming Events***

### **BRAMBLE CLEARING:**

Our next three **Work Days** are on **13<sup>th</sup> March**, **8<sup>th</sup> May** and **10<sup>th</sup> July** [all Saturdays]. Two hours of gentle exercise, camaraderie and the warm feeling of a job well done. So please can we see some new faces at our next meeting. We are making excellent progress in removing brambles, laurel and trimming back the more invasive trees. Saturday March 13<sup>th</sup> at 10am outside the Chapels. Be there.

### **HERITAGE TRAILS & WALKS**

There are two Walks planned for the next few months: a **Tree Walk** on **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April** at 2pm; Cathays Cemetery has many specimen trees and, hopefully, there will be many in full blossom. It will be led by Mike Castle, a tree expert on the staff of Bereavement Services.

**Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> May** at 8:30pm - Laura Palmer, of Cardiff Sustainability & Biodiversity Group will be taking a **Bat Walk**, complete with listening equipment to pick up the bat noises.

There are three Heritage Trails planned; one on **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> April** at 2pm. Then a **Midsummer Walk** in the evening of **Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June** at 7pm; this will be led by members of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery. And lastly one on **Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July** at 2pm.

These heritage trails are an excellent way to learn something about the history of the cemetery and the lives of its more notable residents. All these heritage trails and walks start at the Chapels, Fair oak Road entrance.

### **TALKS**

Earlier this year **Elaine Davey** of Cardiff University gave us a talk about a Cardiff-born sculptor, **Goscombe John**. Although he is of national & international importance [his work stands in places such as Calcutta, South Africa & Baghdad as well as countless examples in the U K] he is virtually unknown in Cardiff. There is a Public House named *The Goscombe*, recently converted from a baker's shop, in Cowbridge Road. [Rather strange as Goscombe John was a

lifetime abstainer.] There are many examples of his work locally including the war memorial in Llandaff, the statue of St David in Cardiff City Hall and the altar piece in St John's Church in the centre of Cardiff.

Our next talk is at 7pm on **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March** [instead of 13<sup>th</sup> April] in the University's Humanities Building to the rear of Colum Road. It will be given by **Geoff Brookes**, writer & historian in Room 3.46 again and is entitled **Stories in Welsh Stone**; it will delve into the history of the more unusual Welsh memorials - perhaps some in Cathays.

We have two more talks in the autumn. One on Architectural Conservation and one on Egyptian Symbolism, but more details to follow nearer the time.

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## ***Forget Swine Flu***

The present day scourge of AIDS has killed, world-wide, in the region of 25 million but that figure, frightening as it is, pales into insignificance when compared to the 1918~1920 outbreak of **Spanish flu**. That pandemic killed 25 million in as many weeks. The final number has been estimated at between 50 to 100 million, that's about 4 or 5 % of the world's population. Or put another way, about 5 times the fatalities in WW1.

The first cases in Britain were reported in Glasgow in May 1918, it soon spread. The number of fatalities in the UK was in the region of 250,000. In France it was 400,000, and on the island of Western Samoa 22% of the population died in just two weeks.

Desperate measures were taken in Britain to control the disease, all totally ineffectual, from spraying the roads with various chemicals to - believe it or not - eating vast amounts of porridge and surrounding oneself in clouds of cigarette smoke.

An unusual feature of Spanish flu was that it mostly killed young adults, 99% were under 65, more than half in the 20 to 40 bracket, whereas other flu epidemics seem to target

babies and older people in their seventies.

Obviously Cardiff was not immune. Below are extracts from the report of the Parks, Open Spaces & Burial Board Committee of Cardiff Council dated 4<sup>th</sup> December 1918. It is now unusual to have more than one interment a day in Cathays Cemetery; compare that with 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918 when there were 40.

#### Committee Report Extracts

#295 *Burials*: The Manager's report, dated 3rd December 1918, as to the Burials for October and November, was read (epitome) (1) In no period in the history of the Cemetery has such a large number of interments taken place in 2 months. (2) The Regulations as to arrivals and notices had to be almost entirely suspended and arrangements made by telephone. (3) The number of interments for October was 483 and for November 536: total 1019. (4) To deal with the extraordinary conditions, the staff of workmen had to be increased and men obtained from the City Engineer, Waterworks Engineer and Parks Superintendent. The Chairman also helped. (5) 12 to 14 men were also supplied daily for Grave Digging for 4 weeks by the Commandant of the Agricultural Distribution Centre. (6) The most busy period was from October 19th to November 16th — 701 interments — an average of 28.2 per day. (7) The greatest number on any one day was 40 (October 30th). (8) The Cemetery staff worked 7 days a week, and at times during very wet weather when temporary men were absent, they "carried on." (9) The organising work meant hours of additional clerical labour for 6 weeks, Sundays & evenings.

*Resolved* – That the Junior Clerk, H Torrington, be granted an honorarium of 2 guineas for extra work hereunder.

*Resolved* – That men who remained on duty at the Cemetery the whole of Armistice Day be granted an extra day's pay.

*Resolved* – That the sincere thanks of this Committee be accorded to the City Engineer, Waterworks Engineer and Parks Superintendent for their ready co-operation in lending men for grave digging; also to 6 volunteers.

*Resolved* – That the expenditure of 13/4d on refreshments for soldiers be confirmed.

*Resolved* – That the question of Shelters for grave diggers (when working) be left in the hands of the Chairman and Manager.

**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>

## ***Biodiversity & Cathays Cemetery***

Biodiversity - the variety of life on earth

2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the UN. Cardiff Council, with



the Cardiff Biodiversity Partnership, have signed up as partners to this international initiative and during 2010 will be highlighting the biodiversity of Cardiff.

The Council have an Environmental Advice Team with 2 Ecologists, myself and Matthew Harris, who you may have met at the 150th anniversary last year - we were the ones with the slow worms and toads! We will be promoting as many events as possible throughout the year, particularly those run by Parks services and the various Friends Groups.

The biggest event of the year is Wales Biodiversity Week - 5th-13th June. This is run every year and there will be events taking place all over the county including bug hunts, pond dips, bat and orchid walks.

You may wonder what all of this has to do with Cathays Cemetery. We are lucky in Cardiff to have so many amazing patches of green space. These range from formal gardens, woodlands and parks to cemeteries. As you are probably aware, the friends group has been working on a conservation area which is turning into a fantastic wildflower meadow, full of butterflies and ant-hills that attract the Green Woodpecker you can often hear 'yaffling' in the trees. If you look a little closer you will find that even the most pristine areas of the grounds are excellent for biodiversity. The short mown grass areas still have a lot of interesting flowering plants including scarlet pimpernel and bird's-foot trefoil. Last year the ecological consultant Peter Sturgess surveyed the waxcaps in the cemetery and on his findings we will soon be designating the site a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).

So, there is much more to Cathays Cemetery than meets the eye. To help people discover the abundance of biodiversity at the site I will be giving a talk on **Tuesday 8th June** during Wales Biodiversity Week. This will be followed by a Midsummer Walk around the site on 22nd. June. But if this has got you thinking that you would like to know more, sooner, then join me for the Bat Walk on Tuesday 18th May.

Laura Palmer - Ecologist Cardiff Council