

July 2010 Issue N° 3



### ***Refurbishment of Memorial to Chinese War Dead***

During the two World Wars commercial ships were recruited by the government for transportation. Some of these were manned by Chinese sailors and some of these were killed. With no local family to take care of their funeral arrangements, a group of local Chinese people took this upon themselves. They also had the idea of erecting a Memorial Stone to commemorate those who died in the wars and to allow relatives to visit and remember them. In the early 1960s, a site was assigned in the northern section of Cathays Cemetery for the stone, which was named 'The Grave for Deceased Chinese Friends'.

After nearly half a century, the Stone was in desperate need of repair due to weathering. With the aid of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this unique memorial has been refurbished. Completion of the refurbishment was formally recognised at a ceremony during the Ching Ming festival, one of two festivals each year (the other is Chung Yeung, in the autumn) which are traditional occasions to commemorate past loved ones. It is a festival to honour and pay respect to deceased ancestors and reinforces the ethic of filial piety. Ching Ming meaning "clear" and "bright" falls on the 106th day after the winter solstice, 5<sup>th</sup> April in 2010, and the whole family go to sweep the graves of their ancestors. At this

time, you may see tokens of remembrance in the form of joss paper, coins, flowers or fruit on graves. Joss paper is traditionally made from coarse bamboo paper, which feels handmade with many variances and imperfections, although rice paper is also commonly used. Traditional joss is cut into individual squares or rectangles and may be decorated with seals, stamps, pieces of contrasting paper, engraved designs or other motifs. Joss paper may also be burned in makeshift braziers.

The Chinese people have lived in Europe for more than 100 years. With the rapid development of the shipping industry came a high demand for labourers and many Chinese came to London and Liverpool to work. With a reputation for hard work, they were employed as sailors or in the engine room, kitchen or laundry room. In 1910, a shipping company in Cardiff employed many workers and sailors from Liverpool & London and three to four hundred Chinese worked in Wales at this time. Bute Street was where Chinese sailors would socialise while resting or waiting for ships. People called it 'Sailor Street' or 'China Town'. The Chinese also started opening restaurants and small grocery shops in the area, while the shipping business was booming.

### ***Bats bring out Record Numbers***

Over 100 people turned up for the **Bat Walk on Tuesday 18th May** ably led by James Byrne assisted by Laura Palmer and members of Cardiff Bat Group. We learnt some fascinating details about various sorts of bats and as dusk fell saw several pipistrelle bats flitting around the tops of the trees - and heard them too thanks to the bat detectors brought by the Bat Group's members. Come along next year!

### **Stop Press: Charitable Status**

At the EGM on 3 July, the new Constitution and Bye-laws were approved, paving the way for our application for charitable status. A full update will appear in the next Newsletter.

## Monumental Mystery

The "lawning" of much of the western (Cathays Library) end of the cemetery was undertaken in the 1960's. This was in line with the general 'modernist' movement of the time which gave little value to things old. The aim was to create something resembling the war grave cemeteries with rows of memorials. While not the main objective, the simplification of maintenance and reduction of associated costs would have been seen as advantageous and, therefore, have influenced the decision to adopt the modernist ideas.

In general, lawning involved moving all the headstones in alternate rows to the foot of the graves (should they now be known as footstones?) and taking out stone kerbs, to leave a broad clear swathe between twin rows of back-to-back headstones. Once levelled and grassed, most of the maintenance needs could be met by a reasonably sized mechanical mower.

However, particularly with the evidence of a postcard [donated to The Friends by Nic Hodges of the Friends of Merthyr Dyfan Cemetery in Barry] it is clear that there were many larger monuments which, to achieve the overall objectives, had to be removed and replaced with smaller markers. Many of these replacement stones are quite plain with minimal inscriptions, that is just a surname and year of death for each person buried there. It has to be emphasised that all reasonable attempts were made at the time to contact grave owners and the Council's actions have to be seen as properly conducted and authorised. With hindsight, what happened may be considered a mistake, but we must recognise that each generation makes its own value judgements on its heritage.



Nevertheless, it still seems surprising that many grave owners (who were also, presumably, relatives)

would readily agree to the substitution of an impressive and expensive monument by a most minimalistic marker. It would be interesting to see records of correspondence and discussion at the time. Perhaps Council minutes would throw more light on the subject? What happened to the monuments that were removed? Were they put into safe storage? If so, it seems unlikely that they are still there, as they would take up a significant amount of space and someone would know where they are. This leads on to the next question - how were they disposed of? In keeping with the practice at the time the original monuments were erected, an appreciable amount of information was likely to have been inscribed upon them. If the monument was going to be lost, did anyone bother to record this information, either as a photographic or textual record and, if so, where is this?

On the postcard, it is possible to identify the name Elliot and the date 1900 on the most prominent memorial and also to make out names (Emily Rogers and Edward Griffiths) on two adjacent ones. The skyline of roof-tops and chimneys is also quite distinctive (outlined in red in the picture).



The second image is today's equivalent - because of trees that would otherwise have obscured the view, it has been taken closer to the Elliot stone, but the general direction of view is the same. Again, red lines pick out the same building profile, which is around the junction of Bruce Street and Fair oak Road: with the exception of one chimney stack that has been removed, the match of profile is excellent.

In both pictures, the Elliot monument/stone is identified with a green spot and the Rogers one with a blue spot. There are two points to note with respect to the latter: the stone is of much better quality and it has a fuller inscription - but you cannot see this in the image, because it was in the row

behind and has, therefore, been turned round. The replacement Griffith's stone is also there, but just out of shot in the 'today' image.

While the motivation for the action taken almost 50 years ago and its manner of execution may be questionable and it seems too late to rectify this past 'mistake', we can at least learn from it and ensure that every effort is made to preserve remaining memorials and the historic record inscribed on them.

## ***Site of Importance for Nature Conservation***

Cardiff County Council has designated the cemetery a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, or SINC. A significant factor in meeting the criteria for this was the identification of several species of waxcaps in the autumn of 2009. During three brief visits in November 2009, twelve different waxcaps were identified and it is felt that with a more comprehensive survey, or in a particularly good year, more would be added to the list. The waxcaps appear to occur through the whole site, generally at a low density.

The 12 species identified so far are *Hygrocybe aurantio-splendens*, *H. calyptriformis*, *H. ceracea*, *H. chlorophana*, *H. coccinea*, *H. conica*, *H. glutinipes*, *H. pratensis*, *H. psittacina*, *H. punicea*, *H. quieta*, *H. virginea*. While most are very common species, *H. punicea*, *H. aurantiosplendens* and *H. calyptriformis* are all significant in the context of Cardiff.



The picture is of the Pink (Ballerina) Waxcap (*H. calyptriformis*) for which we are grateful to Peter Sturgess, who also carried out the survey.

The site is not just good for waxcaps: it clearly supports a good range of grassland fungi. There are impressive rings of Clouded Agaric (*Clitocybe nebularis*) and Blewits (*Lepista cf sordida*), while the uncommon Fairy Club (*Clavaria fumosa*) has also been spotted. The Clouded Agaric can be up to 8" in diameter. The Blewits are edible ... provided that you can identify them with confidence and do not

feel squeamish about collecting them from around graves!

## ***Notice Board***

### **WORK DAYS**

Meet at 10am at the Chapels. I promise you it's more fun than standing at the cereal counter in Sainsbury's wondering which size cornflakes to buy. The dates [all Saturdays] are: - **10th July, 11th September, 9th October and 11th December.**

### **HERITAGE TRAILS & WALKS**

**Sunday 11th July:** A **Heritage Walk** led by Bereavement Services. A chance to hear the stories behind some of the more iconic and quirky memorials.

**Sunday 24th October:** An **Insignia Trail**, also led by Bereavement Services, explaining the varied regimental insignia found on war graves. Plus the history of various past members of the armed services buried in Cathays.

These walks are an excellent way to learn about the history of the cemetery and its more notable residents; they all start at 2 o'clock by the Chapels, Fairoak Road entrance.

### **TALKS**

**Tuesday 14th September:** **Peter Ashby**, Principal Conservation Architect for CADW. He also holds a degree in town planning and he came to CADW from Gloucestershire where he was based in Cirencester, an area with the second highest number of listed buildings of any British town. This talk is at 7pm in the University's Humanities Building to the rear of Colum Road.

**Tuesday 2nd November** [NB instead of 9th November]: **Professor Rosalie David** from, Manchester University [though probably better known for her television appearances] will give a lecture at 7pm under the title "**Ancient Egypt in British Cemeteries**". This will be **open to the public** and will be held in the Julian Hodge Lecture Theatre in Colum Drive. Tickets cost £2.50 [£2 to members] and are available from our chairman, Paul Nicholson [07964 588 265 (evenings) or <nicholsonpt@cardiff.ac.uk>].

**Geoff Brookes' talk 'Stories in Welsh Stone'**

on **13th April** brought to 'life' again a number of fascinating local histories from around South Wales, full of controversy, misfortune or sheer wretchedness. All research sprang from headstones in church & chapel graveyards, which beautifully hide the horror behind the memorials.

Geoff spoke about Sarah Jacobs, the 'Welsh Fasting Girl' and the horrific story of her demise; Mary Morgan, infanticide, social hierarchy & the miscarriage of justice; Thomas Heslop, drink, duels & cowardice. Geoff illustrated these & other interesting anecdotes of everyday people with photographs, transporting us around South Wales in the process.

More intriguing stories are contained in his book, which Geoff sees as a necessary enterprise with more & more stone monuments going together with their engraved lettering, and the added loss of the stories behind them.

Copies of the book, 'Stories in Welsh Stone' are available from the websites.

[www.storiesinwelshstone.co.uk](http://www.storiesinwelshstone.co.uk)

[www.welshcountry.co.uk](http://www.welshcountry.co.uk) or from our Secretary, Mike O'Callaghan, contact <maocall@live.co.uk>.

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## Local News

As a child growing up in Cardiff my local library, [the first one I held a member's ticket for] was the Grade 2 listed **Cathays Library** situated on the site of the original entrance to Cathays Cemetery. It is one of two branch libraries (the other being Whitchurch) given to the citizens of Cardiff by the Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The Cathays one was opened in March 1907, some 50 years after the establishment of the cemetery.

The years took their toll and plans were put in place to close it and if it were not for a campaign, vigorously supported by children from local schools, this prestigious building would have been closed. Thankfully sanity prevailed and it was reopened on 26th of last month with an official ceremony to take place in September. Standing at the other end of

Fairoak Road to the partially restored Victorian Chapels the library gives a feeling of balance to that side of the cemetery. Don't suppose my original ticket's valid any longer.



Also the **railings around the cemetery** are having a coat of paint, black with golden finials. The work is being carried out by a government-funded scheme called A 4 E [Action for Employment] which targets the long-term unemployed between the ages of 19 and 25. Community projects, like the railings at Cathays, and also help in preparing CV's coupled with training in interview techniques are used to introduce these young people to the world of work.



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

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or email <doricwales@o2.co.uk>

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