



A Rowan bedecked in red berries signals  
the end of summer

## *An Englishman's Home is his Castle*

Notwithstanding that we're based in Cardiff, and that his talk focussed on Cardiff buildings, this could well have been the title of John Edwards' talk to the Friends of Cathays Cemetery on 14<sup>th</sup> September.

The main theme of this most enlightening talk was to compare Cardiff Castle with a standard Victorian terraced house that can be found in most of our suburbs, and to point out how similar they are both in construction and maintenance needs.

Unlike medieval castles, Cardiff Castle has relatively thin walls, and is built of stone and lime mortar - just like a terraced house. And as they age, they experience the same sort of maintenance problems, often deteriorating as the result of ill-conceived or badly implemented 'improvements'. All too often, the symptoms of resulting problems are treated rather than the cause.



John is an acknowledged expert in the conservation of historic buildings who worked for Cardiff Council for many years and led

the recent restoration of Cardiff Castle. Over

the years he has advised on other buildings in Cardiff, such as Insole Court, and even the Cathays Chapels.

In his talk he discussed how the castle had deteriorated through neglect over the years, and covered the methods used to diagnose issues, and carry out the restoration. He also drew on his experience on other projects.

Another of his recurrent themes was the lack of expertise in the building trade on how to maintain old buildings. Today's building trainees will learn their construction skills on new-build, using modern methods and materials. Very few will learn the skills needed to work on old buildings.

We were very lucky to have John agree to talk to us at short notice. His talk was informative at many levels, and a measure of its success can be gauged by the post-talk questions, which lasted as long as the talk itself.

## *Power of the Written Word*

Our first newsletter has evidently reached Pontardawe. A lady there, whose husband had died a couple of years ago, had read the story of the recently widowed woman who took her late husband's ashes into the overgrown garden. Well, this lady rang to thank us for the story and said that she had read it several times, each time bringing tears to her eyes. While there is no reason to think that she took her husband's ashes around the garden, she went on to explain that she did let the newspapers and post lie where they fell, lived off takeaways, etc ... just like the widow in the story.

It comforted her to read the story and, in a strange way, helped her remember the good times she had shared with her late husband. It is gratifying to know that a newsletter story can have a beneficial effect.

## Connections – Robben Island

During one of the regular weekly health walks, the words "**Robben Island**" jumped out at me from a gravestone. Why did my eyes make this connection? And, indeed, the connection between the cemetery and this small, distant, but notorious, island was itself a surprise. The memorial was to **Joseph Henry Fish**, who died on 29 July 1930, aged 72, in London. It notes that he had been a missionary to lepers on Robben Island and in South Africa for 41 years. The inscription also refers to his wife (but not by name), who had died in South Africa six



years earlier and had also 'laboured amongst the lepers', and his daughter, Jessie.

Of course, conversation turned to the Island's most famous resident and, immediately, another connection came out. Out of about a dozen walkers, one had met **Nelson Mandela**. Sometimes, it really is a small world. Mike had been active in the anti-apartheid movement and, when Mandela visited Cardiff in June 1998, he had asked particularly to meet those who had supported his cause and paid tribute with the following words. *"When the call for the international isolation of apartheid went out to the world, the people of Wales responded magnificently. The knowledge that local authorities all over Wales were banning apartheid products from canteens and schools - and that the universities, the Welsh Rugby Union, and the choirs had cut their links - was a great inspiration to us in our struggle. So too was the contribution organised by Welsh*

*workers. Action on such a scale could only flow from strong support by ordinary Welsh people on the ground. So we knew that the Wales Anti-Apartheid Movement spoke for a people who cared for our freedom as their own."*

When I got home, I tried the 21<sup>st</sup> century way to find connections ... on the world wide web. Bingo! A perfect match against my search criteria - but it was the wrong connection: I had found another member of the Friends, John Farnhill, pursuing the same information about Joseph Henry Fish. A quick check with him revealed that he had had a little more success - Joseph had a brother, James Westcot Fish, who had also served as a missionary on Robben Island and, furthermore, had written on his experience. His book *"Robben Island - An Account of 34 Years' Gospel Work Amongst Lepers of South Africa"* was published in 1924. The brothers' family came from Devon, their father being a rope-maker, and they had lived in Grangetown.

By 1991, all political prisoners had been freed from Robben Island and, in 1996, the last of the common law prisoners left the island. It is now a tourist destination.

But now I'm hoping for another fortuitous connection - with a reader of this newsletter who may be able to throw more light on the missionary to the lepers 100 years ago whose final resting place is Cathays Cemetery.

## Book of the Month

Our **Cathays Cemetery** book was picked by Rhiwbina library readers as their Book of the Month, the first time a work of non-fiction has been chosen. Eric Fletcher and Richard Garman, who both contributed to the book, met the readers, who were very impressed with the writing, the high quality of the pictures and the layout. They also thought there should be a second publication ... perhaps in a couple of years?



## Notice Board

### WORK DAYS

Meet at 10am at the Chapels. What do you least like doing on a Saturday - shopping, housework, cleaning the car? Well, here's a good excuse for putting it off: a couple of hours of not too taxing work, in a friendly atmosphere - and the satisfaction at the end of seeing the difference you have made. The next one is on Saturday **11th December**.

### HERITAGE TRAILS & WALKS

**Sunday 24th October: An Insignia Trail**, 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, Fair oak Road entrance.

### TALKS

**Tuesday 2nd November** [NB check that this is not still in your dairy for 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 [07866 815 434 or <nicholsonpt@cardiff.ac.uk> or - evenings only - 029 2049 3152].

### CHRISTMAS AT THORNHILL

#### **Annual Memorial Service**

On **Sunday 5th December** in the **Wenallt Chapel** at Thornhill Crematorium from **2pm** to 3.30pm, led by Rev Lionel Fanthorpe in the presence of the Lord Mayor with soloists and the Castell Coch Choral Society. Refreshments to follow. Everybody is welcome.

#### **Christmas Tree**

Memorial tags will be available from Bereavement Services from 1st December 2010

for a donation of £2. Tags can be placed on the memorial tree until Twelfth Night.

Please remember that no dogs are allowed in the cemetery.

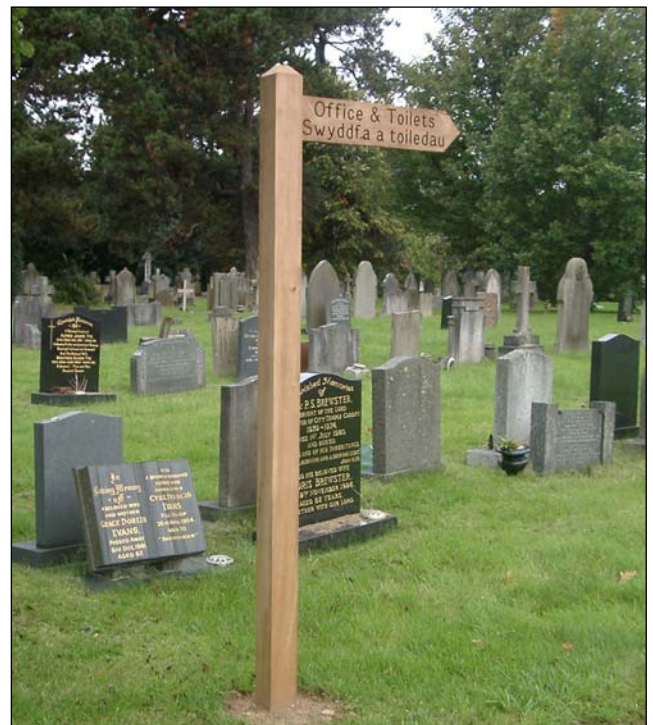
### PROGRAMME FOR 2011

It is hoped to finalise this soon, to be sent out with the formal notice of the AGM, which will be in January. Expect the normal mix of talks, walks and practical involvement in maintaining this wonderful resource.

## Local News

The painting of the **railings** around the southern part of the cemetery has been completed but, we are pleased to report, an Action for Employment team has stayed on to tackle some of the **overgrown areas** in the "heart" of the cemetery, creating lighter and clearer vistas. Some areas still look a bit brown, but when nature restores a green surface, the overall appearance and environment should be much improved.

## Around the Cemetery



If you have visited recently, you may well have noticed that some new wooden **finger-posts** have been put in to help visitors find their way around. This is part of the Green Flag scheme.

## ***Fungi Follow-up***

Since our last issue two more species of waxcap: *Hygrocybe intermedia* (an orange species with a rather fibrous surface) and *H. citrinovirens* (a greenish-yellow species with pale gills) have been found in the cemetery. They are both significant in a county context so its status as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation has been given even greater backing.

## ***Friends Business***

After our application for **Charitable Status** was made, a constructive dialogue has been held with the Charity Commissioners. Whilst they acknowledge that the Friends meet the essential requirements for a charity, they say we need to make some minor changes to our objects and so a further **Extraordinary General Meeting** is needed. This will be held before Rosalie David's lecture on **2 November**. Formal notice of this has been given separately. It is hoped that this will lead to the granting of charitable status by the end of the year.

The Friends **AGM** will be held early in the New Year. Anyone wishing to take a more active role in the Friends is invited to stand for election to the committee. In order to spread the load, additional roles of **Membership Secretary** and **Assistant Treasurer** are being created and volunteers with access to a computer to take on these roles would be especially welcome. It is emphasised that whoever takes up one of these roles will enjoy a planned handover and will be assisted by the officer doing the work at present.

## ***The Bequest***

Sandra didn't expect anything from the will, after all she hardly knew him. Only met him a couple of times and that was many years ago, when she was still in junior school, long before she even thought about drama college. Her sister Joan wasn't even sure if they were related, possibly on their late father's side, but then again possibly not. Anyway Joan reckoned somebody should go to the funeral and Sandra

being "between jobs" was nominated to pay the family's respects - to sit with virtual strangers in a draughty church, to stand on a dark November afternoon in a muddy cemetery, to go to the local pub, a glass of inferior house wine and some rather nondescript sandwiches, standing around looking sad reminiscing about somebody she wasn't 100% sure she even knew.

More than once it crossed her mind that perhaps she was at the wrong funeral, didn't recognise any of the other mourners. Standing alone, surrounded by nameless people. Surrounded by "*He had a good innings*" "*Poor chap he will be sorely missed*" "*It's his family I feel sorry for*" Sandra wondered did that include her. Was she part of this family? Too late now, bluff it out another quarter of an hour then a quick exit and home to a hot bath and a large gin & tonic.

Now that could have been the end of the affair. But no, a couple of weeks later Sandra had just returned from yet another unsuccessful audition when her next door neighbour called. "*Hi, the postman left a package. You were out, so I took it in for you.*" Sandra thanked her and took the small cardboard box into the kitchen. Placed it on the table and made herself a mug of tea, sat down and tore open the package. Inside was a polished stone, egg-shaped, about the size of a goose egg. Nestling beneath the stone was an old black & white photo. She held it up to the light, squinting; she could make out her father standing with an older man, they appeared to be in someone's back garden. In front of the two men was a young girl, she was in school uniform. The girl was clutching something in her right hand. Sandra held the print nearer to her eyes. Yes, no doubt, **she** was the schoolgirl in the photo. And the object in her hand was: ... That's right, you've guessed it.

*Eric R Fletcher*      © Friends of Cathays Cemetery

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

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