



## December 2011 Issue N° 8

### *Autumn in the Cemetery*

It has been a prolific year for **berries**, particularly the most common red ones - holly, hawthorn and rowan. The last of these have been in such large heavy bunches that branches have been bent down in the manner of a weeping willow. Now this could just be a consequence of the exceptional spring, an unremarkable summer (meaning that the ground didn't dry out) and a mild autumn, but folklore would explain it as nature preparing for a hard winter. We will have to wait and see!

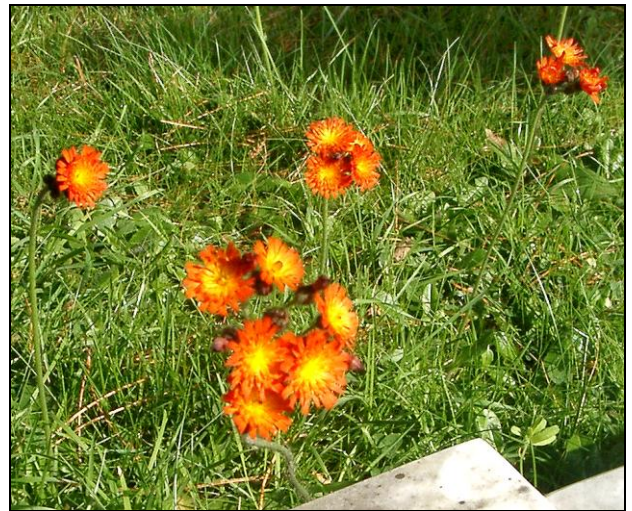


Rowan (see page 5 also)

In the last month, grey **squirrels** have been unusually active. Again, they may just be making the most of the mild weather, while folklore would have us believe that they are frantically laying up a big store of food for the harsh winter ahead - they have certainly done a good job of stripping pine seed out of fir cones. But do squirrels have a better understanding of weather forecasting than the Met Office?

If you have walked around the cemetery recently, you may have seen a bright, burnt-orange, dandelion-like flower, the **Orange Hawkweed**. At present it appears in a few small pockets, but it is a great self-seeder, so we may be seeing more of it in future years! This pretty plant is a native of the alpine regions of central and southern Europe, but can now be

found naturalised in many other areas. It is a low-growing plant with shallow roots and a rosette of blue-green leaves from which a flower stem rises up to produce clusters of bright, insect-attracting flowers. Other local names for the plant are Grim the Collier, Fox & Cubs and Devil's Paintbrush.



Orange Hawkweed

Perhaps the most exciting sighting was the **Hummingbird Hawk-moth**, spotted in October on blossom on a bush just outside the cemetery office. Once a summer migrant to southern Britain from warmer climes, its range is becoming more extensive and some are now thought to over-winter here. These large moths beat their wings at such speed that they emit an audible hum and their feeding pattern mimics that of hummingbirds. They are strongly attracted to flowers with a plentiful supply of nectar, such as honeysuckle and buddleia. The moth has been the subject of a national survey in 2011, so we know that it has been seen around Cardiff several times throughout the summer and autumn, so perhaps we can expect to see more of it in the future.

If you have missed all this, then there is no better way of keeping up with the changing seasons and natural events in the cemetery than joining the **Tuesday Health Walks**. This enjoyable social activity has been going for two

years now and consistently has 10-14 participants, no matter what the weather. It sometimes attracts people from overseas: the most recent was a New Zealand visitor. So why not join our friendly group for a gentle stroll around the cemetery? Walks start at 10.30 a.m. from just inside the gate beside Cathays Library, every Tuesday.

**Snake and Lizard Survey:** on the last Tuesday walk in October, you would have seen the group carefully lifting some roofing felt squares, hoping to find some of our cold-blooded friends. There were spiders, slugs and worms ... and one mouse that looked nearly as surprised as the searchers ... but no reptiles. It was probably a bit late in the year for the result to be conclusive, so we will have to check again in warmer weather next year.

In case you are wondering, roofing felt is recommended for this because it is durable and, if you remember your physics lessons at school, being black, will absorb heat: in the sun, it would create an invitingly warm environment for snakes and lizards. These small, but shy, creatures are much more common than most people realise and the cemetery looks like a promising habitat for them.

## Another Leg

One of the more unusual memorials in Cathays Cemetery is that for the leg of Samuel Chivers, which most readers of this newsletter will already be familiar with. But this is not a unique case: indeed, there is at least one other buried leg in Wales.

Close by Strata Florida Abbey, near Tregaron, is St Mary's Church. If you look carefully in the churchyard, you will find a gravestone, which commemorates the left leg of **Henry Hughes Cooper**, who lost his leg in a farming accident. He subsequently emigrated to America, where the rest of him was eventually buried, but his nether limb was forever at home in Wales, where for the rest of his life he had one foot in the grave.

The inscription on the headstone reads:

*The left Leg and part  
of the Thigh of Henry  
Hughes Cooper was cut  
off & interr'd here June  
the 18<sup>th</sup> 1759 ~~~~~*



But, above this, you can see the outline of the leg carved in the top of the memorial. As the picture shows, both the inscription and the leg profile look as fresh today as they were when new, over 250 years ago. Yet the memorial mason only used a readily available local stone, slate. Fortunately, this ideal material for durable headstones was produced in abundance when the Cambrian Mountains were being uplifted and the heat from igneous rock metamorphosed the pre-existing soft siltstones.

## A Noteworthy Epitaph

**Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester**  
(16th century)

*Here lieth the worthy warrior  
Who never bloodied sword;  
Here lieth the noble counsellor,  
Who never held his word.  
Here lieth his Excellency,  
Who ruled all the state;  
Here lieth the Earl of Leicester,  
Whom all the world did hate.*

## Balloon Girl

Probably the most visited memorial in Cathays cemetery is that of **Louisa Maud Evans**, better known as 'The Balloon Girl'. I'm sure most of you know her story, how she ascended below a balloon from Cathays Park as one of the attractions of the Cardiff Maritime & Industrial Exhibition, the high wind took her towards the docks area then over the Bristol Channel. The poor girl had no option but to release herself from the harness and parachute into the sea. Louisa's body was found three days later at Nash, east of Newport.

**Kathryn Ashill**, performance artist, was so moved by Louisa's story that she produced a short film and a booklet to mark the tragic demise of Louisa aged 14. This involved Kathryn, festooned with many coloured, helium-filled balloons climbing into the lower branches of the Cedar of Lebanon behind the Chapels before jumping down as a re-enactment of Louisa's jump 115 years earlier. Kathryn also led a couple of minutes of silence at Louisa's grave.

The final stage took place at Saint David's Hall on Sunday November 20th, and included the launch of the booklet of poetry & prose, from which an excerpt by Briony Goffin is quoted below.

Kathryn has been chosen to exhibit at next year's Cultural Olympics. She will be in her

*On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1896, a fourteen and a half year old girl, dressed in a sailor suit, was washed up on the shore at Nash, east of Newport.*

*On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011, a group of seventy gather at 2pm in Cathays Cemetery they have come to watch a young woman jump from a 150 year old Cedar of Lebanon, with thirty balloons the colour of lollipops, tied to her arms They come with their dogs, their prams, and their cameras*

*On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 1896 the young girl's body was taken from the shore and laid out in the bell tower of a local church*

*On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2011, a dark haired woman in red shoes, white dress and a sailor collar, which she had sewn the night before, prepares to jump.*

*Afterwards, the assembled crowd of seventy will be served Victoria Sponge and Elderflower Cordial; they will gather in small groups and chitchat away in the sunshine by the boarded up windows of the old chapel*

home city of Swansea, probably working with the cockle ladies in the market.

For a copy of the booklet containing the poetry & prose along with pictures of Kathryn's jump, priced at £3, contact [doricwales@o2.co.uk](mailto:doricwales@o2.co.uk) or telephone 029 2062 7848.



For the full story of the balloon girl and many other residents of Cathays Cemetery see our book, written to mark 150 years of the cemetery [also available from the above e-mail address or phone number, price £7].

Sitting on a comfortable settee at the launch party, it was suggested to me that it was strange how such a tragic accident as the drowning of 14-year-old Louisa Evans can become a pleasant Sunday afternoon's get-together with wine and nibbles. People laughing and happily talking. Almost like a wake.

*Eric Fletcher*

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Our thanks to Kathryn Ashill and also to Briony Goffin for allowing us to dip into, and quote from, her text.

## Blue Plaque for Cemetery Resident

On Friday 2 September 2011, a blue plaque was unveiled at 6-7 St John Street, outside the Blacks shop at the top of The Hayes. Today, this may seem an unlikely location, but the building once housed the Lynn Institute Gym, which offered boxing training, fitness, massage and hot baths during the 1920s & 1930s, and was used by sportsmen including the Cardiff City team that won the 1927 FA Cup.

The person particularly recognised by the plaque is **Jack Petersen**, the boxer, whose final resting place is a corner of Section O, adjacent to the main drive. Jack was born in Whitchurch, in 1911 and trained at the gym, which was owned by his father. He enjoyed an impressive amateur record before turning professional in 1931. He was the first Welshman to win the British & Empire light heavyweight and heavyweight boxing titles and defended the Lonsdale Belt eight times.



Petersen retired at the early age of 25 due to an eye injury, but he went on to become a

Cardiff councillor and served in the army, attaining the rank of major. He was the first boxer elected president of the British Boxing Board of Control (the headquarters in London was even named after him) and held this post until his death from lung cancer in 1990. Jack also served on the Sports Council for Wales and was deputy chairman under Sir Harry Llewellyn. He was awarded the Territorial Decoration in 1950 and the OBE for services to sport in 1978. He died in 1990.

The Tuesday Health walks often pause at Jack's grave, as up to three generations of his family have been known participate at the same time.

## Talks & Lectures

In September **Simon Morgan** from the Monumental Masons, Mossfords, gave a really interesting talk entitled '**Cathays Cemetery through the eyes of a Stonemason's Chisel**'. The talk was very well attended and generated much interest with a large number of questions being posed to the speaker.

This fascinating talk looked at both the history of the company Mossfords and the memorials they had fitted in the cemetery. Simon's talk demonstrated how memorials were made, and the skills still being used today. It included how leaded letters were placed onto a memorial and how lettering is carved into a memorial. The talk, illustrated by numerous photos, looked at the various catalogues and memorials fitted by the company in the years gone by and how these memorials look today in the cemetery. The memorials were a testament to the skilled way in which they were fixed in the cemetery and provide an insight into how families grieved in the past.

For the past three years the *Friends of Cathays Cemetery* has hosted a **public lecture** in association with the *School of History, Archaeology and Religion* at Cardiff University. The lectures began with Dr. Julian Litten speaking on the history of the cemetery movement, followed by Professor Rosalie David

on Egyptianising monuments in cemeteries. This year the high standard continued in November with a **lecture** by **Professor James Stevens Curl** speaking on "*Transformations: Landscape Garden to Cemetery*".

The lecture examined the way in which cemeteries had developed and the way in which they fitted into developments in both landscape architecture and monumental architecture not only in Britain but across Europe. Professor Curl has written widely on the subject of cemetery architecture as well as on the historical development of architecture generally. His depth of knowledge of his subject was apparent in his talk which ranged through classical and Egyptian influences, the Renaissance in Europe and architectural movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The work of John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) on the layout and planting of cemeteries (1843) was discussed among the many influences which eventually led to the development of the cemeteries we know today. However, they are perhaps not quite the cemeteries which *we know today* since the most disturbing part of the lecture were some of images showing the recent neglect and despoliation of some of our important urban cemeteries - part of Britain's history and heritage under severe threat. We are fortunate that Cathays Cemetery is carefully maintained by *Bereavement Services* and has the support of the *Friends* and the community at large.

The vote of thanks was delivered by Professor Bill Manning, Emeritus professor at the *School of History, Archaeology and Religion* and himself an expert on Roman architecture. Thanks are due to the University for providing the Wallace Lecture theatre as a venue, to Carmel Thomas and Bereavement Services for helping with publicity and providing display boards and to all those members of the Committee who came along early to help set up displays and to make the room ready. Thanks are also due to Robert Thomas of Cardiff University who kindly resolved a computing problem so allowing the talk to go ahead.

The public lecture next year will be delivered by Simon Morgan of Mossfords whose general talk earlier this year proved such a great success.

## **Notice Board**

### **CHRISTMAS AT THORNHILL**

#### **Annual Memorial Service**

On **Sunday 11th December** in the **Wenallt Chapel** at Thornhill Crematorium from **2pm** to 3pm, led by Rev Lionel Fanthorpe in the presence of the Lord Mayor. During the service a collection will be held in aid of the **WAY Foundation** (Widowed and Young) a bereavement support group for those widowed under the age 50. Refreshments to follow. Everybody is welcome.

#### **Christmas Trees**

Memorial tags will be available from Bereavement Services from 5th December 2011 for a donation of £2. Tags can be placed on one of the memorial trees in the Chapel courtyard until Twelfth Night.

Our **AGM** will be held in the **Briwnant Chapel** at **1pm on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2012**.



*Holly* (see remarks on page 1)

## **Work Days Report**

The Friends' Work Days have been well supported and always leave helpers with the satisfaction of being able to see the difference that they have made on the day. During the autumn, efforts have concentrated on

maintaining the status quo in Sections L and B. Unfortunately, cutting down trees and bushes to ground level encourages new and, frequently, more vigorous growth. A particular problem has been identified with ash trees, which are prolific self-seeders and could easily overwhelm parts of the cemetery, without more radical action. In addition, there are quite a number of semi-mature ash trees that are too big for the Friends to tackle.

The good news is that specialists from the Parks Department are now advising and will assist in the felling of troublesome trees and the ecologically sound treatment of stumps. While this will be a gradual process, over time, it should aid the Friends and Bereavement Services in their overall objective of clearing and maintaining overgrown areas, while maintaining both the amenity value and biodiversity of the cemetery.

But don't worry, there will still be plenty to do on workdays in 2012:

<b>January 28th</b>	<b>February 25th</b>
<b>March 31st</b>	<b>April 28th</b>

If you are able to help and can spare the time, please come along and join the friendly gang that makes a difference for a couple of hours on the programmed Saturdays, starting at 10 o'clock.

### **Last Words**

Have you decided on your final utterance yet? No, well time is running out, it's nearer than you think. It's your last chance to express your love, tell a joke, confess or just to say goodbye. Or imagine the confusion you could cause if your last words were "I love you, Ruth" when your wife of 40 years is called Jane. Especially if you had previously arranged for a tall woman clad totally in black and wearing sunglasses, to sit alone at the back of the church, clutching a single rose. She then mysteriously re-appears at the graveside and lays the rose down on the upturned earth, tied to the stem is a black-edged card bearing a single kiss and the initial R. She then gets into the rear seat of a large,

black, chauffeur-driven car and is never seen again. Wow! Now that would really stir things up.

A devout Cardiff City football fan's last words may well be "Here we go. Here we go. Here we go". Was it **Spike Milligan** whose last words were "I told you I was ill". Or perhaps it's engraved on his memorial. Staying with comedians, **Bob Hope's** last words, in response to his wife's question "Where do you want to be buried?" were "Surprise me".

Often the last words of people about to be executed are, shall we say, interesting. Take **George Appel**, an American executed by electric chair in 1928. "Gentlemen, you are about to see a baked appel". Or, those of a **Lavinia Fisher** who it's thought was the first American female serial killer. Before being hanged in 1820, wearing her white wedding dress, reportedly said "If any of you have a message for the devil, give it to me, for I'm about to meet him". She was married to John Fisher who was also executed a few days earlier for murder and robbery. A rather profound last utterance was that of a **Robert Drew** who was executed in Texas in 1994: "Remember the death penalty is murder".

The artist **Salvador Dali** asked "Where is my clock?" - presumably in Spanish. Whilst the American, **Jack Daniels**, reputedly begged "One last drink, please". One of my favourites is that of **Winston Churchill** who said "I'm so bored with it all" before falling into a coma and dying nine days later. So get thinking, plan your final words, you never know when you'll need them. One thing is certain, it may be nearer than you think. My choice? "Is that it? Surely not".

*Eric Fletcher 2011*

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

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