



March 2012 Issue N° 9

Winter in the Cemetery

Well, it has been anything but a normal winter. The mild weather meant that oak trees only became bare of leaves around the turn of the year, while the crocuses were out very early in January and primroses were greeting us by the end of the month. The absence of virtually any frosts before the end of January, meant that grey squirrels have been very evident throughout. But the new year did bring a few days with heavy rain and a lot of gloomy, drizzly days, which tested (but didn't beat) the resilience of the Tuesday health walkers. But it couldn't last and February brought a run of cold days and frosty nights ... and even the odd dusting of here-today-gone-tomorrow snow.

One of the often unnoticed jobs undertaken by the **War Graves Commission** is the maintenance of the grass and gardens around the section of World War I graves. The wonderful display of roses each summer is thanks to the careful pruning of the plants and it is nice to report that the new shoots that will support this year's flowers are already coming on strongly.



Pruned rose bush

If you are visiting the cemetery, watch out for the buzzard that has taken up residence in some fir trees near the chapels ... despite being regularly stalked and chased by a local cat!

Our last newsletter mentioned the increasing problem with ash trees. Good progress has been made during the winter in felling some of the larger trees, particularly where they were causing severe damage to graves and concentrating in areas B & G. Stumps are being treated in an ecological way, although it may take more than one treatment for the more vigorous specimens. While this is a great help, there is no danger of running out of clearance jobs for the Friends' workdays.



Treated Tree Stump

Balloon Girl, The Play

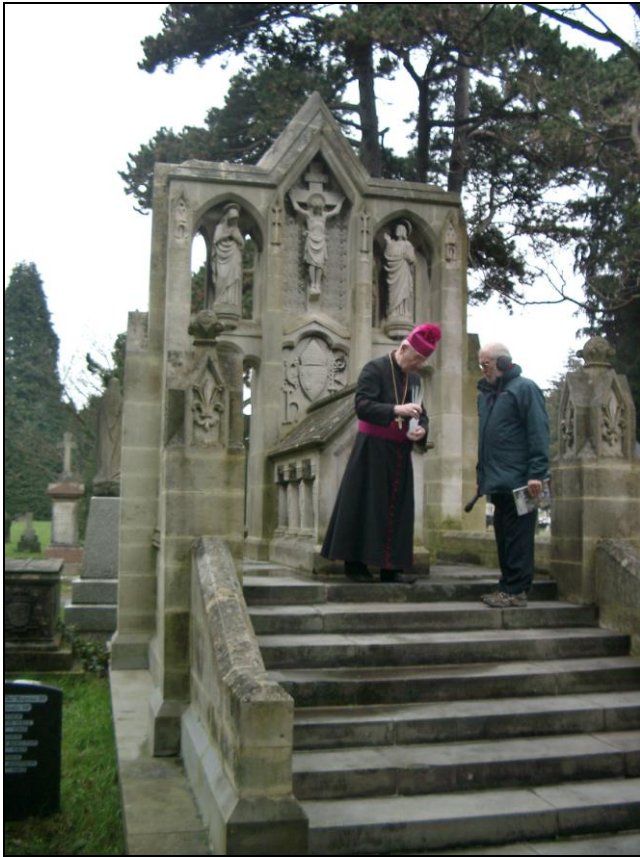
A play for children about the life and tragic death of Louisa Maud Evans, alias The Balloon Girl, is being planned. Early days yet, we'll keep you informed of progress.

Bishop Hedley Tomb Blessing

Following the restoration work on and clearing around Bishop Hedley's tomb last year, a ceremony of blessing and re-dedication was held at the memorial on 31st January. An information board has also been placed by the tomb.

Despite being a weekday morning, and a cold and gloomy one at that, about 30 people were present to witness the proceedings. Our new chairman, Bill Mosley, described the background

to the event, thanking those who had been involved in carrying out and funding the work, and introduced the Most Reverend George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff. After prayers, the Archbishop blessed the tomb and undertook its re-dedication.



*Our chairman with the Archbishop
on the steps of the tomb*

Bishop Hedley, who died at the age of 78 in 1915, had been instrumental in moving the seat of the diocese of Newport & Menevia to Cardiff and, throughout his tenure, had campaigned for it to be upgraded to an Archbishopric. While this wasn't achieved in his lifetime, it did happen on 7th Feb 1916, just three months after his death. So, the first Archbishop of Cardiff was James Romanus Bilsborrow, whose more modest memorial is alongside Bishop Hedley's tomb. It was most appropriate that the seventh man to hold the post, dressed much as Bishop Hedley would have been seen 100 years ago, should conduct the blessing and re-dedication.

2012 AGM and Other Business

The **AGM** was held on Saturday 21st January in the Briwnant Chapel at Thornhill Cemetery and was attended by 16 members of the Friends. The Chairman reported that it had been a good first year as a charity, but took the opportunity to emphasise the advantage of Gift Aiding subscriptions and donations by tax paying Friends. He then gave a résumé of events during a busy 2011, thanking all those who had helped to make this possible. Particular thanks were due to the continued strong support from Bereavement Services.

For those who might be wondering why nothing significant seemed to be happening on the chapels, it was noted that further plans were very dependent on the adoption of the Conservation Plan, which had been subject to much discussion during the year, by the Council. However, UWIC had used the chapels for a project and samples of the students' proposals for their refurbishment and future use were on display when the formal proceedings were over. It was emphasised that these were student projects, rather than proven viable ideas, but they were nevertheless thought-provoking and stimulating.

Although a programme of events for 2012 had been circulated with the AGM papers, a revised version (with very minor changes) was available at the meeting. Once again, the programme is very full, with guided walks, lectures and work days, in addition to the weekly health walks (every Tuesday, 10:30 a.m. from the gates adjacent to Cathays Library). Also, the Newsletter continues to provide updates on the programme, reports on recent happenings, articles and short stories.

The Treasurer reported on a successful year, with funds increasing by about 25% to £4723. Centenary Book sales had exceeded expectations, thanks largely to direct sales and the promotional efforts of Friends, and there had been a gratifying response to the provision of the opportunity to make a voluntary donation when paying annual subscriptions.

As a result of the elections at the meeting, the Trustees' Committee is now:

Chairman: Bill Mosley

Treasurer: John Farnhill

Secretary: vacant [see below]

Other Trustees: Cllr. Brian Jones, Ivor Lippett,
Chris Marsh, Paul Nicholson, Mike O'Callaghan,
Hugh Payne, Margaret Smith.

The new chairman proposed a vote of thanks to his predecessor, Paul Nicholson, for all his work during his term of office - this was passed by acclamation!

Can You Help?

Your committee would like to hear from anyone who can offer assistance to the smooth running or improved working of our group. So PLEASE see the form at the back of this newsletter for further information and respond if you can.

Membership Renewal

Your committee is also anxious to avoid wasting time & money communicating with members who are no longer interested or, perhaps, have passed away. So a reminder about renewal is also contained in the form attached to the back of this newsletter.

Refuge for Fallen Women

In the corner of Section F of the Cemetery, sitting on the top left of the "heart", are three graves marked by headstones in the same distinctive style. Those buried here were Sisters of the Good Shepherd. The modest gravestones are carved from local Pennant sandstone, which is not very durable and prone to delaminate. Already, parts of the inscriptions have been lost.

The **Convent of the Good Shepherd**, otherwise known as the "Home for Fallen Women", was founded by the Marquess of Bute in 1868. In 19th century Cardiff there would have been no shortage of fallen women! The Marquis donated his farm at Penylan and provided the means to develop it as a convent. The farmhouse was known as Ty Gwyn, which gives a clue to its location.



The last recorded burial in these graves is over 100 years ago, but the convent is understood to have been active until about the 1960s. In 1971, it became the home of Heathfield House School and the site is now occupied by St David's Sixth-Form College, which was created in 1987, as a result of a reorganisation of secondary education in Cardiff.

As it was in the beginning . . .

*You held me safe that one first day,
warm in your strong arms.
Held me close and guided me
to that one most special place
where first I fed on mother's milk.*

*I'll hold you then that one last day,
cold in my two hands.
Hold a while, then let you go,
ashes blowing in the wind.
Free to feed a new-born world.*

The Back Story: Two ladies were chatting and one spoke of how she had scattered her late husband's ashes, using her hands to take the ashes from the container, scattering them to the winds. The other said she could never do such a thing, and the first responded "Oh, but you must use your hands!"

Melvyn Rees
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**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>

## Monumental Problems

**Nothing lasts forever, not even stone.** This means that all cemetery monuments will deteriorate over time. From previous comments on individual monuments, we know that granites, marbles and slates are generally more durable, while our local pennant sandstone can deteriorate quite quickly. There is a particular reason for this: sandstone is a sedimentary rock, laid down in horizontal layers and splitting most naturally on its bedding planes. To use slabs for a typical headstone means that large enough slabs have to be stood "on edge". The bedding planes thus exposed to the weather are much more prone to do what comes naturally. The stone is greatly more durable if used with a natural orientation as, for example, in paving flags or building stone.

**What about War Graves?** Because it is used in our war graves, which all look well preserved, it may be thought that Portland Stone should also be classed as a long-lived material. But this is not the case. In common with all limestones, it is soluble in rain water, which is slightly acidic, and starts to dissolve away immediately. In quite a short time, the originally smooth surface is etched out. While this is good if you are looking for the fossils embedded in the rock, the clarity of the lettering and insignia carved into the face diminishes. So the only reason that the war grave headstones look as good as they do is that the War Graves Commission's maintenance regime ensures that they are replaced whenever necessary - so you may be looking at the second or third reincarnation of any particular stone.



*A fairly new headstone, on left, and an older one, on right, that has weathered to show fossils*

While this means that expenditure on long term maintenance of war graves will be greater than the original provision cost, there are surely few who would object to the established practice. What it does do is demonstrate the contrast with the typical state of private memorials, where regular attendance and maintenance is much less or, in the case of most of the oldest graves, non-existent.

Unfortunately, it is not just the durability of the stone that affects the condition of a memorial. Deterioration of the joints between stone elements of memorials can have more dramatic effects and so can **ground movement**. The resultant instability can lead to more catastrophic damage and brings with it a health risk to visitors or workers in the cemetery. Without vigilance and preventative and restorative work, the long-term trend can only be in one direction.

**Who is responsible?** You will often hear people saying something on the lines of "What a shame that such a nice memorial is left like this. Why doesn't someone do something about it?" Aside from the obvious response that it costs money, it is necessary to recognise the fundamental division of responsibilities and powers that influence what can be done. Firstly, the grave or vault and any associated stonework will "belong" to someone, who has responsibilities and views on what would be appropriate. Look around Cathays Cemetery and it is clear that some families take this ownership and commitment to maintenance seriously. But, for perhaps the majority of memorials, any family links are remote and/or tenuous. For the oldest graves, this link could be best described as not readily traceable.

**Why do memorials become unstable?** Most of the larger, more elaborate ones consist of more than one piece and often, the only real strength in the joint is provided by dowels, which may ultimately prove a weakness themselves. Uncontrolled self-seeded trees can also have a destructive effect on graves. Although it is not hard to find examples that have already suffered badly, they represent a relatively



small percentage of graves in the cemetery and, hopefully, the policy now adopted will ensure that the situation will not worsen.



*Self seeded ash trees causing havoc in grave*

But the biggest cause of instability is probably **settlement**. If you return the material dug out of a hole, it will be less compact when you put it back, no matter how diligently you compact it. Added to this, you have usually put a body and a box (both of which will decompose) in the hole and enclosed a large pocket of air. If you are lucky, the inevitable settlement will be even and within the excavate sides of the dug hole - but more likely, it will be uneven and will involve the slipping inwards of the original sides, disturbing anything, such as a headstone or kerb, standing on the edge. It is highly likely that, over time, memorials will start to lean. Depending on the size of the memorial, the configuration of the elements of which it is composed and the way in which it is founded, a lean will inevitably lead to instability.

In the absence of action by the "owner" of an unstable monument, Bereavement Services have a **duty of care**, which requires them to step in. But their responsibility is limited to considerations of Health and Safety. They undertake regular inspections and any unstable memorials are likely to be "bagged" with high visibility warnings. With larger monuments, temporary fencing and/or warning tape may be erected. In the past, unstable stones would have been taken down and laid on or beside the grave. The current practice, for smaller memorials, is to provide a stout stake to

support the stone, which has a number of advantages.



*Memorial with warning bag & Headstone supported by a stake*



*Notice used on staked headstone*

### Comparison with New Zealand

While this may paint a depressing long-term prospect for the future of the cemetery, it is worth noting that things could be much worse. New Zealand cemeteries are arranged on similar traditional lines to British cemeteries. However, there is one notable difference between the countries - New Zealand sits on the Pacific "Ring of Fire" and earthquakes can wreak far greater havoc in a few minutes. In this respect, the South Island capital, Christchurch, has suffered severely over the last two years. It has nine operational cemeteries and three historic cemeteries, including its Barbadoes St Cemetery, established in 1851, and all of these sustained serious damage. It is reported that memorials crumbled, obelisks snapped in half and hundreds of headstones crashed to the ground, leaving them cracked in grave plots, sinking into silt caused by liquefaction. Some of the headstones

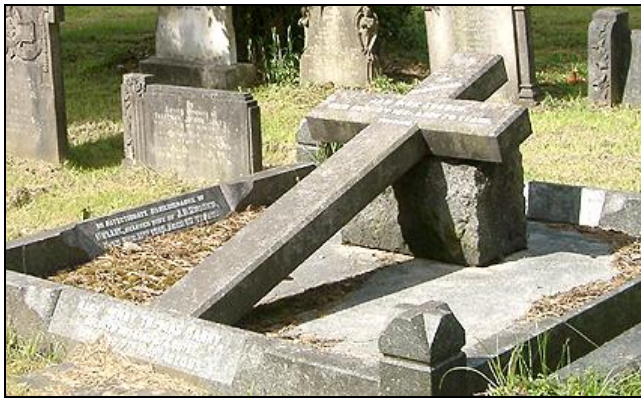


fell face down, leaving the graves effectively nameless. Cemetery managers moved to lay down any other stones considered to be dangerous. The following are typical comments from Cemetery Friends Groups:

"They will just sit there and grow over. An engraved obelisk holds a family's history, but a pile of stones is nothing."

"I can't see them being fixed in my lifetime or longer."

But we must return to Cathays Cemetery. Where the upper part of a larger memorial there has to be taken down it will, whenever possible, be placed sensitively on the remaining stonework.



*Memorial taken down, but laid sensitively on remaining stonework*

### "Rising Ground" - or Sinking Stones?

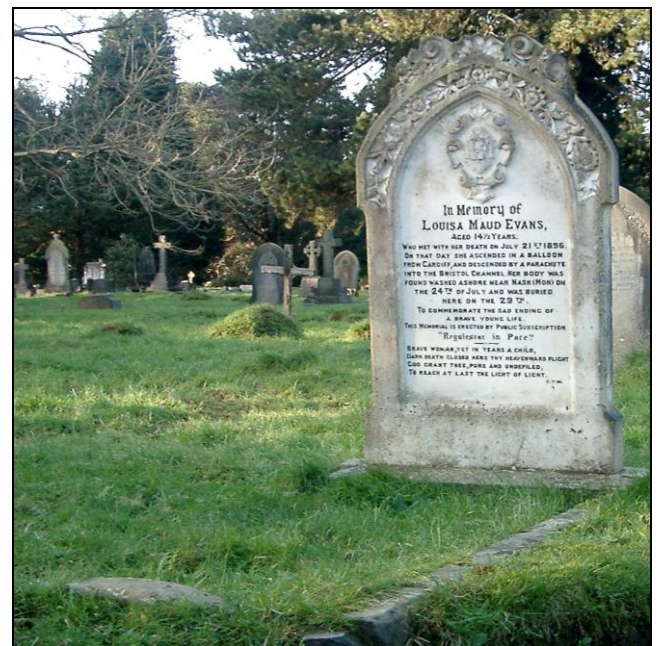
However, in other cases, there is no option but to lay it on the ground - and this brings us to another phenomenon frequently encountered, "rising ground". The most common indicator of this is the disappearance of kerbs around graves and a good example of this is at the Balloon Girl's grave where contemporary pictures show a kerb standing several inches proud of the ground surface, while today it is barely visible. [See the illustrations opposite.]

While there is some potential for ground to rise - dust from the atmosphere, falling leaves, erosion of gravestones, etc. - this cannot be the full explanation. In reality, natural activity by worms, ants, burrowing mammals and the growth/decay cycle of vegetation mean that the soil near the ground surface is very slowly, but constantly, moving. For objects at the surface,

over longer periods of time, the ground will act much the same way as a fluid.



*Contemporary picture of Balloon Girl's grave*



*Balloon Girl's grave today*

Things that are denser than the soil, for example, large blocks of stone, will slowly sink. If the depth of topsoil is greater than the depth of the block, it will eventually disappear. This is the fate of many parts of memorials

that have been laid on the ground for safety reasons.



*Memorial laid on the ground, and sinking into it*

### **"To Clean or Not to Clean?"**

Even the surface of memorials can be adversely affected by lichen growth and atmospheric deposits, enough to obscure writing and detract from their visual appearance. Nothing that a good wash & brush up can't correct, you might think. But think again! These disfigurements occur more readily on stone with an open texture, which forms as a result of surface erosion, so any brushing is only going to exacerbate the erosion. The very same stone is also going to be most susceptible to the adverse effects of water. So any short-term benefit is going to be at the expense of more rapid deterioration in the longer term. And don't think that detergent, or something stronger, is a better option with less water and abrasion - this is likely to be worse! If you want to smarten up a memorial, it is probably best to restrict it to the more durable stones, do as sparingly as possible ... and accept that, in the end, the only acceptable solution will be renewal of the stone. In all the circumstances, the best thing to do for the overall appearance of a grave is probably a bit of cosmetic "gardening" in and around the memorial.

Even if there is a family that would like to tend an ancestor's grave, they may well live a long way away, making it impractical. A Kent lady faced with this dilemma recognised that others in the same position might be willing to enter into voluntary reciprocal arrangements. She now maintains a website - [www.tendagrave.org](http://www.tendagrave.org) - that aims to link relatives who might want to pursue the idea. There is no fee attached to using the site so, if you are interested, why not give it a go?

*Gordon Hindess*

## **From the Archives**

**Western Mail 03 October 1895**

### **A MORTUARY TO BE ERECTED THERE**

A meeting of the Cardiff Burial Board was held on Tuesday morning, Councillor W. J. Trounce presiding.---The borough surveyor submitted plans of a mortuary at the cemetery, the cost of which was fixed at £110 to £120. --- The Chairman said such a place was necessary for the depositing of bodies when clergymen or ministers were not present to perform the ceremony. Sometimes bodies came from a distance, and through some irregularity were not buried on the day of arrival. Previously, in such cases of emergency, they had had to leave such bodies in the church. --- Mr. John Jenkins: Has this been provided for in the budget? --- Mr. Greenhill (borough treasurer): This will come out of the revenue. --- The Chairman said that provision had been made in the budget for a surplus of £300. They had a second crop of hay at the cemetery which would pay for it. (**Laughter**) --- Mr. Jenkins complained that it was a disgrace to Cardiff that bodies should have to be kept at the cemetery all night before someone could be got to officiate. --- Mr. Whitworth (the curator) explained that parties did not always carry out their arrangements, especially when coming from a distance. Clergymen would come and wait a long time, and then, after they had gone, the funeral party would arrive. Frequently he sent out and secured the services of some clergyman or minister living near. --- The plans were passed, and it was understood that the borough surveyor would secure tenders.

## **An Amusing Epitaph**

**W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911) Librettist**

Died of a heart attack after rescuing a girl from drowning in a lake in Harrow\*.

*His Foe was folly  
& his weapon wit*

**\*Postscript** We have learned recently from a local charity there that this lake which was in the grounds of Gilbert's house 'Grimsdyke' is no longer really a lake at all but just a couple of small ponds which often dried out completely very early in the season and were quite likely eventually to have disappeared altogether. However Great Crested Newts were fortunately discovered there last spring and so work has now been done to de-silt the ponds and deepen the water levels in them to improve the newts' habitat.



## An Acrostic for the Friends

**C**rosses  
**A**midst  
**T**ombstones  
**H**uddle  
**A**mongst  
**Y**ews  
**S**ilently  
  
**C**aressing  
**E**mbracing  
**M**urmuring  
**E**ndearments  
**T**enderly  
**E**ternally  
**R**emembering  
**Y**esterdays

Tricia Sewell

## Talks & Lectures

On February 15th an excellent talk was given by **Dennis Morgan**, local historian and writer, on **Victorian Cardiff**. Mr Morgan is the author of many books about Cardiff, his latest dealt with the history of Ninian Park football ground and was sold out in a matter of weeks. He is a first class speaker and his well-attended talk was backed up by numerous slides of old Cardiff.

He showed us how Cardiff had changed little from Mediaeval times just a decade or two before Victoria's reign with the old Town Hall still in the middle of the High Street and the Taff at the end of Quay Street. How the coming of the railway and the extensive docks & commercial developments had brought dramatic changes but how significant buildings like the Theatre Royal & the Cardiff Arms Hotel had disappeared almost without trace. Particularly striking was a slide showing just how overcrowded St John's churchyard was by the 1840's. Also noteworthy was the way some slums persisted throughout Victoria's reign, not being cleared until well into the 20C. Altogether a fascinating and interesting talk.

Our next talk will be on **May 15th** at **7pm** again in Room 4.45 in the University's Humanities Building behind Colum Road. Its subject will be **War Graves**, of which there are nearly 700 in Cathays Cemetery. The talk will be delivered by **David Hughes**, a life member of the War Memorials Trust and a field worker for the Imperial War Museum.

## Notice Board

### HERITAGE WALKS

The next walk will be led by Bereavement Services on **Sunday 15th April** at **2pm**. Meet by the Chapels.

The Friends group will also be hosting their own walk on the evening of **Tuesday 19th June** at **7pm**. Again meet by the Chapels. This walk will visit memorials not included in Bereavement Services' Heritage Trail Guide - so come along and learn something new.

### WORK DAYS

Meet by the Chapels at **10am** on the following **Saturdays**:-

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>March 31st</b> | <b>April 28th</b> |
| <b>May 26th</b>   | <b>June 30th</b>  |

If you are able to help and can spare the time, come along for a couple of hours and join the friendly gang that makes a difference.

## Some More Amusing Epitaphs

**Mr Jones** (19th century)

*Here lies old Jones,  
 Who all his life collected bones,  
 Till Death, that grim and sorry spectre,  
 That all inspecting bone collector,  
 Boned poor Jones, so neat and tidy  
 Here he lies, all bona fide.*

=====

**Tom Richardson** (died 1912)

Surrey and England cricketer

*He bowled his best but was himself  
 bowled by the best on July 2nd 1912.*