

Cure for January Blues

Do the short winter days and the cold, damp and gloomy weather get you down? The recommended treatment is to take a stroll in the Cemetery, where there is always something to see that will warm the heart or brighten the gloom. Even in January, you will spot the first signs of Spring, signalling that better weather is on the way. Although this winter has been relatively dry, with barely a trace of snow, it has been generally colder than last year, so the Spring flowers started to appear a little later. However, the first celandines, primroses, snowdrops and crocuses were spotted before the end of January. While the first two of these flowers seem to spread naturally, the latter two arrived as the result of planned planting, sometimes around individual graves.



Yellow and purple crocuses

But it was not necessary to wait for these flowers to find colour in the Cemetery. A lone rowan in Section V, close to the boundary along Fair Oak Road, has retained a magnificent display of red berries throughout the winter. But this is itself something of a mystery, as all the other rowan trees have been stripped of their berries by the birds: why don't they like the fruit on this one?

We are fortunate that a large proportion of the trees and shrubs in the Cemetery are evergreen. While we might take this for granted, it is another reason why the Cemetery offers pleasant vistas to enjoy on a walk all the year round. To celebrate this, our feature in



Rowan with berries in February

this edition (Page 4) is about one of these evergreens - well, it makes a change from people and events!

But, sometimes, it is these evergreens that provide a burst of colour during the darker days. For example, these trees in section T took on a distinct golden tinge in February, as they prepared to refresh their cloak of needles.



Golden evergreens

There is a popular misconception that squirrels hibernate in winter, so people can be surprised to see them scurrying around the Cemetery during the Winter. However, grey squirrels do not like very cold weather, so will stay snuggled in their winter dens or dreys, which are often

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bigger than summer ones and especially built during the autumn. The larger winter homes mean that more squirrels can curl up together for mutual warmth. For this reason, territorial or mating squabbles, which are a feature of the Spring and Summer months, are set aside in Winter. It is estimated that a squirrel will find and bury 3 years worth of food every Summer and Autumn. But this work is spread out over every longer day and the squirrels will tend to avoid the times when most people are about. So the best time to see our cute grey squirrels can be during the occasional warmer, brighter day during the Winter.

Wider biodiversity in the Cemetery may be an aim but, to show that it is being achieved, the log of resident species has to grow. So we were pleased to add long-tailed tits to the list, when a pair was spotted on one of our recent health walks.

Winter Miscellany

While we reported the Open Doors walk in September in our last newsletter, we omitted to mention that this event was also part of the inaugural National Cemeteries Week launched by the National Federation of Cemetery Friends. Cathays was one of just eight Friends groups participating in the first year. In 2017, the dates will be 9th to 17th September and we will again include our walk in the New Cemetery. With the aim of making people more aware not only of the work of their local groups, but also that this is part of a UK wide cemetery friends movement, it is expected that more cemeteries will participate this year.

After highlighting the problem posed by Japanese knotweed in our last issue, it is pleasing to note that, around the same time, the legal process was being successfully tested in Cardiff. Two next-door neighbours, in Maesteg, successfully sued Network Rail for damages

after the plant got into the foundations of their homes. Their bungalows had been devalued by the presence of the invasive plant and one owner couldn't sell because banks and building societies wouldn't give mortgages on a property with knotweed. The plant can force its way through brick, tarmac and concrete and is very difficult to get rid of. Network Rail, the Government body, were ordered to pay £4,320 to each claimant to treat the knotweed and for a guarantee that it won't return to their properties. The claimants were awarded £10,000 each for the fall in value of their homes after treatment. But, if Network Rail fail to get rid of the weed, they can claim for the full drop in value of their homes, which could increase their claim tenfold. Network Rail were also held responsible for the cost of the Cardiff trial, estimated at £250,000. But Network Rail applied for leave to appeal, saying that the ruling would open the floodgates for tens of thousands of people to apply for compensation, so we may not have heard the last of this. You may also have seen this case highlighted on the BBC Wales X-Ray programme.



Screen hedging plants

We mentioned in the last newsletter the concern about the large air-conditioning units located outside the buildings, so we were gratified to see the proposed natural screen

being planted in February. The screen hedging plants are *Lonicera Nitida* Baggesen's Gold which, as the name implies, will provide a touch of sunshine, even on cloudy days.

We are pleased to record that another objective in the rejuvenation of the chapels has been achieved: the first funerary service was held in the Nonconformist chapel on 8th February and, indeed, three had been held by the end of the month. Demand as a venue for weddings continues, with seven already booked for this year.

With the experience of selling our 150th Anniversary Book, it has been decided that direct selling is better financially and should achieve a similar volume of sales, albeit over a slightly longer timescale. Both of our books will be available at talks, walks and other events in the Cemetery, as well as from Bereavement Services office at Thornhill. The books are also available by post: in the UK, by sending your name & address and a cheque for £13 for the new book 'Hidden Histories' or £8 for the 150th Anniversary Book (these prices include postage and packing) to:-

Friends of Cathays Cemetery
c/o Bereavement Services
Thornhill Cemetery
Rhiwbina
Cardiff
CF14 9UA

For orders from outside the UK please email us for a costing.

Cheques should be made payable to "Friends of Cathays Cemetery".

While on the subject of publications, we have just produced our first themed guides. Typically these are 12 - 20 pages long and allow a visitor to follow a self guided walk of discovery in the Cemetery that might take about an hour. The first of these booklets, which sell for £1.50 to £2.00, cover subjects as diverse as shipowners, memorial symbolism, specimen trees and ...

murders! These booklets were part of the bid package to the Heritage Lottery Fund for last year's 10th anniversary celebration, with the particular aim of having something available at the planned visitor centre that would appeal to casual visitors, as well as those with particular objectives.

One of the advantages of the refurbishment of the chapels is the improved natural lighting. We have previously highlighted the quality of the stonework, but the roof structure which previously looked a uniform dark maroon now shows off the grain of the timber to great effect.



Detail of roof timber in Episcopalian chapel

We were interested to see that Margravine Cemetery, in London, had succeeded in getting Grade II listing for its Victorian bier house. The announcement of the listing was timed deliberately for Halloween last year. The provision of a temporary resting place for coffins prior to burial was necessary because many poor families, living in single rooms, had no other place to keep a body or coffin, when death struck. However, when undertakers began

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providing chapels of rest and purposely designed mortuaries, the need for the facility eventually disappeared. The Margravine bier house, the largest in London, is better preserved than that at Cathays, but this does not in itself lessen the merits of restoring our own building.

Visitors to the New Cemetery at the end of last year may have noticed that one of the gate pillars had suffered damage, as a result of vehicular impact. Bereavement Services have acted promptly to get it repaired, despite the need for specialist mason skills. The repair is perhaps easier to see than it was to spot the damage, but the new stone should soon mellow and blend in.



Repaired pillar

Graveyard Restaurant

While some are squeamish about death, others see it as part of life. Indeed, in India, it may be part of lunch!

The bustling New Lucky Restaurant, in Ahmadabad, is famous for its milky tea, its buttery rolls ... and the burial memorials between the tables. The restaurant is built over a centuries-old Muslim cemetery, with chest tombs marking the graves. The tombs, which are painted green, are scattered across the

restaurant - one near the front next to the cash register, three in the middle next to a table for two, and four along the wall near the kitchen. Every day the manager decorates each of them with a single dried flower. While they don't know who is buried under the floor, the staff say that their customers seem to like the graves and business is better because of them.

Cedar of Lebanon

Standing behind the chapels is one of the most impressive evergreen trees in the Cemetery. The Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus Libani*) is a native of the mountains of the eastern Mediterranean region, in areas ranging from eastern Turkey to western Jordan but centring on Lebanon, a country that features the tree on its national flag. A coniferous tree, it can grow up to 40 m tall, with a trunk up to 2.5 m in diameter so, potentially, our specimen has a long way to go! We don't know exactly how old ours is, but a 1905 archive image shows a very small tree in the centre of the circular plot which could well be it. When young, the crown of the tree is conic but, with age, it becomes broadly tabular, with more horizontal branches. It is this mature, aesthetically pleasing shape, particularly where the tree is not crowded, which found favour as an ornamental feature in parks. But it is also worth taking a closer look.



Cedar of Lebanon

The Cedar of Lebanon produces two types of shoot. The outstretched 'long' shoots, which

develop into branches that form the framework of the tree, and condensed 'short' shoots, which bear most of the leaves and cones. The needle-like leaves are widely spaced in spirals on the long shoots, but clustered in tufts of around 15 to 45 on the short ones. The needles can be anything up to $3\frac{1}{2}$ cm in length and are square sectioned, in varying shades from green to dull turquoise, with bands of pores on all sides.



Short shoots on a long shoot

The cones of the Cedar of Lebanon grow singly at the tips of the short shoots, in an upright position. The male cones are greyish-green or reddish and cylindrical, measuring 3 to 5 cm in length. The female cones are rounded and typically measure 5 to 12 cm in length and 3 to 6 cm in width. As they develop, while still green, the cones are distinctly sticky. Typically, seed cones are produced every second year, maturing 12 months after pollination, in late autumn. Turning from green to brown when mature, the female cone is covered in broad 'seed scales', each of which covers two winged seeds which are released when the cone breaks up at maturity.

Lebanese cedar wood was popular for ancient woodworking because it is easily worked and shaped, and seasons with minimal shrinkage or distortion: its resistance to decay in salt water led to it being much used in ship construction. There are several biblical references to its use: Phoenician king Hiram of Tyre sent Lebanese cedar, carpenters and masons to Jerusalem to



Mature seed cone

build a palace for King David: he also provided cedars and artisans to King Solomon for the construction of his own palace as well as the Temple in Jerusalem: the valuable wood had to be imported into ancient Israel and the Book of Ezra reports that Lebanese cedar timbers were hauled to the Phoenician coast and then carried by sea to Jaffa for transport to Jerusalem: Hebrew priests were ordered by Moses to use the bark in the treatment of leprosy: the prophet Isaiah used the Lebanon cedar as a metaphor for the pride of the world.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, over the centuries, extensive deforestation occurred, so only small remnants of the original forests survive. Deforestation has been particularly severe in its titular home, Lebanon, where only smaller trees up to 25 m tall survive, though Pliny the Elder tells us of 40 m cedars there. Various attempts at conserving the cedars have been made, the first by the Roman emperor Hadrian, who created an imperial forest and ordered it marked by inscribed boundary stones, two of which are in the museum of the American University of Beirut. In recent times, more successful reforestation of the cedar has been carried out in the Mediterranean region, particularly Turkey, where over 50 million young cedars are being planted annually. The Lebanese populations are also expanding through a combination of replanting and supported natural regeneration.

Friends EVENTS

Recent Events

This has been our quiet period, so there is only one event to report:

The AGM

The Annual General Meeting was held in the Episcopalian Chapel on Saturday 28th January 2017, with some twenty members in attendance. Although this represents around a quarter of the total membership, there were some notable absences (for a variety of medical reasons), which left our Chairman manning the "top table" alone.



AGM

The minutes of last year's AGM were accepted with minor corrections and there were no matters arising, so proceedings moved quickly on to the Chairman's report. His first year had been eventful, with the additional activities associated with the tenth anniversary of the Friends. Although the previous trustees had put things in motion, it was the 2016 committee that had to see them through. This was, of course, on top of the usual full programme of walks, talks and workdays.

There had been a lot more development work on the Friends' website, with more extensive information being made available, for example, in relation to military graves and, more recently, civilian victims of the wars. The site now attracts about 300 "hits" a month and often generates specific contacts, not just from the UK, but from around the world.

At the beginning of the year, the restoration of the pews had been completed, in readiness for the first weddings in the chapels. The basic

programme of walks and talks had been enhanced by the very popular Trails and Tales evenings and Lionel Fanthorpe talking about his latest book. There were also events associated with the First World War, particularly remembering the Battle of the Somme, with a lone bugler playing at dawn by the war graves plot in the New Cemetery.

Under the guidance of head gardener, Denise, workdays had included the planting/sowing of wild flowers, which we hope will brighten up the coming spring and summer, as well as improving the biodiversity of the Cemetery. It was pleasing to see that the Cemetery's Green Flag status had been renewed for a further year.

The tenth anniversary celebration had been held in November, featuring particularly the launch of the new book and the presentation of the Catholic Chapel model. It was particularly gratifying to reflect that, in the ten years, the chapels had moved from being in the top ten of buildings at risk to their present state of restoration and use.

During the year, the Friends had been pleased to respond to requests for guided walks from the YHA ramblers group and the nursing section of UHW. Gratuitous copies of the Friends' books have been offered to all schools in Cardiff.

The Chairman concluded his report by thanking the supporters who had made all this possible, particularly the Heritage Lottery Fund, for its contributions to the new book and the celebratory event, Mossfords/MorganConsult, Bereavement Services and members of the Friends.

In relation to the Chairman's report, Ivor Lippett noted the tremendous amount of clearance work undertaken under the Community Payback programme and suggested that the officers from the Probation Service who supervised this work (and joined in with carrying it out) should be given copies of the Friends' books, as a gesture of appreciation.

In the absence of the Treasurer, the Chairman

presented the audited accounts for 2016, noting that the main contributions to the increased end of year balance (by a little over £1000) were donations and book sales. The increased turn-over in the year reflected the Heritage Lottery Fund grant, offset by the corresponding expenditure on the new book and anniversary event. Thanks were again due to Bereavement Services for all their support and the University School of History, Archaeology and Religion, for the use of their facilities for talks. Special thanks were due to Nick Davey, who had been the auditor of the accounts until this year, and to Philip Brown who had stepped into the role for the latest accounts.

As there was no competition for officer or member posts on the Trustees, and all had been duly nominated and seconded, the new committee was elected unanimously en bloc. Those elected were:

Chairman: Paul Jones

Treasurer: John Farnhill

Trustees: Ivor Lippett, Margaret Smith, Hugh Payne, Paul Nicholson, Eric Fletcher, Jean Sandford and Des Sandford.

The last three were particularly welcomed as new members. It was noted that anyone else who was interested would be welcome to attend committee meetings to find out more about what was involved.

Questions and discussion focussed on:

the bell tower: work is incomplete and subject to funds becoming available to progress. The present condition, particularly the absence of lighting militates against general viewing, but the fitting of 'see-through' gates and internal doors is programmed. While the bell is still in place, no comment could be made on its condition.

bier house: it appears that no helpful plans or pictures, which would aid restoration, had come to light. Gordon Hindess suggested that in these circumstances, the best

approach was careful examination and dismantling of what was left, recording what was found, as a starting point for planning restoration. The longer this sort of action was delayed, the harder the process would become.

use of the Friends' funds to support relevant action by Bereavement Services: in response to a query by Ivor Lippett, it was confirmed that the Trustees already had authority to make decisions of this nature,

The meeting closed promptly, but was followed by informal discussion, which was facilitated by the comfortable environment now offered by the chapels.

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

With the Winter break, there has been just one workday since our last issue. This concentrated on clearing out self-seeded holly alongside the drive between sections S and Y and picking up piles of wood left by an anonymous "helper". While this person is well intentioned, there are concerns about some technical, safety and environmental aspects of the pruning that has been done. We would like to make contact with this helper, so that we can harness this goodwill and endeavour, within the Conservation Plan for the Cemetery.

If you fancy some gentle exercise in sociable company, why not join us? You can work at your own pace and tools and gloves are provided. **We meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. We can guarantee that you will see a difference at the end of each session and you can take something home with you - a sense of satisfaction with the achievement. Put the last Saturday of the month in your diary. With an uninterrupted programme, that means the next dates are **25th March, 29th April, 27th May and 24th June.**

Friends EVENTS

Weekly Health Walks

Our normal leisurely walks take place regardless of the weather and last for about an hour. They are intended to be social occasions, exercising body and mind, with anecdotes about the Cemetery and discussion of the natural history. We meet just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. All are welcome on these walks and afterwards, when we adjourn to a local hostelry for a chat over tea or coffee.

There is always something new to see and talk about, as the Cemetery aims to surprise. Perhaps the most notable surprise since our last issue, was when our leader for the day, Ivor Lippett, introduced us to his namesake ... on a memorial in Section G!



Ivor Lippett and his namesake's memorial

Future Events

Walks

The following walks start from the chapels, just inside the main entrance in Fair oak Road.

On **Sunday April 23rd at 2.00pm**, Bereavement Services will lead their ever popular **Heritage Walk**.

On **Tuesday June 6th at 7pm** the Friends will lead a **Midsummer Walk**. As usual, this walk will showpiece some of the more recent discoveries relating to the Cemetery.

Once again, the University of South Wales will be joining with Bereavement Services for evening performances of **"Trails and Tales"**. Ticketing details are still to be confirmed but you might want put a note in your diary now for **Tuesdays 13th and 20th June**.

Talks

The venue for these talks will be **Room 4.45** in the **John Percival Building, Cardiff University, in Colum Drive** (behind Colum Road). These talks are free to members of the Friends, but there will be an entry fee to **non members of £2**.

On **Tuesday March 21st at 7 pm**, **Rosemary Chaloner** will talk about **The Balloon Girl - The First and Fatal Flight of Mademoiselle Albertina**. The Balloon Girl's grave is perhaps one of the most visited in the Cemetery and the inscription on the headstone gives the bare bones of the tragedy. However, Rosemary spent four years researching and writing the book which was published last year, with the same title as her talk. There is no better authority on this subject, so this is a talk that is not to be missed.

On **Tuesday May 16th at 7 pm**, **Gillian and Robert Lawson** will tell us about the **"Turners of Cardiff"**. While you may not recognise this family name immediately, you will undoubtedly be familiar with many of the prestigious buildings which they constructed. Come and learn more about Cardiff's built heritage from Gillian and Robert.

And finally...

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

*Contact the editorial team on 2061 2164
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You can find past Newsletters, the latest news of events and lots of other information about the Cemetery on our website at www.friendsofcathayscemetery.co.uk