

Superb Spring

It has been much drier than average, while the temperature has generally lacked high or low extremes. But nature has responded well to this with a wonderful display of wild flowers. There is also a perception that this display gets better each year, hopefully confirmation that the ground maintenance regime is on the right track. If there were a contest for which is the best, the extent and longevity of the primroses probably makes this flower the winner, but there are large patches where, celandine, wood anemone and bluebell shine.



Bluebells

The more observant will also spot violets, lady's smock, garlic mustard and more. A new find this year was a small clump of cowslips in Section D.



Cowslips

Our specimen trees have also excelled with their blossom this year. The white flowers of the wild plum sparkled like stars, while the foxglove tree, that has been disappointing for the last few years, was resplendent. Meanwhile, its offspring nearby blossomed for the first time, albeit in a modest way. The magnolia in

Section L also had a good year, though sadly, its blossom is short-lived.



Magnolia blossom

Less easy to see are the other sign of Spring - newly fledged birds. So we are indebted to Peter Hewin for the sharp eyes that saw the fluffy baby tawny owl and for the photograph below that records the occasion.



Baby owl

Spring Miscellany

While the chapels continue to be used for funerary services and weddings, it was nice to see a Teddy Bears Picnic party being held in the Episcopalian chapel at the beginning of May. We hope that the local community will make more use of this convenient asset.

On 4th May the ITV programme Fishlock's Choice featured the Cemetery on a walk into the city from Craig Lisvane. While the

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programme used archive footage for shots in the Cemetery itself, it included a long interview with our treasurer, John Farnhill, and told the story of Frances Batty Shand, who did so much for the blind in Cardiff and is buried in Section L. Another founder member of the Friends, Ivor Lippett, also appeared in the programme, but wearing a different hat - representing the Friends of Nant Fawr. In addition, the Cemetery continues to be a popular location for the TV industry in Cardiff, with production teams from *Stella*, *Casualty* and *Born to Kill* having been active recently.

The Friends had a display at the Cathays Fayre, held on 2nd April. In some really sunny weather hundreds of people turned out for the Fayre, organised by St Monica's Church in Wales Primary School. A lot of interest was shown by those attending, with some opting for a guided walk in the Cemetery and a chance to view the chapels and others purchasing books or booklets. Despite relying mainly on direct sales, the latter are selling well.



John Farnhill by the Friends' display

We are always happy to arrange guided walks or illustrated talks for groups. Most recently, Gordon Hindess gave a talk about the Cemetery for the Girl Guide Trefoil Guild in Rhiwbina.

A recurrent theme in these newsletters is that there are always surprises to be found in the Cemetery or something that you just haven't noticed before. In the former category is the

pig (no, not a flying one!) which has taken up residence in Section R. As it bears the logo of a bingo club, does this signify that someone has buried their gambling habit?



The resident pig

Something that has been in the Cemetery for a long time, but just not noticed, is the bird perched on a memorial cross and seemingly pecking at the carved flowers on the back. Strangely, shortly after finding one, a near identical one was spotted. The one pictured below is in Section S, while the other, in Section R, has suffered some damage, having lost its beak and tail. If this wasn't enough, another memorial was found in Section P, with a pair of similar birds, though this time, the flower carving (passion flowers) is on the front and the birds only seem interested in each other. If anyone can explain the symbolism behind this imagery, please let us know.



Carved bird

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A couple of issues ago, we recorded the sowing of yellow rattle seeds alongside the upper path into section L. This was supplemented by bulbs planted at the path junctions by children from a local school. These bulbs produced an early splash of yellow, but more patience was required for the later germinating yellow rattle. However, we are pleased to record that the patience has been rewarded with the hoped for ribbons of gold along the verges.



Yellow rattle lining the path

Litter picking in the Cemetery takes a lot of time, by Bereavement Services, the Friends (both on workdays and during other visits) and caring visitors. In this connection we would particularly mention Michael Fairclough, one of our members, who spends a considerable time collecting litter, particularly from the more remote parts of the Cemetery. We are pleased to record our thanks for his efforts.

But it is a sad reflection on society that this continues to be a necessary task. Time to mount the soapbox! This is not just a problem in the Cemetery and the situation won't change until more effort is put into the enforcement of litter laws. Yes, this costs money, but surely it is better to pay to stop the problem than to clear it up. Couple this with realistic penalties that reflect the cost to the community, then it becomes a nil net cost service.

There are plenty of litter bins in the Cemetery, so why not use them? One of the most frequent items of litter found is the wrapping from bouquets of flowers. This is often very light

material and may blow out of litter bins. This can be prevented by screwing it up tightly or, even, tying it into a knot. Another problem may be due to one of our main residents, the squirrels! They can be attracted by any foodstuff put in the bins and can do a very good job at retrieving it ... often by removing anything else that gets in the way. We have not yet worked out how to explain that this is not appreciated to the squirrels, so perhaps in the meantime we should take any food litter home for disposal.



Scavenging squirrel

Mystery Woman

The funeral of Madame Claire Darras took place at Cathays Cemetery on Saturday 26th January 1918. There were no mourners present, and the only wreath was one bearing the inscription, "With deepest sympathy from the French Colony." This colony had met the expenses of the simple funeral. The inscription on the coffin said, "Claire Darras, died January 21, 1918, aged 29 years." Her body had been found on the 21st January and, from post-mortem evidence given at the inquest, she had probably died a couple of days earlier. There is no memorial to mark the grave in section R.

So who was Claire Darras? We can piece together some of the story from newspaper reports at the time. She had boarded the Romanian steamer, Bucharest, at Archangel on November 22nd 1917 and booked passage to France. She was travelling alone and claimed that her husband was a lieutenant in the French

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Army, attached to the Russian Imperial Army at Petrograd (St Petersburg), and gave her name as Claire Darras. While she had declared that she was French, there was no evidence to corroborate this or, indeed, her name.

The ship put into Barry for repairs, arriving at the beginning of January. A local police inspector saw Madame Darras twice on board in the first few days but, after that, only when he was called upon to identify the body in the mortuary on 22nd January. The ship's captain had last seen the woman on board on the 7th January. There had only been two other passengers on the ship and they had left before this date. No one had visited her on board.

An engineer employed by the Llandaff and Dinas Powis District Council discovered the body, in the Caerau Brook, close to its confluence with the River Ely and at the bottom of Ely Racecourse. (Ely Racecourse was opened in 1855 and was an important racing venue, including hosting the Welsh Grand National, until the late 1930s. The area is now occupied by Trelai Park.) There was much speculation as to how the body had ended up there. The spot was some distance from the nearest road and there were no paths to the location. However, the brook at this point was affected by the tide and, over the preceding weekend, tides had been high enough to flood the adjacent meadows. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, it was concluded that the body must have been washed in by the tide and deposited when the water receded.

The body was fully dressed and expensively attired "in a blue princess robe with blue buttons on the sleeve and the front, and a waist-belt of the same material. She wore a white silk blouse and a silk chemise, which was embroidered with gold lace trimmings, and a corset embroidered with red roses." She was wearing high heeled lace-up boots, her hat had the name of the maker - H Wautter and Co, St Petersburg - and a search of the body revealed "a gold brooch set with a diamond and a hair

slide of brilliants." Giving evidence at the inquest, the chief mate on the ship said that the woman had five rings, two gold brooches and a gold chain. The coroner also made reference to a box containing the lady's personal effects, which was being held by the police. While it had been opened, no information was provided about its contents. About six weeks after her death, her handbag was discovered and found to contain "notes and other valuables to the extent of about £200."

Where had Madame Darras been for the fortnight between leaving the ship in Barry and being found dead in Ely? The police in Barry had endeavoured to keep her under surveillance on the ship, although it is not clear why. One thought was that she did not welcome this attention and had left the ship because of it. She had apparently travelled by train from Barry to Cardiff on the day she left the ship. There was an uncorroborated report that she had been seen with a wireless operator in Cardiff. But, otherwise, enquiries had not discovered where she had been staying, while it was apparent that she had not been living rough.

We should acknowledge that the level of investigation was far from comprehensive. After all, there was no evidence of robbery or foul play, the inquest was happy with the conclusion "found drowned", this was a foreign national, someone else was covering the funeral costs ... and it was war time, when there were more important things to worry about. It had taken five days from discovery of the body to interment in Cathays Cemetery.

Can we be confident that our mystery lady was who she said she was? Noting that the Battle of Arras had taken place early in 1917 and the monastery there is dedicated to Sainte Claire D'Arras, could she have adopted a convenient alias? Of course, there was turmoil in Russia: the First World War had been a disaster, then the Bolshevik Revolution at the beginning of 1917 had led to the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, who was then held, with his immediate

family, under what might now be called house arrest. Any apparent close association with the Romanov dynasty and its military failure suddenly became extremely hazardous. It was not surprising that many, both Russians and foreign nationals, chose to flee the country and may well have considered it prudent to adopt a false identity.

The only viable sea route out of Russia was through Archangel, well north of the Arctic Circle. At the end of November, the *Bucharest* would probably have had to break through sea ice to reach the Atlantic. For a lone woman to make the journey, in winter, would have been challenging and dangerous. There can be no doubting that Madame Darras was both determined and courageous. But there seems every reason to question both the name she used and her claimed nationality. If she wasn't who she said she was, she could well have been Russian. While the Bolsheviks killed the Tsar and some of his relatives, about 47 members of the Romanov dynasty went into exile. Could our mystery woman be one of these?

The Imperial Romanov family (Tsar Nicholas, his wife, Alexandra, and their five children, Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia, and Alexei) were shot, bayoneted and clubbed to death in Yekaterinburg in July 1918. Their bodies were then mutilated, burned and buried. The Bolsheviks only announced Nicholas's death and for over four years continuously denied that the entire Romanov family was dead. The emergence of many Romanov impostors (Anastasia was particularly popular) around the world drew media attention away from Soviet Russia, and discussion regarding the fate of the family was actually suppressed by Joseph Stalin from 1938. Is it surprising, in this situation, that there was renewed speculation relating to our mystery lady?

The Tsar's burial site was discovered in 1979, but this was only made public in 1989. A second, smaller grave containing the remains of two Romanov children missing from the larger grave

was discovered in 2007. In April 2008, DNA tests performed by a US laboratory proved that bone fragments belonged to two children of Nicholas II. That same day it was announced by Russian authorities that the remains of the entire family had been identified. After 90 years, any speculation that one of the last Tsar's daughters might be buried in Cathays Cemetery could be scotched.

There are other unanswered questions. Was there a French Lieutenant Darras attached to the Imperial Army at the time? What happened to the personal effects of the mystery woman, after all they were of significant value (at least £8000 today)?

But perhaps it is better for Madame Darras to remain a mystery, even with regard to the precise position of her grave, by leaving it unmarked.



The grave of Claire Darras is here ... somewhere

Correspondence

I have been delighted to come across the newsletter of the Friends of Cathay Cemetery in Cardiff, the 'not so grave news'. Not only is it a thoroughly good read, varied and interesting but the series that it ran in 2014 on Archibald Hood and his coal career and that of his sons has been so helpful to my family history research. I really cannot thank you enough

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especially as with funding cuts, no library in New Zealand seems to have Archie Blythe's 1994 book 'From Rosewell to the Rhondda'.

My great grandfather, William Hood who migrated to New Zealand in 1875 was a first cousin to Archibald Hood albeit much younger. Their fathers were two of twelve brothers, one of whom went to America in 1843 as did another of Archibald's brothers in the 1850s. He then went to Australia as did a further brother and I have yet to discover if either returned to Scotland. A little over a year ago I retired from work, and have been researching and writing about the family so it has been great to come across this material recording Archibald Hood's activities and contribution to the coal industry. It was certainly a mistake to focus just on their lives in Scotland as other parts of Britain also proved attractive to their ambitions.

In Wellington, New Zealand where I live, we have a project underway commemorating the lives of over 650 people who died in the influenza epidemic in 1918 and we are working both on cleaning up their graves in Karori Cemetery as well as on researching and documenting their lives. The output is being recorded on a blog that is being built <https://1918flu.blog/>

Here too is a link to our facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/1918InfluenzaProjectKaroriCemetery/>

There is another interesting blog on the history of some of those in our cemetery at <http://undergroundhistory.blogspot.co.nz/>

Please pass on my thanks to whoever put their time and effort into documenting the Hoods' coal story. I am very grateful and wish you all well in your efforts in the Cathay Cemetery.

Jenny Robertson, Wellington, New Zealand

Editor's comment: we are always pleased to receive letters and emails about the newsletter (especially such complimentary ones) and if, in a

small way, we can assist someone's family research. But this email brings something else - an insight into activity to preserve a cemetery on the other side of the world and to record the lives of those buried in it. Follow the links in the letter for some interesting reading. It also prompts a question for us: what was the impact of Spanish flu in Cardiff? If the affect was proportional to the UK as a whole there were probably around 1000 burials in Cathays, in a very short period of time, because of it.

Ah Pow

No, this is not the exclamation in a "balloon" in a cartoon story! It is the name of a young Chinese man buried in Section Y. We would normally expect to find Chinese burials in the Oriental section of the New Cemetery, but Ah Pow was the third interment in a grave that was first opened before the New Cemetery was brought into use. We know something of the circumstances of the funeral of 28 year old Ah Pow, in January 1907, because he was an inmate of the workhouse and the interment received some publicity.

Under the headline, a Chinaman's Funeral, we learn that Ah Pow was a Chinese seaman, who died from pneumonia soon after his admission to the Cardiff Workhouse on December 27 1906. A dozen or more "Orientals" witnessed the interment, in the Nonconformist part of the Cemetery. When the coffin had been deposited near the grave, one of the Chinese inquired about a minister. No provision had been made for this, but an undertaker's assistant was sent to the Rev. Caradoc Griffiths, who consented to conduct the normal burial service.

Only when this was done did the deceased's friends show any particular interest in the proceedings. Two of them brought a large hamper to the graveside. The report continues:

Basins of rice, a bottle of whisky, a plate of sweets, a chicken, a piece of bacon, bundles of crinkled paper (on which were printed Chinese characters), and candles were produced. The

whisky was poured on the coffin and the rice was thrown into the grave. While some were doing this others, behind the shelter of umbrellas, lighted the papers and candles, and a Chinaman gave utterance to what a correspondent calls "some weird incantation". All the remaining eatables were then thrown into the grave, in order to provide Ah Pow with sustenance on his journey to the next world, the fire being to light him on his way.

Ah Pow was buried in plot Y1114 on 1st January 1907.



Headstone on Ah Pow's grave

Recent Events

Talks

On **Tuesday March 21st**, **Rosemary Chaloner** talked about **The Balloon Girl - The First and Fatal Flight of Mademoiselle Albertina**. The scene was set with a description of the discovery of the body of Louisa Maude Evans, on the foreshore near Nash, by a girl of similar age, who was collecting driftwood. Rosemary then described how browsing in a book about aviation unearthed a short chapter about the Balloon Girl that sparked a curiosity to find out

more. 18 months of research included visits to archives in Cardiff, Newport and Bristol, as well as meeting family members and exploring the scenes of events in these cities and around Nash. It was well into this period that the idea of writing a book germinated and then followed two years of trying to find a publisher and working through the editorial process. The book was finally launched in July 2016 and the first reprint was needed by December.

Louisa was the daughter of an actress and a sailor, but "given away" to neighbours, the Crinks, at the age of 16 months. For the time, she had a good early education and then started work in a cloth factory. At 14, she was passed on to the Hancock family, who owned a large travelling fair that operated around the West Country. While with the fair, Louisa met the flamboyant French aeronaut, Auguste Gaudron, and the opportunity to achieve fame and fortune seemed within her reach. She ran away from the Hancock family and turned up in Cardiff on the day that the Gaudrons arrived. Within days, Louisa's first and fateful flight was to take place.

The audience were perhaps surprised to learn just how grand the Cardiff Exhibition of 1896 was - lasting 6 months, occupying the area bounded by today's North Road, Corbett Road, Senghenydd Road and Queen Street and incorporating the Taff Vale Railway ... and a tremendous commercial and showcasing success.

A thoroughly enlightening and enjoyable talk ended with details of Louise's final journey via St Mary's church and the Waterloo Inn (where the inquest was held), in Nash, to the mortuary in Newport and the final procession from there to Cathays Cemetery, witnessed by thousands along the route.

On **Tuesday May 16th**, **Gillian and Robert Lawson** gave an illustrated talk about the **"Turners of Cardiff"**. More specifically, the talk covered the activity of the building family up until the death, in 1916, of Frederick, grandson of the company's founder, Ephraim.

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Ephraim Turner came from a Herefordshire farming family, but his father died when he was nine and the family moved to Merthyr, where his mother supported them by taking in lodgers. One of these was a master mason, who at least inspired Ephraim and probably began to teach him the trade. In due course, Ephraim set up in business in his own right and was then joined by his sons James and William, forming the company E Turner and Sons.

Making use of archive pictures in conjunction with current images, our speakers were able to show a large selection of important buildings which the company had constructed, which ones remained (and, in a few cases how they had been modified) but, particularly, how well most of them had stood the test of time. While you may not recognise this family name immediately, you will undoubtedly be familiar with many of the prestigious buildings which they constructed. Examples include Brains Brewery, David Morgan store, the Old Library and Old Post Office, Lansdowne Hospital, and commercial buildings in Butetown such as the Coal Exchange and the offices of the two Cory companies. But the ones with which we are most familiar are the iconic buildings in Cathays Park, including the Law Courts, City Hall, the original university building and, even, the War Memorial in Alexandra Gardens.

While we may think that we are familiar with these buildings, the Lawson's also focussed on detailed carving that showed that we could all benefit from looking more closely at them. These details also bore testament to the quality of the materials and workmanship, which, even more than 100 years later, can still be enjoyed.

The audience included several members of the Turner family and this proved to be one of the most popular talks that the Friends have put on, with all seats in the room taken. And no one there was disappointed. It was very gratifying to have a message from a member of the Friends in Salisbury, the following day, which said, "Heard from my cousin who had heard from a friend whose husband's friend (a

Turner) had been at the talk. How interesting it was and how much he had learnt."

Walk

On **Sunday April 23rd** Roger Swan of Bereavement Services led a well-attended **Heritage Walk**. With an interesting blend of history, current practice and archive news, a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon was had by all attending.



Roger and his audience in Section M

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

The workday staple of clearing unwanted herbage has to be put on hold in the Spring, to avoid disturbing the new arrivals of our feathered friends. Instead, attention has been given to collecting and disposing of branches collected from earlier clearance work and, also tidying the appearance of the area immediately around the chapels, for occasions that want to enjoy these buildings at their best.

But rest assured that the saws, pruners and loppers will soon be out again. So, if you fancy some gentle exercise in sociable company, why not join us? **We meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. You can work at your own pace and tools and gloves are provided. Put the last Saturday of the month in your diary. The next dates are **24th June, 29th July and 30th September**. We don't get together in August because of the bank holiday at the height of the holiday season.

Weekly Health Walks

As well as our weekly walks, our walkers have enjoyed the opportunity to get involved in events further afield. Some of our group took part in the Big Welsh Walk, which this year was around Devil's Bridge, and were able to combine this with a ride on the Vale of Rheidol Railway. Others took up the invitation to the launch of a "heritage point" trail at the Swalec stadium, for some the chance to try out QR code readers on their smart phones for the first time. There was also the opportunity to join in what is thought to be the first game of walking cricket held in Wales.

On one of our normal walks, a cup was discovered in the bushes. The inscription told us it was the Fletcher Morgan trophy, last won by Corpus Christi High School, in 2012. One of our group, Teresa Daniels, took the cup to this school, where Tessa Davies took over the investigation.



Trophy on a Cemetery pedestal

Tessa contacted Carl French, retired Head of PE, who was able to elaborate on the history of the cup. It had been donated by one of the partners of Fletcher Morgan Chartered Surveyors, David Mullins, to be played for between three local high schools - Corpus Christi, Llanishen and Cardiff High - with six players from each school playing in six 3-ball golf matches. The best three Stableford scores from each school would determine the winner of the cup for that particular year. It was believed that it was last played for in 2014, when Llanishen won and that it was probably taken from their trophy cabinet, before it could be engraved. It is a credit to all concerned that the trophy is now back with its rightful holders, Llanishen High School.

If you are up for this sort of opportunity and excitement, why not join us. As the picture below shows, we always enjoy ourselves and a helping hand is always available if required.



Our normal leisurely walks last for about an hour and 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.

Future Events

Walks

The following walks are free and **start from the chapels, just inside the main entrance in Fair oak Road**, except where indicated otherwise.

Friends EVENTS

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

Once again, the University of South Wales will be joining with Bereavement Services for evening performances of "**Trails and Tales**". To support the production costs of the dramatised elements, there is a small charge. **Tickets are £5.00 (under 16's free with a paying adult) to be bought in advance from Bereavement Services, Thornhill Cemetery. Contact (029) 20544820 or thornhillreception@cardiff.gov.uk** The performances are on **Tuesdays 13th and 20th June at 7pm** and run for about two hours.

On **Sunday September 17th 2.30pm**, as a contribution to **Open Doors**, the Friends will lead a **Guided Walk in the New Cemetery**. Please **note especially** that the **starting point** for this walk is just inside the **main entrance off Allensbank Road, north of Eastern Avenue** and almost opposite the back entrance to the University of Cardiff Hospital.

Talks

On **Tuesday September 12th at 7 pm**, **Dr Ian Beech** will give an illustrated talk on "**Whitchurch Hospital's Role in WWI**". There is a poignant link between the hospital and Cathays Cemetery, with most of our war graves from this era being of patients who did not survive their injuries. The venue for this talk will be **Room 4.45** in the **John Percival Building, Cardiff University, in Colum Drive** (behind Colum Road). As a contribution to **Open Doors**, this will be a free event.

Publications

Books (about 100 pages, full colour):

Cathays Cemetery on its 150th Anniversary - £5
Hidden Histories: Tales from Cathays Cemetery - £10

Themed guides (12 - 20 pages):

Shipowners (black and white) - £1.50
Memorial symbolism (black and white) - £1.50
Tree Tale Trail (colour) - £2
Murders (black and white) - £1.50

The books are also available by post: in the UK, with an additional shipping cost of £3, by sending your name & address and a cheque payable to "Friends of Cathays Cemetery" for the book price plus postage and packing to:-

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

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

There are also several free publications which can be downloaded from our website in pdf format.

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
or email <gordon.hindess@uwclub.net>*

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