

## *Topsy-turvy Season*

It hasn't seemed a lot like winter. But we did get some snow - though you had to be quick to catch it! And it shouldn't be a deterrent to visiting the Cemetery, as it provides a lighter background for the memorials and trees which can be quite pleasing, especially if it comes with a low winter sun, as in the picture below.



However, generally the season has been drier and warmer than average, so we have enjoyed our usual early showing of primrose, celandine and crocus, all of which could be easily spotted in January.



*Purple crocuses in Section N*

But we normally forget to mention what is probably the most recognisable of flowers, the daisy. This can be found at almost any time of year and favours areas where the grass is kept short by regular mowing, like the World War 1 war graves plot in the New Cemetery, where the flowers at the top of the next column were pictured.



Of course, if you like your lawns to look like a bowling green, you might consider this to be an unwanted weed!

The clearance of brambles and self-seeded plants from the cedar of Lebanon roundabout during workdays last year has been rewarded by a resurgence of the *bergenia cordifolia purpurea*, more commonly known as elephant's ears. These evergreen rhizomatous perennials have leathery, rounded leaves and erect clusters of bell-shaped pink flowers. A native of Siberia, its green foliage often becomes tinted purple in winter. It would normally be expected to bloom in the early spring, but ours seem happy to bloom at almost any time of the year, as the January image below shows.



Often the first flowers to appear in the Cemetery are thanks to family decoration of individual graves, like the snowdrops pictured at the top of the next page.

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Close behind the first flowers, the early blossoming trees start to show their hand. In the first half of February, similar white blossom appeared on a wild plum and some bird cherry trees.



*Bird cherry blossom*

At the same time, the mild weather tempted the flower buds on the magnolia in Section K to awaken ... but this tree then seemed to have second thoughts and the first blossom only appeared at the very end of the month. With the unseasonably warm weather, bees could be seen buzzing around the bird cherry blossom, in

the warm sunshine at the end of February.

Not all changes are picturesque, but they may be dramatic. Early in February, a very large beech tree by the Cemetery boundary, close to where Sections B and H meet, fell. Mercifully, it came down in an area with few memorials, so caused little lasting damage. Had it fallen in the opposite direction it would undoubtedly have damaged one or two houses in Wedal Road. While clearance work started promptly, the scale of the task meant that, even a month later, most of the trunk and main branches were still blocking one path, but partly cut up into large chunks, as the left hand image below shows.



The tree had appeared perfectly healthy until now, but it seems that it may have simply grown too big for its "boots". As the picture on the right shows, its roots were surprisingly shallow and there was hardly any sign of significant roots penetrating more than half a metre into the ground. Coincidentally, this was one of the trees where the giant polypore had been seen last autumn (see our previous issue) and it may be that the symbiotic relationship between the fungus and the tree was a factor in the demise of the latter.

## *Winter Miscellany*

It is the slow news season and much of what news there is relates to discussion at the AGM, which is reported on page 7.

Sadly, we report the death of Sylvia Barnard on 22nd July last year. Sylvia was one of the instigators of the founding of the National

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Federation of Cemetery Friends, and her booklet (based on her experiences at Beckett Street Cemetery, Leeds) 'Notes on Saving Cemeteries', was the forerunner of the Federation's handbook 'Saving Cemeteries'. She may be best remembered for her 1990 book 'To Prove I'm Not Forgotten: Living and Dying in a Victorian City'.

We are used to carving on the surface of memorials. Less common are intricate figures that have been sculpted within the original stone. There are a few examples in Cathays Cemetery, but they may be passed unnoticed, unless you are lucky enough to catch them when the sunlight hits them at the right angle. The example below can be found in Section D, close to the driveway from the Catholic gate.



In our September 2018 issue, we mentioned the production of a podcast. The first part "Stories of the Sisterhood" is now available on

Apple (at <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/stories-of-the-sisterhood/id1451820554?mt=2> )

... or Spotify (at

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4c14ZnZr65tBDkJftIUfM> )

Please pass these links to anyone you think might be interested.

*The following is the second instalment of Roger Swan's introductory talk to his Heritage Walk, last October. At the end of the first part, following a visit to Père Lachaise Cemetery, George Frederick Carden had spied a business opportunity.*

### **A Brief History of the Victorian Cemetery - Part 2**

London was in a stock market frenzy at the time with companies set up and shares sold for a wild host of ideas and Carden saw it as the time for burial reform and for making a profit. He launched the "Economic Funeral Society", a joint-stock company to provide funerals and burial plots across the metropolis for a fixed price.

Undertakers were becoming notorious for persuading the grieving into all sorts of funeral extras - at huge expense. Carden believed the public would gladly switch from these well-established firms and practices and naively believed that his "funeral society" would be able to solicit undertakers, the owners of hearses and horses and the suppliers of funeral pomp, to provide him with their services. But why should they? They were doing well enough on their own.

Investors were not convinced either and so he revised his plan and doubled the capital he required to £300,000.

He then formed the "General Burial Grounds Association", a company which, rather than manage funerals, would build a London version

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of Père Lachaise - an elegant resting place beyond the city, planted and planned, and with high walls to deter the body snatchers.

Above all Carden claimed that the public health benefits of the plan were the "most important consideration of all", by drawing from his own experience of visiting a city churchyard where "putrefying remains were exposed to the atmosphere by workmen" and "noxious gases issuing from corpses" had left several labourers confined to their homes for days afterwards, while that he himself had been "violently effected by fever" - ample proof indeed of the dangers of graveyard miasma!

However the venture failed and did not survive the stock market crash of December 1825. It was too difficult a task to persuade a change of practices and, in fact, most people accepted undertakers making a healthy and even excessive profit! And, although the church yard was a rather grim place, it was seen as "no unbecoming preparation for the solemnity of the church"!

Also, Père Lachaise had become a fashionable promenade with taverns and drinking houses nearby - was this decent? Above all, it was seen as a continental idea - all rather foreign and unwelcome!

"An honest John Bull would only laugh at the knavish fool whom he saw blubbering and groaning over a grave stuck with daffadowndillies".

Carden's public health claims of graveyard miasma also met with some scepticism - "where is the proof that disease ever has been communicated to the living by the buried dead?"

His failure in 1825 did not put an end to his ambition and after completing his legal apprenticeship he launched, in 1830, the company that would ultimately bring about change.

To be continued ...

*We are pleased to acknowledge the guidance*

obtained from "Dirty Old London. The Victorian Fight Against Filth", by Lee Jackson, and "London Cemeteries. An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer", by Hugh Mellor.

### **The Battle of Rorke's Drift**

With a participant in the battle buried in Cathays Cemetery and the passing of the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, it seemed a good time to give the story an airing. Of course, there can be few who have not seen the film "Zulu", frequently re-shown on television. We touched briefly on the Battle in our September 2011 issue, when we reported on the dedication of the newly erected memorial to Edmund Savage. But there is more to this encounter than a commercial film or a very brief summary can do justice to.



*Edmund Savage Memorial, front and rear views  
(Plot R464)*

The former trading post of James Rorke, an Irish merchant, and mission station was located close to a drift, or ford, on the Buffalo River. At the time, the river formed the border between the British colony of Natal and the Zulu Kingdom. On 9th January 1879, a British column under Lord Chelmsford arrived and encamped at the drift. On 11th January, the force crossed the river to camp on the Zulu bank.

After reconnaissance patrolling and the

construction of a track for its wagons, on 20th January, Chelmsford's column marched to Isandlwana, approximately 6 miles to the east, leaving behind a small force from 24th Regiment of Foot to garrison the post, which had been turned into a supply depot and hospital. The small garrison was under the command of Lieutenants John Chard of the Royal Engineers and Gonville Bromhead. It should be noted that the threatening incursion into Zulu territory had not been sanctioned by the British government.

In the afternoon of the 22nd, two survivors from Isandlwana arrived bearing the news of a comprehensive defeat and that a part of the Zulu army was approaching the station. Chard and his officers had two options - attempt a retreat or defend their current position. A small column, travelling in open country and burdened with carts full of hospital patients, would be easily overtaken and defeated by a numerically superior Zulu force, so the only acceptable course was to remain and fight. The garrison's men constructed a defensive perimeter out of mealie bags, within which were the storehouse, the hospital, and a stone kraal. The buildings were fortified, with firing holes knocked through the external walls and the external doors barricaded with furniture. Later in the afternoon, a mixed troop of about 100 Natal Native Horse (NNH) arrived at the station, having retreated in relatively good order from Isandlwana.

The approaching Zulu force, numbering 3,000 to 4,000 warriors, was, in fact, the reserve of the army at Isandlwana and had been directed to swing west and south of the British force, to position itself across its line of communication and retreat. They reached Rorke's Drift at 4:30 pm. Most of the Zulu warriors were armed with an assegai (short spear) and a shield made of cowhide. A few also had old muskets or antiquated rifles, but their marksmanship was poor and the quality of powder and shot was questionable.

The NNH troopers, who had left the station to monitor the approaching Zulus, were the first to engage but, being short of carbine ammunition and with morale low, there seems to have been a revolt amongst them, resulting in the whole troop abandoning the station, in a "strategic retreat". Outraged by this behaviour, a few British soldiers fired after them, killing a corporal.

The garrison now numbered around 155 men., plus about 39 hospital patients, most able to take up arms. With fewer men, the defensive perimeter had to be reduced and biscuit boxes were used to construct a wall across the middle of the area to make possible the abandonment of the hospital side of the station if the need arose.

Initially, around 600 Zulus attacked the south wall and the defenders opened fire when they were 500 yards away. The majority of the attacking force swept around to attack the north wall, while a few took cover either because they were pinned down by continuing British fire or as a deliberate tactic. Anyway, they began a harassing fire of their own. Even though their fire was not accurate, it was responsible for five of the seventeen British deaths at Rorke's Drift.

At this point, another Zulu force swept on to the hospital and north-western wall. On the barricades, the British were soon engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. The British wall was too high to scale, so the Zulus resorted to crouching under the wall, trying to get hold of the defenders' rifles, slashing at British soldiers with assegais or firing their weapons through the wall. Five of the seventeen defenders who were killed or mortally wounded were struck during this phase of the action.

But the north wall could not be held and, at 6:00 pm, the men pulled back into the yard, abandoning two rooms of the hospital in the process. The hospital, too, was becoming untenable. The firing holes had become a

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liability: rifles poking out were grabbed at by the Zulus while, if the holes were left empty, the Zulu warriors stuck their own weapons through and fired into the rooms. As it became clear that the front of the building was going to fall, one of the soldiers began to hack a way of escape through the wall to the back rooms of the hospital. He made a passable breach and managed to drag two bedridden patients out before the defenders of the door were forced to give way.

The process of creating escape routes by hacking through walls was repeated twice more, each time joining more hospital occupants and followed by stout defence of the opening to delay the attackers. By now, the roof was ablaze and it took fifty minutes to break a hole through to the last room, from where the defenders and patients clambered out through a window and made their way across the yard to the barricade. Of the eleven patients, nine survived the trip to the barricade, as did all the remaining able-bodied men. Only four defenders were killed in the hospital, including two who chose to hide in a wardrobe.

The evacuation of the burning hospital completed the shortening of the perimeter. As night fell, the Zulu attacks grew stronger and the cattle kraal came under renewed assault, forcing its evacuation by 10:00 pm. All of the remaining defenders were now in a small bastion around the storehouse. The assault continued and only began to slacken after midnight, finally ending around 2:00 am, but replaced by a constant harassing fire until 4:00 am. By that time, the garrison had suffered fourteen dead. Two others were mortally wounded and eight more were seriously wounded. Almost every other exhausted man had some kind of wound and ammunition was critically low: of 20,000 rounds at the mission at the start of the action, only 900 remained.

At dawn, only dead and severely wounded Zulus remained. Around 7:00 am, a band of Zulus suddenly appeared but no attack materialised

and they soon left the way they had come. An hour later, another force appeared and the defenders left their breakfast to man their positions again. But this force turned out to be the vanguard of a relief column.



*Savage Memorial, with enactment soldier in contemporary uniform*

Immediately after the battle 351 Zulu bodies were counted but, having witnessed the carnage at Isandlwana, the members of the relief force had no mercy for captured or wounded Zulus and it has been estimated that at least 500 of these might have been massacred as well. The station's defenders were no more merciful: one described in his diary that "altogether we buried 375 Zulus and some wounded were thrown into the grave. Seeing the manner in which our wounded had been mutilated after

being dragged from the hospital ... we were very bitter and did not spare wounded Zulus". A member of Chelmsford's staff, wrote that the day after the battle an improvised gallows was used "for hanging Zulus who were supposed to have behaved treacherously".

Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded to the defenders of Rorke's Drift, seven of them to soldiers of the 24th Foot - the most ever received for a single action by one regiment. Four Distinguished Conduct Medals were also awarded. The high number of awards was interpreted by some as a means of drawing the public's attention away from the great defeat at Isandlwana and the fact that Lord Chelmsford had instigated the war without the approval of the Government.

Sir Garnet Wolseley, who took over from Lord Chelmsford as commander-in-chief, showed that he was unimpressed with the awards made to the defenders when he said "it is monstrous making heroes of those who, shut up in buildings at Rorke's Drift, could not bolt and fought like rats for their lives, which they could not otherwise save". However, several historians have challenged such views, noting that it would be hard to find an engagement more worthy of recognition than a beleaguered force, outnumbered forty to one, surviving and killing twenty men for every defender lost.

Edmund (Edward) Savage was a 21 year old private, in the mission station hospital with an injured knee. Although there was a 14:1 chance of getting a VC, Edmund was not one of the recipients - and he doesn't appear to have featured in the more graphic parts of the action, so wasn't played by Michael Caine in the film. Although hailing from Newport, he lived in the Riverside area after his discharge, working for the council, but died at the early age of 32.

### Recent Events

#### The AGM

The Annual General Meeting was held in the Episcopalian Chapel on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January

2019, with about twenty members in attendance. Around ten apologies for absence were noted and the Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The minutes of last year's AGM were accepted and, with there being no matters arising, the Chairman presented his report on the last year. Contrary to his initial anticipation, assembly of the report had shown it to have been a particularly constructive twelve months, with a full programme of lectures and guided walks. Nature had played its part, with especially fine displays of spring flowers followed by tree blossom. Even the "Beast from the East" and the dry summer had played a part in ensuring a varied scene.

Three new information boards had been provided, the restoration of tiling in the chapel had been completed and recording of memorial inscriptions had continued. Monthly workdays and weekly health walks have been well supported. In addition to the normal programme, one of our talks was our contribution to National Cemeteries Week, the Cemetery again hosted the excellent "Graveyard Voices", two former council employees gave valuable assistance in identifying specimen trees and a fungi walk proved very enlightening.

The Friends had a stall at the Cathays Street Fayre, were involved in the formal inauguration of the Barbier Archive and the unveiling of a blue plaque commemorating Jaques de Guelis. A talk was given to Rhiwbina Civic Society, a guided tour of the Cemetery was provided for appreciative visitors to a librarians conference and the Friends participated in the annual Remembrance Service by the Cross of Sacrifice. The Friends entered into the Big Ideas project to commemorate a hundred people who served in the Labour Corps and took part in an edition of Coast & Country on ITV Wales. The Cemetery had won a coveted Green Heritage Award, four new titles had been added to the booklet series, the website had

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expanded and improved and Facebook continued to be a source of new information about people buried in the Cemetery.

None of this would have been possible without a lot of support from members of the Friends, Bereavement Services, etc. and the Chairman thanked all those involved. Ivor Lippett, on behalf of the meeting, pointed out that the one person, the chairman himself, who had not been thanked also deserved recognition for his own unstinting efforts.

In his report, the President noted his particular pleasure in seeing the chapels continuing to move closer to their original form. While endorsing what the Chairman had said, he avoided repetition, but drew special attention to the individuals involved amongst the Friends and in Bereavement Services, identifying them by name. He particularly noted the extensive support behind the scenes of the Chairman's wife.

In presenting the Statement of Accounts for 2018, the Treasurer explained that the overall position was broadly similar to the previous year. The largest item of Expenditure was the payment of the second instalment of the tiling cost, while the increase in donations was largely explained by a very generous one from the organisers of the librarians conference. Following review and investigation of alternative quotes, the insurance arrangements had been advantageously changed. In response to a question, it was clarified that this included cover for the health walks which had hitherto been provided via a Welsh Assembly grant to the Council. The treasurer pointed out that the depreciation of the book stock in accordance with the agreement at last year's AGM had not yet been done, but it would be in the current year. The Statement of Accounts was unanimously accepted by the meeting.

There was no competition for officer or member posts on the Trustees, and all nominees were duly nominated and seconded, so the new committee was elected unanimously. Those elected were:

Chairman: Paul Jones

Treasurer: John Farnhill

Trustees: Jean Sanford, Margaret Smith, Ivor Lippett, Paul Nicholson (Honorary President) and Des Sanford

Long standing committee member, Hugh Payne, had been unable to continue in the role. The further depletion of the committee means that it could accommodate more members and anyone interested would be welcome to attend committee meetings to find out more about what was involved. It was also pointed out that there is also constitutional provision for a Secretary which, once again, it has not been possible to fill.

Carmel Thomas, apologised on behalf of Martin Birch, Operational Manager for Bereavement Services, who was unable to attend. She noted that the Council was particularly pleased that the Cemetery was the first in Wales to get the Green Heritage Award. Bereavement Services were currently awaiting quotations that would facilitate planning future work on the chapels - external lighting and the rehabilitation of the vestries and bell tower. They were also looking at ways of providing interpretative displays on the restoration of the chapels and providing a replacement for the information hut, which had had to be closed due to anti-social behaviour, coupled with the fact that the Cemetery was not manned for much of the time. There was evidence that the installation of CCTV equipment had resulted in a reduction of fly-tipping. She also noted that the weekly health walks, using continuously varying routes were proving a valuable asset in keeping an eye on the less well visited parts of the Cemetery.

Under the general heading of Questions and Discussion and Any Other Business, there was a constructive exchange of thoughts and ideas on a diverse range of topics:

- the long term security and management of the website and archive
- an opportunity to visit the bell-tower and



vestries (for safety reasons, this has to await electrical installation/lighting)

- litter bins (condition, number, location, possible Friends contribution, etc)
- wildflower garden (location, mixed results, etc)
- the voluntary litter picking of Michael Fairclough, which had a marked beneficial effect on the appearance of the Cemetery and hadn't otherwise been recognised during the meeting

While it was not practical to reach conclusions at the AGM on most of the above, it was agreed to consider them at future committee meetings.



*Happy faces at the AGM*

The meeting closed after about an hour and a quarter, although informal discussion continued for some time afterwards.

### Talk

On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March, John Wake presented "The Cruel & Savage Streets", to a lecture room packed with around 50 enthralled people. He drew interesting comparisons between Victorian south Cardiff, his own time on the beat in Tiger Bay fifty years ago and, even, homelessness today. His particular concern was with social injustice. His talk was illustrated with archive and more recent pictures and focussed on life south of the social dividing line running roughly through Queen Street.

John painted a vivid picture, using examples

from the archives, of drunkenness, prostitution, murder and the contrast between the treatment of men and women (particularly those who became pregnant out of wedlock) in a town of 40000 people, with 80 ale houses. In all, this was a most enlightening talk, albeit illustrated with shocking examples of injustice.

## Our Regular Events

### Monthly Workdays

While there is only one workday to report on, because of the Winter break, it was quite productive in the exceptionally good weather. It was also the first workday where resources were split between the traditional clearance of unwanted growth and the recording of memorial inscriptions. For those interested in the latter, the session started with a briefing about the rationale behind the work, the recording process, the scale of the work and hints about dealing with those inscriptions that are difficult to read. The recorders made a start in Section M, while the rest tackled new growth sprouting from old stumps in Sections O and Q. As is often the case, the amount of work done is often best illustrated by the size of the loppings piles, one of which is shown below.



*Some of our volunteers are camera shy and hidden behind the bush!*

If you think you can spare an hour or two, put the last Saturday of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **30<sup>th</sup> March, 27<sup>th</sup> April, 25<sup>th</sup> May and 29<sup>th</sup> June**. We meet by the chapels at 10 am and work until noon, with a

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break for elevenses. You can work at your own pace and tools and gloves or materials for recording memorial inscriptions are provided.

### Weekly Health Walks

Our leisurely walks take place regardless of the weather and last for about an hour. As well as providing gentle exercise, they are intended to be social occasions and are developed around tales related to the Cemetery and discussion of the flora and fauna that presents itself. There is always something new to see and talk about, as the Cemetery aims to please. This was one of several similar walks around the city established ten years ago by the Council, with Welsh Assembly Government support. Over the last few years, this support has been gradually reduced to the point where, this year, the responsibility has transferred entirely to the Friends. From the perspective of people coming on the walks, there should be no discernible change, although the Friends have had to make a few administrative changes, such as arranging equivalent insurance cover.

All are welcome on these walks, which start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. At the end of the walk, we adjourn to a local hostelry for a chat over tea or coffee.

### Future Events

#### Talks

The venue for these two talks will be **Room 2.03, John Percival Building, Cardiff University, in Colum Drive** (behind Colum Road). The talks are free.

On **Tuesday 16th April at 7:00 pm**, "The **Jewish Community in South Wales**" will be presented by the **Jewish History Association of South Wales**. The Association aims to uncover, document, preserve and share the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Jewish communities of south Wales, so has many parallels with the objectives of the Friends.

On **Tuesday 21st May at 7:00 pm**, **Christabel**

**Hutchings** will talk about "**Thomas Henry Thomas (1839-1915) Artist**". **Christabel** taught History, Business Studies and English at **Coleg Gwent**. Her interest in **Thomas Henry Thomas** began when she realised he was her first cousin thrice removed and her research into his many archives has taken ten years, so we look forward to a knowledgeable and informative talk.

#### Walks

The following walks **start from the chapels, just inside the main entrance in Fair Oak Road** and will last for about 1½ hours.

On **Sunday April 21st at 11.00am**, **Roger Swan** of **Bereavement Services** will lead the ever popular **Heritage Walk**.

On successive **Tuesdays June 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>**, at **7pm**, the combined resources of **Bereavement Services, A48 Theatre Company Ltd** and writers from **Living Lines** present **Graveyard Voices**, a heritage walk punctuated by dramatisations that bring the history to life. Anyone who has been to one of these events in the past will tell you that it is the highlight of the Cemetery year. This year's performances will include several new works and there will be variations between the two evenings. To help defray the incidental expenses of the groups, there will be a £5 entry charge.

On **Tuesday June 25<sup>th</sup> at 7pm**, **Gordon Hindess** will again lead the Friends' **Midsummer Walk**. As usual, this walk will aim to highlight some of the more recent research discoveries relating to the Cemetery.

### 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](mailto: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](http://www.friendsofcathayscemetery.co.uk)