

Blossom and Flowers Galore

We've said it before, but it continues to be true, the Spring flowers get better each year. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the conservation areas, where the end of year strim allows the smaller flower plants to see the sun ... and us to see them. Primroses are the most widespread, and enjoy the longest flowering season. Those pictured below were found in Section M.



But they could also be enjoyed in Section B, where you may also spot the somewhat rarer cowslip. This did not appear on the 2012 species list, so seems to be a new arrival. We hope that it survives and spreads.



Cowslip in Section B

Also to be seen in Section B, but also quite widespread in other sections is horsetail, often incorrectly called mare's tail, which looks very similar, but that is an aquatic plant. Horsetail is a native invasive, deep-rooted perennial weed that will spread quickly to form a dense carpet of foliage, crowding out less vigorous plants - so

don't be tempted to take a piece home to your garden. In spring, light brown stems, up to 20in tall, appear with a cone-like spore producing structure at the tip. It is in this stage that the picture on the left below was taken.



In summer, the shoots become sterile and develop into green fir tree-like plants, 2ft tall, with distinctive rings of needle like leaves (picture on the right above). This reflects its ancestry - giant versions, known as calamites, existed in the forests that formed the coal measures and can still be found in the fossil record in south Wales.

Bluebells, in common with the majority of plants in this mild year, appeared early and the best displays are probably in Section H, where they can be seen alongside their albino cousins, as pictured below.



Friends TOPICAL

Of course, it is not just flowers that bring colour to the Cemetery in Spring. The wide variety of cherry means that there is a succession of blossoms, in a multitude of shades from red to white. Just one example, at the white end of the range, from Section S is shown on the left below, alongside the magnolia in Section K.



While the blossom on some trees precedes the leaves, on others, they appear together and the colour of the blossom is diluted. An example of this is the ornamental pear, of which there are three close to the library entrance. As the image on the left below shows, the blossom could easily be missed. But the image on the right shows the flowers to good effect. The conical shape of this tree makes it a popular choice for roadside avenues. However, it is either barren or only produces miniscule fruits. Some of these, from last year, can be seen within the blossom.



A native shrub that has found its own way into the Section B is pussy willow. This may be goat willow, grey willow or a hybridised version of the two. The facility with which these shrubs hybridise makes them hard to identify. The name, 'pussy', comes from the resemblance of the male flowers to cat's paws. Our specimen is shown at the top of the next column.



Pictured below is another Spring flowering shrub, forsythia, which has jumped from a garden to the boundary fence by Section M.



Another refugee from the domestic scene is lilac, in this case, a purple one that can be found on the edge of Section K nearest to section B.



If you venture behind the screen at the back of the lodge, you might come across something a bit sexy! The screen consists of Lawson cypress, which has short scale-like leaves,

grouped in fours and forming flat sprays of foliage. This monoecious evergreen tree, a native of California, has minute flowers, which look like buds. The male flowers are crimson, becoming yellow when the pollen is produced, while the female flowers are blue. As the picture below shows, male flowers tend more to the top of the leaves, while the females are generally closer to the tips.



Spring Miscellany

A few issues ago, we mentioned the practice of some funeral directors removing pacemakers and recycling them for third world charities. However, 1983 legislation claims that pacemakers are the property of the NHS and should be returned, while individual hospitals consider that they cannot be reused and do not want them. This contrary situation has led to at least one funeral director being visited by police, leading to a request for clarification from the Ministry of Justice. It can be frustrating when logical and benevolent intent can be thwarted by bureaucracy.

It was something of a surprise to come across a newspaper article on the subject of human composting. In a response to demand for sustainable funeral services, Washington state is expected to become the first in the US to allow humans to be turned into compost, by a chemical process of alkaline hydrolysis or a natural process of organic reduction. It is considered that an environmentally friendly

after-death service is badly needed, with an ageing population and as a cheaper alternative to conventional burial services. One company plans to use wood chips, alfalfa and straw to turn bodies into a cubic yard of top soil in a month. The soil could then be used by relatives to nourish plants and trees in their gardens. The company claims their natural recomposition process equates to more than one metric ton in carbon emissions savings per person. Could this idea catch on here?

The Beautiful Burial Ground Project is a national initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Its aim is to put burial grounds across England and Wales on the map by revealing their hidden heritage and importance to biodiversity. To increase the knowledge held about the biodiversity of specific burial grounds, it hopes to gather 75,000 recorded sightings of all types of wildlife, across the four years of the project. It will be looking to work with people with physical disabilities and mobility and mental health issues, who may benefit from the potential of burial grounds as places to learn about wildlife and stories of the communities they are in. These objectives align closely with those of the Friends, but it remains to be seen how the two organisations may interact.

We were pleased to see the first new litter bins arrive, one just inside the main gates of the Old and New Cemeteries. A cemetery faces a unique problem with vegetable waste, in the form of flowers that have passed their best, so the new double bin has a section for compostable waste and one for normal recycling items. In the Old Cemetery, it stands beside a standard bin for general refuse. The new bins are bilingual - Welsh on one side and English on the other. We wait to see how successful these facilities will be, although initial results suggest that cemetery visitors reflect the population in general ... and are not wholly committed to responsible recycling! The trio of litter bins in the Old Cemetery is pictured on the next page.



We were pleased to provide a guided walk in the Old Cemetery for about twenty of the delegates to a librarians conference, which was being held in the university. Most of the visitors were from Europe (thankfully speaking English), although one had travelled from Australia.

While this newsletter was being assembled, the annual green flag inspection was taking place. We shall report on the outcome in our next issue.

Drones have been spotted over the Cemetery, but there are justified concerns about their use. However, they could offer advantageous opportunities in cemeteries. For example, a fly-over video could be placed on the Cemetery's website, so that people researching their family history could see the final resting place of their relatives, when a visit might be impractical. High definition images from a few hundred feet can give a clearer view than other means. Drones might also be usefully employed to inspect monuments and buildings, obviating the need for scaffolding and eliminating health and safety risks.

Here is the final instalment of Roger Swan's introductory talk to his Heritage Walk, last October. Our last issue left George Carden undeterred by failure and, in 1830, about to launch a new company.

A Brief History of the Victorian Cemetery - Part 3

Carden formed **The General Cemetery Company**. He now also had influential supporters, including MPs and wealthy bankers, and together they petitioned parliament claiming that London's burial grounds were "offensive to public decency and dangerous to the health of the people"

Public meetings, of course, soon followed. The Bishop of London broadly declared his support - as long as "the clergy did not lose their accustomed burial fee". The Lancet noted that typhus had been linked to burial grounds, so concerns for public health seemed stronger now than 5 years earlier.

Another noted supporter of the cemetery idea was the landscape gardener and architect, J C Loudoun, who hoped that "the new cemetery might contain as many hardy trees and shrubs as room could be found providing botanic inspiration to the masses".

Carden's insistence on the public benefit of the garden cemetery came at the same time as a great fear of a cholera epidemic loomed - and January 1832 saw the first in a series of cholera outbreaks in London.

Sceptics of the miasma danger were replaced by a general terror that the disease would be spread by touch - so to go near a churchyard or burial ground where disinterred or grisly relics lay on the ground was unthinkable indeed. On the other hand, cynical would-be investors of the new cemetery company must have thought of looming epidemics as having a potential to generate new customers!

The modern cemetery was seen as a safeguard against the enemy within - the corruption of the city churchyard. Had it not been for the cholera outbreaks it is doubtful that cemeteries would have proved to be a profitable speculation. The Central Board of Health urged all London authorities to create separate burial

grounds for cholera victims, but the cost of so doing was too high, so cholera victims were hastily buried in the existing already overcrowded locations.

Legislation was finally passed, in July 1832, to establish a General Cemetery on the land at Kensal Green that had been purchased by the General Cemetery Company and it opened for its first burial in January of 1833.

Carden himself, despite his focus on miasma, was not an ardent campaigner for public health generally. His ultimate goal was to sell the Garden Cemetery idea to the public and, now this had been achieved, he became disillusioned with the Board of Directors of the GCC, who had plans for styles of buildings in the cemetery and for choosing suitable architects. He eventually attempted to sue the company for his services and expenses, finally settling for £1000 in 1834.

So was the burial problem solved? Many now thought that it was - but what of the poor...? Kensal Green and the six other large garden cemeteries that soon followed were, however, squarely aimed at the middle to upper classes, charging more than double the fees of the parish and private burial grounds.

When the Duke of Sussex was buried at Kensal Green, in 1843, it really began to prosper. The creation of these "magnificent seven" cemeteries, as we now refer to them, actually did nothing to end the crowded parish burial grounds nor to stop the use of small private burial grounds and the appalling way in which they were still allowed to operate.

The poor would still struggle to find decent sites for their dead, often keeping the deceased at home until they had enough money for the burial, rather than opt for a paupers funeral, which was seen as the last resort. It was concerns regarding the burial of the poor that led to public scrutiny in the early 1840's and were brought forward by George Alfred Walker (himself an early advocate of

cremation) and earned him the nickname of "Graveyard Walker".

Walker was a surgeon in Drury Lane and, in 1839, he began a campaign to finally end burials in city churchyards. He produced a pamphlet, "Gatherings from Graveyards", in which he concluded that *"concentrated grave yard gases caused instant death to man and beast and that foul smelling ground that constantly releases a more diffused miasma debilitated those living nearby."*

His favourite example of malpractice was at Enon Chapel located in the slums north of the Strand and established in the early 1820's, largely for burial speculation. By 1840, it was alleged that 10 to 12 thousand corpses had been concealed within its vault cellar, which was approx. 60 x 40 feet in size, with large amounts of quicklime added to assist the decomposition, and with some corpses being regularly and surreptitiously *"cleared away..."* Mangled coffins in the vault under the chapel produced an unclassifiable "body bug" which lurked in worshipper's hair and clothing as they praised the Lord - with a handkerchief pressed firmly to their nostrils.

In 1847, Walker bought the chapel and, at his own expense, had the bodies in the vault removed to Norwood Cemetery where they were reburied in a single huge grave. Descriptions of the excavation of the Enon vault reported of *"a pyramid of human bones exposed to view, separated from piles of coffin wood in various stages of decay"*, which would go on to fill *"four up-heaved van loads"*.

At this time, connections were finally being made to ill health among the poor, when wells and drinking fountains were found to be affected by strange tastes and sickness. Several "Enquiries into the Health of Towns", including Cardiff, were made during the mid to late 1840's, all of which strengthened the case for out-of-town cemeteries.

Then Sir Edwin Chadwick produced a report for

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the Poor Law Commission in which he emphasised that cemeteries should not be the "exclusive preserve of commercial companies, that public cemeteries should be founded to cater for all classes, including the poor." He was adamant on one important fact, burial in towns must be prohibited.

Finally, his advice was heeded by the 1850 Metropolitan Interments Act. It legislated that the Board of Health should have powers to establish new cemeteries and advise on the closure of old churchyards, into which all further burials would be prohibited, and even to compulsorily purchase these new "private" cemeteries.

The 1850 legislation was, however, to be repealed by the 1852 Burial Act, but not before the initially private and rather exclusive Abney Park Cemetery had been compulsory purchased.

The 1852 Burial Act saw Burial Boards established in local councils and corporations, which then began to purchase land and establish cemeteries outside of the towns. Such is the case with Cathays Cemetery, which opened in 1859, a mile from the town centre, in the middle of farmland, established and administered by the Cardiff Corporation's Burial Board. A spate of further burial acts followed and were only finally brought together by the 1972 Local Government Act and the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order of 1977.

So it is with thanks to Carden, Chadwick, Walker and a few others, at that time, that cemeteries like Cathays were established and have become a legacy of the Victorian way of death.

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.

Glorious Finale - Prelude

The inscription on the grave in Section G and the month of June remind us of the tragic events of June 1940. So it is fitting to start the story now. This is the first of three parts.

At the start of the Second World War, HMS *Glorious*, an aircraft carrier built in the late 1920s, spent 1939 unsuccessfully hunting for the German pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee in the Indian Ocean, before returning to the Mediterranean, where the picture below was taken.



While the Allies initially supported the Norwegians in resisting the German invasion of their country, the need to concentrate allied forces further south led to the reluctant decision to withdraw. *Glorious* was recalled in April 1940 to support the British evacuation operations.

During *Glorious*' penultimate sortie to Norway, there was a discussion between its Captain, Guy d'Oyly-Hughes, and his Commander (Air), J B Heath, supported by his two Lieut. Commanders (Air), about a request from the Flag Officer Northern Norway to make a raid against an inland target. The three air officers advised against the raid on the grounds that the five Swordfish involved would have been placed at very high risk, unless *Glorious* moved closer to the target. The Captain considered the advice to be verging on mutiny, so the Commander (Air) had been put ashore at Scarpa Flow, pending court martial.

The main evacuation convoy was to have been escorted by Aircraft Carriers *Ark Royal* and

Glorious, two cruisers and eight destroyers but, in the early hours of 8th June, Glorious made a signal to the Vice-Admiral on Ark Royal. It asked for permission to proceed independently to Scapa Flow, via a route which would take her some 300 miles to the west of the German airfield at Trondheim and then south-west to pass between the Faroe Islands and the Shetlands. While a number of reasons were given to justify this request, the principle ones seemed to be:

Glorious had completed the mission for which she had been despatched, the retrieval of RAF Hurricane and Gladiator fighters. These were now on board, having landed for the first time on an aircraft carrier.

Although the ship's company was to be sent on leave from Devonport on completion of the operation, the Commander in Chief Home Fleet had directed that she was first to proceed to Scapa Flow, so that the outstanding court-martial could be held. It is likely that d'Oyly-Hughes was himself particularly keen see the court martial conducted.

The request was approved and Glorious, with two destroyers, Ardent and Acasta, set out just before 4.00 a.m.

By 4:00 p.m. on 8th June, the British ships had changed course to the south-westerly bearing, that would take them to the west of the Shetland Islands and on to the Orkney Islands and the natural harbour of Scapa Flow. Glorious was at cruising stations, steaming at 17 knots on 12 of her 18 boilers. No aircraft were in readiness on deck, nor were any in the air for reconnaissance purposes. Ardent and Acasta were stationed at 440 metres on either bow. None of the ships was fitted with radar and the carrier had no lookout in her crow's nest. The sea was calm, the sun was shining and visibility was excellent. The state of readiness might be described as surprisingly relaxed.

Should the ships have at least been aware of the possible presence of the German navy in the area at the time? The Admiralty took seriously any indication that the German navy might be at sea, that this concern was reflected by the Fleet's principal commanders and that prudent steps were taken to provide protection for the most vulnerable shipping. However, it appears that Bletchley Park had sent repeated warnings to the Admiralty about German ships at sea, due to increased wireless telegraphy activity. This was, of course before Britain had acquired the Enigma machine, so signals could not be decoded - but intelligence experts could analyse the direction, strength, volume and pattern of messages and pinpoint the general area and the probable significance. Air reconnaissance on 6th June, to follow up on this advice, had not found any evidence of German ships, but visibility was very poor in the relevant areas of the North Sea. The Admiralty remained sceptical, so did not issue any warnings to its admirals. In the event, there had been a break-out by a powerful German squadron, consisting of two pocket battleships, four destroyers and a cruiser on 4th June and their operations in the North Sea had already resulted in the sinking of several British transports.

Despite the absence of positive intelligence about German naval activity in the area, should the regime on Glorious and its escorts have been so relaxed? There seems little doubt that better precautions should still have been taken, although the temptation to relax must have been strong on board, with long awaited leave at their home base in the offing, after a hectic mission, and in wonderful weather. It was common practice, if there was a perceived risk, for an aircraft carrier to deploy one of its planes as a spotter. At the very least, one would have expected there to be one readied on the flight deck. But all aircraft were secured below.

At about 5:00 pm, the British ships spotted two ships in the distance ...

This story will continue in our next issue.

Friends EVENTS

Recent Events

Talks

On **Tuesday 16th April**, **Stanley Soffa**, of the **Jewish History Association of South Wales**, talked about various aspects of "**The Jewish Community in South Wales**". The Association were pursuing a Heritage Lottery Fund supported project to uncover, document, preserve and share the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Jewish communities of south Wales. This talk was one of a series to be given across the area, to meet the sharing objective of the project. To date, some 70 aural histories had been recorded and much research into the history of the Jewish community had been documented.

Although Jews had followed the Norman Conquest into the UK, they had subsequently been expelled, only to return in the 17C. Focussing on Cardiff, Stanley noted the gift of the Highfield Road site for a cemetery, by the Marquis of Bute in 1841, and the first meeting room, in Union Street (roughly where the Motorpoint Arena is today), donated by Charles Vachell (whose grave can be found in Section C).

Stanley then traced the various synagogues that had been in Cardiff, from the first in East Terrace, in 1858, to the one at Penylan, in 1955.

The conclusion of the talk covered aspects of Stanley's own family research. While he had lived his whole life in Cardiff, he had traced his family back to Russia in the early 20C, and other links to Ukraine and Poland. One of his anecdotes was about the shop in Albany Road that his grandfather had won, then lost, gambling!

This was another well-attended and enlightening talk.

On **Tuesday 21st May**, **Christabel Hutchings** talked about "**Thomas Henry Thomas (1839-1915) Artist and Polymath**". 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. Her research into his many archives took ten years and this talk gave an insight into her discoveries.

Thomas' wife, Ellen, died following a stillbirth, at the early age of 43, and the Celtic cross in Section M was erected to mark her grave initially. The family were very close to five female cousins, who are buried in adjacent plots. Strangely all were thought to have been marked by memorials, but only one of these remains. It was interesting, too, that some of these cousins were Anglicans but, being unmarried, had to share graves with family members in the Nonconformist area of the Cemetery.

Thomas' early working life was spent in London as an artist (predominately in demand for portraiture) and as a journalist for *The Graphic*, which, unusually for the time, employed artists, rather than draughtsmen, to etch the printing blocks that illustrated articles. Thomas was a skilled reporter and his notebooks combined sketches and the report stories. One of his early illustrated reports was of the Risca Mining Disaster.

But he later returned to Cardiff, where the area and Welsh life were more to his liking and he had greater freedom to pursue his wide ranging interests. Examples of these wider interests included discovering and documenting dinosaur footprints at Newton Nottage, reporting on the British Association meeting, in Montreal, visiting volcanoes in Italy with the Geologists Society, staying on Grassholm with the Cardiff Naturalists and being the first Herald Bard of the Gorsedd. In his role with the Gorsedd, he was responsible for changes to regalia and ceremonial to the form that is largely in place today.

He was much involved in discussions about changes to the Royal Standard, when he pressed to get the Welsh dragon included. While he was unsuccessful in this, he did succeed in getting a dragon on the Prince of Wales' badge and into the Cardiff Coat of Arms, while he deserves much of the credit for

the adoption of the dragon flag as the symbol of Welsh identity.

Thomas was heavily involved in the development of the Cardiff Museum, which was housed in what we know as the Old Library. He also collected and donated many of the items in its collection. When the Welsh National Museum was opened in Cathays Park, much of its early collection consisted of the items transferred to it from the Cardiff Museum. Thomas' support for and contribution to the National Museum is commemorated by the bust of him (sculpted by Goscombe John) in the museum. It is interesting that he got a mention in the recent exhibition of the works of another polymath, Leonardo da Vinci.

A good sized audience enjoyed this excellent lecture, especially as it focused on one of our cemetery residents.

Walk

On **Easter Sunday, April 21st**, Roger Swan of Bereavement Services led their **Cemetery Heritage Walk**. Despite the call of the beach, in the glorious weather, about 20 people enjoyed this introduction to Cathays Cemetery and some of its residents.

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

We've had a full complement of workdays, although, for the middle one, at the tail end of Storm Hannah, and the last one, on a Bank Holiday weekend, our numbers were down. Despite this, we have cleared more unwanted growth in Sections N and Q and along the Allensbank Road boundary, tidied up the area around the chapels and undertaken that most essential of jobs at the First World War CWGC plot, in the New Cemetery - the sowing of poppy seeds. Let's hope the weather is kinder to our objectives than it was last year!

In parallel with these traditional workday tasks, the recording of memorial inscriptions has continued well. But this is an enormous task and

we don't want to give the impression that more volunteers wouldn't be welcome.

Everyone is welcome on these days and you can work at your own pace. We **meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. Tools and gloves or materials for recording memorial inscriptions are provided. If you fancy an hour or two in friendly company, why not give it a try? Put the last Saturday of the month in your diary: the next dates are **29th June, 27th July and 28th September**. Note that there will not be a workday in August, because of holidays.

Weekly Health Walks

All are welcome on these walks, which start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. Our leisurely walks take place regardless of the weather and last for about an hour. They are social occasions and include anecdotes related to the Cemetery and discussion of the flora and fauna that presents itself. The appearance of the Cemetery changes with the seasons, so there is always something new to see and talk about. At the end of the walk, we adjourn to a local hostelry for a chat over tea or coffee.



Happy health walkers

Future Events

Walks

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

Friends EVENTS

On successive **Tuesdays June 4th and 11th**, at **7 pm**, the combined resources of **Bereavement Services, A48 Theatre Company Ltd** and writers from **Living Lines** present **Cathays Cemetery Heritage Walk: Trails & Tales**. We are pleased to announce that an additional date has been added - **Sunday June 9th at 2 pm**. Hear the remarkable history of Cathays Cemetery, with actors bringing this unique site to life through presentations of stories about those buried in it. These 'graveyard voices' span from the Victorian era well into the 20th century and range from the rich, heroic or esteemed to the profoundly tragic and emblematic. This year's performances will include several new works. To help defray the incidental expenses of the groups, there will be a £5 entry charge.

On **Tuesday June 25th at 7 pm**, **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 will provide a diverse array of anecdotes, ranging from the humorous to the tragic.

Open Doors Event

On **Sunday September 15th**, the **restored chapels will be opened to the public from 11 am to 4 pm**. In addition, at **11 am**, **Roger Swan** of Bereavement Services will lead a **short guided walk**. This is an excellent opportunity to learn more about this interesting Cemetery and to see how the restoration of the chapels has progressed over the last ten years or so. There will be plenty of people on hand to answer any questions you may have.

Epitaph

This is the 18C epitaph of Martin Elphinstone

Here lieth Martin Elphinstone

Who with his sword did cut in sunder

The daughter of Sir Harry Crispe

who did his daughter marry.

She was fat and fulsome,

But men will sometimes

Eat bacon with their beans

And love the fat as well as lean.

Publications

Books (about 100 pages, full colour):

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

The books are also available by post, with an additional shipping cost of £3: in the UK, 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

Themed guides (Booklets): at £1.00 each

Five Legs
Restoring the Chapels
Turners & Other Builders
Murders
Builders & Architects
Tragedy at Sea
WW1 Soldiers

Themed Guides are available at all our Events.

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