

Turning the Corner?

Many of our long-haired readers will have had a Covid vaccination, or even two, or will have an appointment to receive one. The graphs that appear on the news every day are looking more optimistic so, hopefully, we are turning the corner on the route back to normality. But it has always been the case that you can turn a corner in the Cemetery and be greeted by a pleasant sight.

Maybe it's the ice diamonds in the grass when the dew has frozen ...



... or the Christmas themed remembrances that appear on graves over the festive period ...



... or the leafless trees providing a long view to the chapels from the south-west ...



... and you may not have noticed the dark tunnel on the path between Sections Q and R before...



Of course it is the time of year when we can enjoy the usual Spring flowers, represented below by crocus and snowdrops.



Flowers on the ground are soon followed by those on the trees, with the first, wild plum blossom, usually starting the display in February.



Turning the corner may also lead to some of the Cemetery fauna - perhaps a squirrel enjoying a

Friends TOPICAL

snack or a magpie keeping watch for his gang scavenging on the ground (or, maybe, it was just enjoying a perch in the sun).



Winter Miscellany

Could the Cemetery also be a sculpture park? Already some readers are thinking that this would be disrespectful, but some of the memorials are meritorious sculptures in their own right. Also, art in the landscape is quite common now, in parks, woodland or around town. So why not commission some for cemeteries? In Cathays, there could be at least one there already - the chunky stump in the corner of section Q becomes a natural sculpture ... in appropriate light and from the right angle.



This has been a testing period for Bereavement Services and the contributions to maintenance by the Community Payback team have been reduced by the pandemic restrictions. The Conservation Areas have suffered most and are starting to look distinctly overgrown in places. However, the in-house maintenance staff have done sterling work across the rest of the

Cemetery, clearing fallen tree debris, of which there has been a lot, due to a succession of named storms. Regular visitors to the Cemetery, will have watched their progress, marked by the movement of temporary piles or full builders bags across the area. Much of the tree debris is suitable for shredding, to become a valuable mulch.

At one point in this process, someone saw the potential for some opportunistic den building. The example pictured below was spotted in Section K, under the magnolia that would be bursting into bloom in just a few short weeks.



John Aubery Owen

The memorials in Cathays Cemetery are many and varied. There are urns and obelisks, broken columns, angels, and crosses galore. However there is only one cross draped with a sword and sword belt, grave number S509A. The hilt of the sword has now gone but the sword belt, baldric is the correct term, is still there, carved delicately in marble. The cross rests on three tiers of marble, although only two are visible now, and there were kerb stones surrounding the plot, with perfect spheres of marble at the foot. These have vanished; either sunk in the intervening century, or removed during the 1960's to make mowing easier.



Memorial to John Aubrey Owen

The grave is that of Lieutenant John Aubrey Owen RNR, who as the grave inscription states, was accidentally killed on board his ship at Stornoway, 27th October 1917, aged 39 years.

John was born on 12th June 1878 to Selina and Frank Owen at 14 Park Street in Cardiff city centre. At the time of the 1881 census the family was living at 9 Crwys Road, now a hair and beauty salon.

He joined the merchant navy as a boy sailor at the tender age of 16, working on the four masted ships sailing out of Cardiff docks. He soon progressed, gaining his First Mate's and then his Master's certificates.

In December 1905, John married Gwendoline Mary Morris, the daughter of a Congregational minister from Glynneath. They settled in Cwmgwrach, in the upper Neath Valley and had two sons.

John served in the Royal Naval Reserve during the First World War, and was made a temporary lieutenant in February 1917. Tragically he died from a fractured skull on 27th October 1917, after falling from the upper deck of his vessel into the stoke hold, while the ship was docked in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides.

There is some confusion over which vessel he was serving on at the time of his death, there are two candidates, the John Pollard and the Iolaire, both with interesting stories attached.

The H M Trawler John Pollard was one of 145 Castle class trawlers built for the Admiralty for war service. All 145 were named after crew members of Nelson's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar. The sailor John Pollard was a Royal Naval officer who served as a midshipman on Nelson's flagship Victory and he is credited with being the man who killed the French sniper who fired the shot that mortally wounded Nelson. Pollard himself survived the Battle of Trafalgar, married, had six children, and died at the ripe old age of 81.

The yacht Iolaire was hired by the Royal Navy for war service in March 1915. She survived the war but came to a tragic end. On the evening of 31st December 1918 the Iolaire set sail from Kyle of Lochalsh carrying sailors who had served in the war back home to Stornoway. Sea conditions were not the best and it has been suggested that the crew were drunk and keen to reach Stornoway in time to celebrate the New Year. Whatever the truth of it, and within sight of the lights of Stornoway, the Iolaire hit the infamous Beasts of Holm rocks and sank. Of the 283 passengers, only 82 survived. It was the greatest peacetime disaster involving a British ship since the Titanic in 1912.

Jean Sanford

Friends FEATURES

The Caerphilly Mountain Spitfire Memorial

Ivan Raymond Trafford was born at East Centreville, New Brunswick, on 11 April 1921, the son of farmers, Clinton and Gladys. He was educated in Florenceville before studying forestry engineering at the University of Brunswick, where he joined the officer training corps, gaining qualifications to be a second lieutenant in the heavy artillery. In October 1940, he interrupted his studies to join the Royal Canadian Air Force. After training in Dunnville, Ontario, he came to the UK and was sent to the RAF's 53rd Operational Training Squadron at Llandow.

On 15 October, Ivan damaged a Spitfire after approaching the Llandow runway too high. At this time, he had only accumulated about 90 minutes of flying time in Spitfires, although he had flown 91 hours solo on all types of aircraft. In good weather on 7 November 1941, he began a one-hour training flight in a Supermarine Spitfire, consisting of 45 minutes formation flying followed by 15 minutes individual aerobatics. Visibility had deteriorated significantly when, at 12.50pm, he crashed onto Cefncarnau, just south of Caerphilly Mountain. The official investigation concluded that he had climbed steeply after low flying and stalled at the top of the climb. The aircraft spun and fell to the ground, bursting into flames on impact.

Perhaps Ivan had a premonition of this tragic event for, in his last letter home, penned in October 1941, he wrote: "If I must pay the big price it will be OK. I will be happy and feel highly honoured to know that I, just one fifth of the family, was the one chosen, and that I was ready and capable of paying the necessary price for the guarantee of the other four fifths of the family's future freedom and happiness."

Ivan's body was taken initially to Caerphilly Miners' Hospital, but he was buried, with full military honours, in Llantwit Major, where his

grave is marked by a CWGC headstone. The wreckage of the plane was quickly removed and official news of the crash was suppressed due to wartime censorship. However, local people, including some schoolchildren in Caerphilly, witnessed the crash and, inevitably, everyone locally knew about it in the next few days.

In 2010, Harry Lewis, who was a boy at the time of the crash, recruited his history teacher friend at St Martin's School, Matthew Ferris, to find out more about the accident. The preceding details owe much to their efforts. They also pledged to erect a memorial in Sgt Pilot Trafford's honour. Sadly, Harry Lewis died later in 2010, but not before Mr Ferris promised that he would complete the task. Thanks to donations from local people, the memorial, which features a replica Spitfire propeller donated by GE Aviation, was dedicated on 6th November 2015.



Memorial to Sgt Pilot Trafford

The memorial is by a disused fairway of Caerphilly Golf Club, on the flank of Caerphilly Mountain. It is a little to the north of the crash site, but on the fatal flight path. It is most easily reached from Watford Road, near the junction of Waunwaelod Road: only about 300m, but the path is quite steep and can be muddy.

Gordon Hindess

A Year of Lockdown in Cathays Cemetery

Well what a year it's been!

Among the thousands of events that have been cancelled during the pandemic were the Friends' guided cemetery walks and the weekly health walks. Not a huge loss in the grand scheme of things, when we could not meet up with friends or family, and the pubs were closed, but those who joined the walks in previous years will have missed the interesting tales of the great, the good, and the not so good of Cardiff's past, and the changing seasons in the Cemetery. I was luckier than most, living within a few minutes walk of Cathays Cemetery I was able to take much of my lockdown exercise there.

Spring brought snowdrops, primroses, crocus, and a Red Admiral butterfly which incidentally has a beautiful Latin name - *Vanessa atalanta*.



A buzzard, not a common Cemetery visitor, was spotted behind the chapels, but did not allow close enough access for a decent photograph. In late summer a crow was seen attacking a slowworm, but this unusual sight eluded the camera lens.

The Cemetery weathered a couple of named storms, one of which brought down a huge conifer branch in Section C. Fortunately it missed the Rosminians memorial, and caused no damage. The team of gardeners from Bereavement Services soon removed the evidence.

Due to social distancing the Payback team have not been able to do much this year, but the team of gardeners mentioned above has been very busy clearing brambles and deadwood in several areas, most noticeably Section K. What interesting stories might the newly revealed memorials have in store for us?

Throughout the year fresh flowers regularly appeared on the grave of the 'Balloon Girl' Louisa Maud Evans, who plunged to her death in the Bristol Channel in July 1896.



A beech tree in section H came down in a storm a couple of years ago. The gaping hole where the roots had been has now been reclaimed by brambles and bindweed, providing a new nesting site for robins and wrens.

The giant hydrangea in section L behind the chapels put on a beautiful show of pink and purple.



The Autumn colours were glorious this year. There was a good crop of Yew and Holly berries for our feathered friends, also blackberries and wild strawberries for the human visitors.

Friends FEATURES

Throughout the year there were plenty of blackbirds, robins, jays, blue and great tits, and the usual suspects; crows, gulls, and wood pigeons. The number of magpies seems to double every year! The green woodpeckers were heard far more often than they were seen. Autumn and winter brought redwing, fieldfare and mistle thrush to feast on the berries.



By February, a year into the pandemic, a light dusting of snow covered the ground ...



... but, as always, nature triumphs, and crocus and primroses have sprung up again, hopefully a promise of better times to come.



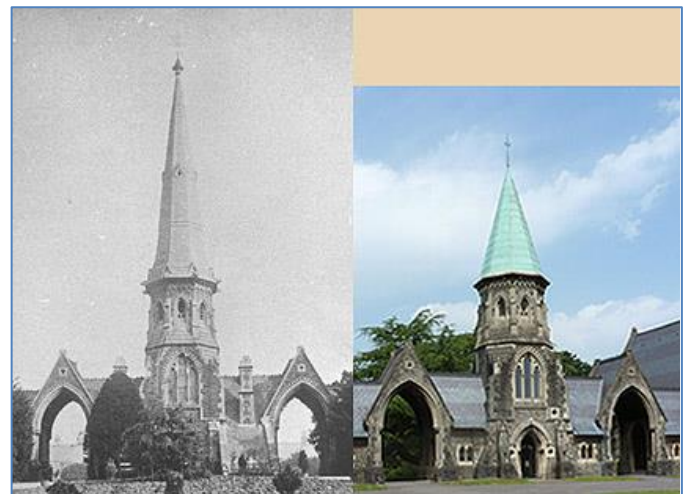
Jean Sanford

The Vestries at Cathays Cemetery

At the AGM in January 2020, it was reported that the work on the vestries had been completed and Bereavement Services undertook to look into the possibility of a visit to see the results. Unfortunately, Covid19 had other ideas!

The two Victorian vestries are incorporated within the central bell tower of the chapels at Cathays Cemetery. Each vestry served the adjacent chapel, so that on the left (as viewed from the Fair oak Road side) was used by the nonconformist ministers, while that on the right accommodated the Anglican clergy. They are separated by a central passage, which acts like a tunnel under the bell tower.

The spire on the bell tower suffered damage during the Second World War and was repaired with a shorter version. The images below are to a similar scale, with the black and white print dating from the early 1900s. The coloured photograph shows the building today. The difference in the height of the spires is clear.



Note that the century old view is from the back, before the roundabout was occupied by the mature Cedar of Lebanon. This tree means that matching the view today is not possible, hence the coloured picture is a front view.

The vestries fell out of use during the 1970s. They were boarded up and remained inaccessible until the major refurbishment work started on the chapels. Like any building

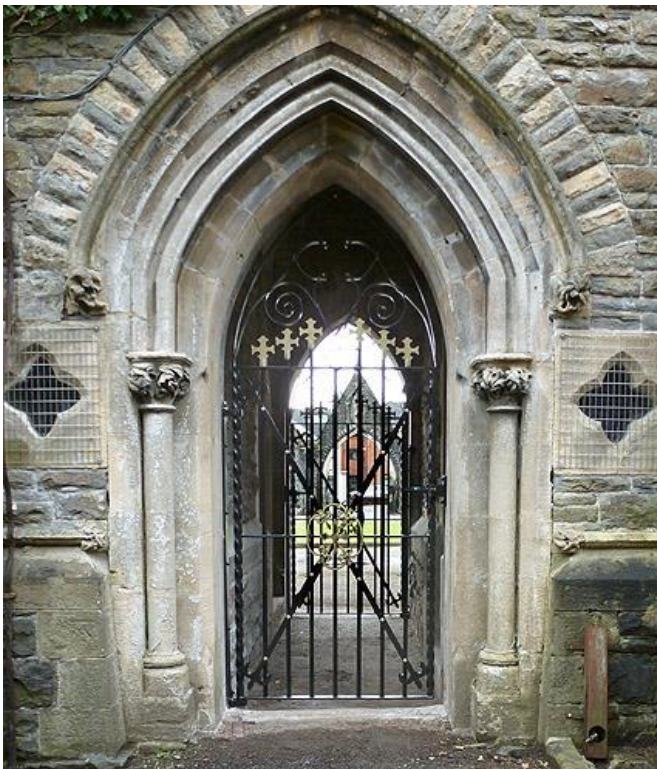
unoccupied and uncared for 40-50 years, the vestries and bell tower deteriorated.

Following the completion of the restoration work to the chapels, attention turned to the building complex between them. About four years ago, with polycarbonate glazing, the building was made weatherproof and accumulated debris cleared out. The central passage under the bell tower was reopened and a pair of gates was designed and fabricated by an engineering company. This both provided security and enhanced the appearance of this part of the building. At the same time, new doors were made and hung on both sides of each of the vestries to allow proper access to them.



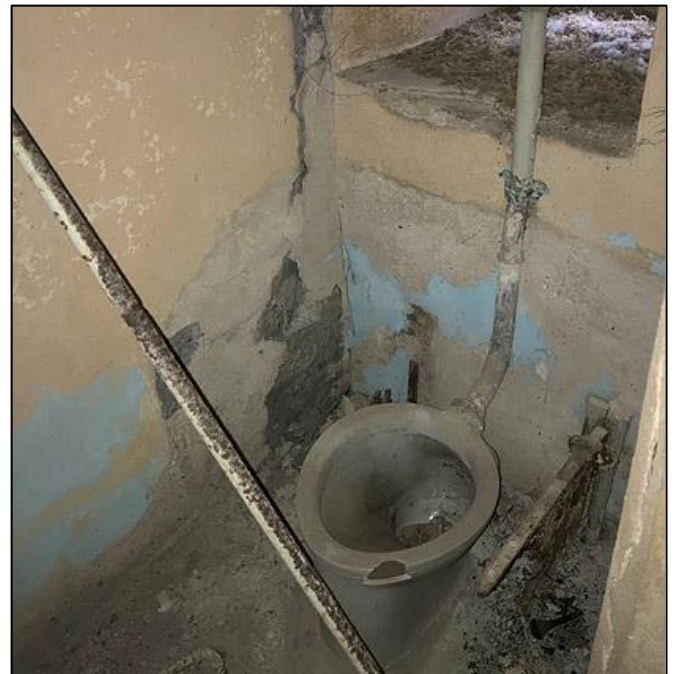
View from first floor of bell tower

Internally, the vestries are quite different in shape. There was no electrical supply and each originally had a flushable toilet, although only one was still in place but long "out of order". This is pictured below.



Gate to bell tower passage

For the first time in many years, it was possible to explore the bell tower and assess its condition. Access up the bell tower is via a narrow spiral staircase from the left hand vestry. Health and safety considerations might make it difficult to allow general public access up this staircase to the first floor room, which is bigger than either of the vestries and, on a sunny day, would be a lovely spot for elevenses.



Both vestries had fireplaces and old pictures show a low outbuilding with a sloping roof, attached to the rear of the left hand vestry, which is thought to have been a coal bunker. You may be able to make this out in the black and white image which appears earlier in this article. Easier to see is the chimney which served the fireplace in the nonconformist

Friends FEATURES

vestry. Both the bunker and the chimney had been removed at some stage. Bricks had been used to reinstate the internal face of the walls and to seal the fireplace. This work had been plastered over and, at some stage, the walls had been painted blue. There was no sign of brickwork in the right hand vestry, but the stone work had been plastered over and, also, painted blue.

Despite the years of neglect and thanks to the roof being sound, both vestries showed no sign of damp, although much of the plaster had blown and had fallen off onto the floor. There were no ceilings, so the rafters were exposed, while both floors appeared to be in a reasonable condition with only a few broken tiles.

Architectural Stone were commissioned to undertake the renovation work required to return the vestries to use, with the objective that they would serve as an office facility and as an ancillary during weddings and funeral services. The work was then carried out in 2019 at a total cost of £24,318 + VAT, which was paid for from donations received.

The following work was undertaken:

In tunnel under bell tower

Wood framed, wire mesh covers were made and fitted into the existing vestry ventilation openings, to keep birds out.

Left hand vestry

Shortly after work commenced, it was noticed that the main floor area sounded hollow. Investigation by lifting the floor revealed a void about four feet deep which had to be filled and compacted. Most of the floor tiles were broken in this process and they were replaced with especially made new ones using the original patterns.

A wooden lintel above one door way was found to be rotten so was replaced with a new stone one, while loose stone work around this lintel was consolidated and repaired. Another lintel needed a "stitch repair" to an external crack in

the Bath stone. Stone work around the fireplace was cleaned and retained as a feature in an otherwise plain wall.

All defective plaster was removed from the walls and the underlying brick and masonry checked and repaired. A rotten window sill and rotten skirting boards were replaced. A new electricity supply was provided, with a double socket and light fittings and a new false ceiling installed at existing coving level with insulation above. A bespoke door was fitted at the bottom of the staircase up into the bell tower.

Finally, all walls were re-plastered and the room decorated. The end result is pictured below (it should be noted that the vestries are small rooms, so it is difficult photograph them).



Right hand vestry

The old toilet and pipe work were removed. It must have seen a lot of use, as the adjacent floor had sunk and needed levelling. The defective plaster was removed, the stonework cleaned and the joints re-pointed with lime mortar, leaving the exposed masonry to be appreciated once more.

The dressed stone around the fire place was cleaned and the fireplace cleaned out. The floor tiles were cleaned and minor repairs carried out.

As in the other vestry, a rotten window sill and rotten skirting boards were replaced. A new electricity supply was provided, with a double socket and light fittings and a new false ceiling installed at existing coving level with insulation above. The end result is pictured overleaf.



Recent Events

AGM

There's a first time for everything ... including an online AGM! It is regretted that this meant that some who would normally have attended, but lacked the necessary technology, were excluded. However, there were others who clearly found the arrangement more convenient and some new faces were seen. In the event, numbers were only slightly down on the previous years' average while, crucially, well above the quorum required by the constitution.

The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. A few apologies for absence were taken. The minutes of last year's AGM were accepted and there were no matters arising. The Chairman's report had been sent out with the meeting invitation so was taken as read.

The Treasurer presented his report on 2020. Not surprisingly there were no unusual items to draw attention to. Income from things like book and booklet sales and door takings at lectures were down, but generally offset by lower outgoings: both the affects of a year of minimal activity. The Statement of Accounts was unanimously accepted by the meeting.

There was no competition for officer or member posts on the Trustees, all nominees were duly nominated and seconded and 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), Des Sanford and Ian Campbell

Carmel Thomas gave an update on behalf of Bereavement Services, noting that the year had not been a complete washout. The Green Flag and Green Heritage Award had been gained for another year and the annual Remembrance Service had been held successfully, within the rules for countering the pandemic. While resuming activities in the Cemetery remained dependent upon relaxation of the current restrictions, protocols were now in place that would facilitate controlled reopening.

After a small number of questions, discussion and other business, the meeting closed at 10.30 am. This was only 10 minutes earlier than last year, which is not surprising considering the limitation on activities during the year and that the Chairman's Report had been circulated in advance rather than presented at the meeting.

It seems appropriate to congratulate the committee, and particularly John Farnhill and Paul Nicholson, for successfully organising this AGM. Perhaps this is a sign of things to come ... but maybe it would be nice to get back to the "old fashioned arrangements" again next year?

Future Events

Zoom Lecture

As the Covid-19 restrictions continue, the first lecture of the year will be presented online using Zoom, on **Tuesday April 27th, at 7 pm**. This will be an illustrated talk kindly agreed to be given by **Dr Ahmed** on the "**The Muslim Community in Wales**". This talk was originally scheduled for 2020, but had to be postponed because of the pandemic. To join the meeting, please apply by email to

cathayscemetery@gmail.com by 13th April 2021, to receive the necessary link and joining instructions. It is appreciated that not all

Friends EVENTS

members will have the facilities to join an online meeting, but we feel that it is important to get some sort of event programme going again.

Events Schedule 2021

A tentative programme of events for this year was distributed with the AGM papers and is available on the Friends' website, but it is still subject to the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions. At the time of writing, we can confirm that there will **NOT** be a workday in March. The programme shows the following in the next few months, but only Dr Ahmed's talk can be confirmed at present:

Sunday April 25th - Heritage Walk, 11am, Cathays Cemetery, led by Bereavement Services

Tuesday April 27th - Illustrated Talk, 7pm, by Dr Ahmed - "The Muslim Community in Wales"

Tuesday May 18th - Illustrated Talk, 7pm, by Richard Frame - "St Woolos Cemetery Newport"

Tuesday June 22nd - Midsummer Walk, 7pm, Cathays Cemetery, led by the Friends of Cathays Cemetery

Health Walks and Workdays remain suspended, but it is hoped that it won't be too long before they can resume. While the situation looks a little more optimistic, it remains essential to ...

CHECK WITH THE FRIEND'S WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA SITES FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION

Publications

Books (about 100 pages, full colour) - £5:

Cathays Cemetery on its 150th Anniversary
Hidden Histories: Tales from Cathays Cemetery

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.

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

Epitaph

All Saints Church, Walesby, in the Lincolnshire Wolds is also known as the Ramblers Church. In the graveyard there is a headstone with the following inscription:

NAMELESS

BE SURE YOUR SINS

WILL FIND YOU OUT

It is not unusual for graves to be unmarked, but the people buried in them are generally recorded in records and known. There must be a story behind the erection of a memorial to someone who was unknown. But who knows the story?

And finally...

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

Contact the editorial team on 029 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