

## More Extreme Weather

It seems that hardly an issue of this newsletter passes without a mention of extreme weather - and this issue continues the pattern, with extreme heat warnings, record high temperatures and requests to conserve water. This does have an impact on the Cemetery, most obviously in the parched expanses of lawn, like that pictured below:



But, fortunately, there are many well-shaded areas in the Cemetery, where there is still plenty of green and, particularly if you are walking through, it is noticeably cooler in the heat of the day.

Of course, at the start of the summer, none of this was expected and we were quite surprised to see carpets of daisies on lesser used and unsurfaced paths (on right below) and swathes of buttercups (left below).



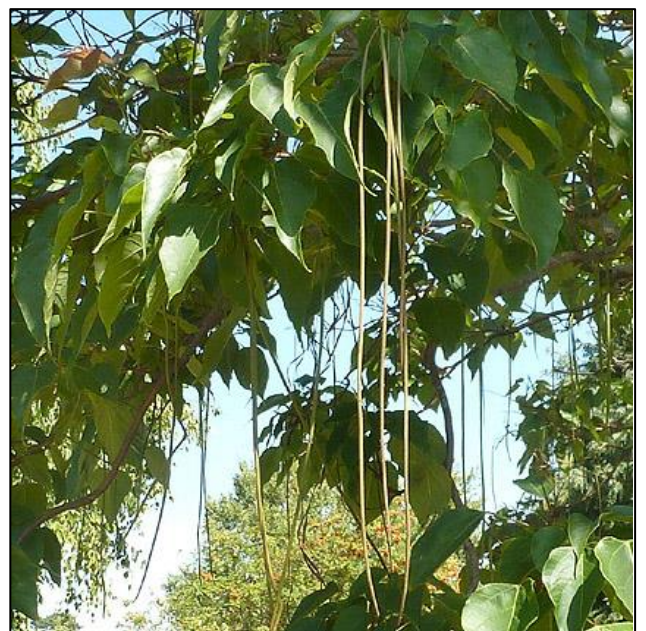
The daisies were found between Sections RA and X. Because of stretched resources, the buttercups bloomed in many of the lawned areas, where the mowing that usually cuts off

most of the flowers was delayed. Those pictured were in Section Y.

The Cemetery is surprisingly well blessed with roses though none are the result of official planting, and the best displays may be in different parts of the Cemetery each year. The example shown below was spotted in Section W.



The weather has obviously suited some plants - the farges catalpa (the Chinese bean tree) has produced some exceptionally long pods, very close to the maximum of 31 inches (according to the "Flora of China").



*Bean pods on farges catalpa*



## Friends TOPICAL

We had anticipated problems as a result of the late sowing in the wild flower garden and it seems that one plant, at least, thrived on the summer weather. At one point, it looked as if only this one plant - borage - had survived. Borage can grow to a height of about 3 feet and has bristly or hairy stems and leaves. The flowers have five triangular pointed petals, leading to its common name of starflower. Flowers are generally blue (see picture below), although pink and white varieties can also be found.



In the UK, its flowering season is relatively long, from June to September. Traditionally, borage was cultivated for culinary and medicinal uses, although today, commercial cultivation is mainly as an oilseed. As a fresh vegetable, borage, with a cucumber-like taste, is often used in salads or as a garnish. The flower has a sweet, honey-like taste and can be used to decorate desserts and cocktails, sometimes frozen into ice cubes.

One or two other flowers did eventually force their way through the borage, including viper's bugloss, another hairy plant with blue flowers. But these similarities with the borage in which it appeared should not lead to it being mistaken. It's funnel-shaped flowers are a much brighter blue, with distinctive purple stamens.



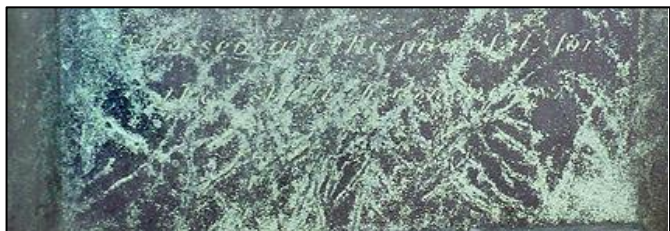
*Viper's bugloss*

It is more commonly found on chalk grassland and sand dunes - typically very dry in summer, much like the Cemetery has been this year. It is much loved by bees and butterflies. The 'viper' part of its name comes from its spotted stem, which is said to resemble a snake's markings, or from the snake's head shape of its flowers. 'Bugloss' comes from the Greek for ox's tongue, a reference to the rough, tongue-shaped leaves.

The sharp eyes of the Tuesday walkers are often responsible for our less common discoveries. Perhaps the best example of this from the last few months is the common emerald butterfly, pictured below (sorry, it's not the best image).



We always say that the Cemetery is not just a place for occasional visits. It is far better to call in frequently, if you can, because so much is seasonal or transitory, so there is always something new or different to see. As an example, how about this lichen on a headstone that could be a frost pattern on glass, although some may see it as a picture of grass or ferns ...



## **Summer Miscellany**

It is very satisfying when the Friends' activities generate a quick and interesting response. In our last issue, we reported on the rather belated erection of a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone on the grave of Leonard William Williams. Just a few weeks later, we received a phone call, then email, from his great nephew, in Crawley. In researching his family history, he had located the unmarked plot in Section S. Then returning to show his brother, had been surprised to find the new headstone. The ensuing exchanges provide much family information and we are grateful to Darren Williams for permission to share it. The following paragraphs are substantially his words.

*The plot also holds the graves of my great grandparents (Leonard's parents) Richard William and Mary Ann Williams, who both died later in the 1930's. My father, Leonard's nephew, is still alive aged 92 (93 in October!) and was named Leonard Charles after his late uncle.*

*Leonard William was the 4th of 6 children and was not married and had no children at the time of his death so my father, myself and 3 siblings together with 2 other cousins that I am in touch with are the living*

*relatives. Leonard William's sister was Gwendoline and her grave is very close by in Plot number S 319A.*

*We have pictures and I have the mounted 'death penny' memorial that was given to Leonard's parents after his death. It is also notable that he was from a very active sporting and military family with his brother Eddie (my grandfather), who also served in WW1 in the Royal Field Artillery and who was also the Powderhall sprint champion of Wales in 1921 and played football for Cardiff Corinthians (winning the Welsh Amateur cup in the season 1913/14). Leonard's nephew, Ivor Williams, played rugby for Cardiff RFC and toured as a British Lion (known then as the British Isles team) on their tour to South Africa in 1938.*

We are hopeful of another episode to this story, as the possibility of a rededication ceremony at Leonard's grave has been picked up, while Darren is continuing his investigations to pinpoint Leonard's sister's grave and any kerbing around the graves, which is thought to exist, but may have sunk into the ground with the passage of time.

There is mention above of the "death penny". This was the Memorial Plaque issued after the First World War to the next of kin of all British Empire service personnel who were killed as a result of the war. The 4.72 inches diameter plaques were cast in bronze and came to be known as the "Dead Man's Penny", because of the similarity in appearance to the much smaller penny coin. 1,355,000 plaques were issued, using a total of 450 tons of bronze, and they continued to be issued into the 1930s to commemorate people who died as a consequence of the war.

It is notable that, since the Friends have had a presence on social media, requests for talks and guided walks for groups have increased. We endeavour to respond positively to these, as spreading the news about the Cemetery is at



## Friends TOPICAL

the heart of what the Friends are all about. Since Covid rules have been relaxed, we have responded to about one of these requests each month. There is a snag, however: responding to these calls falls on a small number of already busy people and it would help to have a few more leaders/presenters to spread the load. If you would like to have a go, please get in touch. We can give you lots of help and guidance.

At a recent talk to Birchgrove WI, Judith Smith took away a copy of our booklet "Tragedy at Sea", which includes the story of James Radcliff and the sinking of HMS Glorious. (The story was also serialised in this Newsletter in 2019 over Issues 39 - 41.) Judith showed the story to her 96 year old father, Peter Welham, who had experience of HMS Devonshire, which features in the story. This prompted him to write the following:

### ***HMS Devonshire***

*In December of 1945 (at the age of 20), I and a number of my RAF colleagues were despatched to India. Having spent a year or more training to be aircrew, why we were being sent to India was a mystery. In addition, we were to travel not in a merchant naval vessel but none other than in the heavy cruiser HMS Devonshire. We sailed out from Devonport a week before Christmas and met heavy weather in the Bay of Biscay and thence, via the Med and Suez Canal, into the Red Sea spending Christmas Day trying to keep cool.*

*Technically, we RAF passengers were considered a "part of ship", i.e. as sailors. As such we were entitled to a daily tot of rum! This privilege was soon revoked when some of my colleagues were found "the worse for wear".*

*I was allocated to the Gunners Mess where we ate and slept, using hammocks. The Gunners were a friendly lot and in discussion we eventually came round to their role in the*

*HMS Glorious incident in 1940. Their version was that in addition to the Norwegian King and his entourage, the Devonshire was also carrying the Norwegian gold reserve, which was more important than altering course to pick up survivors of Glorious. Whilst it is over 70 years since I sailed in the Devonshire I remember quite clearly the Gunners speaking about the gold"*

*Peter Welham (ex Sgt RAF)*

Towards the end of July, we were contacted by Maurice Lake, Port Chaplain at the Lighthouse Seafarers Mission in Stanley, Falkland Islands. For years, he had been researching information on a Lancaster which crashed on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1942, shortly after take-off for a 300 bomber raid over Germany, resulting in the death all of the crew of seven, including his uncle, the rear gunner.

Earlier in the year, whilst visiting RAF Metherringham, Lincolnshire, he found out where all the crew were buried. (Metherringham Airfield was operational between November 1943 and the Spring of 1946, home to 106 Sqn RAF. Part of the communal area of the airfield is now a museum.) Five of the crew are buried at Coningsby Cemetery, Lincolnshire, one (Maurice's uncle) in his home town of Felixstowe and the final crew member is buried in Cathays Cemetery.

Maurice hatched the plan to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fatal crash by placing a single red rose on each of the graves at 11.00 am, so that all seven of the brave crewmen were remembered as one. But the 26<sup>th</sup> was less than a week away and it was at the height of the holiday season. Special thanks are due to John Farnhill and Ivor Lippett, who not only made sure that Sgt Leonard Young in the New Cemetery got his red rose on time but, with the aid of the Tuesday walkers, ensured that it was witnessed and undertaken with appropriate dignity. Sgt Young's body had been returned to his home town, where his parents were living in

Tewkesbury St, coincidentally, just two doors away from a young Stan Stennett.

The simultaneous placing of the red roses was successfully carried out, as indicated in the images below. The top picture shows the five graves at Coningsby, while the second composite picture has the Felixstowe memorial on the left and our own on the right. Note that all except the one at Cathays is a CWGC headstone, while Sgt Young's name is included on a family memorial. From the inscription, we can see that Sgt Young was 20 when he died and that he was joined by his father, Herbert, in 1951 and his mother, Matilda, in 1966.



It was very gratifying to see the John Henry Harding memorial unveiling ceremony, in November last year, making the front page of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends' Summer 2022 Newsletter. This newsletter usually contains something of interest to a wider audience. For example and coincidentally, the latest issue included a short article about a death penny finding its way back into a family.

It also records the return of National Cemeteries Week, after a 2-year Covid break, with some twenty Friends groups participating.

The NCFCF also picked up on the Queen's Speech on 9th May, which included a 'Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill'. You might wonder what this has to do with us, but it affects Listed Buildings and sites on Historic England's Parks and Gardens Register (Cadw maintains a similar register for Wales). Some cemeteries have been registered as a Park and Garden and the new Bill, if passed, would introduce statutory parity for those registered sites. This would have implications for the desirability of preserving or enhancing a heritage asset or its setting and there would be extended duties on the owners of existing listed buildings. There would also be extra controls and criteria to consider if a registered site was considering, for example, grave re-use.

Before leaving the NCFCF, it is worth mentioning their handbook 'Saving Cemeteries'. First published in 1988, it has been updated several times and is now into its sixth edition. Copies of the book are available from the NCFCF Treasurer, retail price £10 or £7 to members.

There are a wealth of stories to be unearthed in the Cemetery: usually, it is a factual account of someone's life, but we also see the fictionalised sketches woven around the historical facts (as in the Graveyard Voices productions) and we have ourselves featured short fictional stories inspired by the location. But we now have a full length book inspired by our Balloon Girl, Louisa Maud Evans.

"The Aerialists" is written by Katie Munnik, a Canadian who is based in Cardiff. While a work of fiction, it weaves around real people, places and events, so you will recognise the Gaudrons, Cardiff and the 1896 Exhibition. Indeed the background has been carefully researched to create a real setting. Not surprisingly in a book written today, it reflects the growing role and ambition of women towards the end of the



## Friends FEATURES

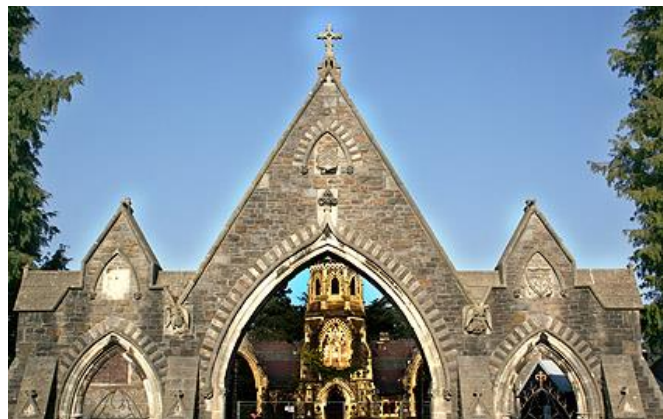
Victorian period.

It seems that we must continue to expect innovations in the funerary experience. If Abba can come back in holographic form, why can't the dead? This summer saw the first application in the UK of a system that allowed the deceased to appear at her own funeral, deliver a short speech and respond to questions from those attending the service.

Marina Smith died in June, aged 87, but, in January, spent several hours on a personal computer, using a webcam, discussing her life. Her tech minded son, Stephen, used an AI-powered video platform called StoryFile to create the question answering digital version of his mother. His mother made her own choice of topic areas which she thought her loved ones might want answers to ... and, apparently made some surprising choices, particularly about her early life, which she hadn't previously talked about to her family.

The digital version could be bought for as little as £40, allowing a choice of up to 75 questions, with two minute answers, and unlimited conversations. William Shatner has recorded information about Star Trek for use after his death and more than 70 StoryFile versions of individuals in Ukraine have been created. But are Bereavement Services ready for this?

Following a great deal of discussion, the Friends have agreed to fund a full restoration of the main entrance off Fair Oak Road. This arched structure dates from the opening of the Cemetery and is listed. More importantly, it is regarded as one of the finest examples of its kind in the UK. One of the shields on the outside face disappeared many years ago, vegetation is growing in some cracks and there are a variety of cracks, chips and pointing problems. All of these defects will be attended to and the whole structure will be cleaned.



*Cemetery main entrance: note missing shield on left side*

### **The Other Hero**

Chapter 16 of our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book tells of the tragic death of John Davies, while attempting to rescue a fellow scout. In the second issue of this newsletter, back in 2010, we were lucky to catch up with the boy he saved, Michael Glossop, who was on a short visit to Wales from his home in Australia. But there was to be a second postscript to the story, as a result of a fortuitous glance at an obituary in a national paper, at the end of last year. In the same incident, there was a second young hero, fourteen year old Margaret Vaughan, and this is her story.

On Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May 1949, Margaret was relaxing with some friends on the beach at Sully, when she noticed that a party of Scouts, aged between 11 and 15, had become cut off by the swiftly rising tide. Most got safely across the causeway that links Sully Island to the mainland, but two of the boys were forced off by the strong tide. The 18 year old leader of the Scout party, Tony Rees, returned to help the elder boy, Richard Wiggins, 13, but in the struggle he too became exhausted.

Watching from the beach, Margaret saw the difficulties the party were in. Although earlier she had found the water too chilly for a swim, she undressed and struck out towards them, covering some 30 yards in cold, rough water and against the strong currents of the rising tide. She towed the boy to the shore while he

supported himself by clinging to the straps of her costume and Tony Rees's coat. When they were about 10 feet from the shore a lifebelt was thrown. The boy was placed in it by the other two and the three reached the shore safely.

According to the citation in the London Gazette, Margaret Vaughan's action probably saved the life of the Scout leader as well as that of Richard Wiggins. Her citation recorded that there was no doubt that in returning to his friend's aid after reaching safety himself, John Davies gave his own life. A newspaper report the following day noted that Margaret was "a strong swimmer" and a member of two Cardiff swimming clubs.

The only daughter of a policeman, Margaret Vaughan was born on 25<sup>th</sup> November 1934 in Tremorfa. She won a scholarship to Penarth County Grammar School for Girls and, in 1948, learnt to swim while staying at a holiday camp on Hayling Island. The following year, on holiday at Gilwern, she had had an operation to remove her appendix, and at the weekend before returning to school cycled to Sully with friends.

Having rescued the scouts, Margaret had intended to return home on her bike but, with the police involved as a result of the fatality, someone who recognised her from church had circulated her name. By the Monday morning, she was front page news, and people sent her letters of congratulation, some containing money.

At the investiture at Buckingham Palace, Margaret was placed in the care of an officer in RAF uniform. It was Gp Capt Peter Townsend, later to achieve fame for his association with Princess Margaret. Dressed in her school uniform, she was told not to look directly into the face of the King as he invested her with the Albert Medal, on account of his speech impediment. Later, her parents took her for supper in Soho, and the following morning she discovered that the papers had all mentioned her white ankle socks!

Margaret had hoped to go to university but financial constraints led her into nursing. She trained at Oldchurch Hospital in Romford, qualifying in 1951, then specialised in midwifery. In 1957, she was commissioned into the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, with the rank of lieutenant, and posted to the Cambridge Hospital, Aldershot. Further postings took her to Mauritius, Kenya, Catterick and, finally, Hanover in Germany, where she met Capt John Purves of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. They married at Llandaff Cathedral, Cardiff, in 1961, six months to the day after their first meeting.

Her husband's postings took her around the world, happily keeping busy with a variety of jobs - nursing in Singapore, card-punching for the Inland Revenue in Ottawa, serving as deputy editor of the REME house magazine, Craftsman. Back in Germany in 1977, she became sister in charge of the medical centre at Minden garrison. She also worked at Cheltenham General Hospital as night sister in charge of the intensive care unit. In 1981, following her husband's final posting, to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Brussels, she became secretary to the chaplain.

Margaret was a founder member of the Albert Medal Association and of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association, regularly attending their reunions. For her life-saving achievement in 1949 she was also awarded the Royal Humane Society's certificate and that of the Carnegie Hero Fund Trust.

Although only 14 when she was awarded what became her George Cross, Margaret Vaughan was not the youngest female to be so honoured. In 1916, aged 11, Doreen Ashburnham had used her bare hands to fight off a Canadian-cougar which had attacked her eight-year-old cousin, Anthony Fairer. In the same incident, Fairer was credited with saving Doreen's life when the cougar turned on her, so became the youngest-ever Albert Medal recipient. The cougar was subsequently tracked, shot, and stuffed.

## Friends FEATURES

In 1983, after 29 service moves, Margaret Purves and her husband settled at Bradford on Avon, where she became chairman of the local Conservative Association and served on the town and county councils until 1989. Following the signing of the Maastricht treaty in 1996, she joined the Referendum Party, led by James Goldsmith. She stood in the general election for North Wiltshire in 1997 but lost to the Conservatives. From 2006 she had been a member of the Freedom Association, campaigning against the over-governance of Britain.

Her husband died in 2007. Margaret died on 12th September 2021, aged 86. She is survived by a son and two daughters.

### *Dictionary Corner - Immortelle*

Recent communications had us reaching for our dictionaries and searching the internet for advice. The outcome of this research is shared below.

The most common *immortelle* (from the French word for everlasting) would consist of ceramic flowers arranged as a realistic display. They were placed on graves as a token of mourning. But they were also there to catch the eyes of visitors, so that they might pause at a grave and think about the person buried there. Of course, visiting a cemetery was once a very normal pastime and garden cemeteries, like Cathays, were specifically designed for this leisure activity.

*Immortelles* were most common in the Victorian and Edwardian periods although some appear to be as recent as the 1950s. Real flowers were expensive and likely to die quickly ... and there were no plastic ones! The production of fake flowers became a significant funeral ancillary business. They were usually made of china or plaster and hand-painted to look realistic.

The constituents of an *immortelle* were not restricted to flowers. Other common items

would be leaves, a pair of clasped hands or a dove, made of white unglazed porcelain. Many included a plaque, perhaps in the form of an open book, with a message on it, either inscribed or written by hand. Over time, the hand-written messages could fade completely.

Metallic leaves, sometimes coloured, might be arranged around the base, possibly with both a decorative purpose and also making the whole more robust. The majority of *immortelles* were fitted under a hemispherical glass dome, typically about 30cms in diameter, with a metal band around the base. In turn, the glass dome might be protected by a wire cage.

The pair of boxing gloves under a glass dome that once sat on the grave of Jim Driscoll could be classified as an *immortelle*, albeit a rather unique one. When the question, "Are there any *immortelles* in Cathays Cemetery today?", was put to the Friends, the typical answer was something like, "I don't recall seeing any ... but I wouldn't rule out the possibility." In the course of 100 years or more, it would be reasonable to expect these fragile adornments to deteriorate and, ultimately, disintegrate. Over this period of time, kerbs around graves and flat memorial slabs have sunk into the ground and disappeared. It is likely that some *immortelles* have done the same. Some may have disappeared during the lawn conversion process, while some fragments may have been inadvertently discarded as rubbish! And who knows what might be awaiting discovery in the conservation areas.

A cautionary tale from Arnos Vale Cemetery, in Bristol offers hope. While cleaning one of the graves, a single flower was found peeking through the muck. It was part of a plaster wreath that had been covered in dirt and leaf debris during the years when the cemetery had been neglected. But the covering debris had actually protected the delicate item from animals, vandalism and the weather. It was carefully lifted from the grave, cleaned and repaired and is now an important item in the



exhibition there. It also features on the cemetery friends' website, cotton bag, brochure and the banner outside the cemetery.

You can be sure that work parties in Cathays Cemetery will now be more discerning when clearing grave areas and will treat anything that appears like rubbish with a greater awareness of what it might be. Should any of our readers know of any immortelles in the cemetery, please let us know.

### Recent Events

#### Heritage Trails and Tales

In early June, capacity crowds attended three heritage walks staged by the **A48 theatre company**. Led by **Roger Swan**, the **Graveyard Voices** events each presented nine dramatic pieces performed by A48 actors and featuring characters whose stories illustrate Cardiff's fascinating past.

The scripts were researched, often using the Friends' work as a starting point, and written by members of A48's writing group, **Living Lines**. This year the performances included fourteen new residents of the cemetery, including the 'Friend of Freedom' John Batchelor, and the suffragist Annie Mullin, brought to life in vivid and lively performances.

Each walk ended with tea/coffee and biscuits in the chapel where there was an opportunity to hear about and examine an exciting exhibition of artwork inspired by Graveyard Voices and created by the **Cardiff Arty Party**.

Gwyneth Williams, Living Lines

#### Walk

On **Tuesday June 21st**, **Gordon Hindess** led the Friends' **Midsummer Walk**. For a change, the walk took place in the **New Cemetery**, starting by explaining the historical context of this major extension of the Cemetery and the location of the First World War memorial plot. The route took in a number of war graves from both World Wars, including a noted New Zealand artist, a 76 year old Norwegian and a

Czech airman who was the subject of a symbolic repatriation.

Civilian graves visited included a pioneer of corneal grafting, a Welsh poet and author, a railway worker who died trying to save a colleague, a boy scout hero and an egg laying corpse! On a balmy summer evening, the walk was enjoyed by around 35 people.

### Our Regular Events

#### Monthly Workdays

With our August summer break, there have only been two workdays since our last issue. With nature in the most productive stage of its yearly cycle, it can seem as if we are playing catch-up, as vegetation encroachment into drives, both from the sides and above, creates more challenges

**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, so why not join us for a couple of hours sociable exercise? Put the last Saturday of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **24<sup>th</sup> September, 29<sup>th</sup> October and 26<sup>th</sup> November**. There will not be workdays in December (for obvious reasons!) or January (because of a clash with our AGM).

#### Weekly Walks

These leisurely walks, which last about an hour, start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. The walks are informative about the history of the Cemetery and those buried in it, while looking out for seasonal highlights from the natural world.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July, the group were pleased to be involved in the commemoration ceremony in the New Cemetery (see page 4) and the following picture shows Jim Lister placing the red rose on Sgt Young's grave.

## Friends EVENTS



All are welcome on these sociable walks and the socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe, where there are also tempting cakes ...



## Future Events

### Open Doors

On **Sunday September 11th** from **11.00 am to 4.00 pm**, the restored Cathays Cemetery Chapels will be opened to the public. After the Covid hiatus, we are very pleased to resume this event. There is no charge for this event and there will be people on hand to answer your questions. In addition, guided walks will leave from the chapels at 11.30 am and 2.30 pm. If you haven't seen the chapels for more than thirteen years, come and witness the transformation.

### Walk

On **Sunday October 23<sup>rd</sup>** at **11 am**, **Roger Swan** will lead the popular **Heritage Walk**, on behalf of **Bereavement Services**. This walk is an excellent introduction to the Cemetery. The walk will **start just inside the main entrance in Fair Oak Road**.

### Talk

On **Tuesday, 8th November** at **7.00 pm**, the annual **Bill Mosley Memorial Lecture** - details to follow.

## Publications

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

Cathays Cemetery on its 150<sup>th</sup> 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.

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