

## *The Green, Green Grass of ...*

... well, the Cemetery, in May. In recent years, we have grown used to the Cemetery looking dry or even parched, but not this year!



The reason was another weather extreme - a near record breaking April for rain. Fortunately nature has a tendency to level things up, so things gradually improved so that, by the second half of May, we enjoyed near unbroken sunshine and, indeed, a meteorological drought (no discernable rainfall for two weeks). The flora of the Cemetery seemed more than happy with this, with continuing excellent displays of Spring flowers, like the bluebells (with a fair sprinkling of the albino version), in section H, pictured below



The trees were not to be outdone by the flowers. The variety of cherry trees ensured a succession of glorious displays of blossom culminating with one of the biggest specimens, in Section W, with nearly pure white flowers, glowing in the May sunshine ...



We are not sure which of the host of hybrid cherry trees this is, but at about 7m tall, and looking good to add to this in future years, it could well be *Prunus Tai-haku*, sometimes referred to as the great white cherry. If any of our readers knows better, please let us know.

The foxglove tree, also in Section W, was on top form this year, as pictured below.



We mentioned the placing of bird boxes in our last edition and we are pleased to report that our Tuesday walkers spotted a pair of blue tits laying claim to one of them. We hope to monitor them discretely through the nesting season.

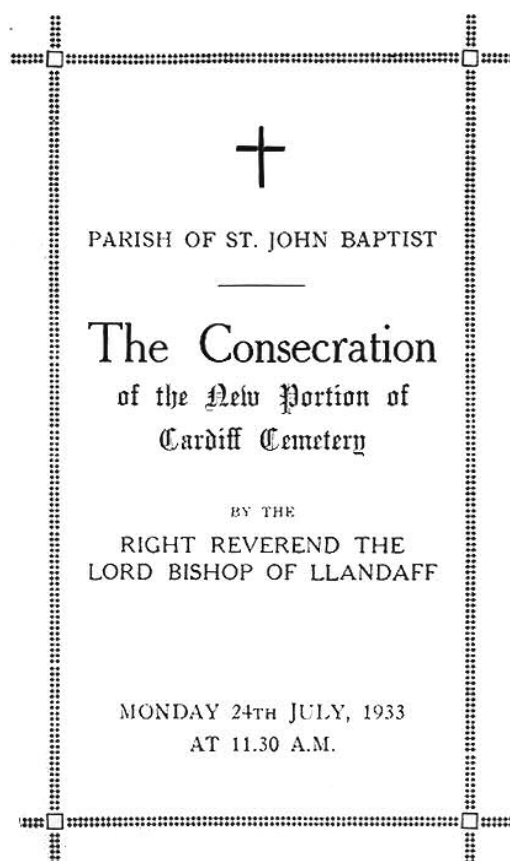
On a particularly wet day in the damp April, an unusual phenomenon was observed - large numbers of worms crossing the Cemetery drives, seemingly intent on being trodden on, run over or making a tasty snack for the birds! Apparently, the explanation of this behaviour starts with the fact that worms breathe through their skin, with oxygen from air or water passing directly from their outer cuticle into their blood vessels. But the rate of transfer from water is only about one thousandth of that from air. Typically, about 50% of the pore space in soil is occupied by air and the rest by water. After rain, the soil pores

## Friends TOPICAL

and the worm burrows can fill with water, the worms can't get enough oxygen, so come to the surface to breathe. They move to seek safety, but sometimes they don't make it back into the soil when the burrows drain, and it looks to us as if they are committing squirmy suicide. One speculative theory is that they get disorientated and confused about where their burrows are. Whatever the reason, it makes for an unnerving sight.

### *Spring Miscellany*

We are grateful to John Farnhill for unearthing details of the 1933 Consecration in the New Cemetery. The Order of Service is pictured below.

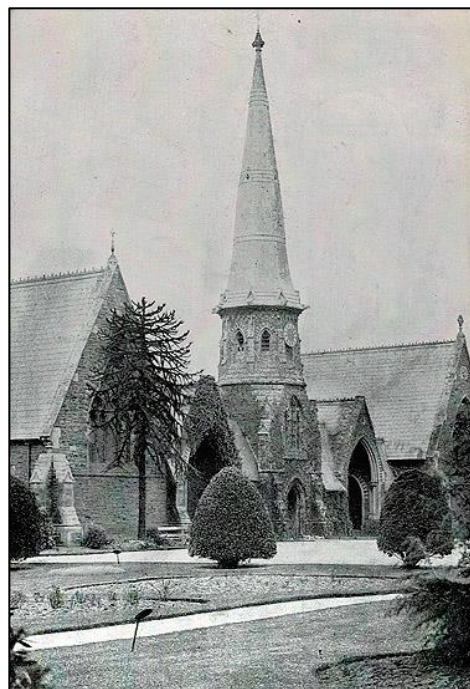


From the outset, areas of the Cemetery were allotted to different denominations and those for the Established (Anglican) Church were consecrated before burials could take place. The southernmost parts of the New Cemetery were laid out in the early years of the 19C and Anglican areas were consecrated in 1904. However, at this time, the northern portion of

this extension to the Cemetery was given over to allotments for the residents of Cathays until such time as the space was needed for new graves. In the event, by the 1930s, the Council was under pressure to find new grave spaces and notice was given to the allotment holders, early in that decade. At the same time, the Council was proceeding to develop Western Cemetery, which opened in 1936.

So the northern part of the New Cemetery was laid out for burials and that part identified for Anglican burials was consecrated on 24<sup>th</sup> July 1933. The ceremony involved the Bishop of Llandaff, the Right Reverend Timothy Rees, walking the boundaries of the designated area, saying prayers at the four corners then, finally, in the centre, where the confirmation of consecration was signed by the Bishop. The ceremony was attended by many clergy from the relevant parishes and several civic dignitaries and officials. It must have been quite a spectacle.

Jim Lister came up with another interesting historical item - a picture postcard of the chapels, which is reproduced below.



The postcard, produced by the Western Mail, was sent to an address in Swansea and bears an



Edward VII stamp, putting it in the first decade of 20C. It shows the original spire and what appears to be a clock on the bell tower. The creeper that seems to be climbing freely up the chapel walls would not be welcomed today.

The park like function of the Cemetery is emphasized by the immaculate drives, trimmed lawn edges, carefully sculptured shrubs and formal beds ready for bedding plants. And is that a monkey puzzle tree, blocking the light into the nonconformist chapel? The area in the foreground was not designated for burials and, indeed, is not today. The same cannot be said for many other section margins, where flower borders and shrubs eventually gave way to graves.

While we are near the main entrance, it is worth mentioning that renovation work, funded by the Friends, is expected to start shortly. While the most significant part of the work is replacing the missing coat of arms over the western pedestrian gate, it is intended that the whole of this listed structure has some necessary TLC.



The missing coat of arms is that of Charles Crofts Williams, who lived at Roath Court and had extensive land holdings in Llanrumney. More pertinent to his recognition on the entrance gateway, was a long record of public service on

Cardiff Corporation and its predecessor body, including serving 5 terms as mayor, the last two of which were in 1857 and 1858, when the construction of the Cemetery would have been instigated. The other two coats of arms are, that of the Bishop of Llandaff, over the eastern pedestrian gate, and the Cardiff Corporation, over the central carriage gate.

War Graves Week, the nationwide event organised by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, took place between 20<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May. We were pleased that Cathays was again included in the programme, with two tours scheduled. The guided walks provided an opportunity to learn about the stories of those commemorated by the CWGC and the skills, dedication and expertise of the CWGC staff and volunteers who work to keep their memory alive. The weekend tour was fully booked quite quickly, while the midweek tour was well attended, despite clashing with our own regular Tuesday walk.

Meanwhile, our own EOHO (Eyes On, Hands On) volunteers, Jean and Des Sanford, have been taking advantage of the better weather and report that the end is in sight for their first visit to all 700 odd CWGC memorials, including those where the Commission cares for the relevant parts of family memorials. One outcome from this is that Jean has been looking into the histories of the eight servicewomen who died in action in WW2, with the aim of telling their stories here. You will find the first two of these later in this issue and can look forward to them continuing as an occasional feature in the future.

### ***In Memoriam***

We are sorrow to have to report the death of one of our long standing members, Patricia Evans, on 24th March. After becoming increasingly frail through the month of March, she died peacefully in her sleep. Despite living in Salisbury, she had attended at least one AGM



## Friends FEATURES

and she also contributed to this newsletter - "From New Zealand to the Friends, via Salisbury" (Issue 6) and "Continuing Story of Q-ships" (Issue 21).

We send our condolences to her family and friends.

### *Servicewomen in Cathays 1*

#### *Mary Cecely Polglase*

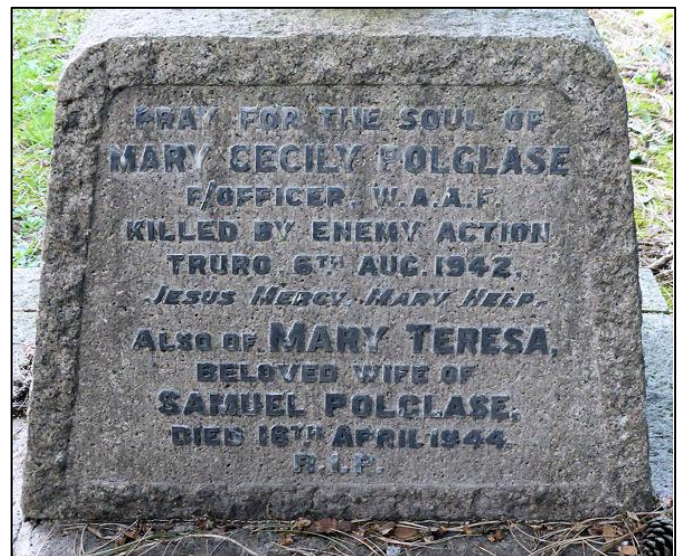


*Polglase family grave*

Mary Cecely Polglase was born in Cardiff on 13th May 1912 to Samuel and Teresa Polglase. The family were Cornish, the surname Polglase was widespread in Cornwall but usually spelt with a z not an s. By 1911 Samuel and Teresa had a son, John Stephen, and were living in Kimberley Road, Pen-y-Lan. At the outbreak of the Second World War the family had moved to the seaside town of Porthcawl and both children joined the services; John in the paymaster section of the Royal Naval Reserve, and Mary Cecely as a Flight Officer in the Women's

Auxiliary Air Force.

Mary Cecely was stationed with Fighter Command at Portreath in Cornwall. She was killed in a bombing raid while a patient at the Royal Cornwall Infirmary on 6th August 1942. People were aware that 'tip and run' raids, designed to undermine public morale, had been carried out throughout south west England but most, including the citizens of Truro, thought of them as merely a nuisance. Just after 7.30 pm on 6th August 2 enemy aircraft were spotted by the Truro Royal Observer Corps, coming towards the city at very low altitude. The initial objective was probably Truro railway station and sidings, with the Penzance to London mail train standing at the station. One aircraft attacked the station with cannon and machine gun fire, killing a postman and injuring several women. The pilot may have misjudged his bomb release as his 500 kilogram bomb missed the station but scored a direct hit on the Cornwall Royal Infirmary demolishing the West wing. Ten people, including Mary Cecely, died, buried under tons of rubble. In all 14 people were killed, 65 injured and over 100 houses damaged in a raid that lasted under 10 minutes.



*Inscription on Polglase memorial*

Mary Cecely is buried in the Catholic section of Cathays Cemetery in grave D550 where she was later to be joined by her parents.



## ***Servicewomen in Cathays 2***

### ***Joyce Alethea Brown***

Joyce Alethea Brown was born in Cardiff on 28th October 1918, just two weeks before the end of the First World War. Her grandparents, Hugh Brown and his wife Alethea (after whom Joyce Alethea was named) were born in Devon, but by 1911 were living at 19 Penywain Rd. Hugh gives his occupation as a joiner and his son Ivor Archie is a corn merchants clerk. In January 1917 Ivor married Nettie Marilla Naish in Devonport.

By the start of the Second World War in 1939 Ivor, Nettie and Joyce were living at 22 Heathwood Rd. Joyce was working as a shop assistant but joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, becoming an Assistant Section Officer on 20th October 1941.

The WAAF was created on 28th June 1939. Conscription for women began in 1941, it applied only to women between the ages of 20 and 30. Women could choose between the auxiliary forces or factory work. Although not used in combat situations the WAAFs were subject to the same dangers as anyone working at military sites. Anyone who has watched the iconic British war films 633 Squadron or The Battle of Britain will be familiar with the WAAFs at the plotting table or making cups of tea for the male officers, but the WAAFs did so much more. They packed parachutes, worked with codes, and analysed reconnaissance photographs, as well as working in aircraft maintenance and with barrage balloons.

Less than a week after signing up Joyce became dangerously ill and on 26th October was admitted to Markfield Hospital, a sanatorium and isolation hospital in Leicestershire where she died of cerebro spinal meningitis on 28th October; her 23rd birthday.

Joyce is buried in Cathays New Cemetery in grave EG 1775



*Joyce Alethea Brown CWGC headstone*

Ivor and Nettie had one other child, Cecil Henry Brown, born on 26th June 1920. In 1939 Cecil is living in London, at 2 Jelfs Cottages SW2. He appears to be a lodger there and gives his occupation as Furniture Remover (Heavy Worker). He joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, a force which was formed in 1936 to provide a reserve of air crew in the event of war. He served in various squadrons flying various aircraft. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross (these are awarded for conspicuous gallantry in the face of the enemy) and in March 1945 was awarded a Bar to his DFC, in reality a second DFC.

After D Day he was with 403 squadron, operating from France and flying Spitfires when the squadron got involved with a flight of ME 109s led by the German ace Walter Nowotny. Cecil Henry said he knew he was facing Nowotny as he was flying the only FockeWulf 190 in a flight of Messerschmitts. The result of this encounter was the downing of 6 German planes and the loss of one Spitfire.

## Friends FEATURES

After the end of the war Cecil Henry stayed on in the RAF in Europe as part of the allied forces of occupation. On 23rd September 1946 he was the navigator on a de Havilland Mosquito piloted by Allan Percival Mountain DFC and bar, flying from RAF Lubeck in Northern Germany, when the plane got into difficulties and crashed into trees near Fassberg, both were killed.

Cecil Henry Brown is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in Hanover war cemetery, Allan Percival Mountain is buried next to him.

### **Dominick Watson**

Many moons ago, on a Friends' workday, the memorial to Dominick McGettrick Watson was uncovered beneath a dense laurel bush in section L of the Cemetery.



*Memorial to Dominick Watson*

The impressive nature of the gravestone suggested that some research was called for ...

Dominick Watson was born late in 1842 to George and Margaret Watson and was baptised in St John's Church, Cardiff on 27th December of that year.

His father George was a successful brewer, originally from Daventry in Northamptonshire, who owned the Cambrian Brewery in Womanby Street and the nearby Three Horse Shoes Inn on High Street. When he died in May 1864, aged 66, his obituary informs us that he was a much respected inhabitant of Cardiff and had been a town councillor for eight years. As a member of the Burial Committee he had voted for John Timms to be appointed as first head gardener of Cathays Cemetery. His funeral was

a grand affair, with an interment at St John's Church.

And so, at the age of 22, his son Dominick inherited a profitable brewing company.

In 1874 Dominick married Amelia (Amy) Mary Thomas, ten years his junior, and the daughter of a county court high bailiff. The couple settled in Windsor Place and then moved in about 1880 to Plas Gwynt, one of the first houses to be built on Cathedral Rd.

He was a keen cricketer and played for the Marquess of Bute's Household team based in the Castle. This was before the rules of cricket were set in stone and the South Wales Daily News reported in 1874 that an All England eleven took on a Bute Household twenty-two at Coopers Field. The Bute Household were all out in their first innings for 89 runs. Dominick scored 14.

The marriage resulted in four children, George John (b 1878), Dominick Macauley (b 1888), and two who died in infancy.

He was not someone who actively sought public office, though politically he was a life-long Conservative. Nevertheless, he was persuaded by friends to seek office and in 1883 was elected to the Town Council for Cardiff's West Ward.

In 1885, Dominick sold his brewing interests to Brains Brewery, a relative newcomer to the Cardiff scene, Brains having only been founded in 1882.

The following year Cardiff was rocked by a scandal. It was discovered that the late chief accountant of the Cardiff Savings Bank had been systematically defrauding the bank over many years leaving a large deficit. (The full story about this can be found in Chapter 12 of our book "Hidden Histories - Tales from Cathays Cemetery".) Difficult questions were asked of the bank managers and trustees, largely Cardiff worthies including Dominick who had been appointed in 1882. Should they be held personally responsible, when many of them



had little or no involvement in the day-to-day running of the bank? Dominick in particular came under pressure over differing accounts of a conversation with a large investor and his willingness to "... give £500 to get out of this difficulty".

Whether or not it was the stress of the bank's failure is not known, but it was around this time that Dominick's health began to fail.

In 1887, therefore, he resigned his council seat and retired to a prestigious residence in Compton Pouncefoot on the Somerset-Dorset border. There, despite his health, he sought to re-invent himself as a country gentleman. Sadly, his new life in the country was cut short when soon after his arrival he suffered a stroke, followed on 6th June 1890 by a second one which proved fatal. He was just 47.

At the time of his death, proceedings had been instigated against him by the liquidators of the Cardiff Savings Bank seeking to compensate investors. His executors settled by agreeing to pay £1000, a similar amount to other managers.

Not that Dominick was short of money. The prestigious country residence he had moved to was Compton Castle, a 13-bedroom mock castle set in a 190-acre estate. When it was sold at auction in 2015 for £6.5 million it warranted a 36-page full colour brochure. And although he occupied the castle as a tenant, his estate was valued at £50,000, the equivalent of more than £4 million today.

When his goods and chattels were auctioned in Cardiff following his death, the Western Mail reported:

"The whole of the effects, which are of the most expensive character .... form a collection such as rarely is to be met with. It comprises the contents of dining, drawing, and thirteen bed rooms, boudoir, library, hall, billiard-room, and kitchens. There is a full-sized billiard table; a high-class grand pianoforte, by Rosenkranz; a cottage piano, by Collard & Collard; elegant

Chippendale furniture, massive dining room furniture, valuable Axminster, Turkey, and Wilton carpets, and suites of costly curtains"

**IMPORTANT SALE AT CARDIFF.**

Preparatory to their being offered for sale by auction on Tuesday and Wednesday next, at Messrs. Gottwalz and Bowring's sale-rooms, High-street, Cardiff, the whole of the valuable and high-class furniture and household appointments belonging, up to the time of his death, to the late Mr. Dominick Watson will be on public view from to-day (Saturday). The whole of the effects, which are of the most expensive character, have been removed from Compton Castle, near Bath, and arranged in the auctioneers' rooms, where they form a collection such as rarely is to be met with. It comprises the contents of dining, drawing, and thirteen bed rooms, boudoir, library, hall, billiard-room, and kitchens. There is a full-sized billiard table, with fittings complete; a high-class grand pianoforte, by Rosenkranz; a cottage piano, by Collard and Collard; elegant Chippendale furniture, massive dining-room furniture, valuable Axminster, Turkey, and Wilton carpets, and suites of costly curtains. In short, the entire contents of Compton Castle are to be disposed of. The sale will, undoubtedly, be one of the most attractive

*Cutting advertising the sale of effects*

After his death his mother commissioned a stained-glass window to the memory of both Dominick and his father George in St John's Church. It depicts Christ talking to the woman of Samaria.



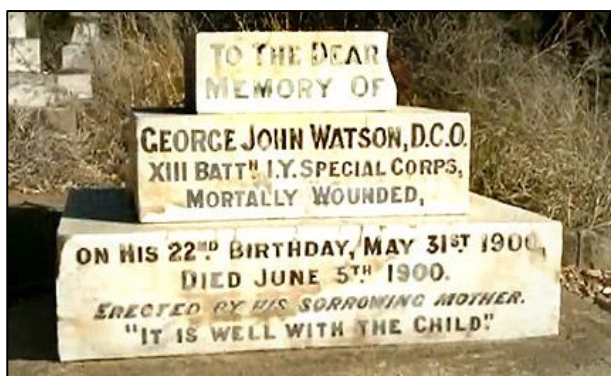
*Memorial window in St John's Church*

## Friends EVENTS

Dominick's widow, Amelia, probably merits an article of her own. Her obituary tells us that after the death of her husband she moved firstly to Widcombe Manor followed by Box House in the village of Box where she is found in the 1901 census with six servants including a governess. She then moved on to Bathampton House in Bathampton, before spending her later years at 21 Royal Crescent, Bath. Amelia took an interest in local hospitals and turned her house into a hospital during the First World War. She was also a staunch supporter of the Bath Horse Show, and a vice-president and treasurer of the Bath branch of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League. When she died in 1927, she left £88,900, and was buried in Locksbrook Cemetery in Bath.

Both Dominick and Amelia's sons died on active service.

In January 1900 George John (Jack) enlisted as a trooper in the Special Corps of the Imperial Yeomanry (Duke of Cambridge's Own). This was a new unit set up with a view to recruiting upper class gentlemen (men-about-town?) to serve in the Boer War, and was also known as 'Millionaires Own'. Jack was wounded on 31st May 1900 at the controversial British defeat at Lindley, Orange Free State (there was an enquiry and questions were asked in Parliament), and died there on the 6th June, ten years to the day after the death of his father. His mother had a memorial erected there.



*Memorial to George John Watson*

Dominic Macauley, a lieutenant in the West Somerset Yeomanry, died on 3rd December 1917 fighting in northern France.

Both sons are remembered on their father's memorial in Cathays and also in another stained-glass window in St Thomas à Becket in Box, presumably donated by their mother.

Speculating with 'what-if' scenarios is never really a good idea but if Dominick Watson had lived and stayed in Cardiff then, given his wealth and social contacts, it is more than likely that he would have made a significant contribution to turn-of-the-century Cardiff.

## Recent Events

### Walks

On **Sunday April 23<sup>rd</sup>**, Roger Swan led the **Heritage Walk, on behalf of Bereavement Services**. Over 100 people joined Roger in the sunshine for a very pleasant and informative introduction to the Cemetery and the Chapel was open after the event for viewing and book sales. A great start to the new season.



### Talks

On **Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> April 2023**, about 30 people attended our first talk to be held in the chapels. "**Angels in the Line of Fire**", presented by **Rosemary Challenor**, traced the role of women in war up to and including World War 1. From an original model set out by Elizabeth Fry and taken up by Florence Nightingale, through some familiar names like Mary Seacole and Wales' Betsi Cadwaladr and several others who were new to most of the listening audience, Rosemary showed how war changed the perspective in which women were seen. Initially, nurses had no support and had to get themselves to the front and even provide



their own transport. There was also a class structure with separate nursing organisations formed from the landed classes, the wealthy through business ... and the rest!

In WW1, it was noticed that the French were far better at dealing with casualties, many more of whom survived their wounds. This was because nursing support on the front line was accepted and based on established religious institutions who already performed this service as part of their calling. At least this meant that the military came to accept that there was a role for women at the front. But it was still dangerous, particularly if you were on the ships transporting the injured back to the UK. Many nurses were killed or injured.

Many in the audience were already familiar with Rosemary from her book about Louisa Maud Evans, "The Balloon Girl", or, indeed, her talk to the Friends on the same subject a few years ago, so were expecting a well-researched and enlightening talk. They were not disappointed.

On **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2023**, Peter Finch gave a talk on "**Edging the City**", reflecting on his book of the same title, published last year. Peter's response to the 2020 lockdown restrictions, confining people to their local authority area, was to walk the boundary of his, Cardiff. It was not as easy as it sounds - and he gave many examples of why it wasn't.

He started his talk with a poem that listed many of the highlights of his fifty plus mile walk. Among his many accomplishments, he describes himself as a psychogeographer and he explained what this meant. It goes beyond geography (the physical landscape, its structure, views, maps, etc) to consider the thoughts and experiences that it provokes in your mind. In his case, it included childhood associations (he painted a vivid picture of the pedestrian tunnel under the River Ely!), the expansionist ambitions of Cardiff, the contrast between the city and its more recent "industrial deceased" additions (including coal workings)

and the friendliness of the people in the latter areas, by comparison with city dwellers.

Peter concluded his talk by reading two extracts from his book, one about childhood visits to Caerphilly Mountain, the other about the former mining community on the flanks of the Garth. This entertaining and thought provoking talk was enjoyed by about 40 people.

## Our Regular Events

### Monthly Workdays

Our workdays have been well supported and it has been largely back to the normal routine of clearing rampant vegetation, particularly when it starts to obstruct drives or prevent access to memorials, and ensuring that the entrance/chapel area looks spick and span. Unfortunately our April workday had to be cancelled at short notice and we hope that this did not cause too much inconvenience.

Tools and gloves are provided and you can work at your own pace, in sociable company. **We meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. If you want to join us, put the last Saturday of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **24<sup>th</sup> June, 29<sup>th</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> September**.

### Tuesday Walks

These sociable walks, which last about an hour, start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. The walks, which are not strenuous, pick out the seasonal highlights around the Cemetery, while being informative about the history of the Cemetery and those buried in it. All are welcome on these walks and the socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe.

## Future Events

### Graveyard Voices

The **A48 Theatre Company** will be performing to **new scripts by the writers of Living Lines** on a guided walk around the Cemetery on

## Friends EVENTS

**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> June at 7 pm, Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> June at 7 pm and Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> June at 2 pm.** Because of the popularity of these events and the need to limit numbers, the performances are ticketed. The charge is £8 per person and tickets are available from

[www.a48theatrecompany.com](http://www.a48theatrecompany.com) or  
[www.ticketsource.co.uk](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk)

When we last checked, tickets were going fast!

### Walk

On **Tuesday June 20<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm, Gordon Hindess** of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery will lead the **Midsummer Walk**. After last year's excursion to the New Cemetery, we will be back in the Old Cemetery, starting just inside the **main entrance in Fair Oak Road**. As usual, the primary aim will be to present the results of more recent research into the residents of the Cemetery.

### Open Doors

On **Sunday September 10<sup>th</sup> from 11 am to 4 pm** the Cathays Cemetery Chapels will be opened to the public as part of the CADW Open Doors programme. There will be people on hand to answer any questions and there will be a guided walk or two during the day. Full details will be available nearer the time.

## 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.

**Themed guides** (12 - 20 pages) - mostly £1.50 with black & white images or £2.00 for those with colour images. Because of disproportionate postal charges, these booklets have generally only been sold at events. The stock was replenished post Covid and there are some 20 titles available, many with new subjects. Those currently available are:

Murder at Cathays

The Cardiff Blitz and Cathays Cemetery

Another batch of Murders at Cathays

Builders & Architects at Cathays Cemetery

The Five Legs of Cathays

Restoring the Chapels at Cathays Cemetery

Sportsmen in Cathays Cemetery

Doctors & Men of Medicine

Exotic Trees in Cathays Cemetery

Cathays Cemetery Tree Trail

Cardiff Mayors in Cathays Cemetery

More Mayors & Councillors in Cathays Cemetery

Circuses & Fairs in Cathays Cemetery

Wild Flowers in Cathays Cemetery

Another Bunch of Wild Flowers

Men & Women of The Church

Mentioned In Stone - - Non-CWGC Graves

The Cemetery Gates

Queen Victoria's Wars in Cathays Cemetery

The Crimean War in Cathays Cemetery

The Boer War in Cathays Cemetery

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](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)