

## Better Late?

Only one weather record this time - three named storms by early November. But there were plenty of much higher/lower than average statistics. For humans it probably meant that putting on jumpers and central heating was deferred and the last lawn mowing was later than usual. For nature, the conditions seem to have been relished, so we have enjoyed a glorious autumn. The delicate evening primrose (probably a second or third generation, self-seeding from a wild flower sowing) brightened the Fair Oak Road perimeter path. Each flower is short-lived, opening in the evening and rarely lasting more than 24 hours.



*Evening primrose*

The autumn colouring has been excellent and prolonged. Early stars were the Hungarian oak, the field maple and the lime, picture below.



The autumn changes can be fairly uniform, but often are patchy or progressive across or downwards, reflecting aspect and exposure. This is apparent for the lime and maple above.

Later we enjoyed the ornamental pear and the liquidamber. In the images below there are early and late versions of the latter.



*Autumn colours of early liquidamber, ornamental pear & later liquidamber*

It has been a good year for holly, which had quite dense bunches of fruit, to the extent that many trees have looked quite red from a distance ...



But other shrubs and trees have done just as well. There were lots of rose hips and rowan berries and the fruit of the yews has been less sparse than usual. The birds are quick to consume the rowan berries, but appear to be discerning, hence the example shown below was left until the end despite the abundance of fruit bending the branches down.



*Yew and rowan berries*



## Friends TOPICAL

The hybrid catalpa, a cross between the American and Chinese bean trees, also fruited well, as pictured below. Note that the bean pods on this tree are much shorter than those on *Farges catalpa* that we have featured previously.

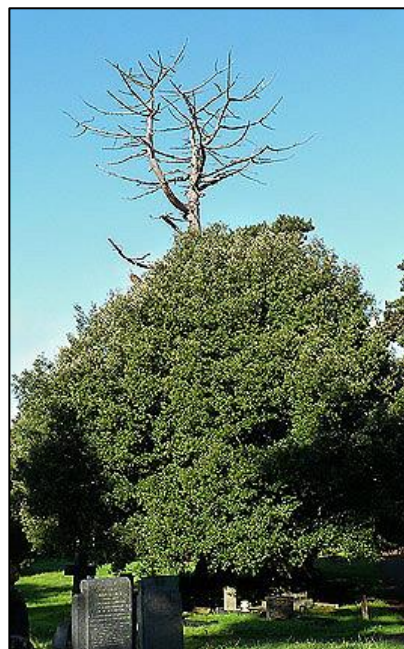


The Cedar of Lebanon behind the chapels produced lots of male flowers ...



... but on selective branches only of the tree. The tree is monoecious, meaning that both male and female flowers appear on the same tree. The green male cones change quite quickly into erect catkins producing dense yellow pollen, which can temporarily colour the tarmac drive underneath. The smaller female flowers can be harder to spot, but it is these that, after pollination, develop into green cones, which become purple-grey and finally brown, up to 12 months after pollination. These cones are 8-12 cms long and tend to produce every other year.

But it's not all good news! We continue to witness the decline of the Corsican pines, which are a characteristic feature of the Cemetery. The one pictured after this paragraph, behind a large evergreen holm oak, has an artistic appeal but is, nevertheless, a stark reminder of the problem.



We are constantly exhorted to support new tree planting, but generally using common native species. Shouldn't some provision be made for replacing more exotic species in historic park-like situations like this?

It is necessary to be continually vigilant to pick up incursions of Japanese knotweed. The clump pictured below has been largely hidden from view in Section B, because of the problems since Covid in keeping on top of shrub clearance in the Conservation Areas in the winter period.



*Japanese knotweed*

The weather hasn't always been kind - there have been periods when it has been sufficiently wet to temporarily flood some of the driveways. As there are always convenient ways around, this isn't a big problem, but it can produce an



unexpected bonus - like reflections of the chapels, as shown below.



*But the highlight of the season has to be the lone primrose that dared to flower at the end of November ...*



*As a sign of Spring, we can only hope that we are about to skip Winter.*

### **Autumn Miscellany**

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Eyes on Hands on (EOHO) project has been mentioned in previous editions of Not So Grave News. Volunteers to this project photograph clean and care for the nearly 700 CWGC graves in Cathays Cemetery. We are pleased to report that 6 new volunteers have been recruited to the project, and the first results of their gravestone cleaning, like the headstone in the following picture, can already be seen.



Gravestones under trees, and we have many in Cathays, suffer particularly from staining, and keeping them in good order can be a bit like painting the Forth Bridge! If you see any of these volunteers working in the Cemetery please stop for a chat.

As well as the graves of British and Commonwealth servicemen and women, the CWGC looks after the graves of the Norwegian, French and Czech casualties, on behalf of their respective governments. As a result of EOHO, three unmarked graves of French sailors from the First World War have been identified, grave markers have arrived from France, and should be installed shortly.

We mentioned in our last issue two memorial plaques that had found their way to Cathays Cemetery. These have now been placed in the recently restored Anglican vestry, but it remains the feeling that there should be somewhere more appropriate for this material archive. In our last issue, we were uncertain as to where the bronze plaque had come from but, noting that one of the names on it is HF Baselow, it seems most likely that this was originally mounted in the Roath Park Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, but its route to the Cemetery is still unclear.

## Friends FEATURES

The annual Remembrance Service, organised by Bereavement Services, was held at the War Graves plot in the New Cemetery on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November and officiated by the Rev James Henley. After the opening address by the Lord Mayor, Cllr B Molik, and the playing of "The Last Post" by Alan Bourne, Director of Music, RAF St Athan, eleven wreaths were laid at the Cross of Sacrifice, including one on behalf of the Friends and the Tuesday walking group, by Jean Sanford. A twelfth wreath was laid at the plaque to Frederick Barter VC by a member of the Barter family.

Pupils from Allensbank Primary School, Gladstone Primary School and Ysgol Mynydd Bychan attended the service, to which they made a direct input. After the service, the role of honour was read directly from the headstones in the War Graves plot, the practice initiated by the walking group.

This is the first time, since these ceremonies began, that there has been a lady mayor. The official title remains Lord Mayor and she wears the Lord Mayor's chain of office. There is no Lady Mayoress, so the Spiridion chain was not on display, but the Lord Mayor, Bablin Molik, did agree that the Mayoress chain was the nicer of the two. She is, in fact, the 16th female Lord Mayor, but she is the first woman of colour and first Muslim to hold the post.

A couple of days later, a similar Remembrance Service was held in Western Cemetery, where the Friends were represented by Ivor Lippett.

A recent Tuesday walk stopped at the memorial to Harriet Beavan in Section M. We were disappointed to find the unusual 'bird bath' memorial on its side. This was, perhaps not a surprise, as it has had a bit of a lean in recent years. Also, it seems there was nothing to provide strength to its attachment to the base. As a small, but fairly unique, memorial to a person of some note, it would be nice to see this restored.



*Fallen memorial to Harriet Beavan*

This emphasises the inevitability of deterioration of memorials over time and the desirability of having a procedure in place to undertake remedial action, at least where they have an historic, heritage or artistic value.

### **Lilian May Vearncombe** **b.1892 d.1979**

*The old part of the Cemetery became an oasis for me during the first lockdown. Its quietness (the residents don't make much noise), the protected nature and the winding, unpredictable tracks were an antidote to a world that suddenly imploded. Then it was the gravestones themselves, the artistry of the stonework and inscriptions saying so much about the people buried and the time they lived in.*

*Tucked away in the corner, a gravestone immediately caught my eye for two reasons. First, because it had the inscription "Dental Surgeon". It's unusual, but not unheard of, for the stone to bear the job title of the deceased. Second, because the grave belonged to a woman: Lilian May Vearncombe. Lilian passed away in 1979 which meant she was a practising dental surgeon at a time when the profession was dominated by men.*





*There's a story to this, I could feel it. My dad used to tell me stories of my great-grandmother. She was a strong woman, and I had the same feeling when I regarded Lilian's stone: there's a strong one here.*

*Ruth Saunders*

### **Lilian May Vearncombe**

According to the Ancestry website, Lilian May Vearncombe was born Lilian May Dunn in Brynmawr in 1892. Lily was the second oldest of four daughters and her father was a local colliery worker. The next record of Lilian is in her teenage years, still living with her parents and siblings.

Brynmawr is thirty miles north of Cardiff, and in the 1800s was a thriving ironwork and coal mining community. By the time Lilian was born in 1892, the local industry and population had sharply declined.

When Lilian died in 1979, she owned a house in King Street, Pontcanna, a multi-storey five bedroomed house in one of the most affluent parts of the city. She bequeathed a total of £8232 in her will (£89,000 in today's money).

So, how did a miner's daughter from an

impoverished town become a self-made, professional woman?

### **Lilian in Cardiff**

The next record of Lilian after Brynmawr is in Cardiff. In 1916, records show she married Frank Vearncombe, her senior by twenty-four years and father to four children, the eldest having just turned thirty. Frank's first wife, Beatrice, died in 1914 and is buried in an unmarked grave in Cathays Cemetery. In 1918, Frank and Lilian had a daughter, Elsie, who trained as a nurse and died in Lincoln in 2002, leaving her estate to the Quakers.

Frank was a man of many talents. Over the years, he's listed as a watchmaker (1888), bootmaker (1902) and photographer (1911). Lilian and Frank lived on Woodville Road in Cathays. A mostly residential street today, in the 1900s it was a bustling local high street, with an array of shops and access to a tram line.

In a regional trade directory from 1914, Frank and his son are listed as running a photographic studio from the marital home. In the late 1910s, both Lilian and Frank are listed as spiritualist photographers.

### **The case of the crooked photographer**

There was a wave of spiritual photographers in business after the First World War, as the country mourned the taking of so many young lives and belief in magic and superstition was rife. Arthur Conan-Doyle and Houdini were proponents of spiritualism but also its biggest debunkers, setting out to expose charlatans who tricked mourners into believing they could see their dead family or friends in the photographs.

According to Conan-Doyle's and Houdini's 1924 book, *A Magician Among The Spirits*, Frank Vearncombe was exposed as a charlatan by both Conan-Doyle and the Occult Committee of the Magic Circle for tampering with plates to create false images of family members and loved ones on the background of photographs.

## Friends FEATURES

The exposure damaged Frank's reputation and Frank soon put his photography plates up for sale in an advertisement placed in the London Gazette.

### From spiritualist photographer to dental surgeon

How did a spiritualist photographer become a qualified dental surgeon with her own, thriving practice? The truth is Lilian never qualified, not in the traditional sense anyway.

Lilian entered the Dentist Register with hundreds of other new entrants in 1923, following the enactment of the Dentists Act 1921 which made it unlawful for unregistered practitioners to practice dentistry. A grandfather clause to the Act meant that men and women who were not formally trained in dentistry, otherwise known as unqualified dentists, could register if they satisfied the Dental Board that they were established practising dentists prior to the Act coming into force. Any persons not meeting these requirements or entering the profession following the Act, were required to be formally trained and qualified.

In 1923, unqualified dentists made up half of registered dentists. In the year of her death, there was only one unqualified dentist in the dental register. Lilian was a dental surgeon until well into her seventies, her last entry onto the dental register was in 1968 at the age of seventy-six.

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact time she put down the photography plates and picked up the dental scalpel, but we can deduce that it was during the period she lived with Frank in Bridgwater, Somerset, in the late 1910s.

### Lilian's dental practice

In 1923 Lilian is recorded as back in Cardiff, Frank is recorded as living in Bridgwater in 1924 and later, in Cardiff in 1938, with someone else.

Lilian's dental practice was at the city end of Bute Street, which later became Hayes Bridge Road when the Glamorganshire canal was built over. The practice was close to the city centre and on the way to Tiger Bay, which has its own iconic cultural status in Cardiff. Hays Bridge Road/Bute Street was a bustling street with several businesses in premises which have since been knocked down. Lilian's neighbours would have included The Salvation Army, tobacconists, coffee rooms, a bookbinders, and tailors. At one point, there was a greengrocer below her practice.

### Ahead of her time

Was Lilian the first registered women dentist in Cardiff? In Wales? We don't know for certain, but she was certainly amongst the forerunners.

What motivated her to become a dental surgeon? Was it needs must to provide for herself, when money from her husband was likely to be inconsistent and unreliable? Perhaps it was her childhood experience of poverty that motivated her to better herself or opportunities presented by the thousands of men who had left to fight in the First World War.

Lilian was a trailblazer and an entrepreneur, even if she didn't set out to be either. Would she have felt like one, tending to the grizzly reality of early twentieth century dental care? Perhaps not, but there was an element of pride in her status. After all, 'Dental Surgeon' is carved on her gravestone.

## Moses White Cardiff & Barry Pilot

On my first visit to Cathays Cemetery in 2019, shortly after moving to Cardiff, I came across this splendid headstone with a nautical theme, situated in Section J 1205.





What struck me was the unfortunate loss by drowning of twin brothers, albeit separated by about 15 years. The monument also commemorates another son and their father Moses White, who was a pilot for Cardiff and Barry docks, on one side and a further son and an infant daughter on the third side.

Moses White was born in Cardiff in 1846. In 1851 his family were living at Sea Lock East Side, at the bottom of the Glamorgan Canal. In the 1861 census he was a seaman aboard the Gloucester based boat Lady of the Forest on the River Severn. Moses married Catherine Williams from Bangor, North Wales, in 1869 at St Mary's Church, and they had two sons and one daughter. In the census of 1871 Moses was still a mariner, Catherine was expecting their first son and they were living in George Street. In May 1878 Moses obtained his license to act as a Pilot for Cardiff Docks. By 1881 they are living in Louisa Street and Moses is now listed in the census as a Pilot, which remained his occupation for the rest of his eventful life.

Catherine died in January 1889 in Kent Street in the presence of her eldest son Moses John White. Very soon after (within a month or so) Moses married Emma Kirby Williams, who was the sister of his first wife, and with whom he had four more sons and one more daughter. In 1891 the family lived in Ferry Road and the eldest son (Moses John) was an apprentice pilot. By the 1901 census Moses and Emma were living in 29 Clive Street, where they remained for the rest of his life.

The twin boys Charlie and Bennie were born in November 1893. The Evening Express of 20 August 1901 reports the inquest into what happened to Bennie. His father (described as a well-known pilot) gave evidence to say the boy had gone out to play after tea the previous Thursday and had not returned. His disappearance was reported to police but, despite searches, it was not until Saturday morning that his body was found in the River Taff above Clarence Bridge. He had last been seen throwing stones into the river. The jury's verdict was "Accidentally drowned".

Charlie's death by drowning was well covered in gripping, detailed nationwide newspaper reports of May 1914, as it was part of a tragic accident off Nash Point in the Severn Estuary. Charlie was an apprentice pilot on the steam pilot cutter W.W. Jones which collided with the steamship Star of New Zealand. The Master, two apprentices and two other hands were drowned. Sixteen men clung onto the anchor chains of the Star of New Zealand in the three minutes the two ships were locked together. But when the cutter sank its mast and funnel swept three of the men, including Charlie, into the sea. The papers remarked that Charlie's twin brother had previously drowned. The W.W. Jones had recently been run down and sunk off Penarth, but had been raised and repaired.

Moses White had an eventful life with several appearances in court, usually for verbal or physical altercations. He also appeared in newspapers:

when his ship returned to port severely damaged in a storm

he was the pilot when the ship he was piloting ran aground off Breaksea Point and was lost, and

he was the subject of an investigation by Lloyds into whether his eyesight was good enough to retain his licence.

His eyesight was found to be satisfactory and he remained a pilot until his death at the age of 71 on 9 January 1918. He collapsed at the junction of Penarth Road and Clare Road of cardiac arrest aggravated by bronchitis brought on by cold weather. His estate was valued at £2,148, equivalent to about £145,000 in 2023.

Within three weeks his eldest son Moses John White died at sea from a tumour, although the headstone says he was in Columbo. The Cathays monument states that another son Albie (Albert William) died as a result of active service, although he actually died in Cardiff in February 1924. His Army war record notes that he was discharged from the Army in 1915 in order to join the trawler service. He was invalided out of the RNR in January 1917 with tuberculosis, which was deemed to have been brought on by his service in MJ Good Luck. He received some disability payments until November 1923.

After Moses died in 1918, Emma remained at 29 Clive Street with Colston, their youngest son, until sometime after the 1921 census. Ultimately when Emma died in 1933 she was living at 19 Fair Oak Road, Roath. The newspaper announcement of her funeral still refers to her husband Moses as the well-known dock pilot, so he must have been a man of some note. Emma is buried in the same vault in Cathays Cemetery.

Martyn Swain

*If you want to know more about Moses White and his family, why not come to Martyn's talk on this subject in March (see Events details on page 10)*

## *Servicewomen in Cathays 3*

### *Marjory Constance Wagstaffe*

Marjory Constance Wagstaffe was born in Cardiff on 1st July 1921. Her father William had married Gladys Mabel Bick in 1913, and Marjory was the third of 4 children.

In 1939 the family were living at 40 Herbert St. Butetown, and while Gladys ran the home, William and the 4 children were all working. William was a riveter at a wagon works, and the youngest child, Harry, worked alongside him as a rivet warmer. Rivets had to be heated before use so that they became malleable and when cooled formed a firm joint. This sounds a dangerous occupation for a fifteen year old. Kenneth, the eldest, was a steelworker while Marjory and her older sister Marion were machinists at a munitions factory. As is well documented munitions work could be dangerous too, and not just from the explosives used in the munitions. In 1944 a stray shell from an anti-aircraft gun hit the munitions factory in Llanishen killing 12 people and injuring many more.





Marjory joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as an Aircraftwoman 1st class. Tragically she died on 3rd February 1945 when she fell down a stairwell in the Courtlands Hostel in Surrey.

### **Reminder re Subscriptions**

In response to members' requests and as confirmed at the last AGM, the annual subscription rate, has increased to £10 per annum. Members paying by standing order may wish to check that their instructions are up to date

### **Recent Events**

#### **Open Doors**

On **Sunday September 10<sup>th</sup>** from **11 am to 4 pm**, as part of the CADW Open Doors programme, the Cemetery Chapels were opened to the public. In addition, there was a guided walk around the Cemetery, introducing some of the interesting people buried there, as well as some trees in the 'arboretum'. The walk was well attended and there was a steady stream of visitors (about 100 in total) throughout the day, showing a genuine interest in the Cemetery, its buildings the natural history, the 'residents' and the role of the Friends.

#### **Walk**

On **Sunday October 22<sup>nd</sup>**, the **Heritage Walk** was excellently led by **Roger Swan**, on behalf of **Bereavement Services**. This ever popular introduction to the Cemetery was enjoyed by all those who came.

#### **Talk**

On **Tuesday November 14<sup>th</sup>**, the **Annual Bill Mosley Memorial Lecture** entitled "**Gardening the World**" was delivered in the **Episcopalian Chapel** by **Amy Kitcher**, public engagement officer for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in this area. The CWGC is the largest horticultural organisation in the world, with 830 gardeners looking after 700 hectares,

in every climate zone. Many of the rules established 100 years ago still apply, although some have been adapted to suit climate and physical constraints while, more recently, sustainability and the impact of climate change have had to be recognised. One very poignant picture selected to illustrate local workers and local tools was of a cemetery in Gaza, which had just been temporarily closed - something that has happened here before! It remains that in most CWGC plots the headstones are in rows in ornamental borders with distinctive colour bands: did you know that the distinctive red roses in the plot at Cathays Cemetery are appropriately named "Remembrance"? The number of questions for Amy at the end indicated how much the audience had enjoyed the talk.

### **Our Regular Events**

#### **Monthly Workdays**

Our most recent workdays were spent making the WW1 CWGC plot look its best for the Remembrance Service, cutting back shrubs that were endangering the stability of a memorial and getting stuck into the brambles in Section L (where our workdays started). Our workdays are usually on the last Saturday of the month, but there will be no workday in December or January, so put **24<sup>th</sup> February** and **30<sup>th</sup> March** in your diaries. Tools and gloves are provided for these sociable events, so why not come and join us. **We meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses.

#### **Tuesday Walks**

All are welcome on these gentle walks, which start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning, except 26<sup>th</sup> December and 2<sup>nd</sup> January**. The sociable walks last about an hour and are informative about the history of the Cemetery, its flora and fauna and those buried in it. The socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe, which is well worth a visit for its window decoration, which reflects

## Friends EVENTS

current events or festivals. The picture below shows how it looked for Halloween.



### Future Events

#### Annual General Meeting

The **AGM** of the Friends will be held on **Saturday January 27th at 10 am** in the **Anglican (Episcopalian) Chapel** at the Cemetery. Agendas and other relevant papers will be sent out in January 2024. We hope to see you at the meeting but, if you can't get there but have issues that you would like raised, please write to us in advance. Otherwise, our next newsletter will give a comprehensive report on the meeting.

#### Talk

On **Tuesday March 19th** at 7pm, Martyn Swain will present the fascinating story of **Moses White** and his family in the **Anglican Chapel** - on the right when you enter the **main entrance from Fairoak Road**. You can get a flavour of the talk from the summarised tale on page 6 of this newsletter.

### 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

**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. 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

### 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)