

Storms, then Cold and Gloom

It is only a few years ago, that the practice of naming severe winter storms began, but sometimes it seems as if this has just encouraged more to develop! We've certainly had our share this winter and the Cemetery has not come through them unscathed. The forking trunks of a silver birch in the New Cemetery fell outwards simultaneously - just one half of the duo is shown below:



In the Old Cemetery, there were a number of criss-crossing fallers in the well wooded Section X ...



Fortunately, damage to memorials was minimal.

Apparently, the Winter has been drier than average, but this doesn't mean that there haven't been a lot of damp (and gloomy) days. Similarly, while there has been no severe frost,

there has been a scarcity of warm sunny days. The net result has been that the earliest flowers and blossoms have been later than usual. So primrose and crocus are yet to reach their peak - but they can still be found ...



Following a clearing of brambles and other competitors last year, a viburnum tinus behind the library has thrived, so provided one of our early blossom displays ...



The berries in the Cemetery attract winter migrants like thrushes, redwing and fieldfare, but we have seen fewer than usual this year. Hopefully, this was because they anticipated a milder winter in their summer homeland (places like Scandinavia), rather than a reflection on the gloomy weather they found in Cardiff.

Winter Miscellany

Sometimes, the longevity of a building is ensured by timely maintenance. The restoration, in January, of the most exposed chapel door is an excellent example of this:



And it is not just the appearance - it is less draughty, too. Although less urgent, the other three chapel doors will be getting the same treatment.

In an effort to make the policy on dogs clearer, the following signs were placed all around the Cemetery:



Many who walk in the Cemetery regularly will have noticed a worn path across a corner of Section F, which knocked a few steps off the distance between Allensbank and Fair oak Roads. To the uninitiated, this was just an area of lawn when, in reality, it is full of unmarked graves, which deserve as much respect as those with memorials. We were pleased to see that wooden markers have been put on a patch of the graves here and the message has been reinforced with taping off the area, as shown below ...



Spiridion

Part 5 – Business Succession

Our last issue took us up to the burials of Spiridion and his wife, Rachel, in Cathays Cemetery. But the story continues.

We saw in our last issue that Spiridion's son, Josef, moved into the shop premises within days of his father's death. The security of the premises may well have influenced this decision and it would certainly have been unreasonable to burden Spiridion's widow, Rachel, with this responsibility. With three sons, at least one of whom might be expected to come into the business, it was convenient to continue to trade as Spiridion & Son.

By now, Josef had chosen to anglicise his name and was known as Joseph. From this point onward, we shall do the same. Turret or tower clocks continued to be a feature of the business. In 1896, Spiridion & Son erected a clock with a 10 foot black dial for the Cardiff Exhibition of that year and, in 1904, they provided a clock with a large opal dial and patent automatic gas lighting at the council offices in Abercarn. The firm's expertise was widely recognised, so they were often called in as advisors or to provide maintenance and repair services.

Gillett & Johnston won the contract to supply a prestigious turret clock when the new Cardiff City Hall was built. The clock had four skeleton iron dials 12feet 4inches in diameter, a 15feet long pendulum, an hour bell 5feet 4inches in diameter and four bells for the chimes. It would have been a disappointment not to have won this order on their home patch ... but local assistance was required for winding and maintenance, so Spiridion & Son was approached. Joseph carefully explained what would be required - the time consumed in

winding, plus climbing to the top of the 200foot tower and back, would be three hours per week for two men (as it would be physically impossible for one to wind the three weights without assistance). The care of the clock and chimes required someone fully experienced in such work. Any repairs and replacements would be charged in addition. The Council accepted his advice and being awarded the maintenance contract would have been some compensation for not winning the order for supplying the clock. The contract was worth twelve shillings and sixpence per week (about £100pw now). The clock was formally started on St David's Day 1905, eight months before Cardiff officially became a city and twelve months before the City Hall was formally opened.

Several local authorities sought Joseph's expert advice on the installation of public clocks when someone else was constructing theirs. An example of this is the town clock in Barry, constructed by Niehus Brothers. of Bristol, in 1908.

The firm continued to design and supply commemorative keys, trowels, etc for formal openings and civic events. It also produced gold caskets for presentation to people granted the freedom of the city, for example, David Lloyd George, Lord Windsor, General Baden-Powell and Lord Kitchener. Perhaps the most prestigious order was to design and supply an improved chain for the Lady Mayoress, commissioned to coincide with the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, in 1897. The year before, Mayor Ebenezer Beavan had convened a public meeting where it was agreed to open a public subscription, one of the objectives being the provision of a chain for the Mayoress. A sum of between three and four hundred pounds (£40-50,000 today), including £100 from the Marchioness of Bute, was subscribed and a specification prepared by the Town Clerk. Joseph, who had trained as a jeweller, must have relished this opportunity to display his

skills. The chain is composed of a succession of shields, representing the historic Welsh counties, and each of these is held by a dragon and either a seahorse (for coastal counties) or a deer (for inland ones). The whole chain is in 18 carat gold, set with diamonds, rubies and emeralds. The central pendant has a picture of Queen Victoria.

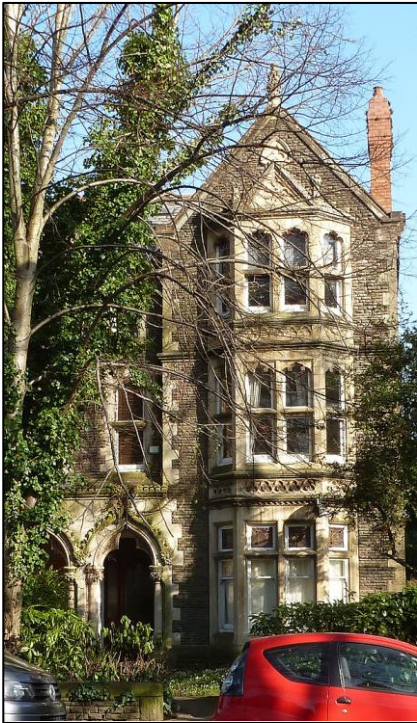
The names of wearers are inscribed on the chain, the first being Ebenezer's second wife, Harriet. (The Beavan's can be found in Section M of the Cemetery and have their own stories.) The chain, which outshines that of the Mayor, is still in regular use today as the picture below, taken a couple of years ago, shows:



We have seen that Joseph moved into the living accommodation above the shop when his father died. Census information tells us that 20 years earlier his home was in Oakfield Street, Roath, with his wife and three young sons. Even at this time the family had two servants. It seems that, at the time they moved to Duke Street, they were living in Llanblethian Gardens, with two teenage sons, Alfred and Hubert, plus a younger son, Clement. There would not have been room above the shop for all of them, so

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they must have kept both homes running initially. They soon took steps to rationalise the living arrangements and acquired 78 Cathedral Road, where the whole family took up residence, with two servants. Although its function has changed today, you can still see the impressive building ...



The friendship with Joseph Conrad, which started in 1885, before Conrad became an author, may have been initiated by his father, but blossomed with Joseph. Conrad's first known compositions in English, are letters to the younger Spiridion from Singapore and Calcutta in 1885-86 and his contact with the family is the only known Polish link Conrad made during his early life in England. The bond between the families was sufficiently close for, a decade later, the newly wedded Conrads to spend Christmas 1896 with Joseph and his family in Cathedral Road. Conrad actually completed his novella "The Nigger of the Narcissus" during this visit.

Conrad was to visit the family on, at least, two further occasions. In his novel Lord Jim, one of the characters, a wanted revolutionary, made his escape and found refuge with a watchmaker

in Trieste, while one of the many sea captains featuring in his novels was named Captain Elliott. The links to Spiridion's own journey to the UK are clear.

Joseph was a lifelong eisteddfod supporter, both at the national and the local level, giving silver medals as prizes for the winners in some of the musical competitions. He also generously provided prizes for local rifle shooting competitions. The firm was frequently called upon as an expert witness in cases involving counterfeit money and stolen or fake goods. Another major order was to provide 35,000 bronze medals for the Lord Mayor to distribute to the children of Cardiff as mementoes of the visit of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra for the opening of the Queen Alexandra Dock in 1907.

The business continued to expand its services, selling instruments such as thermometers, altimeters and barometers, including unusually large ones for public display. Linked to this, it started to provide an authoritative semi-official service of local temperature and barometric readings, with weather reports for Cardiff. In reporting unusual weather events or, even, eclipses or small local earthquakes, the local press regularly consulted Spiridion & Son for an expert comment. The firm catered for the Victorian and Edwardian culture of conspicuous consumption and display, providing such items as large table clocks in fretwork cases, silver epergnes (ornamental centrepieces for a table) and candlesticks, silver goblets, and massive marble clocks with pure bronze Corinthian columns.

Another example of the expansion of the scope of the business is demonstrated in 1905, when it opened a stand alone optician's shop at 112 Queen Street, but still under the name of Spiridion & Son. We assume that this was largely Alfred's baby as he is described in the 1901 Census as an optician. Sadly, just three

years later, Alfred (commonly known as Fred) is reported to have died on the SS Alouette, while on a passage from London to Ostend. He was only 32. It would be nice to know more about the circumstances - what was the cause of death and was he travelling for business or pleasure? However, he becomes the third interment in the family grave, with the inscription on the bottom tier of the pedestal, immediately below the record of his grandparents, reading (digitally tinted yellow in the image which follows):

HERE ALSO REPOSES
**ALFRED STANISLAW SPIRIDION
 KLISZCZEWSKI**
 GRANDSON OF THE ABOVE
 BORN AT CARDIFF 2ND NOV 1873
 DIED WHILST ON A PASSAGE BETWEEN LONDON
 AND OSTEND 18TH AUGUST 1908



Memorial, highlighting details for Alfred, Marie & Joseph

There was more bad news about ten years later. Where the family once had stores and workshops in Frederick Street, there was now the five-storey Glamorgan Insurance Building, close to the Queen Street junction and jointly owned by Hubert and Clement Spiridion, In January 1917, this became the site of what was described as "the greatest fire seen in Cardiff"

up to that time. Fire started in a part occupied by a hosiery company, but quickly spread through the rest of the building, which burnt to the ground. The total damage was valued at around £100,000 (nearly £9m today) and 25 million health insurance records were lost.

Joseph and Hubert continued running the business until about 1920, when Joseph retired, probably prompted by the death of his wife Marie, on 16th January that year. At this time, their home was recorded as 173 Newport Road, coincidentally, just around the corner from their first family home, 6 Oakfield Street. This proximity suggested a photographic comparison of the two houses - but we were about a year too late! We found No.6 cloaked in scaffolding and, even worse, No.173 had just been pulled down.

It appears that Joseph spent his retirement in Hampshire, as his death is recorded in Lymington, on 7th June 1932, at the age of 83. The interments of Marie and Joseph in the family plot took place just three and two days, respectively, after death. Their details were duly recorded on the memorial (tinted red and green respectively in the preceding picture), filling the bottom tier of the pedestal and continuing onto the horizontal tablet at its foot:

ALSO **MARIE** WIFE OF **JOSEPH SPIRIDION
 KLISZCZEWSKI**
 BORN AT ST FAGANS 12TH DEC 1846
 DIED AT CARDIFF 16TH JAN 1920

ALSO **JOSEPH SPIRIDION
 KLISZCZEWSKI**
 CHEVALIER OF THE ORDER OF THE REBIRTH OF
 POLAND
 BORN AT FAREHAM HANTS 3RD DEC 1848
 DIED AT LYMINGTON HANTS 7TH JUNE 1932

Sometimes it is a few words on a memorial that tells us what was really important in a person's life - in this case, that Joseph had inherited his father's Polish patriotism and had actively

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supported the cause of Polish independence.

The Order of Polonia Restituta (Rebirth of Poland) was established by the Polish state on 4th February 1921, having recovered its independence at the end of the First World War. It could be conferred on Polish citizens and foreigners for outstanding achievements in a wide range of fields, including furthering good relations between countries. There are five classes to the order and Knight (or Chevalier) is the fifth.

At the time of Joseph's retirement, Hubert and his family were living at Edlina, 12 North Road, a well appointed semi-detached residence. Aside from the two storey extension on the side, this probably looks much the same today as it did then:



12 North Road

Hubert and his wife, Irene, moved into the accommodation above the shop. But they had two young children, Bernard, aged 10 and Wanda, aged 12, who could not be comfortably accommodated there. They chose to run two homes, so the children could continue to live at Edlina, with a nurse and a cook, while they also had a domestic servant at 29 Duke Street.

On 11 January 1921, Hubert formally renounced and abandoned the surname Kliszczewski by deed poll. Henceforth, his family's name and that of the business would be aligned.

In 1923, the widening of Duke Street necessitated the demolition of all buildings on its north side. The firm moved across the road

to 9 Duke Street, where the mosaic floor of the re-entrant doorway to the shop is white with the name SPIRIDION & SON in black. You can see this floor today, although it may be largely obscured by standing displays of the present occupier, Jokeshop.com ...



Mosaic floor at 9 Duke Street

After Joseph retired, Hubert continued to run the business under the same name, although 10 year old Bernard could not be active in the business - and there is no evidence that he ever worked there. The business focus changed to that of ophthalmic opticians and the Spiridion & Son brand continued until about 1964 at 9 Duke Street, although Hubert stepped back from hands-on involvement about 25 years earlier, moving to Bognor Regis.

It may be more than 60 years since the business ceased trading, but clocks, watches, instruments and jewellery bearing the name Spiridion still appear for sale and are greatly sought after.

While we have come to the end of the business, there remain some family loose ends, which we will look at in our next issue.

Recent Events

AGM

The well attended **Annual General Meeting** was held in the Anglican Chapel at the Cemetery on **Saturday 25th January**, starting at 10.00 a.m. The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending. The papers for the AGM had been sent out in advance and he hoped that everyone had received and read them. Some apologies for absence had been received and a few others were made at the meeting: all were recorded.

The Minutes of the 2024 AGM were accepted and there were no matters arising.

The Chairman reported on a full and successful year, highlighting:

- visit to the Cardiff University Library for talks about their work and the opportunity to examine items from their archive, focussing on the Barbier section
- grateful receipt of an architectural drawing of the Catholic Chapel shortly before its demolition from the artist, Nick Ruff
- three excellent Spring talks, held in the chapels with the Friends newly acquired projection equipment, by Martin Swain (Moses White, Cardiff & Barry Dock Pilot), Nick Davey (Jacob Matthews, Nurseryman & Builder of Temperance Town) and Rob Pickford (Reversing the Decline of Nature in Cardiff)
- a number of talks or guided walks given to other groups
- Spring Heritage Walk, led by Roger Swan and Amanda Eades, which attracted about 100 people
- three nature walks organised by The Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales, featuring birds, butterflies and fungi (the latter identifying 20 species of waxcap)
- Peter Sturgess of Highfields Church conducted a Nature Survey as part of a project coordinated by the Caring for God's Acre group, recording more than 160 species
- Midsummer Walk (attended by around 30 people) led by Gordon Hindess
- three sold out Graveyard Voices presentations, performed by the excellent A48 Theatre Company and scripted by the Living Lines writers group, with refreshments served by the Friends
- an attendance of more than 100 people at Open Doors, about 40 of whom also

enjoyed a guided walk. Both chapels and vestries were open, with displays including the model of the Catholic Chapel (thanks to Roger Martin) and a display panel of a copy of Nick Ruff's Catholic Chapel drawing (kindly produced and donated to the Friends by Cardiff University Library)

- Autumn Heritage Walk, attracting some 40 people despite unfavourable weather. Cathays Cemetery honey was completely sold out at the end
- the award of a Green Flag, marked by a flag-raising ceremony attended by the Friends
- representation at the Remembrance Services in both Cathays and Western Cemetery
- the annual Bill Mosely Memorial Lecture by Simon Morgan, about the restoration of the shield on the main entrance

He thanked all those who had contributed to individual events, with special mention of Jean Sanford and Ted Richards (who had joined the Tuesday Walk leading rota) Simon Morgan and John Farnhill, who was stepping down from the Treasurer duties which he had undertaken since the formation of the Friends. He was grateful for the ongoing support of Bereavement Services, particularly Carmel Thomas and Denise Rogers, the Trustee committee, Michael Fairclough for his regular litter picking around the Cemetery and the behind the scenes work of his wife, Linda. He looked forward to another full programme of events this year, as outlined in the programme distributed with the AGM papers.

In his report, the President endorsed the Chairman's report but drew attention to the unstinting work of the Chairman and his wife that ensured a full and successful year. He thanked Bereavement Services for their continuing cooperative support, emphasizing that not all cemetery friends groups were so fortunate. He noted the passing of Julian

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Litton, who had been a supporter of all cemeteries and friends groups and always ready to give help and advice, including here. Other contributions to be particularly thankful for were:

- Gordon Hindess for the newsletter and guided walks
- Simon Morgan for both his personal support and through the organisations that he represents
- John Farnhill for his long service as Treasurer and Ruth Saunders for volunteering to step into his shoes

He noted that holding our lectures in the Anglican chapel, with the new projection equipment, was working well. With the successful completion of the shield restoration at the entrance, he suggested that focus could now be on the bier house, although it was recognised that this was a significantly bigger project. Contributions by the Friends were also being considered in relation to restoration work on the chapel doors, which had already commenced, and the provision of low kerbing around the grassed areas at the chapels, to improve appearance and aid maintenance. Thanks are due to Des and Jean Sanford, for their volunteering with CWGC and liaison with them over a number issues regarding marking, inscriptions, etc of service personnel graves.

In presenting the audited accounts for the year ending 31st December 2024, which were distributed at the meeting, the Treasurer noted that this would be the last time for him. He had been Treasurer since the Friends were formed almost 20 years ago. He noted that some members had not yet updated their standing orders to pay their subscriptions and how this was dealt with would be a matter for the committee to consider. Overall income exceeded expenditure, so the balance on the account had increased. Subscriptions, donations and book/booklet sales continued to be the main sources of income. Interestingly, the insurance premium had gone down a little, due to a more flexible approach to cover options by the

insurer. The accounts were duly approved by the meeting. It was noted that there would be some early expenditure in 2025 in relation to proposed restoration/improvement works, subject to further discussion with Bereavement Services. It was emphasized that a reasonable minimum balance on the account needed to be maintained.

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. Ted Richards had offered his services and was duly elected at the meeting, so the trustees are now:

Chairman: Paul Jones

Treasurer: Ruth Saunders

Trustees: Sue Clancy, Jean Sanford, Margaret Smith, John Farnhill, Ivor Lippett, Paul Nicholson (Honorary President) and Des Sanford.

Carmel Thomas gave an update on behalf of Bereavement Services, reciprocating the thanks given by the Friends and emphasizing the assistance provided by the Friends. She confirmed that Roger Swann had retired from leading Heritage Walks and that Amanda Eades, who had shadowed Roger last year, would be taking over. The Cemetery had again gained the Green Flag and Green Heritage Awards and the involvement of the Friends contributed to this. The Friends' Tuesday walkers and a group of external volunteers were present at the flag raising ceremony. During the year, some repair work had been undertaken on the chapel roofs and new audio/visual facilities had been provided in the "Funeral Chapel", matching those at Thornhill. Living Lines meet fortnightly in the chapels and the A48 Theatre Company have staged indoor performances here. The west facing door on the chapels has been restored and similar, but less urgent, work is under consideration on the three remaining doors. New external lights have made it easier to use the chapels on dark evenings and work

has been undertaken to tackle a damp problem in one of the vestries. While the demise of the monkey puzzle tree by the main entrance was disappointing (though not entirely unexpected), consideration is being given to a possible replacement planting. New litter/recycling bins, complying with government guidance are being pursued and clearer "dogs on short lead" notices mounted on them is in hand.

There was a constructive discussion under Any Other Relevant Business, the most significant points being:

- General appreciation of the restoration work on the chapel door and acknowledgement of Simon Margan's assistance in organising this.
- There was general agreement in principle to the Friends making contributions to the various improvement works discussed during the meeting, although quantum would have to be agreed by the Committee, with due cognisance of prudent budgetary management, and in consultation with Bereavement Services.
- Margaret Smith offered spare copies of Julian Litton's obituary to anyone who might be interested.
- John Farnhill reported an increase in followers on Facebook to 762, although the numbers on X (Twitter) were slightly down at 602, possibly reflecting a more general drop in enthusiasm for this platform.
- The local group of Cardiff Wild Gardeners have shown interest in working in the Cemetery. While welcome in principle, any involvement would require further dialogue with both the Friends and Bereavement Services, especially Denise Rogers.
- The membership renewal form relates only to an individual, although discussion acknowledged that one membership would include other family members living at the same address. It was agreed

to review the wording of the form
The meeting closed at 11.10 am.

Talk

On **Tuesday 11th February**, we were fortunate to enjoy not only the billed speakers, but also the atmospheric reading of three pertinent historic records by **Howell Thomas** of the **A48 Theatre Company**. Joint authors of "**Death on a Gravestone**", **Mary Jones** and **John Wake**, talked about the book which was published last year, saying enough to whet the appetite, without giving too much away. They outlined their different backgrounds and skills and how these were brought together for the book. Mary is the best selling author of the Maze Investigation books, which are founded on her forte, genealogical detective investigation and emphasized the importance of records recorded on headstones. John, from his working background in the police and subsequently building up a unique archive emphasized the importance of research, which underlies his own popular books. A selection of Mary's books was on display, while John brought along some precious items from his personal archive. The chapel was full and many of those who had been enthralled by the presentation went home with copies of "Death on a Gravestone". All in all, this was an excellent start to this year's talk programme.

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

It was nice to get back to work after the winter break, more so because our February task (clearing and cutting back vegetation between the main entrance and the lodge) was one where the very obvious improvement gave great satisfaction.

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? **We meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. So put the last Saturday

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of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **29th March, 26th April, 31st May and 28th June.**

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.** All are welcome and the walks are not strenuous, concentrating on the seasonal highlights around the Cemetery, with a sprinkling of information about the history of the Cemetery and those buried in it. The socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe.

Future Events

Talks

The venue for our talks is the **Anglican chapel - on the right when you enter the main entrance to the Cemetery from Fairoak Road.** All start at **7.00 pm.**

On **Tuesday March 25th,** **Bob Price** will talk about **Cathays Cemetery Station.** Bob is the enthusiast behind **Bob's Rail Relics,** a series of You Tube videos, about disused railways, canals, and other industrial archaeological sites, mainly around South Wales. The subject of this talk is something which has intrigued the Friends since shortly after the group was formed. We can't wait to be enlightened!

On **Tuesday April 15th,** **Jenni Phillips** will present **The Rule Family.** Researching her own ancestry led Jenni to pursue postgraduate qualifications as a genealogist, which she has put to good use locally. A fascinating talk is guaranteed.

On **Tuesday May 6th,** **Ted Richards** will talk about **The Billups Family.** Ted is immersed in research into local history and regularly talks on what he has brought to light. Most visitors to the Cemetery notice (you can hardly miss it!) the impressive red granite Billups memorial in Section M. The family history is no less impressive.

Walks

The walks will start just inside the **main entrance in Fairoak Road.**

On **Sunday April 27th at 11 am,** the **Heritage Walk** will be led by **Amanda Eades, on behalf of Bereavement Services.** This is an excellent introduction to the Cemetery and some of those buried in it.

On **Tuesday June 17th at 7 pm,** **Gordon Hindess** of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery will lead the **Midsummer Walk.** As usual, the primary aim will be to present the stories of residents of the Cemetery who haven't been included in this annual walk previously, so you can expect to hear something new.

Other Events

The **A48 Theatre Company** will again be performing to **new scripts by the writers of Living Lines** on a guided walk around the Cemetery in **June/July** (dates/times to be confirmed). There will be a small charge for these events. Further details, including online booking arrangements, will be available closer to the time on the Bereavement Services' website, the Friends' website, social media and posters on the Cemetery gates. These events are very popular and, with a limit on numbers, early booking is recommended.

On **Wednesday 26th March at 2 pm,** **Glamorgan Archives** have an event featuring **Cathays Cemetery,** with a talk and display of documents. The event is free, but needs to be pre-booked through Glamorgan Archives.

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
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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