

Sun Galore and Little Rain

If the last quarter was a bit gloomy, this one has been anything but. Terms like 'record sunshine hours', 'hottest end to April/start of May', 'hottest May Day on record' and the inevitable 'risk of drought' have been freely bandied about. But the flora and fauna of the Cemetery seem to have been happy with this. Once again we have enjoyed an extended primrose season, with new patches appearing, in some cases seemingly adopting a particular grave (picture below left). Pinky hybrids have also impressed (below right).



Other flowers only come into their own when it is really Spring. Just take a walk around the Cemetery and you will find something to gladden your heart, like the bluebells in a carpet of celandine, the scattered cuckoo flowers or the shy violets, as pictured below.



We have enjoyed what might be regarded as the second phase of blossoms, with the foxglove tree excelling after a few poor years, while a non-exotic, which made its own way into the Cemetery, the hawthorn, has also impressed.



Foxglove tree and hawthorn in blossom

We have occasionally reported on tree losses, but never before on a case of stoicism and bravery. A cherry tree at the southern corner of Section T has had branches dying and being cut off in consequence for a few years. From a distance, it now looks like a skeleton (left, below), but a close look showed it doing its best for the future of the species, with its remaining live branches having a mass of blossom (right, below).



While Spring flowers and blossom have been earlier this year, one of our indicator migrant birds, the swift, was spotted during the Tuesday walk in the Cemetery on 6th May, a few days earlier than the previous best. While the lovely weather here will have played a part, it is consistent with early sightings across the UK this year, thought to be partly due to calm, dry weather across southern Europe.

This emphasizes that, to be in with a chance of spotting the best of the Cemetery's natural history, you need to spend time in it. You may

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be rewarded with something quite exceptional, like the buzzard posing in clear view on a headstone, like this:



We are grateful to geocacher ruthnj117 for allowing us to use this excellent photograph.

Summer Miscellany

Though often unseen, or unnoticed, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission continues to maintain its heritage and sort out problems and omissions. Sometimes, the trigger for their action is the vigilance of our own Eyes On Hands On (EOHO) volunteers, Jean and Des Sandford. On other occasions, it is someone's pursuit of a particular grave that sets things in motion. It can take years to progress from a query, through record checks, getting authorisations, having new stones made and delivered, then erected. It was, therefore, a happy surprise to find two new arrivals recently, as pictured below:



The one on the left is on a French wargrave (CWGC look after these in the UK) and is unusual in that it does not give any more information than the name of the person, Teffaine A. This is the only French marker in Cathays Cemetery like this. Normally, it would indicate service, rank and date of death, plus "Mort pour la France". The standard CWGC headstone on the right marks the burial place of Private J E Pearce, of the Northumberland Fusiliers, who died on 3rd September 1919, aged 38.

The headline "Lawnmower ban at ancient cemetery" prompted closer inspection. The Giles Hill Graveyard is less than half a mile from the centre of Winchester and dates from medieval times, but also includes people killed during WW1 and a Titanic casualty. The council took control of the site in 2021, when the graveyard closed, while a Friends group has existed for about 10 years. During this period, the Friends have made a significant contribution to ground maintenance, with their own tools, including a power mower. But, following consultation with their insurers, health and safety and other local authorities, the council has now banned the use of power mowers by the group, even though the Friends have their own insurance cover to do this. The Friends can no longer keep on top of the ground maintenance. At a time when the public purse is overstretched, an unsatisfactory outcome for the site now looks inevitable. Insurance and health and safety have legitimate rolls, but it seems increasingly that they become a reason for not doing sensible things rather than providing a route to supporting common sense.

The Law Commission is reviewing the law on dealing with bodies. Burial law is governed by a patchwork of legislation, including different laws depending on who is responsible for a burial ground. Burial space is running out, and grave reuse, common in other countries, is again being considered as a solution. There are also

unresolved issues around what can be done with cremated ashes. Consultation on these issues has commenced. Advances in technology have led to new methods of dealing with people's remains after they die, such as alkaline hydrolysis and human composting, but such methods are unregulated in England and Wales. The project will look at ways to address this. Current rules about who has the right to decide about the remains of a deceased person can lead to disputes. The project will consider how to clarify this responsibility in law. The review has commenced, but is expected to take a few years to complete and will report in stages.



On the morning of Thursday May 22nd we held a joint bird walk with the South West and Wales Wildlife Trust led by Alex Griffiths, the Wilder Engagement Officer, around the Cemetery. Accompanied by 20 other members of both societies the glorious weather treated us to a fascinating glimpse of wildlife around the grounds. This consisted of watching several robins fighting it out over a territorial battle for the best ground; visits past the nesting boxes of great tits and blue tits, a wide array of butterflies and mating blue damsel flies; we even fitted in a visit to our famous Balloon Girl gravestone memorial.

The birds encountered comprised the following amongst the 26 species we managed to identify; goldcrests, magpies, greenfinches, swifts, a sparrow hawk, blackbirds, jays, a mallard, crows, dunnocks, treecreepers, great tits, blue tits, black caps, starlings, wood pigeons, wrens, long-tailed tits, robins, thrushes, rooks, siskins, and many types of gulls including herring and black-backed. A wide variety of blossoming trees were also pointed out. A great day out, again thanks to Rob Pickford and Alex.

Next year, the International Dendrology Society will be visiting Cardiff. A planning recce this Spring confirmed the Cemetery as a must visit site. Although these tree experts converse in Latin names, they reminded us what a wonderful arboretum we have. We have a wide range of beech trees, including one which is the only known example. There are oak trees that have leaves that look more like willow or sweet chestnut and there is even a corkscrew willow.

Spiridion

Part 6 – Loose Ends

We reached the end of the Spiridion business in our last issue, but there remain a number of peripheral family matters of interest ...

Joseph's sister, Wanda Caroline (sometimes recorded as Vanda Karolina) married Horatio Hooper in June 1876, when she was 24. Horatio was a shipowner, initially setting up in partnership with William Campbell and Joseph Child-Priestly, trading as Hooper Campbell and Co, at 15, Mount Stuart Square. This company was amicably dissolved after one year, at which point Horatio founded the Cardiff Steamship Company, which proved to be a profitable enterprise.

The couple had five children, two sons and three daughters. One of their sons, Walter Thomas Hooper, emigrated to Canada, but returned across the Atlantic, as a major in the 78th Bn Canadian Infantry to be killed at Vimy Ridge, in 1917. He is buried at Givenchy-en-gohelle Canadian Cemetery, Souchez, France.

Wanda outlived her husband and finished her days at Uphill, Weston-super-mare, in a house called Fareham, reflecting her family history. She died in 1940, aged 88.

We are uncertain about the amount of involvement Hubert retained in the Cardiff business when he and his wife Irene moved to Bognor Regis in the late 1930s. With Hubert in his early sixties, he had not reached state retirement age, while Irene was several years younger. Bognor had been granted its "Regis" suffix by George V after a successful convalescence, in Aldwick, in 1929. This gave the town a reputation as a healthy place to live and it became popular with retired professional people. Select residential estates sprang up to meet the demand that followed. The Spiridions (they seem to have dropped the Kliszczewski surname completely by this time) settled into a

fine detached residence in Fourth Avenue, on the Summerley Estate, Felpham, about 100 metres from the seafront.

They may have moved hoping for a peaceful retirement, but the Sussex coast was not the place to find this during the Second World War! With the 1931 Census records being lost in a fire during the war and the 1941 Census cancelled because of it, we are lucky to have the 1939 Register to give us a glimpse of the Spiridion's situation. (Following the start of the Second World War, the government needed an accurate count of Britain's civilian population to enable the issuing of ration books and ID cards, the direction of labour and conscription into the armed forces. The 1939 Register was compiled for this purpose.) The entries for the Spiridion's address list Hubert as a retired jeweller and ARP Warden, Irene as an unpaid domestic servant and volunteer nurse at St Richard's Church. They have two female 'lodgers' around 40 years old, one a domestic servant, the other a school teacher. The Spiridions were clearly doing their bit for the war effort and this is reinforced by an advert in a local newspaper which shows that Hubert is the representative of the Sussex Society for Polish Relief (citing 200,000 homeless Poles in need of clothing) and "will accept donations (including money) at his house or will collect from anywhere in Bognor". Their Polish heritage is still to the fore.

After the war, a personal advert in a newspaper tells of Hubert's intention to attend the Festival of Britain, in 1951, hoping to find out more about a bronze medallion and diploma presented to his great grandfather (William Grant) who was described as an inventor and an exhibitor at the 1851 Festival (Exhibition of the Works of All Nations). The prize winning exhibit was thought to have been a landing craft. Was the quest to find out more about this prompted by the Normandy landings?

A probate notice confirms Hubert's death on 19 Jan 1963, at the age of 85, leaving Irene a

widow. At this time, their son, Bernard, is a lieutenant colonel in the army, while their daughter, Wanda Spiridion Wennberg (having been married to Charles Paul Hjalmar Wennberg, who was about 20 years older than her) is a widow. Hubert's estate was valued at about £0.3 million at today's price level. Hubert and his family are not buried in Cardiff.

The final interments in the family plot are recorded on the horizontal tablet as shown highlighted in the image below.



Although this is the most recent inscription, it can still be difficult to read, so the words are repeated below:

**CLEMENT GRANT SPIRIDION-
KLISZCZEWSKI**
BORN IN CARDIFF 12ND OCT 1880
DIED 14TH APRIL 1965
ALSO JANINA, WIFE OF CLEMENT
DIED IN CARDIFF DEC 1ST 1975

The inscription is, perhaps, more interesting for what it doesn't tell us! It doesn't tell us where Clement died. Although still resident in Cardiff, he died in Cheltenham General Hospital. Also, it doesn't tell us where Janina was born. The 1911 Census tells us that Janina was born in Germany, but the 1921 Census qualifies this with 'Province of Posen, now Poland'. Notably, Poland had regained its independent status after the First World War. Following the carving up of Poland after the defeat of Napoleon, Poznań became the capital of the Grand Duchy of Posen, which in theory enjoyed

limited autonomy, with the rights of the Poles respected. (*Poznań is in the middle of western Poland, about mid way between Warsaw and Berlin.*) It seems that Janina was a proud Pole, very much in keeping with the family she married into. It is highly likely that she spoke Polish and almost certainly fits the bill as the person who translated Clement's grandfather's account of his early life and his journey to Britain.

The hyphenation of the surname in the inscription demonstrates the cementation of Spiridion into the family name.

Clement set a course that would not lead him into the family business. Perhaps, with two elder brothers already committed to Spiridion and Son, this was both practical and wise. The 1901 Census finds him listed as a dental student, boarding in the Parish of Paddington. Two years later, he qualified at the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS) with a Licence in Dental Surgery (LDS). The next 10 years must have been very busy! He established a dental practice in Cardiff and married Janina, their two children, Jan Tadeusz Wladyslaw and Aleksandra Marya, were born and the printed version of his grandfather's story, dated 1911, was produced. During WW1, Clement volunteered as a stretcher bearer in his spare time. Cardiff was overflowing with injured soldiers brought back from the front and there would have been a huge demand for such volunteers.

The family home and the dental practice were both at 7 Windsor Place for around 50 years. There are some impressive period buildings in Windsor Place. Sadly, this one, together with its immediate neighbour, was replaced shortly after the Spiridions moved out in the early 1960s. The replacement building is bereft of architectural merit and is currently occupied by Cooke & Arkwright.

Clement had a long and distinguished career, becoming President of the British Dental

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Association in 1952, at the age of 72. Even in the 1961 Census, he does not describe himself as retired. Throughout their residence in Windsor Place, they enjoyed the support of live-in domestic help. Clement was in his 80s when they made a move to another Windsor - Windsor House in Westgate Street...



While this move was probably motivated by sensible age related downsizing (a term that is more familiar today!), it may also have been linked to the redevelopment of the property in Windsor Place. The terrace of prestigious apartments in Westgate Street was probably one of the most desirable places in Cardiff to live at the time. Sadly, Clement was only able to enjoy their new home for a couple of years. He left his widow, Janina, and his two children, Jan and Aleksandra.

Looking back on this story, it may be seen as a tribute to a baby boy who died in Poland a little over 200 years ago. His name was part of a successful plan to escape oppression, became a business that thrived for more than a century and became consolidated into the family name. The name can still be spotted around Cardiff, including on a granite memorial in Cathays Cemetery. Not least, it became the appropriate umbrella title, for the longest serialisation to date in *Grave News*!

Servicewomen in Cathays 6 to 8 *Joan Margaret Sellwood, Ruth* *Harvey & Barbara Sarah* *Watkin Williams*

Joan Margaret Sellwood was born in December 1919 to Isaac and Elizabeth Sellwood. Isaac had been born in Wootton Bassett and served in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry in the 1st World War, but now he was a plasterer and living in Penypeel Rd, Canton. Isaac died in April 1935, and at the time of the 1939 Register Elizabeth was still living in Penypeel Rd with her children Wilfred, a solicitor's clerk, and Joan, a shorthand typist.

Joan joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as a Leading Aircraftwoman but sadly died of TB in the North Wales Sanatorium on 17th of March 1945. She is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave, Plot EP106 in Cathays New Cemetery. (Memorial pictured left below).



Ruth Harvey nee Watling was born in Chelsea in 1922. In July 1944 she married Albert Harvey in Cardiff. At this time Ruth was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, stationed at RAF Llandow in the Vale of Glamorgan. The RAF base at Llandow opened in 1940, initially as a grass strip airfield with a small number of wooden

buildings. In late 1941 the concrete runways were completed. During World War 2 the main RAF unit based at Llandow was Number 38 maintenance unit.

Ruth was a fabric worker attached to Number 3 Aircraft Preparation Unit at Llandow. On 17th December 1944 she was admitted to the RAF hospital in St Athan, where she died on 22nd December from tubercular meningitis. She is buried in Plot EK226 in Cathays New Cemetery.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission allowed the family of the casualty to choose a short personal inscription for the grave stone. Ruth's family chose MIZPAH, a Hebrew word meaning watchtower; usually translated as May God Watch Over You. Mizpah became a popular word on jewellery in the mid Victorian period, it then fell out of fashion but regained popularity during World War 1.

Barbara Sarah Watkin Williams was born in Cardiff in July 1922 to Thomas Baker Williams, an auctioneer's clerk and his wife Annie Maud. In October 1935 Barbara was a bridesmaid when her older sister Annie Elizabeth married the well known boxer Jack Petersen in Marshfield parish church. By the outbreak of war in 1939 Barbara and her parents were living at 18 Ninian Rd Cardiff.

Barbara joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in 1939 and was stationed at RAF Digby in Lincolnshire, which in May and June 1940 was home to No 222 squadron of Spitfires on a rest and recuperation break from the Battle of Britain. RAF Digby was the oldest RAF station, opened in March 1918, the last year of the First World War. Frank Whittle the inventor of the jet engine, and Douglas Bader were stationed here, and it is where Guy Gibson learned to fly.

On the night of 19/20th of June 1940 Barbara was travelling in a car with Pilot Officer Alan Blanchard Lawton when they were involved in a head on collision with a car driven by Pilot

Officer Kenneth Andre Cockerell in the blackout near RAF Digby. The previous morning Cockerell had returned from a successful bombing raid on Hamburg. All three tragically died.

Barbara is remembered on the war memorial within St Martins Church, Albany Road. Her friends at RAF Digby bought a flower urn which is still in use on her grave (Plot O1107 in Cathays Old Cemetery), it is inscribed:

To Barbara

*In loving memory from the Girls of C. Control
Digby 1939-40*



Barbara Watkin Williams headstone in family grave, with flower urn from RAF Digby

(A few years ago, in Issue No.43, we mentioned Barbara but inadvertently gave an incorrect version of the manner of her death. We apologise for this error. Unfortunately, internet searches may find unreliable sources!).

Unfortunate Coincidence



This is the monument to Rev Nathaniel Thomas in Section M. The inscription states that he was "forwards of 30 years the faithful and beloved minister of the Welsh Baptist Church, the Tabernacle, Cardiff". He died on December 2nd 1888. The impressive memorial was erected by the Tabernacle Church itself. However, you may be taken aback by the numbers etched into the plinth at the back ...



If you look carefully you will find that the three digits are preceded by the letter M - it's just the plot number!

Recent Events

Talks

On **Tuesday March 25th**, **Bob Price** gave an entertaining talk to a capacity audience on **Cathays Cemetery Station**. Bob, the enthusiast behind Bob's Rail Relics on You Tube, confirmed that there really was a Cemetery Station, located where Fair oak Mews is today, and that it did provide some ad hoc service to the Cemetery. However, the demand for this service was found to be limited, so the facility was adapted for other uses. Bob had unearthed a great deal of information relevant to the subject, throwing more light on the Friends' previous understanding of the position.

Unfortunately, the programmed talk on **Tuesday April 15th**, about the **Rule Family**, by **Jenni Phillips**, had to be cancelled. It is hoped to reschedule this sometime in the future.

On **Tuesday May 6th**, **Ted Richards** gave an illustrated talk about **The Billups Family**. Jonathan Billups came from a humble farming family in Chatteris, Cambridgeshire. He moved to London to work as a platelayer on the railways and his first child was born in Deptford. Still employed as a platelayer he moved to Newport, where his second child was born. In a remarkably short time, he is contracting to build railways across south Wales and also undertaking other major construction works, sinking mine shafts and going on to develop brick and cement works. (One of Ted's illustrations for the talk was a "Billups" brick!) His contracting work went further afield, including London and Sweden. His first home in Cardiff was Cadiz House, on what is now Newport Road. While living there, he built his family home at 28 The Parade, which was to become the home of Cardiff High School for Girls, for some 30 years. If you look up at the building today, you can still see the monograms of Jonathan and his wife, Susannah, carved in the stonework ...



The Billups family were committed Methodists and this led to them meeting William and Catherine Booth and providing substantial support to their evangelical work. This included obtaining a home for their evangelical preaching in the former circus building in St Mary's Street (the site now occupied by the Prince of Wales) and effectively underwriting the organisation that was to become the Salvation Army. The two families were to become closely intertwined thereafter.

After the well-researched talk, on a warm, sunny evening, the 30 or so attendees went out to look at the impressive memorial to the Billups family, which is conveniently close to the chapels.



Red granite Billups memorial

Walks

On **Sunday April 27th**, the **Heritage Walk** was led by **Amanda Eades of Bereavement Services**. This was Amanda's first solo lead of this walk around the Cemetery and she gave a faultless and very entertaining presentation to

some 30 attendees, in favourable weather. Once again, this was an excellent introduction to the Cemetery and some of those buried in it.

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

Unfortunately, our March workday had to be cancelled - but we feel as if we made up for this in April and May. The work around the main entrance was completed (including seeding with wild flowers) and the lonicera screening hedges at the chapels were trimmed and two provided with timber framing supports. At the end of May, some nest boxes which we had been gifted were set up in the New Cemetery. This follows the success of similar installations in the Old Cemetery a couple of years ago. Although the Friends were not involved, on the same day, a number of bat boxes were being put up around both parts of the Cemetery.



Bird box being placed in a large beech tree

We usually meet by the chapels at 10 am and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. So

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put the last Saturday of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **28th June, 26th July, and 27th September**. As usual, there will be no workday in August. You can work at your own pace and tools and gloves are provided. So why not join us for a couple of hours of sociable exercise?

Tuesday Walks

These walks, which last about an hour, start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. We have some new leaders, who have brought new stories and different specialisms. The walks are sociable and not strenuous, picking up seasonal highlights around the Cemetery, with a sprinkling of information about the history of the Cemetery and those buried in it. All are welcome and the socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe.

Future Events

Walk

On **Tuesday June 17th at 7 pm, Gordon Hindess** of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery will lead the **Midsummer Walk**. 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. The walk will start just inside the **main entrance in Fair Oak Road**.

Graveyard Voices

The **A48 Theatre Company** will again be performing to **new scripts by the writers of Living Lines** on a guided walk around the Cemetery on **Tuesday 8th July at 7 pm, Wednesday 9th July at 7 pm (indoors!!!), Thursday 10th July at 7 pm and Sunday 13th July at 2 pm**. The dramatised walks last for about 2 hours. Please note that the Wednesday performance will take place inside a chapel and not involve walking around the Cemetery, so may be of particular interest to those with restricted mobility. There is a small charge for these very popular events and, with a limit on

numbers, early booking is recommended. Online booking opens on 2nd June at:

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/a48-theatre-company>

Open Doors

On Sunday September 7th, between 11 am and 3 pm, the Cathays Cemetery Chapels will be opened to the public, with displays and people on hand to answer your questions. There will also be guided walks around the Cemetery during this time.

Publications

Because of disproportionate postal charges, books & themed guides are only sold at events.

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

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

Themed guides (12 - 20 pages) -£1.50 Those currently available are:

Restoring the Chapels at Cathays Cemetery
Sportsmen in Cathays Cemetery
Cathays Cemetery Tree Trail
Cardiff Mayors in Cathays Cemetery
More Mayors & Councillors in Cathays Cemetery
Circuses & Funfairs in Cathays Cemetery
Another Bunch of Wild Flowers
Men & Women of The Church
Mentioned In Stone - - Non-CWGC Graves
The Cemetery Gates
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
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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