

Fruitful Season

It seems that a quarter can't pass without some sort of weather extreme: this time it was heatwaves, which, strangely enough, need lower maximum temperatures in Cardiff than in many other parts of the UK! There has been rain, but we have probably got off lightly compared with other parts of the country, so overall it has been warmer and drier than average. However, the overall response in the Cemetery has been an exceptional crop of fruit.

The biggest surprise was the abundance of red and yellow wild plums:



The red ones haven't appeared in recent years, while the yellow ones have only been seen intermittently and in small quantities. Despite the best efforts of foragers (human and bird) most of the crop ripened and fell to the ground, where a different type of scavenger made the most of the bounty. The carpet of yellow plums in one area was indicative of the size of the crop:



We have used the fairly loose description of wild plum. You may find the same shrubs in the catalogues of nurserymen, listing them as ornamental plums, on account of their early Spring blossom, which may be why they are in

the Cemetery. You may also find more exotic names, like cherry or Mirabelle plums. Adding to the confusion, wild plums aren't technically wild, they are feral and grow from the seeds of cultivated plums, which have probably cross-fertilised with sloes. They are surprisingly widespread in southern parts of the UK, typically appearing as bushes or small trees in hedgerows. Once popular and widely used, they have now become one of our almost forgotten traditional fruits. While edible raw, they were more often used for jams and cooking due to their tartness. Every generation of wild plum tries to revert back to its wild ancestors and the fruits become progressively smaller and sourer. So, if you try to grow shrubs from the seeds of the present ones, you may be disappointed!

Closely related and also found in the Cemetery are (wild) damsons, which ripen a few weeks later. The amount of fruit is very variable from year to year, but our shrubs (which probably made their own way into the Cemetery naturally) have excelled this year, as the picture below shows:



The blackberry crop has probably been the biggest of recent years although this may be due more to the alarming spread of brambles, as the individual berries have lacked the moisture needed to swell them. The crop on the rowans, which will be at their best later, is also

Friends TOPICAL

looking good. Fruit is, of course, a seed distribution device, as are the paragliding wings of the sycamore, which have also had a prolific year. This is best illustrated by the wing debris piled up along the side of paths:



We mentioned the excellent display of blossom on the foxglove tree in our last issue. This translated into a bumper crop of seed pods:



But you can have too much of a good thing! As the pods swelled, their weight bent the branches down. Some found relief when they came to rest on headstones, while others reached the ground without mishap. But about eight big branches snapped under the strain and ended up as a tangled jumble on the ground:



Tuesday Walks are a good time to observe the changing face of nature, sometimes showing off something unexpected - like this tiny decorated egg cup ...



Closer inspection showed it to be a spruce fir cone which had been carefully decapitated by a squirrel, which had then removed the seeds inside. Despite this, it still looked quite attractive.

Normally, this is the time to show off the wild flower beds, but this has not been one of the better years, being one of the few things that haven't had ideal weather. The soil was either too wet or too dry to prepare a decent tilth and then it has been generally too dry for consistent germination and growth. Different seed mixes were used in different parts of the beds and there has been a lot of self-seeding from previous years. Two views of the result are shown below.



Almost by definition, wild flowers look after themselves and the end result can be more effective, as with the several clumps of common knapweed which appeared in Section U. This may be the first sighting of this flower in the Cemetery - or have we just not been observant enough?



Common knapweed

Common knapweed, also known as lesser or black knapweed, is a perennial with thistle-like flower heads. The spherical, reddish-purple flower is composed of many small florets, surrounded by long, ragged bracts. Its leaves are deeply divided and oblong. It is found widely across the UK in grassland and roadside verges, attracting pollinators like bees and butterflies, while its seeds provide food for birds.

You may have seen news reports of autumn making an early start, but there is no formal definition of "early autumn" and the experts say that what we are seeing are signs of nature becoming stressed by the long hot and dry summer. Trees conserve their limited food reserves by concentrating their energy into roots and branches and stopping chlorophyll production. So leaves lose their green pigment, but may well increase production of anthocyanin, giving rise to reddening. More drastically, summer branch drop may occur to save energy. This year some London councils warned against sitting under trees because of the risk from branches falling without warning. There has been nothing this drastic in the Cemetery but, by mid August, the maple shown

below was giving a good illustration of the change of leaf colour, in an interestingly patchy way:



Elsewhere, but equally early, more conventional autumn colouring could be seen on a birch tree :



A leucistic blackbird has been regularly foraging in Section S through the summer, close to the assembly area for the Tuesday walks and has become a talking point for the group. It was not that sociable, so observation had to be from a distance and photography was difficult, but one snapshot is shown on the following page.



Leucism causes a patchy partial loss of pigmentation, resulting in white or light-coloured feathers, so is different from albinism, which involves a complete lack of pigment together with pink eyes. Both are genetic conditions though leucism is more common. Leucism is more frequently observed in blackbirds because of the contrast with their dark plumage. It may be hereditary or caused by other factors like diet, age, or injury.

Summer Miscellany

This is the same subtitle as we used in the last issue, when it should have said Spring. Did anyone notice the error?

As its primary use as a place of burial inevitably diminishes, the Cemetery has to be valued for secondary purposes, including as a place of education. This has been illustrated recently by a visit from Cardiff Naturalists Society, indulging in the many specimen trees, and a guided tour for The Arts Society Cardiff, led by Ted Richards. The route took in the graves of artists or those with connections to the arts, the pick of the memorial sculptures, the buildings, the "garden" design and, of course, the vistas and seasonal flora on display. Many were visiting for the first time and had been

unaware previously of the opportunities available for pursuing their particular interests. We are pleased that they are now likely to return to indulge in their individual specialisms.

While many families make regular visits to family graves, making strenuous efforts to keep them looking smart, the majority of memorials are left to fend for themselves. Sadly, a large proportion of memorials are dark and dirty, discoloured by atmospheric pollution and/or lichen. Left untouched these only accelerate the deterioration of the stone. Even within the short history of the Friends, the rate of this deleterious change seems to be worsening. It has long been known that cleaning memorials should be done without excessive abrasion or use of strong chemicals: a soft brush, water and a lot of elbow grease are recommended. More aggressive cleaning may appear more effective, but it removes base material and opens up the surface, which will accelerate deterioration. The memorial will very quickly look worse than before.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, despite using the most sympathetic cleaning methods, have recognised that there are tiny photosynthetic and fungal organisms that continue to thrive and produce dark pigments that settle deep into the stone. They have now committed to finding an effective long term sustainable solution. Working with scientists, they are determined to find an answer to this complex problem. Whatever they come up with will offer help far beyond their own grave markers and will certainly be welcomed in Cathays Cemetery.

It was a big surprise when one of four large trunks of a lime tree came down close to the Whitchurch Road boundary. Fortunately, it didn't fall across the road (which it would have blocked or had possibly far worse consequences) and managed to fall on perhaps the only line that would miss memorials.

The tree looked to be in good health, but the

underlying cause was one which we often seen, a joint inclusion where trunks fork. As is typical, this one had attracted debris, causing localised rot, while ever-increasing girth had gradually increased pressure on the joint. Where trees have multiple trunks, they tend to give each other mutual support and protection from wind. Remove this and the risk of the remaining trunks falling increases significantly. The only safe answer is to take down the remaining trunks - a specialist and expensive exercise. The tree was reduced to a sky-high bug hotel and some giant logs, as shown below.



It is a little way off from any path and in a heavily shaded area, but it has a lean on it to challenge the towers at Pisa or Caerphilly Castle. It would appear that the large tree and its root system on the left of the picture have caused significant ground heave. Another spot where remedial action will be required soon.



What this confirmed and can be seen from the image was that the timber was in excellent condition and would have been eyed enviously by wood turners and wood sculptors. The latter might have created something like this:



Now where did those visitors from the Arts Society go?

While trees are an essential part of a "garden cemetery", there are other ways in which they can be hazardous. While passing through Section J recently, the memorial in the following picture came to our attention.

It was impossible to ignore the newspaper headline "Inspirational Coffin Ideas". The underlying theme was to reflect the character of the deceased, so an allotment enthusiast might be buried in his gardening clothes; accompanied by a trowel. There might be a jar of honey amongst the flowers on a beekeeper's coffin or, for a hillwalker, a compass - perhaps to navigate the way to eternity. Mention was also made of an exhibit in the British Museum's Living and Dying gallery, a replica of the elaborately decorated hollow log coffin of a North Australian Aborigine. The body of a dead person was allowed to decompose, either in the ground or on a platform, then the bones were painted in red ochre and placed in the hollowed out log, which would be left standing upright to be gradually eroded away by the elements, allowing the spirit of the deceased to make the final journey beyond earthly existence. Before any readers start getting ideas, be sure to check burial law and local burial rules!

Friends FEATURES

Billy James ... and the Forgotten War

We have just passed the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day - the ending of the war against Japan. For World War 1 and the Second World War in Europe, there are many links through memorials in the Cemetery. The same cannot be said for the War in the Pacific. Most of the servicemen who died are buried in war cemeteries in the Far East. Those that returned were generally reticent to talk about their grim experiences and the fashion for memorials to record snippets of a person's life had passed. However, we offer one example to mark the Anniversary.

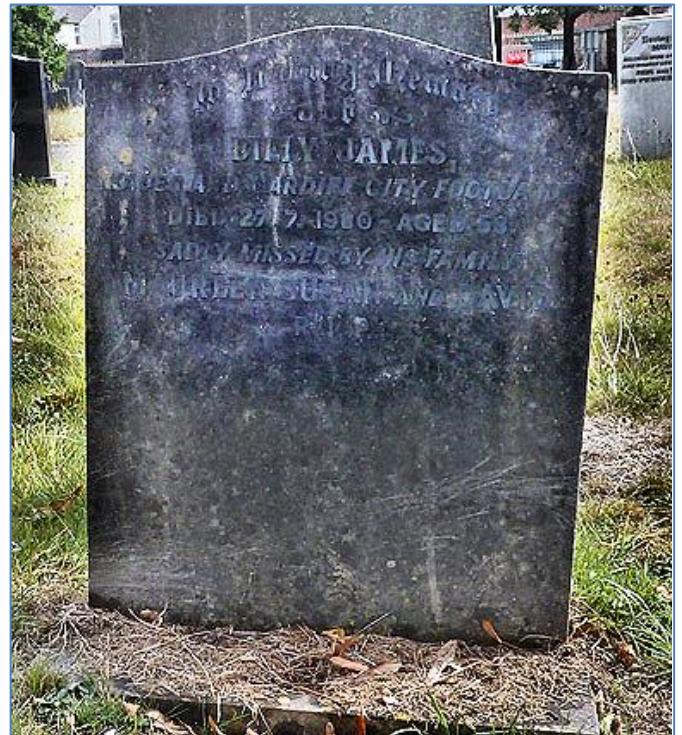
William John "Billy" James was born on 18th October 1921 and raised in Splott, living in Carlisle Street. He was a gifted footballer, generally playing at centreforward - a striker, in modern parlance. He was regarded as an exciting prospect in Welsh football, joined his hometown club, Cardiff City, in 1939 and was chosen to represent Wales in two wartime fixtures against England, scoring in the first match where he played against Stan Cullis.

At the age of 18, James enlisted in the army, joining the 77th HAA Regiment, Royal Artillery. The unit contained a number of footballers, including other Cardiff City players, Ernie Curtis and Billy Baker. They embarked by ship for deployment in North Africa but, while they were on route, Japanese forces launched attacks on Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya. Britain declared war on Japan and James' unit was diverted to the Dutch colony of Java in the Dutch East Indies. The British forces suffered heavy losses and James was one of numerous British troops taken prisoner.

He spent three years in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp before returning to Britain at the end of the war. He resumed playing for Cardiff City in the 1946-47 season, scoring in his first two matches in the Football League, a 2-1 defeat to Notts County and a 2-0 victory over Bournemouth. In all, Billy played six times in the

Football League for Cardiff City, but was forced to retire at the end of the season. His time in the POW camp had seen him suffer from severe malnutrition and the effects had resulted in irreparable damage to his eyesight. The club held a benefit game for James in May 1950 and he later returned to work for the club as a scout.

Billy James died on 27th July 1980 and is buried in Section S, in the area that had just been prepared for new interments when the "mirror image" entrance on the Whitchurch Road side of Cathays Library was closed. The memorial is pictured below.



Billy Brian, Trick Cyclist

Billy Brian was born William O'Brien on 27 August 1881 at 11 Garth Street, Newtown, Cardiff. You may be wondering where Newtown is - it effectively disappeared in the 1970s in a slum clearance exercise, following compulsory purchase by the Council. It had been developed by the Marquess of Bute to house construction

workers for Cardiff's new docks. With the influx of Irish families following the Great Famine, it became known as Little Ireland. It originally occupied the area between Tyndall Street and Adam Street but, with the advent of the railway in 1850, Newtown was taken to be the area south of the railway, while the area north of the railway became Adamsdown.

In 1999, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation gave £10,000 towards the cost of a memorial to commemorate the Newtown community. The Newtown Memorial Garden, featuring a large stone 'knotwork' sculpture by local artist David Mackie, opened on 20 March 2005, on the south side of Tyndall Street. The paving slabs around the sculpture are inscribed with the names of the families that lived in Newtown in the 19C. Although Tyndall Street is a busy thoroughfare, the Garden is probably not noticed by most passers-by. Of those that pause, few will spot the O'Brien paving slab. The composite image below shows you what to look out for.



Billy was the youngest of seven children born to John O'Brien, a labourer, originally from Clonakilty, County Cork, and Margaret (née Whelan) also originally from Ireland. Billy's mother died when he was less than a year old and his father never remarried. It seems that Billy was bought up by his father and older siblings. By 1891, the family had moved to 118 Cyfarthfa Street, Roath, and ten years later, they were living at 25 Croft Street and Billy was working as a clerk in a flour mill.

The spelling of the family surname changed over the years, which wasn't unusual at the time. In the 1901 census it had changed from O'Brien to O'Brian and it appears that they dropped the 'O' shortly afterwards.

Billy's main trick cycling exploits seem to have been around the years 1904-1908. Acrobatic riding included doing wheelies, standing on the saddle and other tricks that could be performed in any convenient arena with an audience. Photographs suggest that he usually performed smartly dressed. Other exploits combined a cycling skill with endurance, like riding backwards over a considerable distance. Riding backwards meant sitting on the handlebars and facing backwards i.e. the rider went backwards, while the bike went forwards.

On Easter Monday 1904, Billy rode backwards from the Ebbw Bridge in Newport to the Moon & Stars Hotel, Cyfarthfa Street, Roath. This was a temperance hotel that had only recently opened and the ride was intended to publicise this. Billy was presented with a cup for his successful ride. The non-alcoholic beverages seem to have been less successful and the hotel closed after about a year.

A newspaper report of him cycling backwards to Caerphilly, seems to be packed with errors and inconsistencies, but our best interpretation is that he started in Abertridwr and covered a circuitous route of about 4 miles in less than 15 minutes.

On separate occasions, he rode backwards from Canton up Leckwith Hill to the Merry Harriers and to The Old Post, Bonvilston, up "Tumble Down Dick". The latter may now be known as The Tumble but, apparently, reflects a story that it is where the stagecoach of Richard Cromwell (the son of Oliver Cromwell) struck a pothole with such a jolt that the impact threw him from his seat and out onto the road.

At a sports event in Sophia Gardens, he won a first prize which was presented to him by the famous comedian, Dan Leno. As well as

Friends EVENTS

performing at local social functions (sometimes assisted by his nephews Charlie and Edward Brian, who were also clever trick cyclists), he sometimes gave exhibitions further afield, for example at Cheltenham and Pontypridd.

When Billy's son, also called Billy, was interviewed in 1997, aged 84, he recalled that the great German trick cyclist Bud Snyder, who was appearing at the Empire Theatre at the time, begged his father to join him in his act.

Cycling was a very popular pastime at the turn of the 19C and the Roath Park Recreation Ground used to have a cycle lane around it. Rapid growth in its use led to conflict, highlighted in a letter to the South Wales Echo in 1897, encouraging cycling in one direction only and proposing that children keep to the grass. So a cycle route in the Recreation Ground and conflict between users is nothing new! Roath Park was a popular location for Billy Brian to show off his tricks.

While the peak of Billy's performing lasted only a few years, according to his son, he continued trick cycling into his 50s and then took up the piano as he loved the idea of entertaining people. While he had offers to make a career of trick cycling, he turned them down, preferring to stay with Spillers and Bakers, where he worked as a clerk for 40 years. Maybe domestic responsibilities influenced this choice.

In the summer of 1910 he married Florence Thomas, originally from Newport, and they took up residence at 92 Glenroy Street, Roath. In 1915 they had a son, William Lionel Brian, and they were still living in 92 Glenroy Street in 1921. By 1939, Billy had retired (at a relatively young age) and was living at Heol Nest, Whitchurch. He died in Cardiff on 8th February 1951, aged 69.

Billy is buried in plot C2115 in Cathays Cemetery. His grave wasn't easy to find, with the stonework looking like a pile of builder's rubble, but his name could still be read on part of the kerb (see images opposite).



Recent Events

Walk

On **Tuesday June 17th**, we were surprised (but pleasantly so) by a record turnout of more than sixty for the **Midsummer Walk**. In response to this, the group was divided into two and the halves were led by **Ted Richards** and **Gordon Hindess** of the Friends of Cathays Cemetery, doing the same walk, but in opposite directions. The itinerary included the graves of the infamous "Mad Jack" Matthews, circus owner David Hutchinson, Victor Erle Nash-Williams (archaeologist), Spiridion-Kluszczewski (subject of the recent serialisation in this newsletter), the Welsh clergyman and poet Charles Davies, Dan Isaac Davies (champion of the Welsh language) and the impressive memorial which remembers William Black, a victim of the tragic sinking of HMS Natal. The walking tour was blessed with near perfect conditions befitting the walk title.

Graveyard Voices

We were splendidly entertained by the **A48 Theatre Company**, performing to **new scripts by the writers of Living Lines**, on **Tuesday 8th July, Wednesday 9th July, Thursday 10th July and Sunday 13th July**. Apart from on the

Wednesday, when an indoor version was put on, the format was a guided walk interspersed with dramatic interludes, which reflected the life of the person buried at that location. The role of linking guide was expertly filled by either Carmel Thomas or Amanda Eades from Bereavement Services. As for most events this summer, the weather was ideal. All performances were fully booked for what has become the best event in the Cemetery calendar.

Our Regular Events

Monthly Workdays

With a break for the peak holiday period, there were only two workdays in the quarter, but these were both productive and satisfying i.e. you could see the difference that you had made. A jumble of fallen trees, interspersed with brambles and other unwanted growth in Section J was cleared, restoring access to a number of graves. At the cedar of Lebanon roundabout behind the chapels, brambles and rosebay willowherb shoots were cleared from the toroid of bergenia cordifolia purpurean, better known (and definitely more easily remembered) as elephant's ears. Elsewhere, spreading tree shoots and drooping branches that were restricting vehicular access along drives were cut back.



Before



...And after

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? **We usually meet by the chapels at 10 am** and work until noon, with a break for elevenses. So put the last Saturday of the month in your diary, as the next dates are **27th September, 25th October (New Cemetery by the War Memorial Section), and 29th November**. After a winter break, workdays resume in February.

Tuesday Walks

These 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. The walks last about an hour and start just inside the **gates adjacent to Cathays Library at 10.30 am every Tuesday morning**. All are welcome and the socialising continues afterwards over tea or coffee in a local cafe.

Future Events

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 at **11.30 am and 1.30 pm**. If you have never seen the restoration work that has been undertaken

Friends EVENTS

on the chapels or are curious to know more about the Cemetery and those buried in it, this is your opportunity.

Walk

On **Sunday October 12th**, at **11 am**, the **Heritage Walk** will be led by **Amanda Eades of Bereavement Services**. The walk will start by the chapels, just inside the **main entrance in Fair oak Road**. This walk provides an excellent introduction to the Cemetery.

Talk

On **Tuesday November 11th**, at **7 pm**, the annual **Bill Mosley Memorial Lecture**, entitled **Graves, Cemeteries & Stories**, will be given by **Professor Paul Nicholson** in the **Anglican Chapel** (on the right when you enter via the main entrance in Fair oak Road). There will be a **£5 entry charge** for this event. Paul is a founder member and past Chairman of the Friends, who now holds the position of President. You can expect a knowledgeable and well researched talk.

Epitaphs

Walter Raleigh (1552-1618)

Within the chancel of this church was interred the body of the Great Sir Walter Raleigh Kt., on the day he was beheaded in Old Palace Yard, Westminster. Oct 29th Anno Dom 1618.

READER — Should you reflect on his errors, remember his many virtues and that he was a mortal.

Written the night before execution:

*Even such is time that takes in trust
Our youth, our joys, and all we have,
And pays us but with age and dust:
Who in the dark and silent grave
When we have wandered all our ways
Shuts up the story of our days.
And from which earth and grave and dust
The Lord shall raise me up, I trust.*

=====

Captain Underwood (18th century)

*Here lies free from blood and slaughter
Once Underwood — now under water.*

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Wife of Sir Albert Morton (16th century)

*He first deceased; she for a little tried to live
without him, liked it not, and died.*

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