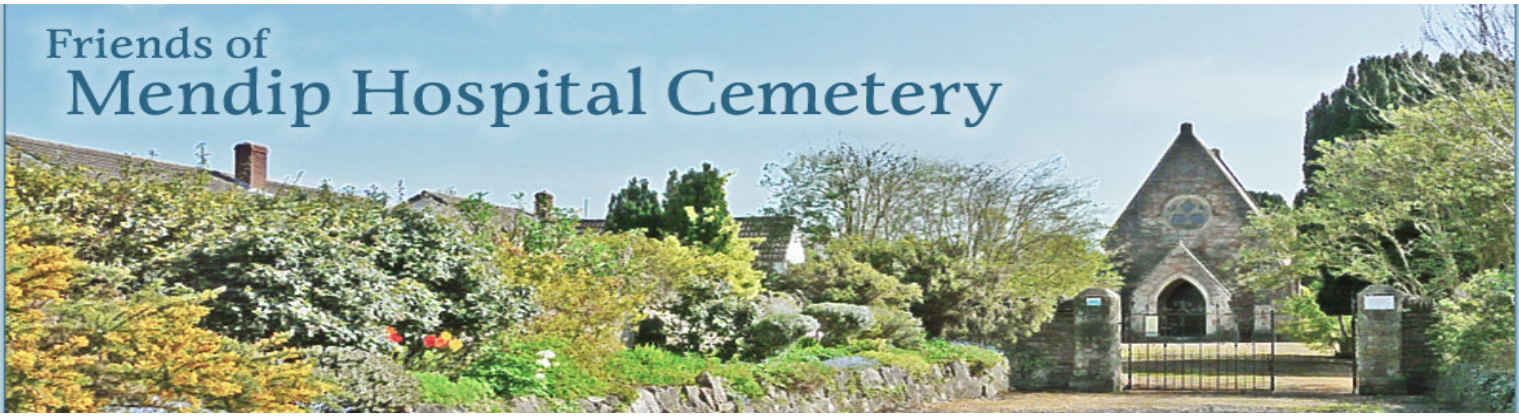


Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery



Friends of Mendip Hospital Cemetery Newsletter

Winter 2012/2013

It is winter. The cemetery and its little chapel lie quietly dormant. Yew trees stand tall and dark against the frosty ground. Here and there pale white tree sculptures emerge above the grass. The winter sun now barely skims the top of Tor Woods leaving the lower slopes in icy shade. The pond, brimful after weeks of rain, wears a glassy film. Trees are bare. Birds seek shelter in hedgerows. There are no visitors and no one is working in the grounds. Close to three thousand graves lie undisturbed but not forgotten.

How different it was one day last October when a huge blue tractor lumbered noisily down Cemetery Lane as it made its way to the site. Within a matter of hours nearly three acres of grass was roughly cut and all the surrounding hedges trimmed. The smell of crushed grass and laurel leaves drifted through the air as a small group of hard working volunteers cut and swept the public footpaths clear of vegetation.

Then the cemetery looked like a newly shorn sheep; colourless, devoid of its summer coat of purple willow herb and waving green grasses. Starkly exposed were the two dozen headstones, some wooden crosses, tree sculptures and a willow hedge around the badger sett. A sudden and harsh transformation.

And yet within a few days the slopes had a sheen of green and a week later grass had re-emerged across the site. How wonderfully resilient nature is!

The next month was the All Souls' Day service in the chapel. Sunday November 4th brought the first snow of winter to Mendip followed by torrential rain. But the weather did not deter more than two dozen people attending the service and enjoying tea and cake afterwards. By keeping the tradition they are ensuring that, at least once a year, the sounds of music and singing fill the little chapel and drift gently down the hillside with a message of remembrance.

Although we have seen the resilience of grasses in nature there are some species that are struggling with environmental changes, and one of these is the honey bee.

Bees fulfil an essential role in propagating plants and flowers. Without bees we would have no fruit and vegetables. Sources suggest that the number of honey bees in Great Britain has dropped by 50% over the last 25 years. Somerset's bee population is fighting for survival following continuous rain and an unusually cold summer. Some keepers are providing syrup to feed the bees to avoid the colonies starving to death.

It is in all our interests to support bees. We have invited a local bee keeper to keep bee hives in our cemetery. We are delighted to anticipate that in spring this year our ancient cemetery will begin buzzing with insect life!

But introducing bees brings with it responsibility. We will have to work out ways of managing the grassland to encourage more flowers and flowering plants to feed the bees throughout the seasons. We already have a pond, which bees love, and masses of flowering ivy trailing up through the yew trees. Willow herb is prolific in late summer and there are flowering plants in the beds outside the gates. However we must do more to encourage spring and summer flowers among the grasses.

Join us at the Friends' AGM on March 15th to find out more. Your ideas and suggestions for ways we can work together to grow and improve our 'cemetery garden' will be warmly welcomed.

Financial matters

A big 'THANK YOU' to all those who have been giving donations and subscriptions so generously over the past twelve years. Without you we would have been unable to look after the cemetery, its chapel and the two thousand nine hundred souls who are buried here.

Up until 2012 we ended our accounting year in November and subscriptions were due that month. For simplicity we have now moved our accounting date forward to March, so that it coincides with our AGM at the end of the financial year. Therefore from 2013, subscriptions will be due in March rather than November.

Anyone who has already paid a subscription in November 2012 will effectively get three months free membership and their next subscription will not be due until March 2014!

Although this may give us a short-term cash flow problem we believe it will make accounting easier in the long run.

Standing orders through your Bank.

One approach that would make a big difference would be if you felt able to set up a standing order with your bank to pay your subscriptions automatically every March. Jill, our Treasurer, could help you with this.

Gift Aid Declaration

Some of you have already filled in the Gift Aid declaration enabling us to claim an additional 20% of your subscription from the taxman - for which we are very grateful. Another copy of the Gift Aid declaration is included in this newsletter in case there is anyone who missed out last time. Please complete and return it to our Treasurer, Jill Sturman.

Communications

Postage is now so expensive that we are trying to use e-mail as much as possible to send out your newsletters. If any of you has an e-mail address you have not yet communicated to us, please send the briefest of e-mails to

ljogborne@btinternet.com.

(If you received this newsletter through your letterbox and you are on-line—PLEASE get in touch!)

If you are a UK Tax payer please help us to claim charity tax relief by completing the following Gift Aid declaration. Doing so will cost you nothing.

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1. To be able to qualify you must pay an amount of income tax at least equal to the tax that the Friends reclaim in any one tax year. i.e. approximately one third of your subscription or donation.
2. If you pay tax at the higher rate you can claim further tax relief on your self assessment return.
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