

FRIENDS OF MENDIP HOSPITAL CEMETERY

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held at the Chapel on Monday 7th October 2024

Present: Peter Jaggard (Chairman), Gwen Ansquer, Clare Blackmore, Alan Carr, Camilla Carter, Tony Cavill, Ginger Cook, Helen Ellison, Mike Harris, Jean MacCormack, Colin Mann, Jane Mann, Marilyn Parker Armitage, John Slater, Conor Spollen, Hilary Waters, Penny Anne Windsor, Roy Yates

1. Welcome

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting

2. Apologies

Annie Brennan, Susan Brown, Pamela Crummay, Anne Dyke, Graham Livings, Jane MacKenzie, Roy MacKenzie, Paul McCafferty, Eileen Moschke, Catherine Wright, William Wych

3. Approval of AGM minutes from 3rd October 2023

There was one amendment to the minutes - it had erroneously been recorded that our long term supporter Frank Smith had died at the age of 101; in fact at the time of last year's meeting he had still been alive, although he has since died. There were no other matters arising.

4. Chairman's Report

PERSONNEL AND ORGANISATION

With great regret the Chairman had to record the death of our Treasurer, Magnus Stirling, on 9th July following a short spell of vascular dementia. His warmth and kindness to all is fondly remembered and he always went the extra mile to help in all aspects of running the cemetery. We intend to honour his memory in the near future.

We thank David Waters for stepping in as Treasurer at the beginning of this year, and for preparing the accounts successfully for audit.

EVENTS DURING THE LAST YEAR

We have opened the cemetery to our visitors every Wednesday and Sunday between April and September and although the weather was somewhat variable we managed to complete the season without any cancellations. In the enhanced Chapel space available to us Hilary, Clare and Dee put together a thought-provoking exhibition which included a lot of new material about members of staff. Visitors were impressed and this was reflected in the donations and the comments in the Visitors Book. It is unfortunate that our card reader regularly fails to communicate properly; even more unfortunate is the fact that we are unable to improve our Wi-Fi ability without a postcode – something that officialdom has found beyond them.

Many more folk have discovered ancestors buried here, including one man who travelled from New Zealand to see the site of an ancestor's grave in Section B, and we also are in touch with two Australian families who have ancestors buried here.

Our annual All Souls Service which was quite well attended was again conducted by Rev Claire Towns who gave us an inspirational and uplifting talk. She will be back again for this year's service on Sunday 3rd November at 3.00 pm.

THE GARDENS AND THE POND

The pond continues its recovery following last year's relining which we expected would take a while; many newts have already taken up residence, and our Ecology experts have assured us that it is all looking good.

In Section C we have mowed the grass area and cleared the copse, and are delighted that English bluebells, Ragged Robin and other native flowers are establishing themselves.

We are maintaining Section J as a pristine area by mowing it regularly, and have recently acquired two loads of top soil to even out and reseed the surface.

The laurel hedge flanking the entire West side of the cemetery has been cut back to encourage bottom growth which will thicken it all out, and we will shortly be installing a new metal fence inside the boundary to increase our security. Also at the foot of this hedge our neighbour Jeremy Weare has installed a metal gate made by Somerset Forge of Easton which will greatly facilitate our ability to deal with any detritus from the bottom of the cemetery.

The pedestrian gate at the top of the track where it gives on to Hooper Avenue had rotted and so Colin Mann, one of our garden volunteers, has made and hung a replacement gate. Colin has also created a cement gully to divert rainwater away from the North wall of the Chapel.

In January we hired a skip for a day which enabled us to clear away all the old metal and other rubbish from behind the old tool shed, and this area has now been re-landscaped. We also took the opportunity to fill up any remaining space in the skip with our winter prunings of ivy etc, thereby reducing our reliance on bonfires and hopefully keeping the neighbours happy!

In Section A we are continuing to clear the brambles in preparation for a Memorial Garden to the children that are buried in the cemetery.

All this has been accomplished through the hard work of our wonderful volunteers: Jean, Terry, Jeremy, Gwen, Helen, Sarah, Alan, Colin, Ginger and Mark. Thank you all!

THE CHAPEL

In January our builder Neil Barham began work in the Chapel; he has removed the timber platforms, filled in the spaces underneath, laid new flagstones, and replaced the damaged panelling thus enclosing the ring main cables which were behind. We thank Haydn Davies of Wells Reclamation who provided the flagstones in exchange for the pews which he donated many years ago. As a result of this work we have the benefit of an increase of one third in the usable space in the Chapel, as well as a visitor space with fewer trip hazards

P.R. ACTIVITIES

Clare, Hilary and Dee manned a stall at the Community Day in Wells Cathedral on 20th January which was well attended if rather noisy at times. Less successful was our stall in the Market-place on Easter Saturday; Clare, Jean, Hilary, Dee, Alan, Gwen and myself all helped out but our location proved to be less popular than the crepe and cake stalls.

Clare has had a busy year with media and publicity, designing a new publicity leaflet and regularly providing updates for the Wells Voice which included a half page feature in the April edition. She has given many talks to local societies, and Radio Somerset broadcast some of our patient stories in a Somerset history feature.

We have two primary marketing tools: 1) our Facebook page now has 11,330 followers which is fast catching up the Bishop's Palace total of 11,717 and 2) our website has been completely revised. Hilary did a great job in researching this market, and we were fortunate to find a local man, Mark Mapstone, who worked really closely with us to produce a completely new design which has proved to be both effective and attractive.

HISTORIC ENGLAND

Following their visit last year the Somerset Gardens Trust employed Sarah Rutherford to write an application for our cemetery to be listed in Historic England's Register of Parks and Gardens, with a separate application being made for the Chapel. A comprehensive site visit in the autumn was followed by an even more comprehensive photo session in the spring, and we have recently received the wonderful news that our applications have been approved. The press release and official launch will take place on 29th October. (Note: we feel this is timely, given the recent recommendation of the Law Commission's Burial and Cremation Consultation Paper which will recommend the reuse of old graves!)

5. Treasurer's Report

In the absence of a Treasurer the Secretary presented the Accounts for the year ended 28th February 2024, and pointed out that we continue to be almost totally reliant on donations. He was grateful to Tim Lunn for again auditing our accounts very efficiently.

The accounts were adopted unanimously.

6. Election of Officers

The current principal officers of the Charity (Chairman – Pete Jaggard, Vice-Chairman – Clare Blackmore, Secretary – John Slater) all having indicated their willingness to stand again, were re-elected *nem con*. The Treasurer role is currently vacant and we will be actively seeking a replacement over the winter months

7. Questions from the floor

Are school visits welcomed? The Vice-Chairman explained that the children who visit were always enthusiastic, and it was mainly the schools themselves who needed convincing; she did however expect things to improve with the current emphasis on mental health. A group from Frome called Open Story World, whose clients have physical and mental needs, are putting on a production at the Merlin Theatre in Frome on 29th November; this is called "Through the Open Door" and will be their interpretation of the story of the patients here.

The Chairman pointed out that organised visits ideally required toilet facilities, which are currently a problem for us. A resolution remains in our long term plans, and it was suggested that our new-found status as a listed heritage site might help if we made another approach to the National Lottery (it was noted that Wells Museum had to employ a specialist to see through their application for Lottery funding).