



Newsletter 32

Spring 2026

The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery, c/o 100 Enborne Road, Newbury, RG14 6AN
Website: www.fnrnewbury.org.uk

Tel: 01635 30108
E-mail: committee@fnrcnewbury.org.uk

News from the Chair

Maureen Hudd



It has been some time since we sent you a Newsletter so here is a catch-up.

We begin with some sad news that Jenny Peet and Chris Reynolds, two of our Friends have died recently. We offer our condolences to their families and friends.

In October 2025 we offered our All Saints Day Evening which was this year by ticket only to avoid the very large numbers who attended the previous year. This year was much easier to administer and was a successful event, with all three tours sold out.

In November we laid poppy crosses again and offered a half-day Welcome Event, with Steve Schollar leading a tour of Commonwealth War Graves. (Steve will be offering the same tour on our next Welcome Day on April 18th 2026)

We also hosted St Bartholomew's School to lay a wreath the Davis grave. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't good, but there was a representative from the various Cadet Forces at the School, plus the Headteacher and governors. As a result of this visit, we have been invited to give a presentation to Year 8 pupils prior to their Battlefield Visits.

The Osmond vault collapsed in February, and we have only recently been advised by the Town Council that they are able to proceed with filling it in and reinstating the top portion. The Friends have agreed to finance the lifting of the roof slab of the vault, the Town Council will finance the filling in and then the Friends will hopefully be able to put an explanatory



plaque at the foot of the vault. Michael and Sarah Osmond were active Primitive Methodists and campaigned for a new chapel in Wash Common.

The grave of Georgiana Douglas, who gave the money for the building of St Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, has been repaired. The Friends paid for this repair as Georgiana had no relatives. It is almost 100 years since her death on 10th March 1926.

We have had a group of Police Cadets from Thames Valley Police clearing and tidying the graves of police officers buried in the Cemetery. They will resume this work in the Spring.

Elsewhere you will see information about the re-enactment at the Wash Common Show in September which provided us with another opportunity to publicise the work of the Friends.



As reported at the AGM unfortunately our very efficient Secretary, Carol Brindley, resigned because she is collaborating with the writing of a book. To date we have not been able to find a replacement, and we desperately need a Secretary to take committee minutes and liaise with the Town Council.

The Friends took a stand at the Volunteer Fair in January and hopefully we have a few new volunteers, particularly for History Group and Drama, coming forward. Unfortunately, we didn't have any interest shown for the secretarial role.

The Gun Club Mystery

Ros Clow

Impressed by our January production of 'In The Beginning...', the Wash Common Festival asked the Resurrection Players to contribute something for the 2025 event on September 27th.

Working with Steve Wallis we came up with the idea of a 'murder mystery' based on the killing of William Ward outside the Gun Inn in 1870. We had newspaper reports and knew who the killer was, but needed to find a range of 'residents' who might be witnesses.

What had happened was that the Gun had set up a benefit society (precursor of the NHS where you paid a weekly subscription and could claim if your husband had an accident and couldn't work, or if you needed money because you were having a baby). On the first anniversary of this club, there was a special service at St John's Church and a knees-up in the garden of the Gun which went on till late evening.



Steve worked on finding appropriate words which would have been in use in 1870 and I selected a range of residents who were either definitely present in the Gun or surroundings or who might have been.

Many of the usual gang volunteered but we were lucky this time to recruit, via New Era, three teenagers who threw themselves into their roles, fixing their own make-up and staying in role convincingly throughout. As labourers, Cohen Roberts played Harry Palmer, Tyr Hughes played Charles Haines and Luke Johnson played William Brindley.

Other roles included the landlady of the Gun, Elizabeth Titchener (Pat Counsell), the Coroner, Joseph Bunny (Steve Wallis), Dr Henry Bursey (Steve Counsell), the vicar of St John's, Rev. Thomas Hubbard (Graham Salter), Esther Dove, schoolmistress (Yvonne Paris), Edith Dolton, Methodist campaigner against alcohol (Meg Thomas), Lucy Hoare, local seamstress and key witness (Judith Bunting), Maria Taylor, laundress and Benefit Society member (Lynette Edwell), Bill Stillman, police constable (David Clow) and Joe Muggins, Mayor of the City (Chris Jones). Joe Muggins was the only fictitious character and all except Lucy Hoare are buried in our cemetery.

The public paid £5 for the privilege of interrogating everyone they saw in Victorian dress. When the Coroner announced the culprit, William Brindley,



he tried to escape, closely followed by PC Stillman to the sound of 'Yakety Sax', provided by the Kennet Radio!

I think we got away with it!

Dates for your Diary

Saturday, April 18th - Spring Open Day (10am – 4pm)

Tours available all day, including the Commonwealth War Graves tour, "Angels, Artists and Authors". Find-a-grave service and a wildflower display will be hosted in the chapel.

Monument Recording

Sue Kitchener

To the best of my knowledge, all the monument recording has been completed. Thank you to everyone who spent hours and hours on their hands and knees digging, spraying, brushing, photographing and recording all the details of the monuments, which was, as always, dependent on the weather! It was a mammoth task, and as we all know, it was not easy in some of the areas.



We did find two small groups of graves that were never recorded by Mrs Pattison, which was really exciting. These have now been recorded and are on the website.

There are of course a few headstones or kerbstones that we have been unable to find, as they are either so badly eroded, that they are unreadable, or they are so far into the ground they are completely buried and it is impossible to get to them, or to even find them.

At the moment, as it is really too cold, wet and windy to spend any time in the cemetery, I have been searching the website, checking for any monuments that have not been recorded but do have Mrs Pattison's details. This means she did find them when she recorded all the monuments, back in the 1980's. So as we know that they were there then, we will be able to have another look and update the website accordingly.

At the moment, I am about halfway through the website, and surprisingly I have not found that many!

Sarah Manson

David Clow

I was in the process of tidying up the hundreds of files I have on my computer relating to the Cemetery, and I came across a photograph that I had taken in 2021. It shows a handwritten sign under the large cedar tree in the southern part of the Cemetery.

It seemed to me pretty obvious that somebody had disposed of their mother's ashes under the tree.

After some thought, it seemed that the best thing to do was create an entry for Sarah Manson on our website. However, this required a bit of research – and some dates! Generally, I have found that it is not easy to find recent deaths, and Ancestry came up with nothing of use. Finally, I searched the GRO; except you have to do this for a particular date + or - 2 years. Slowly working back every 4 years from 2021 gave me, at the third attempt, a **Sarah Marguerite Manson** who had died in West Berkshire Q3 in 2011.



It would seem that somebody's mother's ashes had sat on the shelf for 10 years or so until they had finally decided to dispose of them under the cedar tree.

Did anybody know a **Sarah Marguerite Manson** who died in 2011, aged 43?

All Saints Day's Night

Ros Clow

Closely following the Wash Common Festival Gun Club Mystery, it made sense to use characters from that event to play the ghosts on 1st November.

We put on three tours. The first for families had Dave Stubbs as the sexton/guide and Meg Thomas in her earlier role of Edith Dolton, this time playing up Women's Rights to schooling, keeping their own money when marrying, a forerunner of the Suffragettes.

The second tour, Luke Johnson was the sexton, and Tyr Hughes played the role of Mrs Titchmarsh, the Gun Inn landlady. Luke led the third tour with Chris Jones playing the role of Rev Hubbard, whose grave is very near the Chapel.

All three tours sold out a couple of days before the event, and we had to turn at least 10 people away. But that did mean that there was room in the Chapel at the end of the tour for participants to enjoy mulled wine and nibbles, music from Patrick Cogswell and Dorothy Leddy and most importantly to be regaled by me about having photographs of family printed off and making sure names are



written on the back. I do this by displaying my collection of wonderful Victorian photos, all taken in Newbury, but not one of them with a name on. We will never know who they are.

Three new members volunteered at the event, either to become Resurrection Players or to do History Research (or both), so that was an excellent outcome.

Bees at the Cemetery

Marguerite Shave

Several years ago, I started taking part in the Bee Walks, which are part of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's monitoring of bumblebees. When we moved to Newbury, not far from the Newtown Road Cemetery, this seemed a good place to establish a walk, although it is quite a short route.



Red-tailed bumblebee

It takes a while to set up a route which is suitable; see <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/> for a wealth of information on these vitally important insects and guidance for setting up your own bee walk.

I am not an expert but have learned about these wonderful bees over the years. There are eight commonly seen bumblebees in the UK. The bee walks take place from March to October inclusive. The results are sent to Bumblebee Conservation as part of a scientific survey and are not for general viewing.

Bumblebees are social in their organisation, living communally in a nest with a queen where workers and males are produced as well as the new queens for next year. Queens are larger than workers and males.

While always hoping to spot bumblebees in the cemetery, I am also prepared for disappointment, as of course they rely on suitable sources of nectar and pollen. Pouring

rain, extreme heat and wind are not good conditions for bees in general. Although there is usually something flowering in the cemetery throughout the year, it may not be suitable for the bumblebee.



Buff tailed bumblebee



Tree bumblebee

Mostly I have seen the buff-tailed bumblebee, the red-tailed bumblebee, the common carder bee and the tree bumblebee. Sometimes in early spring, they are trying to find a suitable nest site, and later in the year they will be feeding on flowers. The most popular flowers are alkanet, white dead nettle, buddleia, bramble and clover. When the lime tree blossom is out, they certainly love that too.

There are also honey bees and hover flies which love the bramble and ivy blossom, and the very fascinating hairy-footed flower bee, which delights in lungwort blossom as well as alkanet.

See this wonderful link about the hairy-footed flower bee:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p054dfrr>



Common Carder bee