



Newsletter 23

Autumn 2020

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Chairman's Chatter

Brain Sylvester

What a year this has been! And not just the epidemic which has impacted on our lives directly and indirectly in so many ways - even bringing some to a sad end: fortunately, none of the Friends that I know of has caught the wretched thing. But the extraordinary weather we've had has knock-on effects on our natural world, much of which is noticeable in the cemetery.

We'll certainly never forget 2020.

You'll be thinking I'm obsessed with time travel as I'm about to embark on it again - the subject not, unfortunately, the journey! I've been intrigued with it for many years, since reading H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, and hearing it serialised on the "wireless".

Gosh, I find it was as long ago as 1985 that the film "Back to the Future" first came out. If you missed it (and the many repeats on TV), it was about a teenager Marty McFly (played by Michael J. Fox), who accidentally travelled back to 1955 where he met his future parents and becomes his mother's 'romantic interest'. Oops: that was tricky!



He was not endeared to his 1985 parents then, but by clever manipulation in 1955, he was able to change events so that it all turned out right in their future.

So it leads one to wonder what we would have made of life back in the second half of the nineteenth century when the majority of the cemetery's 'residents' lived. Life would have been so very different - and harder - then. And, if able, what changes might we have implemented, knowing what we do now? Would things have worked out any better? And if reversed, what would our forebears make of our current way of life, our technology, our mores?

It is suggested that time travel is impossible as, after all, we've not yet met anyone from the future who's come back to tell us what to do. *Or have we?*

Someone is supposed to have said it is our greatest blessing that we can't see into the future (annoyingly I can't find who!). But it is true, isn't it?

But I have found the following Winston Churchill quotes:-

"The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see."

"It is a mistake to try to look too far ahead. The chain of destiny can only be grasped one link at a time."

Whatever! We, as Friends of the Cemetery are doing our bit by following our journey of "Bringing the Past into the Future" and what a fantastic journey we are on: do we all agree? Answers please on our Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/FNRCNewbury/>

And as always, let me close with continuing appreciation to those involved in our time travelling. The Newbury Town Council for their ongoing maintenance, site enhancement and appreciation: your committee for keeping matters ticking over: the groups who research our history, record the memorials, monitor and record our nature: and, of course, our webmaster and editor. And let's not forget the budding authors who have not been able to present any dramas for us this year but who, I'm assured, are not idle - so watch this space for the future.

Subscription Reminder



Thank you very much for your support as we continue on this fascinating journey we have undertaken.

Even if, for whatever reason, you are unable to take an active role with the Friends, please don't forget to support the on-going work through your subscription. A membership renewal form and standing order can be found with this newsletter and as an extra attachment to the email version of this newsletter. Subscriptions are due from October 1st.

Help Required

Paul Thompson

Elizabeth Capewell has asked if anyone would like to consider helping out with a bit of light digging and grave clearing. This isn't about digging up our residents, just clearing around the memorials, some of which are partly covered by undergrowth and others that may have sunk slightly, hiding part of the inscription. If you can lend a hand, please contact Elizabeth on 01635 523985 or email eacapewell@gmail.com.

Henry Froom Beck – A Tribute.

Dave Stubbs

As a serving police officer since the late 1960s, I have always had an interest in the history of policing, but it was not until a phone call from your esteemed chairman back in 2011 that I became acquainted with my forebear as constable of the parish of Newbury, Henry Froom Beck. I am sure tales from the cemetery – and especially the ‘Resurrection Players’ - have generated as many shaggy dog stories as there are fascinating and absorbing actual genealogies to be found from the cemetery’s occupants – but this one may make links that no other grave can lay claim to.

The story starts with Ros Clow’s first play about the setting up of Newtown Road Cemetery – which needed a character in the uniform of a Newbury Borough police constable – our own ‘Henry’ - who had been responsible for posting the legal notices about the cemetery company’s plans around the town and calling witnesses at the public enquiry held in Newbury town hall. Knowing I was a volunteer at the Thames Valley Police museum, Brian sounded me out about borrowing a ‘peelers’ uniform, and as the museum was only prepared to lend one out providing it remained in my custody – I ‘got’ the part!

Henry Beck’s grave was one of the earlier headstone restorations and one of the most moving and surreal experiences of my career, in the year that I retired – as part of publicity for the play - was to stand at my forebear’s grave dressed as Henry Froom Beck, constable and bellman, as he was known, with my old boss, retired Chief Inspector Dick Godfrey (right) – the author of the definitive history of Newbury



Borough Police, Brian Sylvester as current town crier and Joss Nankoo (left), the stonemason and restorer. It is difficult to describe the deep affinity that people who have worn the blue uniform have with the different generations down through the years and the experience certainly made a lasting impression on me.

Continuing involvement – and fun – with subsequent productions of the ‘Resurrection Players’ has maintained my interest, but here the story diverges somewhat from factual history into my other passion (dear lady wife excluded of course!) ...running my garden railway. This is not some ‘ride on’ extravaganza round a country estate but a small ‘narrow gauge’ line around the rockery in my back garden. Now railway modellers fall into two categories – those who model the real thing faithfully down to the last nut and bolt – and those who like to create

their own relaxing little fantasy, especially if it involves running trains through a pleasant environment of plants, ponds and 'proper' landscape. So my little line is based on a railway that only exists in my imagination – The 'Berkshire Downs Light Railway'. Connecting the outlying villages with the main line and the canal somewhere in Newbury's hinterland, building and running the trains and maintaining the garden scenery around them is an endless source of pleasure and creativity but where is the link with 'Henry Beck' you are wondering?

Well most of my locomotives are 'live steam' rather than the electric models which most people associate with 'toy trains' – hence the need to operate outdoors – but many years ago I acquired a very basic battery powered workhorse that I could switch on and leave running for hours while I mowed the lawn (or sat with a brew watching the world go by!). This old engine (based on a machine called a 'motor mule' built by a company called Fowler), became dilapidated through constant use and had sat on my workshop shelf for some years awaiting an overhaul – when along came lockdown and some free time to catch up with such outstanding chores.

The loco was stripped back to bare components, cleaned and resprayed - not wanting to lose the original rather workaday and functional appearance – management made the decision to retain the original black livery – but wanting a name for the engine which would echo local heritage but also reflecting long service, reliability and loyalty – in a black uniform - the obvious choice was 'Henry Beck' – in honour of my illustrious forebear.



Dave Stubbs' model engine, named Henry Beck

So – among the many memorials and memento mori of all the occupants of Newtown Road cemetery, is Henry Beck the only one whose reputation lives on commemorated as the name of a railway locomotive?

Newbury Civic Awards 2020

Brian Sylvester

Newbury Town Council introduced the Newbury Town Civic Award in 1997.

The awards have highlighted the importance of those who make a difference in our community and are presented to those who, in the opinion of a panel of judges, have made an exceptional contribution to Newbury.

While current events meant that the usual awards ceremony couldn't go ahead this year, the judges felt that the awards should still be issued following the outstanding nominations that were submitted.

We are proud to announce such recognition was received by our very own Paul Thompson for "Service to Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery & Newbury Astronomical Society".

From our point of view, this was not only for his tremendous job of establishing and maintaining the universally referenced Friends' website, but also for producing our informative, twice-yearly newsletter.

Well done Paul and well deserved.

[Thanks everyone for the nomination. I was honoured to receive it – Ed.]

Nature Group

Martha Vickers

The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery's Nature Group met on Saturday September 12th. for their monthly walk around the Cemetery. The Group includes two members with a specialist knowledge of plants and flowers, an entomologist, a member with a keen interest in fungi and two skilled photographers.

The walks are used by the Friends to document and photograph everything they find, so it is possible to compare the current list of flora and fauna throughout the seasons, and observe

the changes, not only as the seasons pass, but year-on-year as well; noting when new plants are seen or if something recorded last year does not re-appear as expected.

Autumn crocus, cyclamen and some impressive parasol fungi were the highlights of the morning walk as well as numerous species of ladybird!

The next nature walk will be on Saturday October 17th from 10am – 12 noon. The walk is conducted in a Covid-safe manner with all current rules applied for outdoor spaces.

Joan Stacey also writes a "Flower of the Month" article each month which is published on the web site. You can find it in the [Nature section](#) of the website.



The group photo shows, Brian Sylvester, Chair of the Friends, Elizabeth Capewell, fungi enthusiast, Dorothy Leddy and Joan Stacey our plant and flower experts, Martha Vickers, Town Councillor and convener of the Group and Chris Foster, Town Councillor and entomologist.

Annual General Meeting 2020 – Postponed

Maureen Hudd

“In view of the Covid-19 restrictions it is not possible to hold an ‘actual’ AGM for the Friends this year. The Committee will continue to work together for the foreseeable future. For information, the Committee members are as follows:

- Chairman: Brian Sylvester
- Treasurer: Celia Pay
- Secretary: Maureen Hudd
- Ros Clow
- Doug Larsen
- John Gardner

The Committee and Friends are continuing work on monument recording, history and nature. New volunteers and Friends are always welcome.”

A BIT OF LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Ireland's worst air disaster occurred early this morning when a small two-seater Cessna plane crashed into a cemetery.

Irish search-and-rescue workers have recovered 1,826 bodies so far and expect that number to climb as digging continues into the night.

Attr: Tommy Cooper

Events Diary

All our events have been cancelled due to COVID-19. We will keep you posted as things change. Meanwhile, the cemetery is still open to visitors, providing you follow the rules of social distancing and follow the government guidelines regarding outside spaces that apply at the time of your visit.

History Group in Lockdown

When is a group not a group? – Ros Clow



My Filofax tells me that lockdown started with cancellation after cancellation: lunches and performances at the Watermill; National Trust meetings; Art Society lectures; Newbury District Field Club events; U3A groups; City Arts; Corn Exchange films. Worst of all my hair appointment on 27th March! I had to wait till 7th July. Our History Group meetings and FNRC

Committee Meetings were also casualties.

I can't say I've missed the Committee Meetings, but I am so sad that History Group has not been able to meet. It is always so exciting to hear what everyone is doing. So let me share what has been going on in the last six months.

Most research is done online so some of us carried on with that. Every so often the doorbell rang with a carrier bag of new work from Deirdre Duff, Brian Sylvester, Sylvia Sellwood and

new member Christine Gambles. Sylvia Green has soldiered on putting everything ready for publication on to our web site. Also, I received frequent emails from Gerald Soper. Gerald has been working away for 10 years. He asks for names he can work on (as he has finished his own family) so I asked him to look at Stillmans. And so he did. Whomever he researches he writes short pen pictures that can go straight to the website and always he completes the 'front sheet' for each individual, which saves time when we are filing. Marvellous – except I had no idea who he was!

I had assumed he was a member of Berkshire Family History Group, so I asked Sylvia Green and Eileen Barnes to help me place him. They had no idea either! So I had to bite the bullet and ask him who he is! Gerald lives in Tunbridge Wells! A decade ago, he found our newly created web site and was so impressed that not only did he write up his own family for us he continues working away. I have just agreed he should start the Elliotts.

I asked him for a photo to accompany this report but he says he has run out of film!

As the pile of filing built up Dave and I decided we had to do it ourselves. In fact, we have now done it twice (April and July 2020). Having filed everything we then update the index spreadsheet – and we have done that twice. As it was only us doing it we expected it to be free from all errors. No! There were just as many as usual so the index took just as long.

When we first originated the spreadsheet, we didn't really know what we were doing. As we began to understand what we were doing we changed the spreadsheet design (I am lucky that Dave was 'Mr Excel' when he was still employed.). We added a column for 'Age at Death' and we always fill that in as we update. But earlier entries did not have that information.

Nowadays nothing is filed without the top shaded section of the form completed:

Date first filed:

Surname	First names	
Age	DODeath	D of burial
Researcher	Gravestone Yes/No <i>Mrs Patt. page</i>	Where is the grave? <i>Code</i>
Note for spreadsheet		

I have also been writing a history of the cemetery during lockdown and Dave produced some great graphs from the burial information we have. We realised that he could do more analyses from the spreadsheet if 'Age at Death' was complete. A call for help produced one volunteer, Jan Budgen. Jan is not even in the History Group but she took on looking up ALL the missing dates, more than 1,000!

Completed filing sits on two trolleys in my office and they are nearly full. I had to give away my bed settee to fit the trolleys in but I cannot store any more. Sometime later this year I need to bequeath half the filing to one of you, then I can buy another trolley and keep going. The most obvious split is A-M and N-Z, unless anyone has any better ideas. I will miss the convenience of having access to all this information but there we are. Of course, whoever takes over half the alphabet will also need to host filing sessions and answer queries.



As more and more text is made ready for the web site, the paper files become less important but we still have a long way to go. Currently we have files on approximately 3,500 individuals, so only 8,500 to go.

Also, during lock down someone had a bright idea that 'The Resurrection Players' might do another performance of monologues as we did in 2015, Residents Resurrected 20th century or as I prefer to call it 'Talking Deads'. You might have seen my letter in the Newbury?

So far Brian has written from the perspective of Jack Evans' mother. Jack was a submariner who died in WW2. Martin Strike has written the story of Fred Gardner who died in an accident in Pangbourne. That leaves me with two more to write. One is the story of Edward Pellew Plenty, an RAF pilot who died in the flu epidemic in 1918, the other is Charlie Jessett, RAF mechanic, AA scout, fish and chip man and ventriloquist! What I love most about this writing is the way in which I make contact with strangers who are always willing to help.

When we perform remains to be seen. First I need to finish the scripts.

Are there any benefits of lockdown other than time? Dave is using the surplus time at home to build a sauna and instal a hot tub, I have learned to use Zoom for U3A book club and Tai Chi, Arts Society lectures and hopefully David Peacock's talk on Newbury Wharf. And this week I attended a medical research meeting using Microsoft Teams. It was so easy and efficient but of course no free lunch or pen!

And next week I am being interviewed by the Public Engagement Manager of Arnos Vale Cemetery as part of her doctoral research, via Microsoft Teams of course.

I so hope that by the next newsletter we will have met up again and you can all meet Christine, though we may never get to know what Gerald looks like!