



Newsletter 31

Spring 2025

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Chairman's Letter

Maureen Hudd

I begin with praise! Praise for all those who have made our recent endeavours so successful. We had an amazing attendance at the All Saints Eve in the Cemetery and again at the highly acclaimed 'In The Beginning' production at the Town Hall. Neither of these events would have happened were it not for a large number of people spending a lot of time and effort to ensure their success. Thanks must go to Ros Clow our indefatigable Leader of the History Group, giver of talks, writer of plays for all her dedicated work. You will see elsewhere in the Newsletter the poem written by Garry Poulson in praise of Ros and her thespian attributes.

The Committee are working towards putting together a bid to Greenham Trust (The Good Exchange) for a number of 'wants' in the Cemetery. We would like to have markers on the paths, the bell re-instated on the Chapel, a place for visitors to leave flowers, wi-fi in the Chapel and restoration of some of the badly worn and damaged graves.



Sadly, our very efficient Secretary, Carol has stepped back from that role as she is involved in the production of a book which is a very time-consuming undertaking. We are incredibly grateful to Carol for all the work she undertook for The Friends and look

forward to her presenting her 'Golden Couples' tour in the future. So, we need a new Secretary, if you or someone you know would be prepared to take that on, please let us know.



Recently Ros organised a Filing Day and a few, a very few got together to undertake this task. It is not like filing in the ordinary sense, you are not standing over a filing cabinet slotting bits of paper into folders, this is interesting and informative as we endeavour to bring together all the information we have on our Residents whether in the form of birth/marriage/death certificates, newspaper reports, etc. into a separate folder for each of

our Residents who have been researched. Do come and help when the next filing day is advertised, you don't have to stay all day an hour or two is welcome, we can arrange soup for lunch and actually doing the filing it's surprising what you learn, there is also expert instruction and help from Ros and Dave Clow.

Talking of helping. All of the events we run at the Cemetery require a team of helpers in order for them to run smoothly. We usually require two or three people to be at the Gate to welcome visitors, some people to be in the Chapel to help with 'Find a Grave', information and light refreshments. The time commitment is usually about an hour or two and we send out beforehand to ask what help Friends can give. Please look out for requests for help for our next event 'Spring Open Day' on Saturday 12th April from 10am to 3.30pm.

One of the areas of our Welcome Days that is always very popular are the display boards that we have in the Chapel. These displays can spark discussions, offers of help and general interest but they do require putting together and keeping up to date. If you have an interest in helping with displays, or you know someone who might be interested, please let us know.



*Welcome sign at Welcome Cemetery
in the town of Welcome, Ohio*

There are some dates for your diaries - Spring Open Day – 12th April and Midsummer Event on 21st June which is First Day of Summer. More information about these events soon.

Thank you for your interest in the Cemetery and to quote the words of Sarah Page (Judith Bunting) at the conclusion of 'In The Beginning'

'Newtown Road Cemetery is now yours to look after. Good night'.

Tomb Collapse

Ros Clow

Over the weekend of 22/23 February one of our graves collapsed. Beneath it is a large brick-built vault that could take eight coffins. It is over 3 metres deep.

A dog-walker notified the Town Council, who visited immediately and put up red and white tape to cordon off the area. Then they closed the cemetery for safety reasons.

James Heasman, who manages outdoor spaces owned by the Council, contacted us to see if we could find any living relatives. The grave belongs to Michael and Sarah Osmond, and some research had already been done on them. Michael and his brother Richard originally were farmers in Linkenholt, Hampshire. Michael converted to Primitive Methodism and was active in recruiting new members and re-building the Wash Common Primitive Methodist Chapel. He died in 1868.



When the Chapel was opened it was Sarah who gave the first sermon, Michael having already died. The second sermon was by the Rev Daniel Harding, who by coincidence is the current grave of the month and is buried close by, as many Primitive Methodists are, the most famous being Robert Tasker, whose equipment and ephemera form the basis of Milestones Museum at Basingstoke.

The vault is along the path leading from the Lodge south to the southeast corner of the cemetery, easily visible from the road. I contacted a lady from Aberdeen who had been in touch 10 years ago but unfortunately, she has since died.

Dave has emailed everyone on Ancestry who have the Osmonds in their family tree.

He has had one reply so far. A weird aside is that the couple's only daughter died before them in 1861. She is buried in the grave behind them, not with them. Maybe the vault hadn't been built yet?

The next step is to make sure the vault is cordoned off and probably to close that path until it can all be repaired. Hopefully the cemetery can soon be opened to the public every day.



Decisions will need to be made as to how to repair the grave. James is finding out if the insurance will cover the costs. Do we try to restore the grave? Or do we fill it in and make it safe? Maybe there could be a plaque explaining what happened?

James is particularly interested in the Linkenholt connection as he grew up there and his mother still lives there. He is now in contact with the Linkenholt local historian, to find out more about the family.

It could become the site of a sculpture which visitors can use to leave flowers, if, as so often is the case, they can't find the grave of their ancestor. It has been suggested that we install a clear pane of glass or plastic so that visitors can see what 19th century vaults look like. The brickwork clearly shows the entrance which would be opened up each time a new coffin was added, and then rebuilt afterwards. There should be steps leading down to it, stretching across the path. Maybe we should dig down to see how they were constructed.

We'll post on our Facebook page when the cemetery is open again.

STOP PRESS: As we go to print, we are informed that the Cemetery is now open again following the collapse of the vault. Our thanks to Newbury Town Council for dealing with this quickly so that visitors can enjoy the wildflowers now blooming'.

Upcoming Events

Please keep a place in your busy schedules for the following events.

- Spring Open Day – Saturday 12th April
- Midsummer Event – Saturday 21st June

More details to follow...

Available Talks on the Cemetery and Local History.

Ros Clow

Ros and David Clow offer illustrated talks on the cemetery and other local historical people and events.

The £60 fee goes to the Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery.

Titles – relating to the cemetery:

- Introduction to Newtown Road Cemetery
- Angels, Artist and Authors
- Lost Ladies of Newtown Road Cemetery
- The Venness Sisters: who were they?

Other topics:

- Before TV: what did Victorians look at?
- Death, Debt and Discrimination: crime and punishment
- Lord George Sanger: A Newbury Lad?
- Lord George Sanger: from Peepshow to Parliament.

Joint talk:

- Travelling Taphophiles: 10 international cemeteries we have visited.

David's talks:

- Stained Glass: history, international and local favourites.
- The Bombing of Newbury 1941.

Walking in the Cemetery

Lynette Edwell

Newtown Road Cemetery on a rainy mid-February morning, and it does not look as if much is growing. The gardeners have been trimming around the base of the trees, just where the spring bulbs will bloom, perhaps, and the ivy has been stripped from the walls and the low railings by the road – a haven for the smaller plants which it used to shelter such as Herb robert, Purple toadflax, Yellow corydalis, and Ivy leafed toadflax. If we are lucky they may return.



Purple Toadflax
© [Gail Hampshire](#)

But there are still wild flowers blooming if you look. Mainly white at this time of the year, groups and gatherings of Snowdrops, a few tiny Barren strawberry Cinquefoils, White deadnettle, a sprinkling of Common daisies and two Earthstar fungi (Marasmiaceae) – still present, well past their prime. The purple/mauve Woodland crocus is out in clumps and there are yellow Lesser celandines in flower and Common primroses everywhere.

Despite the wet weather the cemetery paths are trim and almost free of mud. Small white pigeon feathers, probably the latest meal of the cemetery fox, are caught on the longer grasses and give the impression of tiny exotic flowers. The litter, although it adds a touch of colour to the landscape, badly needs clearing up.

Perhaps when it is not quite so wet.

The Latest Production from the Resurrection Players

Ros Clow

In January 2025, exactly 177 years after the real event, the **Resurrection Players** performed their re-enactment of the preliminary enquiry into the establishment of a cemetery in Newbury. They put on four shows in the Chamber of the Town Hall beneath the portrait of a young Queen Victoria painted in 1847 by William Corden the Elder, our resident's father.



Garry Poulson, Graham Hunt, Chris Jones and David Clow discuss the Old Library for their next production.

The cast of 12 men and one woman did themselves proud. Each performance sold out and praise has come from every quarter.

The audience particularly complimented the smart 19th century outfits, top hats, waistcoats and cravats, the men were wearing, so different from today's fashion!



The team were: Chris Jones, Graham Hunt, Paul Shave, Dave Stubbs, Steve Counsell, Graham Salter, David Clow, John Gardner, Steve Wallis, Barry Digby, Dan Ledwith, Brian Sylvester, not forgetting Judith Bunting as the mysterious Mrs. Page and Jan Budgen in charge of costumes.

On Saturday 25th, as the run ended, we walked across to the Corn Exchange to celebrate with drinks and cake. The drawings of the planned performance space in the Old Library were on display and we wondered if our next performance would be there.

The dress rehearsal was videoed by new Friend Stephen Talent so, hopefully those of you who couldn't buy tickets will be able to watch it sometime in the future.



Dave Stubbs, Graham Salter and Graham Hunt at dress rehearsal.

The Keeper of Stories

Gary Poulson

Gary Poulson wrote a Poem that was read at the "In The Beginning" play. Here it is:

*Beneath the yew trees, where shadows play,
In Newbury's soil, the silent lay.
Their voices hushed, their tales untold,
But Ros, the keeper, breathes life bold.*

*With pen in hand, she digs through time,
Unearths the past in rhythm and rhyme.
Through archives thick and records worn,
She finds the threads where lives were born.*

*A playwright's craft, a scholar's mind,
She weaves the lives the world left behind.
The baker, the soldier, the campaigner's cry,
Their stories rise, they will not die.*

*She writes with care, each word a thread,
To honour the souls, the revered, the dead.
Her scripts are maps, her stage a gate,
To lives that history forgot to narrate.*



Gary Poulson

*The director's eye, the producer's might,
She shapes the dark into the light.
With actors' voices, the air is stirred,
The buried speak through every word.*

*The stage becomes a sacred ground,
Where Newbury's past is found, unbound.
The audience sits, their hearts held tight,
As Ros's vision takes its flight.*

*Oh, Ros, the guardian of the gone,
Your work ensures they still live on.
Through sweat and toil, through nights so long,
You turn the quiet into song.*

*So here's to you, with passion true,
Who gives the dead their overdue.
In every play, their spirits soar,
Because of you, they live once more.*

