



**Newsletter 14**

**Autumn 2016**

The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery, c/o 100 Enborne Road, Newbury, RG14 6AN  
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## Chairman's Chatter...

Brian Sylvester

Dear Friends

This year being the centenary of several events in 1916 has kept World War 1 to the forefront of our thoughts. These include the evacuation of Gallipoli, the Battle of Jutland, the Battle of the Somme and the introduction of tank warfare.

The Somme was commemorated here in Newbury on 1st July by a 12-hour vigil at the War Memorial which received considerable public appreciation.



Our cemetery holds one hero from the first day of that conflict – Private Harold Freeman of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He'd been acting as a signaller in a forward position, and reported to his Captain who said "You have done well, my boy. Get back into the trench slippy or they will have you." Unfortunately, as he dropped for cover, he was struck on the shoulder by an expanding bullet.

He was shipped back to England to the Metropolitan Military Hospital, but died of his wounds two months later "after great efforts to save his life". He was given a military funeral with a bugler sounding the Last Post. Further details of this tragic story may be found on the West Berkshire War Memorials website: <http://westberkshirwarmemorials.org.uk/texts/stories/WBP01022S.php>

Just one of thousands, but nonetheless a great personal loss to his family and friends.

By the way, there's some debate as to when The Great War became World War 1. There are suggestions it was as early as 1935 when speculation about a second war was imminent: it was in common usage after Pearl Harbor – "a date which will live in infamy".

Why am I majoring on WW1? Well, we've been very fortunate to have secured an expert speaker who has also researched in detail the contributions of a set of individuals to that effort and the personal costs involved, including these in a book "A Group Photograph". His

name is Andrew Tatham, and you'll find further details elsewhere in this newsletter. I'm sure it will be a very moving story so please make the comparatively-minor effort to be there.

[Please note: this will be at **Shaw House**, and tickets – from the Corn Exchange – are needed, *but are free of charge to members*. Please try to bring additional guests to this fascinating event. Let's make it a “full house”!]

You'll also find notice of our forthcoming AGM elsewhere in this newsletter. No need to shy away from this, I promise to make it as brief as possible, and no one will be railroaded into anything.



I think it fair to say we've had a very successful year with well-attended and interesting events. A real feather-in-our-cap was the hosting of the AGM for the National Federation of Cemetery Friends who were most appreciative of our hospitality.

As ever, work proceeds in the fields of monument recording, history research, and nature observing: and our most grateful thanks go to those enthusiasts who pursue these activities with so much dedication.

Whilst dishing out thanks I must not overlook Newbury Town Council who maintain the cemetery, and the Friends' Committee of Secretary, Treasurer, etc. who do so much, and help maintain my sanity – allegedly! Thank you all so much – it's really appreciated.

## History Group Report

*Ros Clow*

Our July meeting was held on a fine evening in the Cemetery Chapel. Friends Jane Burrell and Phil Wood gave a fascinating talk on the late 19<sup>th</sup> century origins of the Newbury and District Field Club. In many ways these kinds of organisations gave opportunity to what we would now call Continuing Education. Members carried out local research into buildings, wildlife, geology and archaeology and presented papers at meetings. The published papers, the Transactions, are available in Newbury Library and to purchase through the Field Club website.



Of course our own Walter Money was an active member. Jane and Phil introduced us to other members including Lord Carnarvon. Henry Godwin and Dr Essex Wynter also contributed Transactions.

## Website updates

The meeting of the History Group on 20 September was mainly given over to “Questions and Answers” in connection with the website and Paul Thompson attended the meeting to facilitate this. He spoke about early challenges and how they had been overcome. Discussion covered the structure of our website using the Newtown Road Cemetery entries in the Burial Registers. We suspect that one existing register has not found its way to our transcribers. Currently the registers do not cover 1850 to 7<sup>th</sup> October 1868 or between 1<sup>st</sup> October 1884 and 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1898. We refer to these as the ‘Missing Years’.

David Clow has re-photographed those pages of the Newbury Cemetery Company Burial Accounts in Berkshire Records Office that were unclear or missing and these are available to all members through Dropbox. Contact David ([clow@ntlworld.com](mailto:clow@ntlworld.com)) for password. Unfortunately the Burial Register numbering and the Accounts numbering do not coincide so Paul has to introduce our own numbering system so that the Accounts data can be added to the website.

All this is a huge amount of work. What a good job Paul decided to come back to Newbury to live in 2009!

## St John's has stolen our bees!

*Ros Clow*

One of the activities at our Welcome Evening on August 3<sup>rd</sup> was making homes for mason bees. When James Heasman from the Town Council checked our bee tubes he found that only one bee had chosen to inhabit what we had provided. David Clow agreed to re-site the tubes so that they were south facing and to replace the cardboard tubes with bamboo – harvested from his back garden. Mason bees do not sting and are good pollinators.



In September I gave a talk to the St John's Ladies Fellowship and stayed on for a session run by Paul Cowan, Vicar of the Benefice. He asked for feedback and was challenged about the changes to the Garden of Remembrance. He explained that the cross had been taken away because it was infested with mason bees! Intrigued I asked him afterwards what the mason bees were living in – was it the urns? No, it was the human ashes themselves and their activity was bringing the ashes up to the surface. The cross in question

was apparently a cross of sand on the lawn. Now it is no longer there perhaps the bees will come and live in our cemetery!

## Dates for Your Diaries

Don't forget to add these dates to your diary.

13 <sup>th</sup> October, 2016 (Thursday)  7pm	<b>The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery AGM.</b>  The meeting will be held at Shaw House, Church Lane, Shaw, Newbury RG14 2DR  A very quick AGM will be followed by a talk and film by Andrew Tatham at 7.30pm.
12 <sup>th</sup> November, 2016 (Saturday)  10am – 3pm	Remembrance Cemetery Open Day  Please see details elsewhere in the Newsletter
23 <sup>rd</sup> November, 2016 (Wednesday)  7.30pm	FNRC history group meeting.  This is normally held at Ros' house. Please let Ros know if you intend to come along.

## Monument Recording Group

*Doug Larsen*



The Monument Recording Group continue to contribute to knowledge about those buried in the cemetery as well as enabling the digitizing of their monument inscriptions. Many monuments have been recorded during the pioneering work of Mrs. Margaret Pattison several decades ago but with web technology now available it is important to convert these to digital form. In order to make the records as accurate as possible we are checking every inscription at the gravesite where sometimes errors or omissions are discovered or graves that were obliterated by weathering or vegetation are cleaned or surface-cleared revealing new inscriptions. Such events are very exciting both for us and for the families who suddenly have a “physical” connection to a long lost relative.

This is, of course, a very arduous process and all credit should go to our Monument Recorders who work long hours in the cemetery and then spend an equally long time typing their scripts into spreadsheets. So a vote of thanks to Elizabeth, Jan, Sue K, Sue C, Deidre, Alastair, Hilary and Doug and remember that new volunteers are always welcome.

## Defenders of the Realm

By Deirdre & Alastair Duff

We have become very familiar, understandably, with the details of those who served and died in the First World War. But the Cemetery also contains the relics of those who served at other times and in other campaigns and one of these is highlighted here.

Charles Stone, born c.1781 in Burbage, Wiltshire. He enlisted in the army in 1800 and became a Corporal in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards, popularly known as The Queen's Bays. His army record shows him to be of good character and sound performance which led to him being selected in 1813 to join an important but little known unit – the Peninsular Staff Corps of Cavalry. This became the first standing military police force, under the control of the Adjutant-General's Office. In addition to its policing role, it undertook escort and other staff-related duties and on occasion was employed as combat cavalry. Members of the Staff Corps of Cavalry wore a red scarf tied around the right shoulder of their regimental uniform, which is believed to be origin of the "Red Cap" of the Royal Military Police, which came into existence in 1855. Amongst various disciplinary functions the Staff Corps was responsible for patrolling the battlefield after the event to prevent looting, pillage and robbing the dead and dying.



*Cavalry Staff Corps, 1813  
Aquatint by J.C. Stadler after  
Charles Hamilton Smith. 1813*

Charles Stone's death announcement states he was "formerly a sergeant in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards (a Waterloo veteran)" but we have been unable to find any definitive record of this. But it is entirely possible that he was, due to his experience, on secondment/detached duty or amongst the reinforcements rushed to Belgium to boost Wellington's Army, but they would have arrived after the battle. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards were sent to France and quartered in Paris with the King's Dragoon Guards who had fought in the battle. The following year they were at St. Omer and during 1817 they were in the area of Calais before going to Cambrai. The Bays were finally sent home in November 1818.

From the Chelsea Pension records we know that Charles Stone served in the Army for 21 years and 205 days. At the time of his discharge in August 1821, aged 41, he is shown as being 5 foot 9 inches tall, light hair with grey eyes and fair complexion. The reason for his discharge was "suffering from frequent attacks of haemorrhage from the lungs with consequent asthma and increasing debility". It is recorded that early on in his career his horse fell on him when leaping a bar in the Riding School at Tullamore, Ireland, rupturing one of his blood vessels. On 24<sup>th</sup> October 1821 he was admitted into the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, and the 1841 census confirms he was still in residence (3<sup>rd</sup> Ward).

In the 1851/1861 census he is living in Wallingford Street, Wantage with his French wife, Catharine, who was born in Cambrai. At an unknown date Charles and his wife made their home in Newbury where he died on 15th February 1870, aged 89, at Dredge's Yard, Bartholomew Street, and he was buried on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1870. The death certificate gives the cause of death as "decay of age". His widow Catharine died in 1875 in Burbage, Wiltshire, at the age of 89 years and the burial records at All Saints Church, Burbage, confirm she was buried on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1875.

## Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery – Annual General Meeting

The Friends' AGM will take place on Thursday October 13<sup>th</sup> at Shaw House in Newbury. The meeting will start at 7pm with the normal business part of the meeting and will be followed by a talk given by Andrew Tatham at 7.30pm. See the poster elsewhere in this newsletter.

**Please note that this is a Ticket-only event.** All FNRC members are entitled to a FREE ticket. Non-members tickets for the talk will cost £4.

Tickets are available from the Corn exchange booking office or from their web site at: <http://cornexchangenew.com/events/info/an-evening-of-first-world-war-family-history>

## Nature Report

*Rita Gardner*

Our summer open evening had a lovely splash of nature with the display, 'The Vices and Virtues of Cemetery Plants'. A friend of a committee member did a moth collection for the evening. One among the number was delightfully called 'Uncertain'-its actual name. We also had the use of a bat monitor and were very excited to hear the bats we never see!



Our group is hopefully increasing in numbers. We have interest from a botanist, a keen herbalist and others who have expressed interest in highlighting the natural treasures in the cemetery. A teenager has become a Friend and is interested in adding nature notes and pictures to the website. This will enhance and create more interest for those viewing our website. Steps are underway to put this into action.

In keeping with our theme of Medical Matters and The Vices and Virtues of Cemetery Plants, the yew tree will have a potted space in this newsletter.



The yew common to Britain and Europe is the *Taxus baccata*; it is also found in Asia, North America, and on mountainsides in the tropics. The yew was once thought to be a separate group of tree, but closer study now confirms it as a conifer. The yew generally has a male and a female plant, but occasionally has both male and female cones or can change sex with time. The male cone is globose shaped and sheds pollen in early spring. Yews contain poisonous alkaloids

(taxanes) which are toxic to humans. The cytotoxic pollen can cause headaches, lethargy, aching joints, itching, skin rashes and be a trigger for asthma. (One can see a yellow blanket of pollen on the ground when it is shed by the yews on the north side of the chapel.) A completely female yew does not produce pollen. The seed cones produced by the female yew has a soft, bright red, berry-like structure (aril) 6-9 months after pollination. The aril is open at one end and encases the seed which is toxic to humans and some grazing animals (cattle and horses, but not deer). Birds, such as thrushes and waxwings, eat the berries, digesting the sweet aril and dispersing the seed, undamaged, in their droppings. In humans the seed coat breaks down in the stomach and releases taxanes into the body. This can be fatal. (The berry can be eaten if the seed is removed, be on the safe side-DON'T-eat the berry.)

As a medical plant, the yew is being used to produce taxane drugs in the treatment of cancer (tumours of the breast, prostate and lung). The taxane drugs usually stop cancer cells dividing and cause the cells to die. If resistance occurs, the taxane is used to weaken cancer cells and other drugs are used simultaneously to overcome the tumour cells. The drug companies are beginning to synthesize taxanes as the curative property is found mainly in the bark. To gain enough taxane for current need will put the yew in danger.

Now for some interesting facts about yews to end the nature story. It can be a very long-lived tree. The UK has some of the oldest yews in Europe. In the small Welsh village of St. Cynog, a dendrologist (tree historian), has dated a yew at being 5,000 yrs. old. The Fortingall Yew in Perthshire is reputed to be 4,000 years old. The young Pontius Pilate supposedly slept under it when on duty before 30 AD. The Ankerwyke Yew on the bank of the River Thames at Runnymede is over 800 yrs. old. Yews have been symbolized by poets William Wordsworth, Alfred, Lord Tennyson and T.S. Eliot.

The yew was traditionally used to make bows as its wood is very springy. The fact is supported by a Neolithic mummy found in the Alps who carried an unfinished bow of yew wood. In Norse mythology, the god of the bow, Ullr, lived in the translated name of Yew Dales. The yew longbow was the weapon used in medieval times and was critical in defeating the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

A suggestion as to why yews are found in churchyards is that English parishes were required to grow yews. As the tree had toxic properties, it was grown only in enclosed areas of a village, such as the churchyard. Being grown in such a site has led it to symbolizing sadness.

Saplings taken from cuttings of historic yews are being grown in a hedge around the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh. It is being grown as Britain's historic yews are not protected and are vulnerable to damage by agriculture and development. The Woodland Trust is campaigning for a statutory register for Trees of Special Interest. "These trees are national landmarks, are vital for wildlife, and are as important as any listed building."

## The Next Cemetery Open Day

*Doug Larsen*



The Friends will be holding the annual Open Day to remember those who fell in the two World Wars as well as other conflicts on Saturday November 12th. It is held, as usual, as closely as possible to Remembrance Sunday but not coinciding with it so as not to distract from the official ceremonies held in the town. The Commonwealth War Graves as well as family graves whose loved ones fell overseas will be marked with poppy crosses in their honour and a tour of the

Commonwealth War Graves will be conducted, beginning at 11:00. The cemetery chapel will be open for the day for members of the public to read more about these brave men. Members of the Friends will be on hand to greet visitors and help them to find any memorials they may be interested in.

In the afternoon, the very popular "Medical Matters" tour of monuments to those who have made significant contributions to health and welfare in the district will take place and will be led by Ros Clow.

All of these will be held during normal opening hours of the cemetery, 10:00 A.M to 3:00 P.M. The gathering point for the tours is the front of the Cemetery Chapel.

So the timetable is:

- 10:00 A.M. – Cemetery Opens
- 11:00 A.M. – Commonwealth War Graves tour
- 2:00 P.M. – Medical Matters tour
- 3:00 P.M. – Cemetery Closes

Throughout the day, we will be offering our popular "Find-a-grave" service. If a grave has a memorial stone, we can find where it is from the person's name and take you to it. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the location of un-marked graves.