



Newsletter 7

Spring 2013

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

Brian Sylvester

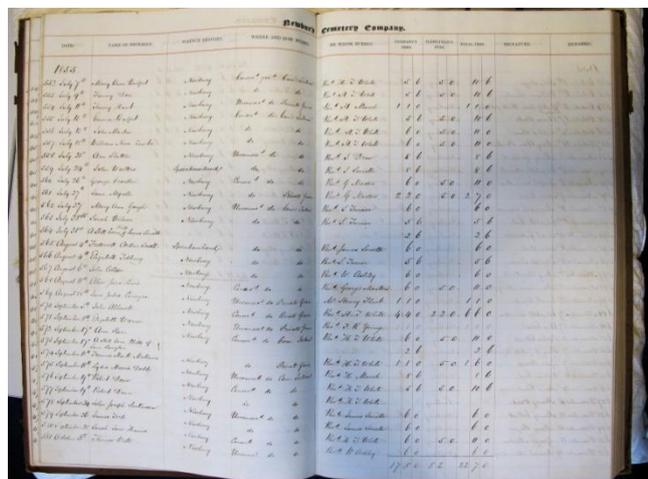
Hello Friends

Idling through the etymological dictionary (as surely everyone does on a rainy day!), I came across the word 'cemetery' and found it comes from the Greek for 'sleeping place' or 'dormitory'. Apparently Early Christian Writers were the first to use it in the sense of a burial ground. So, they were clearly attempting to soften the pain of death.

This discovery got me reflecting on what we as Friends are all about in Newtown Road, and I concluded, in our little way, that's what we are doing too. By researching our 'sleepers', looking up their obituaries, recording the gravestone inscriptions, and providing a pleasant environment, we too are softening that blow by supporting an acceptable 'dormitory'. Would you agree?

As you will see from others' reports, we are continuing to make good progress in our stated aims. Have you checked out our **website** lately? More and more is going on to it and, as a result, we are being contacted by descendants from all over the world.

We struck gold recently at the Berkshire Records Office when a cache of original documents from the **Newbury Cemetery Company** was found. These included ledgers which recorded all burials from Day 1 and much more. Until now we thought it wouldn't be possible to trace everybody as the Burial Registers are incomplete: but now we know this is not necessarily the case. So, no more 'missing years' as we have hitherto called them. A big task lies ahead, of course, to copy the particulars, type them up and download them on to our website, but it will be very worthwhile.





You'll recall we were due to man/woman (?) a stall at the **Volunteer Fair** in January but the event had to be postponed due to the heavy snow. This has now been rescheduled for **Sunday, 2nd June** retaining the theme 'Keep Calm and Volunteer'. This is a great window into what is happening in Newbury and we plan to be there again this time. We'll require a few willing helpers to represent us so, if you can spare just a short time, please contact Maureen Hudd by phone on 01635 30108 or email [committee@fnrcnewbury.org.uk](mailto:committee@fnrcnewbury.org.uk).

As you will see elsewhere in our Diary Dates, we are also planning another '**Welcome Day**' on **Saturday 13th April**. These have proved popular in the past and bring in the public and potential new Friends. Again, if you would like to be part of this, please get in touch with Ros.

**Nature:** I mentioned in my last Chairman's Chatter that work was ongoing to pollard the trees. This has now been completed and as soon as spring arrives we will get the benefits. In case you were wondering, the basal growth (that is the shoots around the bottoms of the trees) won't be trimmed back for now so as not to deny this wild-life protection. We are very interested in hearing of any activity you may have seen, in particular if use is being made of the bird-boxes. We've already had a sighting (see our website - <http://www.fnrcnewbury.org.uk/newsstory.asp?NewsID=32>), so please drop an email to Rita if you have further news in this direction on [ritaireneuk@yahoo.com](mailto:ritaireneuk@yahoo.com). And on your next visit don't forget to look out for the beautiful spring flowers now coming into bloom.



May I just mention again that a welcome awaits anyone interested in the fascinating pastime of **monument recording**: why not give Doug Larsen a no-obligation ring on 01635 826334 or email at [dlarsen@ntlworld.com](mailto:dlarsen@ntlworld.com) and hear all about it?

**Memory test:** We do know there were originally two chapels in the cemetery; the present Anglican one in the north and one for 'Dissenters' in the south. The latter has now completely vanished, its place marked by a bench. Who was the architect? What was it like – similar to the other? Did it have stained glass too? What were the circumstances of its disappearance? [We've heard vague stories about vandalism, fire, workman's accident, etc. but nothing positive.] No doubt we could find a report in the good old Newbury Weekly News, but we don't even have a date. Come on, I bet there's someone out there who can plug the knowledge-gaps with chapter-and-verse answers.



Now, have I saved the best until last? A Stop-Press item! We have just heard that Newbury Town Council is to go ahead and schedule the restoration of our wonderful **stained-glass window**. This important piece of Victoriana, you'll recall, was set up as a memorial to the cemetery's founder who is buried in a place of honour directly in front of the chapel. Once the work has been carried out it will, of course, be protected from vandalism and, we trust, bring pleasure and admiration for future generations. Similar protection will be given to the side and top windows. That's got to be brilliant news!

Meanwhile, enjoy our beautiful 'sleeping place': I hope to see you there soon – wide awake, of course!

## History Research Group

*Ros Clow*

Things are going well. We meet every other month and compare notes, helping each other where we can. Attendance varies between six and fourteen. We had another filing afternoon (21<sup>st</sup> Feb.) which was successful. How sad we are!

Now we have discovered that BRO has a complete list of everyone buried in the cemetery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (including stillborn babies) we no longer have 'Missing Years'; at least we won't have when we have found a way of being able to look up individuals without making a trip to Reading. So instead we have decided to plough through every year of the Newbury Weekly News starting in 1867. So far we have eight researchers who are being assisted by the Library's acquisition of a better microfilm reader. Each volunteer will read through every NWN for their given year and photocopy anything relevant to NRC. If you would like to take on a year please contact me.

We now have over 800 individual records and Sylvia Green is working hard to proofread and check information we have been given and add it as biographies and newspaper announcements on the website.

We are now able to offer three different guided tours on Welcome Days or for groups by appointment. The 'Introductory Tour' covers the early days of the cemetery, the role of the workhouse, wildlife and some of the most important characters. The Commonwealth War Graves Tour covers all 19 graves plus one or two related memorials. The 'Angels, Artists and Authors' tour brings in the five most significant angel statues (Harrold, Finn, Douglas, Dowling and Head), two artists (Corden and Gore) and four authors (Ingham, Stuart Hall, Money and Malachi Mouldy). I will be running the AAA tour at 2.00pm on Wednesday



27<sup>th</sup> March for anyone who would like to lead that tour in the future or who just wants to come along to find out more. I can be contacted on 01635 40188 or [raclow@ntlworld.com](mailto:raclow@ntlworld.com).

## Nature in the Cemetery

*Rita Gardner*



The lime trees along the western wall of the cemetery were pollarded at the end of November to the beginning of December 2012. The appearance of the trees has dismayed some individuals. This remedial work had to be done as the trees had been previously pollarded. Without maintenance, limbs develop forks which weaken and double leaders which cross and rub. Winds cause structural fractures to these limbs which

damage the trees and make them less resistant to disease. Due to lack of financial resources, the trees were not maintained on a regular basis and pollarding was well overdue. The height of the trees had to be brought down for safety to persons and property, as well as for the health of the trees. The wild life will return when new shoots and leaves appear.



We are hoping to have a butterfly walk and a bat walk for spring and summer events. Notices of dates will be posted on the FNRC web site and on the cemetery railings.

## Monument Recording Group

The Monument Recording Group has continued working toward their objective of recording every monument in the Cemetery, even through the winter months. In some ways it is easier because we don't have to contend with long grass and other growth around the monuments. We then only have to cope with freezing fingers which stop working after an hour or two in the cold. We are discovering new material in almost every recording session; this is material that was often too difficult for Margaret Pattison to record because monuments needed lifting or she didn't have available the techniques we have for revealing eroded or weather-stained inscriptions. Photographs are taken of every monument and they, along with our records, are beginning to be transferred to the website.

We hope to finish Group 1 in the next few weeks and will then move on, in our disciplined, orderly fashion, to Group 2A which is the group of graves that are clustered around the south side of chapel. It will feel as if we are closer to home rather than out by the wilds of the West Wall, which is nice, but more of a challenge as it is more difficult to discern the

order that these graves are in as you will notice if you walk along the path towards the Chapel.

We would love to share this experience with others so if you feel you would like to get involved please give me a call. For those who don't want to get "down and dirty" there is research that can be done in the comfort of your own home; we often find footstones or children's graves that only have initials and a date. By searching the burial records, it is sometimes possible to determine a name and from there a whole train of research can begin and our records enhanced. It is exciting and rewarding work!

## The Remarkable Story of Albert Alexander

*Ros Clow*

Through the website we were asked whether we could locate the grave of Albert Alexander. The enquirer already had a photo but was hoping to come and visit the grave. Luckily this grave was easily found as it is on the right-hand side of the curved path between the gate and the Chapel – about nine graves along from Mrs King's grave outside the Chapel. Intrigued I asked why he was interested in Mr Alexander.

In December 1940 Constable Alexander, a Newbury man but living in Oxford, was scratched on his mouth by a rose thorn. Infection set in and by January 1941 Albert was hospitalised in the Radcliffe Infirmary. His face became so matted with weeping red abscesses that one of his eyes had to be removed. The infection had spread to his lungs. He had no hope at all.

Meanwhile Howard Florey and Ernst Chain, Oxford scientists, had been developing supplies of penicillin mould and had experimented successfully on mice. They were now ready to try this new wonder drug out on a human being. They had no idea whether it would kill or cure.

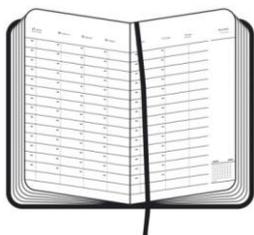


With the help of a young doctor, Charles Fletcher, Albert Alexander became the first patient to be treated with penicillin. Within 24 hours his condition was greatly improved, his temperature was normal and his appetite had returned. However, at this point the penicillin supply ran out. For several days the team recycled Albert Alexander's urine to recover as much penicillin as possible but to no avail; after a week they ran out of the drug, despite the recycling, and Alexander died on 15<sup>th</sup> March, aged just 44, and is buried in Newtown Road Cemetery.

Dr Tim Walter who advises us on medical matters remembers hearing the urine recycling story in medical school but of course had no idea Alexander was buried at the end of the

road. The next patient treated recovered completely and as we know penicillin went on to be the magic bullet which saved thousands of lives since 1941. Albert Alexander did not die in vain.

## Other Dates for Your Diaries



**13<sup>th</sup> April (Saturday)** – Welcome Day at the cemetery (10am – 4pm)

**2<sup>nd</sup> June (Sunday)** – Newbury Volunteer Fair at the Corn Exchange

**23<sup>rd</sup> June (Sunday)** – Welcome Day at the cemetery (10am – 4pm)

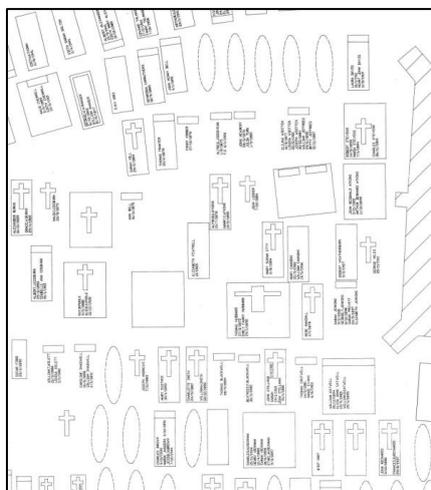
Don't forget, the cemetery is now open daily from 10am to 3pm. Come along, relax, see and enjoy the constant changes which occur in our peaceful local amenity.

## Web site News

*Paul Thompson*

Thanks to the dedicated work of the Friends, the website continues to grow as volunteers add more and more information. Some are adding biographies and transcriptions of newspaper reports; others are transcribing records from the burial registers and other sources such as Workhouse records. At the time of writing, there are 5,650 burials recorded in the database, 80 biographies, 21 obituaries as well as many other records, news items and pictures.

With the discovery of the Cemetery ledgers, there is another big transcription job coming up as we prepare to record all the data available in them.



When we found the large scale maps that are used to locate graves in the cemetery, we had them digitised and I have spent long hours combining those 12 images into one huge image. This has now been uploaded to the website and is available for you to use to locate a grave. You are able to zoom in on any section of the cemetery and read the names of the people buried in the graves. Our Monument Recording Group has noticed a couple of minor errors on the map and these will be corrected at some point in the future.

You may also like to pay a visit to Phil Wood's great website about all the War Memorials in West Berkshire. You can find it at: <http://westberkshirerwarmemorials.org.uk/>