



Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery: Newsletter No.21 Autumn 2024



Message from our Chair, Dr. Janet Sturgis

I am pleased to introduce our latest newsletter, which brings our members up to date with our activities over recent months. As you will see, a lot has been happening. For a small committee, we manage to organise quite a variety of events to bring our peaceful cemetery to the attention of the community so that we can raise funds to enable us to carry on our work in preserving and publicising it.

If you didn't manage to attend them, you will learn about two recent events which proved particularly popular. In August Dr. Ian Beavis' amazing collection of the local moth population impressed us all with their variety and unexpected beauty. In September our Memorial Inscription Group mounted an exhibition of words and photos honouring some of the many people with an international connection buried in our cemetery. We are hoping to persuade The Amelia Scott to exhibit the display as so many visitors said it deserves a wider circulation.

Progress on our beautiful mausoleum remains slow but we remain hopeful. We managed to arrange for aerial photos to be taken, which confirmed that preservation work is much needed.

I hope you enjoy this publication – and I hope to see you at our annual carols afternoon next month.

Gardening Group Update



Following the judging of the cemetery in July for the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom competitions we have great pleasure to report a GOLD award was received, which was presented to Jo Hunt at the Assembly Hall event in October. This is a great achievement and reward for the hours spent gardening in the cemetery by our team of volunteers.

We have been lucky with the weather this autumn and whilst it has been quite wet,

the days for gardening have been dry and there has been lots of cutting back and tidying of the beds. Even this late in the year there is still some colour to enjoy.

The team planted lots of primulas in the Primrose circle and we now look forward to a wonderful display next spring. Earlier, we planted 25 allium bulbs in the right hand entrance bed which will give a striking display next spring and early summer.

The team are now in the process of deciding what planting succeeded this year and what is required next year.

To date it has been a very successful year.



Memorial Inscription Group Update

Over the summer members of the Memorial Inscription Group were busy preparing for this year's Heritage Open Days, the national theme of which was, 'Routes-Networks-Connections'. We responded to this by researching the lives of twelve people who are buried in the cemetery who had connections across the globe. Some were born abroad and some travelled as far as Peru and New Zealand amongst other countries, in an age when such travel could take months. Some had a connection with Tunbridge Wells, others were just passing through when they died, and in some cases it is a mystery why they are



buried here. An exhibition in the South chapel showing the lives of these people was well attended over two days, and we received some very favourable comments. Information about the people featured in our exhibition can be found here,

[Some interesting biographies | friends-tw-cemetery](#)

Recently one of the members of our team highlighted the fact that many family memorials in the cemetery commemorate servicemen who died in the First and Second World Wars and who are buried elsewhere, usually close to where they fell. We are now in the process of compiling a list of these 'incidental' servicemen, and have so far found 92 men who served in the First World War and 17 in the Second World War. Some of these men have no known grave, and for those whose graves were identified it was impossible for family members to visit them for several years after the wars ended, so having their loved ones commemorated on a memorial close to home provided families with a place to come and remember them.



Moth Identification Event

Our first ever moth identification took place in August. Moths collected at the cemetery overnight were identified and photographed by Dr. Ian Beavis of The Amelia Scott, before being set free. In spite of the night being quite cool and damp, an impressive 73 moths and 30 species were found. The full list can be found here,

[Moth ID 2024 | friends-tw-cemetery](#)



Brimstone Moth



Light Emerald



Rosy Footman

Photographs courtesy of Dr. Ian Beavis.

Fungus Walk

We held our annual fungus walk on 23rd October. We are grateful to expert mycologist Martin, who found plenty of specimens to identify and he was aided by some keen-eyed visitors. The recent wet weather had encouraged a bumper crop of fungi including waxcaps, spindles, blewits, puffballs and earthballs, making the morning a very fruitful event.



Battle of Britain Day

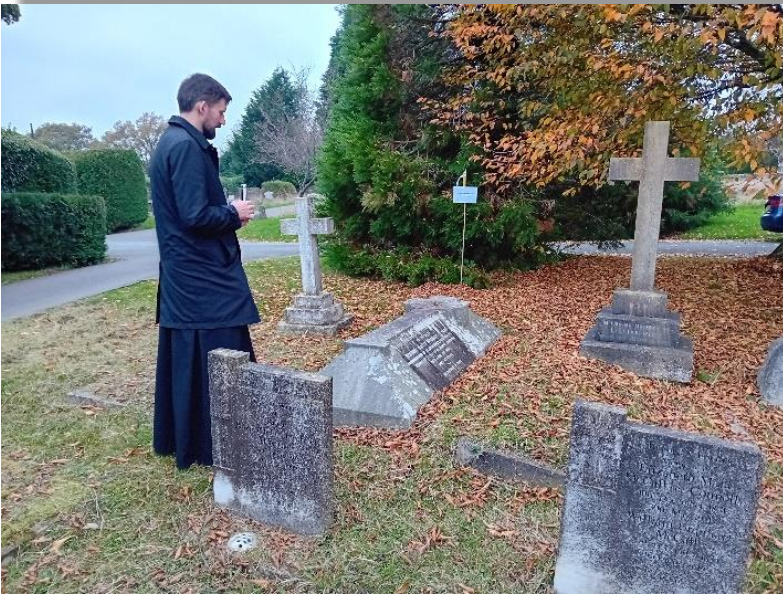


On 15th September, a day blessed with a glorious blue sky, the 84th anniversary of the Battle of Britain was again commemorated with a short wreath laying ceremony at the RAF Memorial just outside the twin chapels. We remembered all those members of the RAF who have lost their lives in the defence of our country, and in particular the 23 members of

the RAF and one member of the Royal Canadian Air Force whose graves are in the cemetery. Photograph courtesy of David Walter.

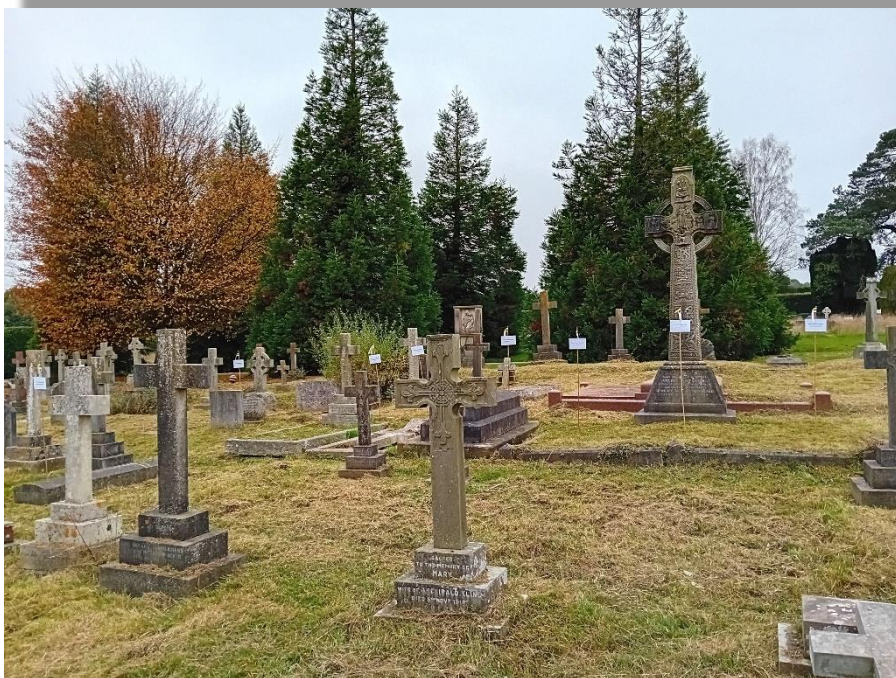


Catholic Blessing of Graves Service



The annual Catholic blessing of graves took place on the Sunday after All Souls Day, 2nd November. After a short service led by Father John and Father Paschal from St. Augustine's Church, prayers were said at individual graves around the cemetery before they were blessed with holy water. Recently members of the Memorial Inscription Group transcribed the inscriptions on the graves of

several of the priests from the early days of St. Augustine's, and further research revealed that ten of their priests and two of their deacons are buried in the Catholic part of the cemetery. These graves were tidied up and marked for the occasion. The top photograph shows the blessing of the grave of Father Herbert Massy Myddleton Evans (1860-1923).



An Interesting Memorial – Disaster in the English Channel



William Plummer was born in 1836 in Newbury into a drapers family. He built up his own drapery business there before moving to Tunbridge Wells in 1864 where he established himself as a draper and silk mercer. He married in 1865 and within a few years the couple moved to Hastings where he built up a large drapery business, initially on his own, but later joined by Mr Beecroft and Mr Roddis, forming the company of

Plummer, Roddis and Beecroft Ltd, which was very successful (later becoming Debenhams in 1928). He was regarded as one of the most successful businessmen in the South of England.

He and his family left Hastings in 1890 and returned to Tunbridge Wells where they lived at 5 Carlton Road. He had other business ventures in parts of the South East, and within a few years withdrew his interest from Plummer, Roddis and Beecroft Ltd. Unfortunately his other businesses did not flourish and this affected his health. Then his wife Phoebe died suddenly in 1897.

In March 1899, William set off from Southampton on the London and South Western Railway Company's passenger steam ship *Stella* to spend Easter in Guernsey with a friend. On board were 147 passengers and 43 crew. Approaching the Channel Islands, a thick fog bank was

encountered, but the Captain did not order the speed to be reduced. Shortly before 4pm, the fog signal from the Casquets Lighthouse was heard and the Casquets rocks came into view directly ahead. The Captain ordered the engines full astern and attempted to turn away from the rocks but the *Stella* scraped along a submerged granite reef, and her bottom was ripped open.



Eye witness accounts tell of William remaining calm as the passengers scrambled for life boats, refusing to don a life jacket himself or take anyone else's position in a boat. The ship sank in eight minutes. 86 passengers and 16 crew drowned, including William Plummer.

William's body was washed up at Ambleteuse north of Boulogne almost 2 months later, and transported to Folkestone where an inquest was held at the end of May. His son Edwin identified the body from pieces of clothing. William was buried in Tunbridge Wells cemetery alongside his wife Phoebe on 26th May 1899. His coffin plate bore the words:

Wreck of the 'Stella'. William Plummer, died March 30th 1899.

He had been a member of the Plymouth Brethren congregation, was interested in any Evangelical activity, and supported the YMCA movement. The firstborn of his 12 children, Amy Gertrude, was buried in the same grave (B5 Gen 6) in 1936.

Two Channel Islands divers discovered *Stella's* wreck in June 1973. It lies in 49 metres (161ft) of water south of the Casquets.



Featured Tree - Eucalyptus



Just outside the chapel stands a large eucalyptus tree, estimated to have been planted in the 1940s. There are several hundred different species of eucalyptus, ranging from small shrubs to tall evergreen trees. They can be identified by the blue-green adult leaves that are long and slender and hang downwards from single stalks.

Eucalyptus oil comes from the adult leaves which secrete the unmistakable scent when crushed. The flower buds are cone shaped and grouped together in threes. Each bud has a round cap on top, which falls off to reveal the fluffy white or red flower stamens. In the middle of the flower a hard woody pod develops that opens to reveal seeds.

In the eucalyptus tree's native Australia, koalas feed on the leaves, while the nectar produced by the flowers is enjoyed by birds, bats and possums. In this country the nectar is enjoyed by honey bees. This tree seems particularly attractive to bees – on a warm summer's day if you stand under it you can hear it humming!

In medicine, eucalyptus oil is valued as an expectorant, a decongestant and as an antiseptic. Australian indigenous populations used the wood and bark of the eucalyptus tree to make tools, spears, shields and musical instruments.

Future Events

Saturday 7th December at 3pm - Carol Concert

Join us for an afternoon of carols with CREATE Choir and seasonal refreshments



Saturday 12th April 2025 – AGM

The AGM of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery will take place on Saturday 12th April 2025

**ANNUAL
GENERAL
MEETING**

**Check our website and social media pages
nearer the time for further details and more events**

Contact Us

Via our website:

<https://www.friends-tw-cemetery.org/support-us>

Alternatively email us at ftwc.sec@gmail.com or call us on 07944364622

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