



Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery: Newsletter No.25 Spring 2026



Message from our Chair, Dr. Janet Sturgis

As we approach another Annual General Meeting and I reflect on the past year, the impression I have is one of solid achievement. For me, the highlight of the year was the poster exhibition of the architects, builders etc. who helped to create the town that we are so proud of. I have repeatedly gone around it, and each time glean a new detail that I hadn't previously fully appreciated. Our annual programme now has a familiar rhythm, with the Christmas carols, wassail and raffle the highlight.

Our dispute with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council regarding what we view as the sacrilege of their plans to build on consecrated ground containing paupers' graves within the cemetery walls continues. To reinforce our view, our secretary Lynne Monckton, and two other members of the Friends, recently spoke passionately at a meeting of the Council's planning committee, where our view received short shrift. Outline planning permission was agreed, however implementation of the planning permission cannot be granted unless the relevant burial legislation has been complied with, so all is not lost. It was also gratifying to learn that just hours before the meeting, after being contacted multiple times by the Friends, that the Anglican Diocese of Rochester have finally confirmed that the area of the cemetery in question is indeed consecrated.

Finally we express our sympathy with Lynne on the loss of her husband after his period of poor health. We are fortunate indeed to have someone of her commitment and energy as our driving force.

An Interesting Memorial

A Tunbridge Wells Icon - Alfred Romary (1844–1929)



Many of you will have heard of the famous Romary biscuit, a wafer type biscuit. But did you know that it was invented and produced by Alfred Romary in his shop at 26 Church Road here in Tunbridge Wells? He opened his bakery in 1862 and soon his biscuits became so popular that they were sold worldwide – exported to Macy's of New York, food stores in Belgium and Paris, and in London at Harrods, Fortnum & Mason, and Jacksons of Piccadilly.

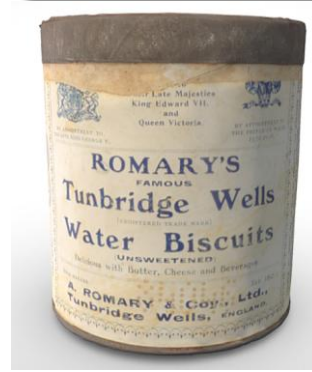
Queen Victoria visited the bakery in 1876 and liked the biscuits so much that she granted the company a Royal Warrant. Framed letters were proudly displayed in the shop of orders for the biscuits from the Queens of Yugoslavia, Spain and Romania. Romary's described the biscuits as *'thin as lace, and of a flavour so delicate as to be indefinable. The clubs serve them with port but they are also excellent with ices or at afternoon tea'*.

Romary's royal warrant was renewed by King Edward VII in 1901 and again in successive reigns until finally Queen Elizabeth II renewed it in 1963. In 1926 A. Romary & Co had become a limited company when W.A.P Lane purchased it, and later it became part of Rowntree & Co (now part of Nestle). Rowntree built a new modern factory off Eridge Road, and baked biscuits there until 1957 when it closed. Some baking still went on at Church Road, but this site was not really suitable for the mass production methods which were required to fulfill the orders, as the original biscuits were all hand made.

Queen Elizabeth II liked Romary's biscuits, so Rowntree decided to begin producing them again, this time in Glasgow in 1963. The last batch was made for the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981.

Alfred Romary died in 1929 and is buried with two of his daughters who died in childhood. His wife is buried nearby.





26 Church Road, Tunbridge Wells, with plaque commemorating a visit by Queen Victoria.

"ROMARY LTD."
 . . . CELEBRATED . . .
TUNBRIDGE WELLS WATER
 An Ideal Biscuit for Invalids
 or for Dessert. **BISCUITS.**
AS REGULARLY SUPPLIED TO:—
 His Majesty the King, Her late Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, H.R.H. the Duchess of Albany, H.R.H. the Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll), H.R.H. the Princess Beatrice, H.L.H. the Emperor of Germany, H.L.H. the Crown Princess of Germany, His Majesty King Alfonso of Spain, The Imperial Court of Austria, H.R.H. the Hereditary Princess of Saxe Meiningen, H.R.H. the Princess William of Prussia, the Empress Eugenie, H.S.H. Prince Edward of Saxe Weimær.
 Sold in 1/- and 2/6 tins. Agents for Hastings & St. Leonards—
ATKINS BROS. & COX.

ROMARY'S
CELEBRATED
TUNBRIDGE
WELLS
WATER-BISCUITS

By Appointment. *View of the Pastries, Tunbridge Wells.*

"A REGAL DELICACY."
 Delicious wafers: highly nutritious; easily digested. Dr. Huxall, in *Lancet*, says: "The original **Romary Biscuits** are thin, crisp, light, delicate, and pleasing." To be had from all high-class stores and leading confectioners; or in sample tin, post free for 1/-. Larger size tins, 2/6, 3/6, and 5/6, from **ROMARY, Ltd., Tunbridge Wells.**

Regularly Supplied to
 HIS MAJESTY THE KING. H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES. H.M. THE EMPEROR OF GERMANY. THE EMPRESS EUGENIE. H.M. THE KING OF SPAIN. IMPERIAL COURT OF AUSTRIA.

Advertisements from 1906

Annual General Meeting Saturday 11th April at 2.30pm



We hope that many of you will be able to join us for our AGM, which will take place in the cemetery's North Chapel. This will be followed by a short talk by Dr. Philip Whitbourn OBE entitled, 'George Smart – Tailor of Frant and Professor of Peculiar Art'.

Refreshments will then be served in the Friends Chapel, where there will be another chance to view our exhibition about some of the 'Creatives' who are buried in the cemetery.



Memorial Inscription Group Update

Although the weather has not been kind enough for much transcription work to be done, members of the Memorial Inscriptions Group have been busy researching. For a new publication and for Heritage Open Days in September, we are researching people who died as a result of an accident. These are surprisingly many and varied, and were followed by an inquest which was reported in the newspapers. Here the details of the accident are often described in graphic detail. Sad cases of people being burnt, or workmen falling off ladders were common.

We will be revealing more with a walk and talk on Saturday 12th September, so please make a note of this date in your diaries.



Gardening Report



What a disastrous start to the gardening year 2026 has been. With such a wet winter no gardening was possible until Thursday 12th March and even then the ground was still soggy but just about manageable. A week later, 19th March 2026, the sun was shining and the ground had dried sufficiently for the team to weed the Friends' bed with comparative ease.

We hope from now on we can plan for summer colour in all of the areas that the gardening team manage.

It was a joy gardening on the 19th, with the warm sun and the birds singing early in the morning and the robins could not follow us around fast enough, picking up the worms we exposed in the overturned soil. Such a difference from the cold wet mornings experienced over the past two months.

The daffodils in the entrance beds are still looking their best with many varieties on show. Such a welcoming sight when entering the cemetery. There has been much to do as no cutting back of the shrubs had taken place, so this was another urgent job on the agenda. At this time of year quite a few of the larger plants need pruning; the buddleja, hydrangea, salvia and the larger clumps of plant that have become far too big and needing to be split into smaller manageable sizes. One of our favourite plants is the gaura, and we put five small pink plants in the small round bed last year. Sadly it looks as though they have not survived the winter and we shall have to order more. The polyanthus we rescued from the Chapel beds at the end of the season last year have bloomed this spring, giving a riot of colour.

Bridget brought from her garden some of her foxglove seedlings from two years ago, very healthy plants, and will bring some more for the entrance beds. These do well and give height and colour in the summer. The bees love them of course.

We are now deciding what plants we shall require for summer colour, although most have survived the winter and are getting larger each year. It is an exciting time in the gardens, seeing which plants have come through the wet winter and which have failed. Fortunately the cemetery beds are looking very good indeed which is most pleasing.



Hellebores in the Friends bed looking their best in the Spring sunshine.

The daffodils in the entrance beds that were planted by the gardening group.



The Primrose bed.

Featured Tree – Tulip Tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)



The magnificent tulip tree that grows near the cemetery chapel was planted in around 1949. Tulip trees are so named because of their unusually-shaped leaves that are said to resemble a tulip, and from the beautiful tulip-like yellow flowers that appear in late spring, but in fact they are members of the magnolia family. They are large fast-growing deciduous trees that are native to the East of North America, and they can live for up to 300 years. They are botanically primitive plants, and they have been found in fossilised form from the Cretaceous period 70 million years ago.

The tulip tree was introduced to England by the pioneering botanist and gardener John Tradescant the younger, who like his father collected specimens and rarities on his many trips abroad. At least one tulip tree grew in his garden in Lambeth.

In its native land the Cherokee and other indigenous peoples valued the tulip tree for its timber, which they used to construct houses, furniture, cradles, totem poles and dugout canoes.

As well as being a lovely sight in spring when full of flowers, an added bonus is that the tree also looks stunning in the autumn, when the leaves turn vivid shades of orange and yellow. On a sunny autumn day it is a truly spectacular sight.



Belgium's National Day at the Cemetery



If you visited the cemetery last July you might have been surprised to see seven graves marked with the flag of Belgium, in honour of the fact that 21st July is Belgium's National Day, marking the anniversary of the investiture of Leopold 1 as the first King of the Belgians in 1831. The flags were placed on the final resting places of seven Belgian exiles who were among hundreds of people who took refuge in our town during the First World War. Following the invasion of Belgium by Germany in 1914, around 225,000 of its citizens sought refuge in Britain, with around 300 making their temporary home in Tunbridge Wells for the duration of the war.

Sadly seven of those people died during their time here, and their graves are situated near each other in the older Catholic part of the cemetery. Those

who died were Rosalie Gebruers-De-Pauw, Helene Denyn and her 12-year-old daughter Emma, 2-year-old Joseph Van Nuland, Wilhelmina Vanhercke, baby Helene Becker, and Theodore Van Beneden.

Two years ago the Friends were contacted by a great great grandchild of one the seven, who was hoping to visit their ancestor's grave while on holiday in the area. We were delighted to be able to direct them to the grave, and to assure them that the story of the Belgians who sought refuge in our town during the First World War form an important part of our local history.



Future Events

Saturday 13th June. Moth identification. Drop in from 10am to 12 noon.



Dr. Ian Beavis will once again identify moths which have been trapped overnight near the cemetery. We should find some different species from previous years, as the event is earlier in the year than previously. (The moths are not harmed and are released at the end of the morning). As usual refreshments will be available during this drop in session.

Saturday 22nd August at 10.30am. Tree Walk and Talk.



David Carey, Tree and Pond Warden for Hadlow, will lead another walk round the cemetery. He will tell us about the fascinating world of trees and will focus on different trees to those we looked at last year. If you haven't already got one, you might like to purchase our booklet 'A Treasure Trove of Trees' which will be on sale on the day. Refreshments will be served in the Friends Chapel after the walk.

Heritage Open Days. Saturday 12th & Sunday 13th September



Our theme this year will be Accidents and Disasters. A walk and talk will take place on Saturday 12th September to include some of the graves of people who died following accidents. Be prepared for some shocking details!! We are preparing a booklet to include these people and many more who died before ideas of Health and Safety were considered the norm. On Sunday 13th September there will be a small exhibition and a self-guided walk to accompany our new publication.

Fungus Walk



Our annual and ever popular fungus walk led by mycologist Martin Allison will take place on 29th September. Details on how to book will be available nearer the date. The Friends Chapel will be open for refreshments afterwards.

More events are planned for later in the year, with details to be finalised at a later date. These include the annual Remembrance Sunday event, the Catholic blessing of graves service held close to All Souls' Day, and an Advent carol concert.



Our **Memorial Inscription Group** records and researches information from memorials. There are over 40,000 graves within the cemetery, so the group focuses on recording the earliest graves. The group has also researched those with no memorials buried in unmarked Victorian paupers' graves. We welcome new members with an interest in local history and

with all sorts of expertise. Even if you don't want to get on your hands and knees to explore gravestones, you may enjoy doing research at home or in the library, putting a booklet or exhibition together, giving a talk or writing an article for this newsletter.

The **Gardening Team** of the Friends meet regularly and is always on the lookout for new volunteers willing to help maintain the particular garden areas of the cemetery that the Council have allocated to us. We use our own tools and typical tasks include planting, weeding and pruning of informal cottage garden style beds, general maintenance and clearing of brambles in selected historic areas of the Cemetery and assisting with the planting of trees.

The **Friends Executive Committee** would also welcome new members, particularly someone who would be willing to help raise our profile by publicising our events as widely as possible.



The Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery Website

If you haven't already done so, please visit our website! It is regularly updated and contains a wealth of information about the history of the cemetery, its ecology, the many interesting people who are buried within its walls, and details of our future events. You can also contact us, become a member of the Friends and purchase our publications via the website.

[Tunbridge Wells | Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery at Hawkenbury | England](http://www.friends-tw-cemetery.org/support-us)

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

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram