



Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery: Newsletter No.23 Summer 2025



Message from our Chair, Dr. Janet Sturgis

Recent events have turned this period in our organisation's normally tranquil series of events into an exceptionally busy time. It resulted from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's (TWBC) proposal for a residential development in a disused part of the cemetery currently used as a depot. What TWBC had assumed was waste ground was in fact part of the cemetery's consecrated ground which had contained the remains of Victorians who were buried in public graves reserved for the poorest members of society. Local residents opposed to the plan contacted BBC Southeast News, and your Secretary and Chair were interviewed and appeared in a local news bulletin! The issue will at some stage come before the Planning Committee, and in the meantime we are in discussion with TWBC and the Diocese of Rochester regarding the status of this land.

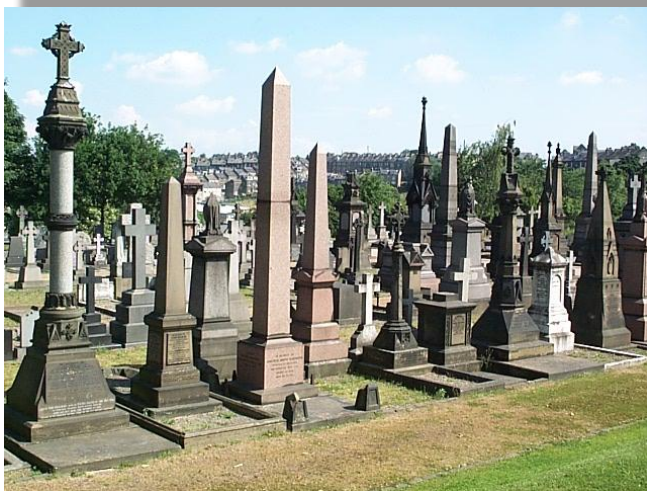
A repeat of the popular Angels Walk in June was badly affected – ironically – by the first rain we had seen for many weeks. However those of us who came along enjoyed a pleasant get-together and Felicity's tasty baking. We hope for better weather for our upcoming programme of events, which we hope you will support.

Visit to Bradford for the National Federation of Cemetery Friends AGM June 2025

The title of this may seem a bit uninteresting, but our visit to Bradford was certainly not. Felicity and Sue of the Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery spent three days in the city, which happens to be this year's City of Culture. The centre of the town has been given a much-needed face lift in recent years, bringing to life some of the magnificent Victorian buildings built in Bradford's glory days of wool. In particular, the City Hall, the Wool Exchange (now a Waterstone's bookshop), and the Cartwright Hall which was built as an art gallery.

The NCFCF AGM took place near the Victorian Undercliffe Cemetery, and was well attended by representatives from all over the country. There was considerable interest in our stand and publications, highlighted by our new banner advertising our cemetery.

We had a guided tour around parts of Undercliffe Cemetery, which opened in 1854 as the privately owned 'Bradford Cemetery Company'. By the 1980's the demand for burials had declined and the site was subject to vandalism. Bradford Council could not justify the cost of taking it on and eventually its management was given to the Undercliffe Cemetery Charity, which has been instrumental in restoring many of the memorials. The Victorian wool barons liked a good monument, and it seemed there was a certain amount of 'one-upmanship' as the monuments got more and more impressive and taller!



Undercliffe Cemetery



Bradford City Hall

Gardening Report



What a contrast to the Spring gardening report when the ground was so wet and it was very difficult getting the weeds out of the ground without great clods of soil attached. For the early part of the summer the sun shone every day, making the ground very dry indeed, and with hardly any rain gardening was a difficult task. However, there was much to do, lots of cutting back and tidying of the beds and the team have been weeding where possible.

It has been a good time to take stock of what is growing successfully in the dry conditions and what plants to avoid. Plants such as the hydrangeas and heleniums have loved the hot weather and more have been ordered for next year. Also, salvias are such a good plant in these dry conditions and cuttings have been taken for next year. The leaves have quite a strong smell and the deer leave them well alone. An ideal plant for the cemetery beds.

The primrose bed is full of lavender and the bees just love it. Whilst there is not a lot of colour in this bed the lavender perfume and the sound of the bees is wonderful.

We were offered some geraniums by the Council and these have been put in the beds, making a lovely splash of colour. Again, with the leaves giving off a distinct smell the deer leave them alone.

The Community Payback team have made a significant difference to one of the entrance beds which is looking so tidy and nicely planted. We are grateful for their assistance each month.

The cemetery was judged for the Tunbridge Wells in Bloom competition and we are hopeful for a successful outcome. Everyone worked so hard to ensure the cemetery looked its best on the day the judge attended.

With rain forecast for last weeks of July we hope to see quite a difference to the beds, and shall be busy weeding and making the beds look good for the autumn months.



Memorial Inscription Group Update

With the improved weather it has been possible to resume our memorial transcriptions, although the long grass is giving us some difficulties. When the MIG group was formed in 2011, it was decided to transcribe graves only up to 1911, but we are now attempting to fill in the gaps.

We were delighted to recruit a new transcriber who is doing sterling work with one of the sections.

Occasionally we receive an interesting story about a person buried in the cemetery. One such is the story of Frederick George Barton born in Tunbridge Wells in 1859. He lived a life of crime, fake identities and multiple bigamous marriages, finally dying in 1950 and buried in an unmarked grave as Major Frederick Augustus Hastings Seymour! Read his incredible story on our website under Your Stories in the Family History heading.

[Frederick George Barton alias Lord Barrington | friends-tw-cemetery](#)

We were contacted recently by a member of the public with some interesting information



about engineer Measham Lea (1869-1963), whose grave is in the cemetery. He spent many years in Karachi, Pakistan, and his engineering projects there are still benefitting its residents today. Lea Market in Karachi is named after him. We are currently researching his life and hope to have information about him on our website soon.

September will see our exhibition for Heritage Open Days about some of the

architects who are buried in the cemetery. Many of the churches in Tunbridge Wells were designed by local men, and the exhibition will also feature architects who were important elsewhere. There is a very interesting plan by Egbert Cronk showing a layout for a 'Winter Garden' in Calverley Grounds, but it was never used. Of course we also have our beautiful buildings in the cemetery as well. Come along and meet the men who built some of Tunbridge Wells.

Featured Tree – Lawson Cypress (*Chamaecyparis lawsoniana*)



There are more Lawson cypress trees in the cemetery grounds than any other species, numbering 77 in total. Many of these trees were planted in the late Victorian and the Edwardian periods, reflecting their popularity at the time, which resulted in them being planted widely in parks, gardens and churchyards.

The Lawson cypress is a tall, evergreen, narrowly conical tree with feathery foliage. The wood of the tree is strong and light, and is highly valued in Japan for coffin and shrine construction. It is also used to make arrow shafts and musical instruments, in particular guitars.

Although the Lawson cypress, like many conifers, has fallen out of fashion, it is great for wildlife,

harbouring many species of insect, and providing shelter for nesting birds when many broadleaved trees are still in bud.

Also known as the Port Orford cypress, the Lawson cypress is native to Northern California. The Karuk people, a Native American tribe, used branches from Lawson cypress to build sweat lodges – low, humped buildings where they took ritual steam baths to purify themselves. They also made the branches into brooms.

The Lawson cypress is named after Charles Lawson (1795-1873), who introduced it to Britain in 1854. Lawson was a Scottish nurseryman and merchant, noted for the introduction of foreign plants into Britain. He was born in Edinburgh, the son of seed merchant Peter Lawson, and he took over the business after his father's death. He served as Lord Provost of Edinburgh from 1862 to 1865.



Charles Lawson wearing the ceremonial regalia of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh



Future Events at the Cemetery

Tree Walk and Talk Saturday 23rd August at 10.30am



David Carey, tree and pond warden for Hadlow, will lead a walk and talk around the cemetery. This will be a chance to appreciate and learn more about some of our wonderful trees. Following the walk there will be an exhibition about some of the trees in the Friends chapel, and you can test your knowledge by taking a tree quiz. Refreshments will be served. Free event, no booking required.

Heritage Open Days 13th and 14th September 2pm-4pm



Stories of the Stones - Architects and Architecture in Tunbridge Wells Cemetery. We have discovered that our cemetery holds at least 15 architects and probably more. We are busy researching some of their stories and some of the amazing buildings they designed. We also have our lovely chapel, lodges and Mausoleum which are architectural gems in themselves. Join us for an exhibition, chat, tea and cake.

Moth Identification Morning Saturday 27th September 10am-12 midday



Dr. Ian Beavis from The Amelia will once again identify moths which have been trapped overnight, before setting them free. Our previous event took place earlier in the year, so Ian expects different species to be found this time. This is a free drop in event.

Fungus Walk Wednesday 22nd October



Our popular fungus walk with Martin Allison will take place on 22nd October. Last year over 40 species were found. Will this be a bumper year? Booking required, more details nearer the time.

Catholic Blessing of Graves (Date to be Confirmed)



This annual event takes place on a Sunday around the time of All Souls' Day (2nd November). The service starts at the Catholic area of the cemetery with a short service where prayers are said for the repose of the souls of the departed, followed by the blessing of graves. Everyone is welcome to attend. Refreshments will be served in the chapel following the blessing.

Remembrance Day Sunday 9th November



The annual Remembrance Day event will take place on this day. Wreaths will be laid at all four war memorials. After the ceremony the Friends Chapel will be open. There will be an exhibition about VE Day and VJ Day, with reference to Tunbridge Wells.

Annual Advent Concert Saturday 6th December



Once again we will be hosting our annual advent carol concert on the afternoon of 6th December. Join us for a fun-filled afternoon of singing, hot wassail, mince pies and a raffle. Further details to follow.

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 and become a member of the Friends via the website. All of the Friends' publications can be purchased, including 'Our Beautiful Necropolis', the history of the cemetery published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of its opening.

[Tunbridge Wells | Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery at Hawkenbury | England](https://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

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