



# Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery

## Newsletter No.14 Autumn 2021

Although life is gradually returning to a more normal pattern, the shadow of Covid 19 still hangs over us and we are not able to return to our usual pattern of events. However, as restrictions have gradually eased, the Friends of TW Cemetery have managed to keep the organisation going. Our Committee meetings have progressed from Zoom, to bundled up in Lynne's garden, to masked and socially distanced in the Chapel. We have now put together this newsletter to bring you up to date.

### Heritage Open Days in September: *Bright Day, Booklet and Bishop*

Thanks to John de Lucy's family documents and his wide research, the exhibition and booklet John produced about the missionaries to China who are buried in our cemetery generated one of the best attended events we have organised.

The central event was the visit of the Bishop of Guildford, who came to bless the *gingko* tree and plaque placed to commemorate the approximately 100 returned missionaries buried here. Using our newly-purchased loudspeaker system the Bishop spoke to the assembled visitors of his own family's connection with the mission to China, and dedicated the tree to the memory of those remarkable people.

There followed a very well attended reception and sale of booklets in the Chapel: altogether a memorable day.





## **Our Gardening Team Once Again Successful**

In a season that challenged any gardener, our team were again awarded a Gold certificate by the *TW in Bloom* competition. Not resting on their laurels, they have just planted up an iris bed – and would welcome new people – green fingers not required – to join them on weekly (weather permitting) tasks on the site.

## The Queen's Tree

As a response to the scheme for a national 'forest' to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year, in October we planted a *sorbus torminalis* on an open corner of the cemetery which we hope will flourish and with spring blossom, summer fruit and autumn colour, brighten the corner where it stands.



## Successful Annual October Fungi Walk: *Even in the long grass*

Despite worries about the long, dry and uncut grass (*that's another story*), once again Lynne organised a walk for a group of enthusiasts led by mycologist Martin Allison who managed to find an interesting variety of fungi – including the deadly *Death Cap* which we learned to identify and the humble but interesting *Clavulinopsis fusiformis* (Golden Spindles).



### **Annual Blessing of Catholic Graves 7<sup>th</sup> November**

Once again, following *All Saints Day*, clergy and congregation gathered for a blessing of graves in the Catholic section of the Cemetery. Afterwards, visitors came into the Chapel for a cup of tea and an opportunity to see the Chinese Missionaries exhibition.





## Remembrance Ceremonies 2021

This annual event was back to nearly normal. With the laying of wreaths starting in the Garden of Remembrance at the *World War 2* monument and the *TW Civilians'* plaque in the Garden then along to *World War 1* monument and finally along to the RAFA memorial and flower bed, we paid our respects and fell silent to the bugles' call. Then into the Chapel for welcome refreshments (this year including an impressive cake provided by Peter Blackwell's daughter-in-law). He had been called on to return to his rôle as Deputy Lieutenant of Kent as his successor was indisposed.



## The Memorial Inscription Group (*Our diligent research arm*)

This under-publicised sub-group of the Friends of TW Cemetery is the source of responses to enquiries from the public, the impressive series of booklets we have to offer, a comprehensive database of graves and currently of the development of a much-needed new website. Their varied research skills – not to mention their hardy tolerance of weather and

aged gravestones – are building a valuable body of information about our cemetery, bringing to life the hidden stories it contains.



MIG records and researches information from memorials (when weather and grass cutting permit!). This information is stored on an Excel spreadsheet and information on specific graves is available on request. It is currently identifying The Portraits of Residents buried in the cemetery and photographed by Henry Peach Robinson in 1887 in his Great Hall Studio for Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The 5 albums were subsequently donated to the town and are currently housed in the library archives. The MIG research will feature in a booklet and exhibition next year.

The group is also researching early photographers buried in the cemetery and will produce a booklet and exhibition in 2022

Among the current projects is the production of a booklet about the wide variety of trees on the site – very appropriate for the year of the Queen's 'treebilee'.



**A recent discovery is the grave of this footballer, well known to**

We were recently excited to discover that the grave of one of the first black professional footballers is located in the cemetery. William Gibb 'Willie' Clarke was born in Mauchline, Ayrshire on 3 March 1878 to a Scottish mother and a father from British Guiana.

Playing as a winger, he started his career with junior clubs in Scotland, and was a member of Scotland's junior international side in 1897 that beat Ireland 3 - 1 in Belfast, becoming only the second black player to represent Scotland. During his professional career he played for Bristol Rovers, Aston Villa, Bradford City and Lincoln City. In 1901 while playing for Aston Villa, Clarke became the first black footballer to score a goal in the English Football

**Aston Villa fans:**

### **Looking to a New Year**

One consequence of the combination of labour shortages on the *Tivoli* team responsible for maintaining the cemetery, Covid pressures on TWBC funds and a year of exceptional grass growth, has been the failure to keep the grass in the cemetery cut as in previous times. This issue has generated many complaints – including our own. We have discussed the issue with TWBC staff who are all too aware of the problems. We all hope that with good will and improving circumstances (not to mention better weather), the cemetery can be returned to an improved state.

### **And Finally, Season's Greetings to All Our Members**

