



Friends of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery: Newsletter No.24 Winter 2025



Message from our Chair, Dr. Janet Sturgis

Recently our small organisation had widespread coverage in the local and national news media. This resulted from our discovery that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council had plans for new housing on land that formed part of the cemetery – consecrated ground that contained the remains of Victorian paupers. This led to widespread concern locally. Fortunately these plans appear to be on hold currently, and the planners' next steps have yet to be revealed.

Otherwise we have had a busy time, with perhaps our best ever Heritage Open Days exhibition. It featured those buried in our cemetery whose work as architects and builders shaped so much of our locality as we know it today, and further afield in some cases.

Congratulations must go to our team of gardening volunteers, who yet again have helped the cemetery gain a Gold award at the recent South and South East in Bloom awards.

Following our annual Remembrance Sunday ceremony, which though solemn as always, took place in brilliant sunshine, we now look forward to the next event, our annual carol concert, accompanied by mince pies and mulled Hawkenbury apple juice, rounded off with a raffle. We hope that you can join us.

Gardening Report

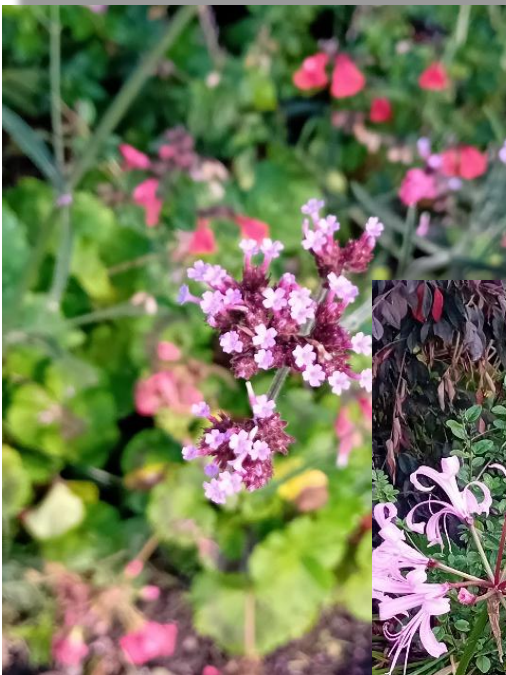
This has been a year of contrasting weather. At the start of the year the ground was muddy and hard to manage. We then had a brief interlude of light breezes and sunshine when conditions were ideal for gardening, until the beginning of summer when the sun shone and shone. The ground soon became so hard that it was difficult to put a fork into it and, once again, gardening became quite a challenge. However as the summer wore on the plants thrived in the sunshine, and we were soon rewarded with wonderful colour which continued throughout the summer and into the early autumn.

The cemetery was awarded GOLD in the South and South East in Bloom awards this year, and everyone is delighted. The cemetery looked very good indeed, with all the teams working hard to ensure it was at its best.

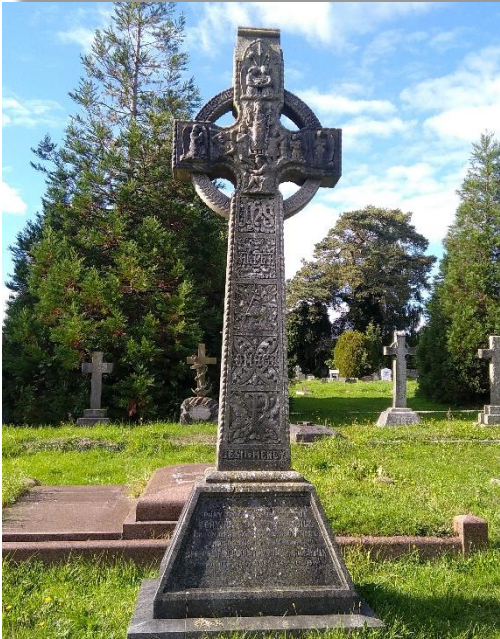
Over the past few weeks the gardening team have been very busy planting bulbs in readiness for next spring. Tete-a-Tete daffodils were put in the Primrose circle, crocuses were planted in the Friends bed and allium were dotted here and there in the hope that they will keep the deer from eating the other plants, as well as giving a lovely purple hue in the spring. The beds have been looking very colourful all year, which has been most pleasing.

The Community Payback Team have assisted in the clearing and planting of one of the entrance beds, and we hope for a very pretty border next year.

This has been a very rewarding year with excellent results.



An Interesting Memorial – Canon James Keatinge



Canon James Keatinge was the Parish Priest of St. Augustine's Catholic Church in Tunbridge Wells between 1906 and 1923. He is buried alongside his two predecessors, Canon Joseph Searle and Father Charles Stapley. The priests' graves are at the centre of the old Catholic section of the cemetery, surrounded by the graves of the parishioners that they served. Their plot is marked by one of the most notable memorials in the cemetery, a ten foot tall intricately carved marble Celtic cross, decorated with an image of the risen Jesus surrounded by saints and angels, and various other symbols of the resurrection.

James Keatinge was born in London in 1854 to a comfortably off Catholic family. He was educated at St. Edmund's College, Ware and was ordained to the priesthood in 1877. His younger brothers Charles and William also became priests and his sister became a nun. Charles had been a military chaplain, but was serving as a curate at St. Augustine's when he died in 1906 at the age of 49. He is buried in a grave near his brother. William was also a chaplain, rising to the rank of Chaplain General and becoming Bishop of the Forces.

Before he came to St. Augustine's, Canon Keatinge served in Catholic parishes in Sutton and Chatham, and had two spells at St. George's Cathedral in Southwark. During his second period at the Cathedral he served as administrator, where his organisational skills and sound judgement were put to good use. These skills were urgently needed when he arrived at St. Augustine's, as at that time the church was heavily in debt and the school that was in the church crypt had been condemned by the Board of Education. Within a year of his arrival the debt had been paid off and the following year a new school was built next to the church.

Canon Keatinge loved to travel, and documents found recently in St. Augustine's Church archive reveal that in 1880 he was given a permit to visit the Sistine Chapel, and that in 1885 he said Masses at the chief shrines in Jerusalem.

During the First World War under Canon Keatinge's leadership St. Augustine's played an important role in welcoming and giving practical help to the occupants of a Belgian town who had escaped to England and who settled temporarily in Tunbridge Wells. He officiated at the Requiem Mass when the Mayor of the town died. During the war hundreds of soldiers were stationed locally. Canon Keatinge held Sunday Masses



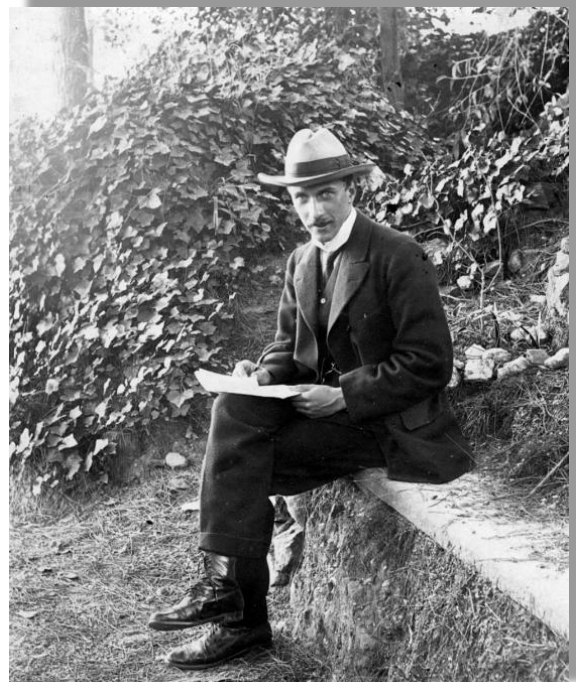
Featured Tree – The Great White Cherry (prunus ‘Tai haku’)



In 2021 ten great white cherry saplings were planted alongside the main avenue in the cemetery, just down the hill from the chapel. These deciduous trees have a broad spreading crown and once mature can reach a height of up to six metres. The young leaves are a deep bronze-red later turning green. In autumn the leaves turn bright yellow and orange. The icy-white single flowers emerge from pink buds in April and measure up to five centimetres across. Once mature, these trees promise to be a beautiful sight in the cemetery in both spring and autumn.

The great white cherry has an interesting history. A specimen of the tree was part of an un-labelled collection sent from Japan to a garden in Winchelsea, Sussex in the early 1900s.

In 1923 Collingwood ‘Cherry’ Ingram (1880-1981), an ornithologist, plant collector and gardener who lived in Brenchley, saw the tree in full flower. He was taken by the immense pure white flowers, and immediately took cuttings to propagate without knowing what it was. Later when he was visiting Japan to address the Cherry Society, he was shown an illustration of a cherry tree thought to be long extinct, and immediately recognised it as the cherry he had seen in Sussex. It was re-introduced to Japan in 1932, and due to its spectacular display of flowers it is now one of the most commonly planted flowering cherries worldwide.



Collingwood ‘Cherry’ Ingram

Memorial Symbols



Symbols have been a feature on gravestones since the Middle Ages, when they often showed morbid themes of death and time. Common symbols included the skull and crossbones, hourglass (reminders of how short this mortal life was), angels' heads and winged cherubs (representing the belief the soul would rise and live on in heaven).

By the time Tunbridge Wells

Cemetery was opened in 1873, more classical imagery was preferred.

Mourning female figures, full-length angels, doves, anchors (strong faith), broken columns (a life cut short) and clasped hands (unity after death) were used.

The Cross as a symbol became very popular with the Victorians, as Plain, Celtic, Wheel or other decorated forms, usually standing on a three-tier base which depicted Faith, Hope and Charity or Love. Some crosses were decorated with foliage or flowers, especially those which had Christian associations including palms, lilies and passion flowers. The symbol IHS comes from the Greek word for Jesus.

Masons would often copy decorations from pattern books, architecture, or take ideas from nature. Although earlier decorations were carved for symbolic meaning, during the Victorian period symbols were often chosen because they were fashionable or looked pleasing to the eye, rather than for their underlying meaning.

More recent graves tend to be less elaborate, possibly due to cost. Those of the 1920s to 1940s often are in the Art Deco style, with sharp angles, although these often have an angel or some floral decoration.

However, some more individual memorials in our cemetery include that of Henry Peach Robinson, the Victorian photographer, who modelled his memorial to represent his own front door in Queen's Road.

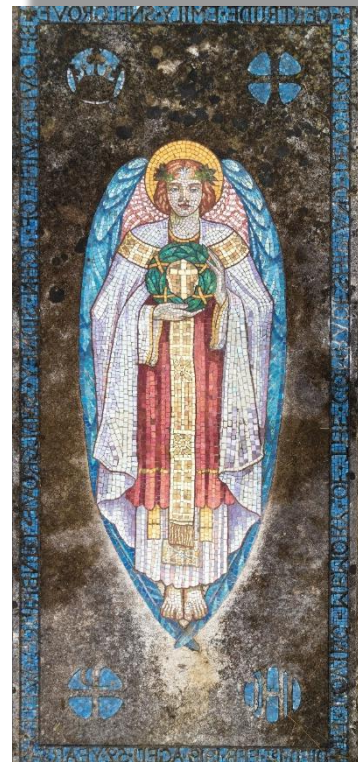
Standing next to the Mausoleum is a memorial to the Fairbairn family which originally housed a sculpture of their two deaf children. Sadly the sculpture was removed some time ago.

A beautiful and unusual mosaic angel marks the grave of John Sydney Snelgrove and his first wife Gertrude.

Our booklet 'Memorial Symbols – A Walk in Tunbridge Wells Cemetery' gives a more detailed study of symbolic meanings with examples in the cemetery.



Photographer Henry Peach Robinson's memorial - designed to look like the front door of his house in Queens Road, Tunbridge Wells



The beautiful angel mosaic that marks the grave of John Sydney Snelgrove and his first wife Gertrude



Remembrance Sunday 2025

We had glorious sunshine and a very good attendance for our Remembrance Day service, where we honoured members of our Armed Forces who lost their lives in the service of

our country and the Commonwealth. The Last Post was played by buglers from TS Brilliant, and wreaths were laid at both Crosses of Sacrifice, the RAF memorial and the civilian memorial. The chapel was open afterwards for refreshments and for viewing an exhibition which focused on the 80th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day.



More Recent Events

August Tree Walk and Talk. David Carey who is the Tree Warden in Hadlow came along and gave us a wonderful conducted walk in a small part of the cemetery. We hope that he will come back and teach us about the interesting trees growing in another part of this lovely area. **September Moth Identification Morning.** Although the temperature had dropped a little, there were quite a few moths trapped overnight, which Dr. Ian Beavis was able to identify in the Chapel the following morning. The moths were all released unharmed following the event and a couple of escapees were also ushered out of the building later! We hope to hold another such morning earlier next year. **September Heritage Open Days.** The national theme this year was architecture, so our exhibition featured some of the architects buried in the cemetery, and also the buildings to be found within the cemetery, including the architecturally important mausoleum. **October Fungus Walk.** We were again blessed with a lovely sunny morning for the annual Fungus Walk, and our expert Martin Allison was helped by a couple of visitors who found some more unusual specimens for us. **November Catholic Blessing of Graves.** The clergy from St. Augustine's Church conducted a short service in the Catholic section of the cemetery, before blessing individual graves at the request of loved ones. This annual service takes place every November, close to the feast of All Souls' Day.

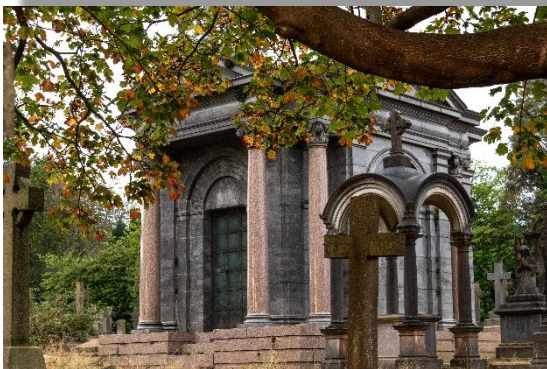


Photo Credit: David Walter



Photo credit: Christopher Smith



Photo Credit: Dr Ian Beavis

Future Events

Our Advent Carol Concert takes place in the cemetery chapel at 3pm on Saturday 6th December. The singing will be led by the wonderful CREATE Community Choir. We hope you can join us for carols, our Chair Janet's homemade (non-alcoholic!) apple wassail, mince pies and a raffle. Tickets cost £5 and can be purchased via the website or by contacting the Friends secretary.



The Friends AGM will take place on 11th April 2026 – details to be confirmed later.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



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

Follow us on Facebook and Instagram

