



First Annual General Meeting

The Kingston Arms, Newport Road, Cowes

Tuesday 31st March 2009 at 7:00pm

The Chairman Lora Peacey-Wilcox welcomed twenty-five members to the inaugural Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Northwood Cemetery.

Apologies for Absence:

There were 50 apologies received including committee members Richard Day and Paul Fuller.

1. Chairman's Report:

Lora thanked the members present for their attendance; she also thanked Jackie and Adrian for allowing us to take over so much of their pub for the evening. She referred back to the recent, highly enjoyable, Quiz Night staged at the pub which had been so successful.

Lora stated that she was honoured to be asked to be Chairman of the Friends, she has had a long association with the cemetery, going back to when she played there as a child and she is passionate about its well being. Lora thanked committee members for their hard work and she introduced each individually summarising their contributions.

2. Secretary's Report:

David Jones explained that we still have the restoration of the twin chapels as our long-term objective, we have identified possible uses for the buildings and there will be a question and answer session at the end of meeting when we hope to hear member's views on this and other subjects. Meanwhile the committee is pursuing smaller projects; a group of volunteers have cleared growth from in front of the chapel, a new door has been fitted to the store and we are undertaking repairs to the building, we also intend to connect it to the electricity mains. As the building is on consecrated land this is complicated by the need to gain a Faculty from the Diocese of Portsmouth. We would like to thank the IW Council who have provided a new bench. We are members of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, the National Federation of Cemetery Friends and we have close links with the Friends of Ryde Cemetery and Cowes Heritage. David thanked Cowes Heritage for allowing the Friends the use of display boards in the Library to stage an exhibition, which is currently viewable.

3. Treasurer's Report:

Marie Gladdis provided a written report showing an income of £3,267.64 (this includes advance subs of £785.00), expenditure of £1,575.52 leaving a closing balance of £1,692.12. We also have stock with a retail value of £731.00. Marie was pleased to announce that we have found an independent scrutineer. In reply to a question from the floor, she confirmed that income had started from scratch with subscriptions and donations. The Treasurer's Report was accepted and signed by the Chairman.

4. Nature Conservation Officer's Report:

Richard Day, the Nature Conservation Officer, had tendered his apologies but had provided a written report. Jon Matthews apologised for not having it to hand but he gave a verbal summary of progress and our intentions. Richard had led a small group of volunteers who had cleared the area in front of the chapel and freed the holly trees on both sides of the main path. The holly in the cleared area was in a very bad state; however we hope we can save it. Jon confessed that he knew little about nature conservation before his involvement with the cemetery but now he recognised it as a vital part of our work. He was meeting Richard Grogan from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in the near future; his advice would be invaluable. When we started to clear the area in front of the chapel a number of people had expressed concern about what we were doing; now we have opened up the view of the chapel, we hope members and the general public are happy with the result. Jon was pleased to announce "hot of the press" that our MP Andrew Turner will lay the first turf on Good Friday at 10.00 am and that everyone was welcome to attend. Jon explained that there were 45 plots in the cemetery and that we had been working on the area in front of the chapel and mortuary which we have designated "plot 0". Plot 1 offered a serious challenge and careful consideration was needed before starting work on it. Jon wondered whether we yet have sufficient expertise to tackle this area feeling a need to move carefully, possibly in less challenging areas.

5. Archivist's Report:

Barry Sowerby opened by urging those who had not already done so to visit our exhibition in the library. Barry gave an interesting report, outlining the process and some of the problems when transcribing the burial records from the hand written originals (copies of some of the original pages were circulated). Barry had hoped to finish the task by the end of 2008 but had under-estimated the task and was at present working through the mid-1960s. Many of the entries are not easy to read, to help with this Tim Gladdis has created on our website the "Archivist Asks" section which displays some of those difficult to read entries in the hope that a keen eyed viewer might be able to decipher it. Barry thanked those who had contributed to this for their detective work. Barry asked anyone searching the burial records, and who could fill in any missing detail, to please contact him. In the future it was hoped that we might add columns for categories such as military service, obituaries and biographies. There are 12 entries on the history web page and Barry asked if anyone has anything of interest they would like featured, either in the newsletter or on the website if so please let him know. He also hoped that some members might become researchers; he mentioned the case of the Cust family where information had been researched by a member in Australia entirely on the Internet. The Burial Board minutes are also being transcribed by two members on the mainland, Margaret Elsdon in Haverhill, Suffolk and Andy Wood in Solihull. Barry thanked them for their help. Barry also requested any photos both recent and old, which we could copy, and publish on the website.

Tim Gladdis, the Friends' webmaster, explained how the site had expanded impressively thanks to those who had contributed a huge amount of interesting material. Feedback and many positive comments had come from all over the world. Tim produced some interesting statistics showing that

since opening on 16th June last year there have been 8,536 visits from 34 countries, 36,888 pages have been opened with the Burial Record page the most viewed, followed by the Home page. Overall the website has been a major achievement which continued to grow. The Chairman thanked both Barry and Tim for the huge amount of work they had put in.

6. Membership Report

Jon Matthews thanked those members who had paid next year's subscription and reminded those who had not yet paid that subs were now due. Jon was pleased to report that he won a bet that we would exceed 100 members by 31st December 2008. In the 9 months to then we had attracted a total of 159 members, comprising 89 single members and 35 family members. So far in 2009/2010 we have received subscriptions from 51 single members, 29 family members which, together with pending standing orders, gives a total of 134 individual members from whom subscriptions have been received in our second year. If all members renew their subscriptions, we will have 194 members. Of these 130 lived within the Cowes/East Cowes/Gurnard/Northwood area, 12 elsewhere on the Island, 40 were mainland UK members and we also had 12 overseas members (six in the United States, four in Australia and two in Canada).

7. Election of Officers:

The Secretary took the chair for the Election of Chairman and asked for any nominations. Lora Peacey-Wilcox was proposed by Jon Matthews and seconded by Patrick Massey. There being no other nominations Lora was elected by a unanimous vote. Lora took the chair for the election of other officers and committee members. It was proposed by Roger Mazillius, seconded by Anne Morgan-Crockett that the present committee be re-elected *en bloc*. It was explained that the Constitution limited the committee to three officers and another three members. In the event, three other members had been co-opted onto the committee during the past year but these could not be re-elected because of the Constitution. The Chairman stated it was the committee's intention to hold an EGM, possibly in conjunction with a fund raising event, before the next AGM to rectify this anomaly.

The existing committee were re-elected by a unanimous vote.

Chairman: Lora Peacey-Wilcox

Treasurer: Marie Gladdis

Secretary: David Jones

Committee: Tim Gladdis, Jon Matthews and Barry Sowerby.

8. Open Forum

Lora explained that the committee were looking into closing the main gates from dusk until 8.00am as there had been some problems with vehicles causing damage. She stressed that it was only the vehicle entrance that would be locked and it would not restrict access on foot. She had had only one negative comment that the police would not be able to drive in at night. The meeting expressed general agreement and Margaret Jessop proposed that the Friends organise a rota to open and lock the gate; this was seconded by Rosemary Stewart and passed unanimously.

Jon explained the brainstorming process that resulted in the committee agreeing on what we considered were the best options for the buildings, both for the community and for attracting lottery funding. In response to a question from the floor, Graham Lloyd confirmed that both buildings are consecrated and that we will need permission from the Diocese before any work can proceed.

Jon listed the committee's choice. For the chapel building a multi-purpose Community Hall, an inter-denominational chapel and a Drop-In Centre were the committee's favoured options; while for the mortuary building, a combined Environmental Education Centre, Heritage Centre, a Project Office and a Museum and/or Art Gallery were favoured.

Peter Morgan-Crockett agreed with the idea of a chapel where small service before internment could be held. Roger Mazillius agreed with this idea and felt there should be an area to reflect. Jackie Hunt suggested that toilet facilities were important facility. Lora explained that the committee had spent a great deal of time discussing this issue. There was already a toilet block in the cemetery; however the Council had no funds to clean or maintain it so any toilet facilities would have to be provided at no cost to the IW Council. Anne Morgan Crockett suggested dedicated fund raising specifically for toilet facilities.

There followed a general discussion in which a question about the time scale for the restoration of the two buildings was asked. Jon explained that it was likely to be a long haul and that until after the 2012 Olympics lottery funding was going to be in short supply.

Mollie Elliott felt that refreshments facility would be welcome and it was agreed that it was something that could be looked at.

Roger Mazillius suggested that we should seek someone capable of writing a successful lottery bid and that we should set things in motion with a preliminary bid. Rosemary Stewart knew of a facilitator who had helped Ventnor Botanical Gardens and she offered to contact them on our behalf.

Roger believed that Life membership had much to recommend it and it was agreed that the committee will look into the idea; corporate membership will also be considered.

The Archivist was asked about the problem of finding a grave when all that remained was grass. Barry explained that each plot was mapped with names and numbers and it was usually possible to use nearby headstones to pinpoint them. He offered to help anyone locate a grave.

Jon suggested we supply logoed watering cans, although Lora pointed out that when the Council had supplied them a few years ago they disappeared very quickly.

John Groves asked whether family trees would add to historical heritage and Jon responded by agreeing that they would.

Patrick Massey was concerned about a lack of dog bins in the cemetery; although the grounds were surprisingly free of dog mess he had noticed plastic bags dumped in the hedge. Lora commented that it was permissible to put dog mess bags into the general waste bins. Lora was also pleased that the newly appointed Environmental Neighbour Officer had visited the cemetery and would be alert to any dogs not on leads.

Patrick wondered whether visitors could carry secateurs in order to clear overgrown graves. It was explained that although Bernie Colman, the groundsman, is contracted just to cut the grass he does a lot more than that and would probably be delighted with any help. The problem is that individuals working unsupervised would not be covered by insurance so it was not something we could support. Tim suggested that people wishing to tidy up overgrown areas join our working party on Saturday mornings.

The Chairman thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting at 8.30pm.