

# NEWSLETTER NUMBER 3 NOVEMBER 2008



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

|           |                    |               |              |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Chairman  | Lora Peacey-Wilcox | Barry Sowerby | Tim Gladdis  |
| Secretary | David Jones        | Paul Fuller   | Jon Matthews |
| Treasurer | Marie Gladdis      | Graham Lloyd  | Richard Day  |

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## EDITORIAL

It's hard to imagine that we have been in existence for just 6 months! We may not have achieved very much *that is visible* but the Committee has learned one heck of a lot about getting Heritage Grants; the name of the game is patience and it's going to be a long haul, believe me, that will undoubtedly take several years to come to fruition.

**But we have started!** If you have been to the cemetery recently you may have seen that there are now drillings around the sad Mortuary building taking readings of soil and water content. This information is vital before a plan can be adopted to stop the subsidence of the building (judging from the size of the main crack beneath the window, it has visibly moved in these past 6 months). But the good news is that we are expecting that the 'Heras' fencing surrounding the mortuary (erected for Health & Safety reasons) will be gone within 6 months. Once the building is stabilised then we can start focussing on its restoration.



Other new items include (i) our Notice Board just inside the main gates; and (ii) a new door on the Store building which is immediately to the left of the Cemetery entrance conveniently tucked behind a tall Laurel hedge. This building (once called "the Dead House"! ) will be used by the Friends as a Project Office; our thanks go to the IW Council for leasing it to us and clearing its inside from decades of 'junk'! However, new legislation that requires us to install a toilet suitable for the disabled has got in the way of our plans and, as a result, there will be no toilet there contrary to the expectations three months ago; the store is just not big enough for the larger footprint required.



**Bill Shepard** has completed his work in surveying the trees in the cemetery and he has identified no less than 257 species (by the way, he knows them all by their Latin names!). The question now being considered is "what do we want to achieve with these trees?". They have been allowed to grow like 'topsy' for as long as anyone can remember and it has become evident to the Committee that "nature conservation" is nearly as big an item in the cemetery as the buildings themselves. So we have appointed **Richard Day** to the Committee to oversee where we go from here. Please see his contribution on page 3.



We also have a new photographer; after **Ady Targett** volunteered to photograph the headstones, he became quite poorly and hasn't been able to get to the cemetery as often as he would have wished. We are hoping a few months will see him back 'on the case' but meanwhile **Paula Bailey** (no relation to David Bailey!) has kindly taken on the role of photographer. Take a look at the Image Gallery on the Friends web-site ([www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk](http://www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk)) where we have already collected many varied photographs taken by several budding photographers.

We mentioned in August that **Dan Lyons** had started the transcription of the Burial Board Minute books but a cataract operation rather put a stop to that. However, we are indebted to two mainland Friends for continuing this work - **Margaret Elsdon** in Haverhill, Suffolk and **Andy Wood** in Solihull, West Midlands. It's a bit of a slog so we are not expecting that we'll be publishing significant output until well into 2009.

Finally, **Barry Sowerby** continues to beaver away at the Burial Registers and has now reached the mid-1930's (from 1856) in his most thorough transcription of every detail recorded; these are now accessible on our web-site. It is very rewarding to see that there are significantly more 'oveners' asking for help in tracing their ancestors in the cemetery. Barry just loves any excuse to stroll through the grounds of the cemetery so don't hold back asking him! Please see his contribution on page 7.



## Sponsored Walk

On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October, and in conjunction with the **Friends of Northwood Church**, we organised a sponsored walk to the church and back and raised over £500 for our joint causes. The weather was, once again, unkind to us and only 20 walkers braved the elements. But, we now know a lot more about what is involved in fund raising activities such as this and plan to do something bigger and better next spring. Our thanks go to those who did participate and to **Jay Shipley** who did most of the organisation.

What are we going to do with the proceeds of this event? Well, the Committee have agreed that the funds can be used to repair or replace the bench seat at the entrance to the cemetery. This work, to be done by Friends, should be completed before Christmas!

## Fund Raising

Back in August we made a late run for the nomination of the Co-op's annual fund raising award. Their scheme works in two phases; firstly, each summer local organisations compete for the nomination and there's only one winner who then holds the award for 12 months. Secondly, during that year signed up members of the scheme effectively donate 3% of what they spend in the main Cowes superstore to the winning organisation.

Alas, in 2008 we didn't get the nomination it went to the Isle of Wight Community Club (aka the "Plessey club") and there it will remain until August 2009. We put in a good show and our thanks go in particular to **Marie Gladdis** and **Peter** and **Anna Morgan-Crocket** who seemed to get nominations from most of the residents of Medham village!

Now we understand the process better, we intend to mount an earlier campaign next year.

## Nature Conservation Management

Whilst **Bernie Coleman** has kept the grounds (he is the Groundsman!) 'under control' no-one seems to have touched, trimmed or otherwise tidied the trees and shrubs (which are outside his remit) for decades - with the result that many areas of the cemetery have become overgrown

I will involve the Committee in the decisions and propose to start at the front of the cemetery and work gradually back into the rest of the grounds. When I have put together a work management plan volunteers to do the actual work will be required - so anyone who is interested, please let any member of the Committee know!



(a)



(b)

If you have any local knowledge of the cemetery I would be very pleased to hear about this. Rest assured - I am not going to start hacking the trees and shrubs about without very careful planning and consultation.

For the first task on which I am going to focus is the 'tidying up' of the 4 holly trees that stretch across in front of the Chapel and Mortuary buildings (see photographs).

The one on the right (a), as viewed from the entrance to the cemetery, is a good example of how I hope the rest will look in due course.

The next one (b) is partly obscured by undergrowth; the third (c) is totally hidden by a hedge; and the last one (d) has a couple of neighbouring trees trying to hide it. There is also a Morinda Spruce which I think is an original planting dating back to the 1850's hiding behind the hedge with third holly (c).



(c)



(d)

So, we need to arrange insurance, write up a Risk Assessment, procure tools and agree a work programme before a working party programme can be developed and, although this can be seen as a slow process, we hope that we will be able to make a start in the New Year (although the window for this must be by the end of March perhaps earlier depending on the weather - when the animal kingdom start nesting and mating.

Richard Day

## Northwood Cemetery in the Second World War

Lying as it does between J Samuel Whites shipyard and Somerton airfield, it was almost inevitable that the cemetery should suffer war damage; whilst the air power in World War I hadn't progressed to become a threat, by the time of World War II it most certainly had - and Cowes, and East Cowes, were to suffer more than their fair share of bombing.

Although the most severe attack on the towns occurred on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1942, when the Polish destroyer the ORP Blyskawica undergoing a refit in the shipyard came to their aid, an earlier raid on the night 27<sup>th</sup> May 1941 was to shake the cemetery. It has been suggested that the glass flower holders on the graves reflected moonlight back to the aircraft and these were mistaken for the sky lights of the adjacent J Samuel White's Somerton factory (in what is now the Somerton Industrial Estate); was this, then, why the cemetery was hit?



ORP Blyskawica

That night the Air Raid warnings increased in frequency and eventually the Luftwaffe unleashed its bombs; two of them were to hit Northwood Cemetery and another two landed in Shambler's Copse. One landmine exploded with such ferocity that the author T C Hudson, living next door to Somerton garage in Northwood more than half a mile away, recalled being shaken in his bunk bed.

The scene of devastation must have been immense; one bomb dropped on what we know as Plot 5, immediately behind the chapel, where headstones were smashed to pieces, trees were damaged and interned bodies were thrown high into the sky.

Was this the bomb that catapulted a piece of graveside railing 60 feet up into the Cedar of Lebanon behind the Chapel building - where it remains to this very day? More evidence is provided by the shrapnel damage to some of the headstones Harry Smart's behind the Mortuary, adjacent to the main pathway, being a case in point.



It is said that Newport Road and Mill Hill Road were awash with dead animals, clay and debris of all kinds. Frederick George Sykes (49) and James Frederick Wapshott (34), of Gurnard - a full-time ARP (Air Raid Precaution) warden - went to the cemetery to see what damage had been done and were very shaken by the devastation they saw.

Frederick Sykes had been convalescing from an operation but the shock seemed to be too much for him and he was hospitalised again. His daughter, Violet, was due to be married on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1941 and, on his death bed, she was able to give him her wedding bouquet in hospital. He died a week later.

James Wapshott contracted a very rare disease called pneumococcal meningitis from the exposed bodies and died on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941 in Frank James Cottage Hospital in East Cowes. He left a widow Emily and two small children; Emily maintained that he inhaled 'something' from the graves and she was awarded a war widow's pension as her husband's death was considered to be indirectly as a result of the bombing.

Both Frederick Sykes and James Wapshott are buried in the cemetery in family graves.

Of the many families decimated by the bombings, Frederick and Iris Bartlett's in East Cowes was one; not only did they perish but their 4-year-old son Dennis was also killed and they are buried together in another family grave in the cemetery. Their other three children survived; two with minor injuries while their one-month-old baby David was found unharmed protected by his mother's body. Iris Bartlett's brother adopted one of the surviving boys, Maurice, who still lives on the Island. Maurice suggests that the reason his family were buried in Northwood Cemetery was because the surviving children would have moved in with their grandmother in Pelham Road.

Terry Norton lived opposite the cemetery gates (in what is now Lora Peacey-Wilcox's house) during the early 1940's and recalls the night when the bombs fell in the cemetery; luckily his house only suffered minor damage. He remembers getting up for work on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1942 when he heard the sound of low flying aircraft. From his upstairs window he had direct sight over the cemetery where he saw six enemy aircraft flying low up the river from Newport. Terry distinctly recalls bombs dropping almost instantly after they had flown past aimed, no doubt, on J Samuel White's shipyard.

But the heaviest loss of life occurred a week later on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1942 when 31 people died in Cowes alone - with Arctic Road and Medina View catching the worst of the enemy action that night.

The Varney family, of 35 Arctic Road, took a direct hit. William Varney, his wife Sarah and their daughter Patricia were killed in the raid along with William's 80 year-old mother, Ellen.

Another family to be decimated that night were the Gustar's who lived at 16 Medina View, a row of terraced houses (no longer there) on the west side of Mill Hill Road between Newport Road and Love Lane. They took a direct hit which caused the death of Frank Gustar, his wife May and their children all an John (9) and Sarah Elizabeth (5). Frank was a Riveter at J Samuel Whites.

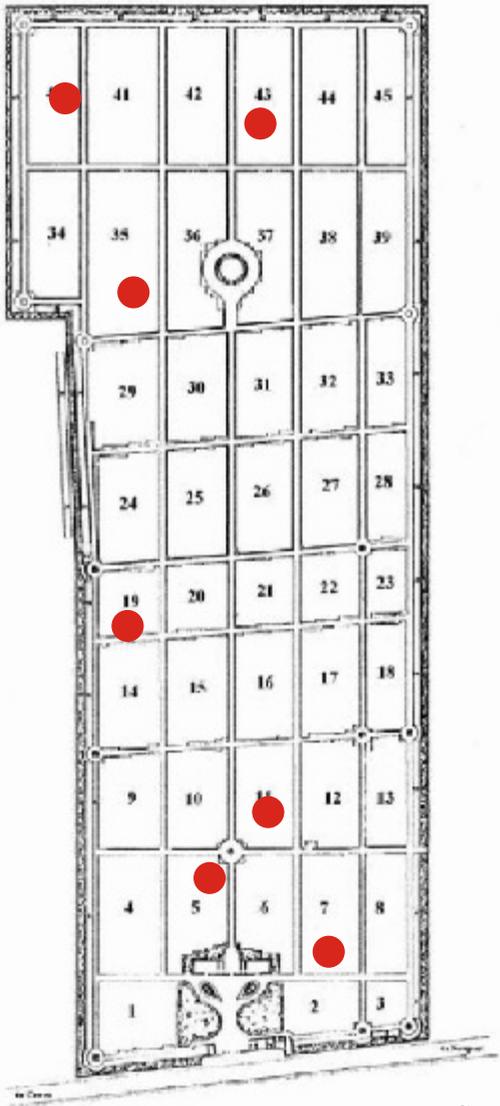


Cowes Urban District Council felt that the victims of the air raid should be buried in a communal grave, provided relatives so desired, and one was dug at the top of the cemetery; later a War Memorial was added.

Of those killed 27 are buried there, but although Ellen Varney is listed, she is the only person mentioned on the War Memorial headstone as being buried in the cemetery who is not recorded in the Burial Register - suggesting that her body was never found for burial. It is believed that her identification was only by the discovery and identification of a ring.

Adrian Seale's book ('Isle of Wight at War 1939-1945' published by the Dovecote Press) captures the mood of the sombre mass funeral "a long procession made its way from Cowes on the wet afternoon of Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May to Northwood Cemetery. As it did so, the final indignity was inflicted on the mourning town. The Air Raid siren, which had heralded a night of so much suffering a week earlier, wailed out its chilling warning. Gunfire was heard in the distance but Cowes was not prepared to be mocked in this way; the procession kept moving and the alert passed".

This book describes how Union Flag draped coffins, borne on lorries, had to pass huge bomb craters as the procession, which included civic dignitaries and representatives from the wartime services, made its way from the cemetery gates to the communal grave. ARP wardens acted as bearers for all the coffins except one; that was of a cub scout. His cap and neckerchief were placed on his coffin which was carried by senior members of the scout troop. The choirs from three churches sang and the Island's Archdeacon gave the address.



Seven bombs landed in the cemetery as shown here;  
The War Memorial erected to commemorate those killed is also pictured

### Meet the Committee, David Jones

Having lived for over forty years in the last house before or first house after the Cemetery down Newport Road, depending on direction of travel, I have a real fondness for the Cemetery.

Although we have no relations buried there my wife and I are regular visitors; we love the sense of peace and quiet. There is always something different to see, whether it is the wonderful wild flowers or majestic trees, changing through the year.



Like many others I have watched with dismay the gradual deterioration of the twin chapels so when Jon Matthews suggested the setting up of the Friends of Northwood Cemetery I was happy to become involved.

Now retired, I was for many years the manager of W Hurst & Sons in the High St. I have two daughters, 6 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren; all of them, except for a grandson and his son live on the island.

Both living and working and bringing up my family in Cowes has made me passionate about this great town and its history. I am involved with Cowes Heritage, researching and recording history. I am also a Town Councillor willing to listen to peoples concerns and help where possible.

## ARCHIVIST'S REPORT

Burial transcriptions are now completed up to 6 January 1936. I say 'completed' but there remains some indecipherable wording to sort out. You may have noticed in the comments column of some entries, (Researching) Can Anyone Confirm Occupation ? or (Researching) Can anyone confirm House Name ? If you do come across this during your burial register searches and you 'do' know the answer, please don't hesitate to contact me. Your assistance in solving this missing detail will be much appreciated.

The number interred in Northwood Cemetery is currently 16668 and the next registry entry to be edited is line 9683. That indicates that there are 'just' 6985 more registry entries for me to do: I am over half way! I did, at a previous Committee meeting, commit myself to completion by the end of 2008, but have been rather held back due to the atrocious handwriting in the Register during the early 1930s. I am pleased to say that from 1936 onwards, it does look to be improving. I think somebody must have had a word in the Registrars ear. I am still hoping for completion by 2009.

I find it very exciting and encouraging that I now get enquiries from around the world from as far away as Argentina and Australia for information relating to people interred. This just goes to prove that the creation of the FoNC was well worthwhile. Not only do the enquirers ask for plot and grave locations, but often want to know where the people lived and where they worked etc. You might catch a glimpse of me out and about with my camera, photographing a house or something pertaining to someone interred in Northwood, in order that I can answer the enquiry as usefully as I can. Some of the questions that I am asked relate to house locations etc and just this week I have started including global coordinates in my replies in order that they can be viewed on 'google earth' <http://earth.google.com/>.

Please do contact the FoNC if you need any help locating a grave or if you have interesting information that you would like added to the comments column of a loved one's burial entry and if there are any family historians out there that have an interesting story relating to someone interred in Northwood Cemetery, please consider sending them to me, either for inclusion in the burial register or perhaps as a feature in our newsletter.

We are particularly interested in the large CUST family memorials does anyone have any connection with them or who would like to take on some research in to the family?

Barry Sowerby

## MEMBERSHIP

We've passed the 150 mark of "Friends" still with our sights on 200 by the end of the year but we need to step up our recruitment drive to attain this objective!

New members in alphabetic order (and resident in Cowes, East Cowes, Gurnard or Northwood unless otherwise stated) are:

Liz Bail (Exmouth, Devon), Paula Bailey (Newport, IW), Carmine Brudenell and family (London), Faye Bunday, Sally Cass, Jo Cottingham (Wimborne, Dorset), Alan Dinnis (Macclesfield, Cheshire), Graham Fellows (Hayle, Cornwall), Pat Gilpin, Cleet Holmberg, Richard de Kerbrech, Clare Rogers (Weymouth, Dorset), Nicholas Schroeder, Margaret Scott, Roseanna Silk (Alberta, Canada), Bernard Taylor and Hilary Tomlinson.

It was remiss of us not to mention those Friends who have made a donation with their subscription in previous Newsletters – so let us set that record straight now; in alphabetic order, our grateful thanks go to: Kevin and Gillian Arnell, Sandra Baguley, Sarah Banks, Mr J Boutland, Mary Chessell, Jo Cottingham, Richard de Kerbrech and Hilary Tomlinson, Margaret Elsdon, Jean Fayers, Wendy Gardiner, Pat Hamilton, Diana Harding, Noel Harrison, Nick Henry, Sheila Hoare, Anthea Humber, Pauline Moore, David and Sheila Nash, Tony Norris, Jay and Nancy Nunamaker, Ann Ryder, Anna Sladden and Hilary Whiteman.

Jon Matthews



## MERCHANDISING

We are indebted to a new “Friend”, Ken Brudenell, for exploring the possibilities for us in developing a range of merchandise. Here are some of the options that Ken has come up with - nothing is in concrete but if any of you have any comments on this interesting range positive or negative - then we'd be very pleased to hear from you.

Meanwhile, thank you Ken for arranging for the production of these samples.

