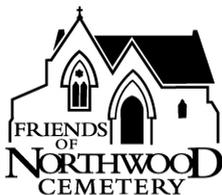


NEWSLETTER NUMBER 48

February 2020



Officers:

Peter Almond	Chairman
David Jones	Secretary
Richard Day	Treasurer

Other Trustees:

Roger Williams	Vice Chairman
Jon Matthews	John Pullen
Barry Sowerby	Stella Watling

Registered Charity no: 1180926

Please address all enquiries to:

The Secretary, Friends of Northwood Cemetery, 194 Newport Road,
Cowes, Isle of Wight PO31 7PU; **Tel:** (01983) 298445

Email: secretary@friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk

Website: www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk

Chairman's Report

Firstly, here's an update on some items mentioned in the November 2019 Newsletter:

The **Isle of Wight Council** has awarded the Island-wide Grounds Maintenance Contract (for the next 5 years) to the incumbent contractor **John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Ltd.** It is our intent to meet with the local manager on a quarterly basis to monitor the application of the contract to our 10-year **Management and Maintenance Plan.**

We have received quotes for the renovation of the stone border of the **Civilian Mass Grave** and the Board now needs to find significant funding; specifically, we are exploring the availability of grants. Sadly, this is time consuming and will delay matters beyond the 78th anniversary of the Cowes Blitz which will take place over the week-end of 2nd/3rd May.

It is now expected that the IW Council will go ahead with the formal 8-week Consultation period on the issue of "dogs in public places". If so, then the Board plan to reiterate its position that dogs **on leads** should be permitted in Northwood Cemetery; what we would expect is that the Council provides more effective policing. Unfortunately, it is the irresponsible dog owners (thankfully we only have one or two) who make these measures necessary as they fail to control their dogs urinating - or 'clear up' after their pets.

I would like to thank the 40+ dog owners who have registered with us that they walk their dogs in the Cemetery. Our response to the Consultation, if it goes ahead, will be to contact these dog walkers individually and document a robust argument for retaining the *status quo* (ie: dogs on leads). Of course, that's more work, so we hope it doesn't come to that!

Visitors will have noticed that a large Portland Stone has been erected at the entrance to the **Natural Burial Ground**; this is so families have the opportunity to purchase one of the plaques (£230 inc VAT) so it can be engraved to remember their loved one buried there.

Peter Almond

President: **Jon Matthews**

Vice Presidents: **Geoff Banks, BEM** **Graham Lloyd** **Lora Peacey-Wilcox**



Call for Volunteers

In the voluntary sector (not just on the Island but across the country) charitable organisations like the **Friends of Northwood Cemetery** survive and prosper thanks to the involvement of volunteers (***we have no paid staff***).

Volunteering does ***not*** mean **hard labour** (though if that's what you really want we can provide it!). Some of the tasks are desk-bound and may involve the use of computers.

There is a myriad of tasks involved in running a charity and we can offer new volunteers an abundance of comradery and the chance to enjoy a relaxed sense of achievement.

Every volunteer we have gets a buzz from moving things forward - with no pressure. It is a fact that people generally volunteer to do things that they enjoy doing. So if you have recently retired, and/or have a few hours a month to spare, why not come along and try something that may be completely different, at times to suit you?

Just as one example we have a small team of people transcribing Monumental Inscriptions so that they can be made available on the web-site; this task is in need of more volunteers if it is to be completed within the next 5 years. Does this appeal? Could you be a volunteer to help on this?

Or perhaps would you like to be on hand at some of our events (see back page) to entertain visitors or serve a cuppa? I'm sure there is a task for everyone that together will help benefit all concerned.

The Trustees are around on Wednesdays and Saturdays between 9.00am and 1.00pm, (when you will find us in the Cemetery grounds) and on Thursday and Friday between 10.00am and 1.00pm in the West Chapel, offering assistance to visitors in their research activities, whilst continuing our own research into those buried in the Cemetery.

Alternatively you can ring our friendly Secretary (see Front page for contact details) for further details without any obligation.

I do hope this will encourage some of you to come along to see what might be of interest to you.

Roger Williams

Vice-Chairman

Over the Christmas period we lost one of our Life members, **Cecelia Lange** of Denver, Colorado, following a fall in her home. On her regular trips to the Island with her husband Jerry she helped as a conservation volunteer and she was a great enthusiast of the work we do in Northwood Cemetery – as was evident to all those who met her. Our deepest sympathies go to Jerry and their family.

Fund Raising

Our major fund raising activity last quarter was the **Auction** held at the **Cowes Ale House** on 18th November 2019 and I'm pleased to say that over **£600** was raised. The Board's thanks go to the donors of **all** the lots - and particularly to the hospitality outlets: **Jolliffe's Eatery, Mojacs Restaurant, Toninos Restaurant** and the **Duke of York** (all in Cowes) for their kind generosity in donating meal vouchers which proved to be very popular.

Our **Tree of Remembrance** was, once again, appreciated by the many who called by during the five days before Christmas during which **£263** was donated; thanks go to the musicians who gave their time freely and played seasonal songs and carols. Sales of hand-made greeting cards, featuring several Red Squirrels in the Cemetery, also swelled the takings. The Board is also grateful to those who baked magnificent cakes, consumed with relish!

Our monthly Coffee mornings go from strength-to-strength with over **£200** collected during the quarter. In particular, the Christmas Tombola event on 5th December was very popular with over 30 people popping in.

All our events brought the total of our fund raising efforts in the 2019 calendar year to over **£6,000**. This is a major contributor to covering the costs of the **Heritage Resource Centre** and the work undertaken by our conservation volunteers.

Stella Watling

Fund Raising Coordinator

Membership Report

In the year drawing to a close on 31st March 2020 the **Friends of Northwood Cemetery** attracted **333** members; of these **255** are Island residents, **69** live elsewhere in the British Isles (of which 25 are just across the Solent) and **9** are from overseas. Amongst these 333 there are **73** Life members.

It's that time of year when 2020-2021 subscriptions become due – so, if you feel inclined, now is as good a time as any. To remind you it's **still** £10 (single), £15 joint (two members at the same address) or £100 for becoming a Life member (no more subscription nagging!). Subscriptions have not changed since they were established in 2008 – that's 12 years ago.

There are **Banker's Standing Order** and **PayPal** options; if you would like to avail yourself of these, please email me (membership.secretary@friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk) or contact the Secretary (contact details on the front page of this Newsletter).

Jon Matthews

Membership Secretary

Frank James Cottage Hospital

Northwood Cemetery is the final resting place for 436 people who passed away in the **Frank James Cottage Hospital** in East Cowes during the period 1909 to 1999. But who was “**Frank James**” - and how did the hospital come to bear his name?

Frank Linsly James was born in Liverpool in 1851 to a family of unfathomable wealth. He was the eldest son of **Daniel** and **Sophia** (nee **Hall**) **James**; his father was an American businessman who co-founded the **Phelps Dodge Corporation** and then managed its British arm from Liverpool.



Frank went to Cambridge University and was destined to a gentleman's lifestyle from an early age. Well-known and popular in London Society circles, **Frank James** grew to be an adventurer, a ceaseless explorer and a writer. He loved to travel the globe on his 211 ton 160 foot yacht, the *Lancashire Witch*.

It was on his 39th birthday, 21st April 1890, that **Frank James** was killed by an elephant that he had wounded in the Gabon on the west coast of Central Africa. The melancholy journey home with his body was made on the *Lancashire Witch* (of which my great-granduncle, Captain **William Alfred Matthews** was the Master).

Frank James's estate was worth £100,000 - the equivalent of more than £12m today. He did not marry but bequeathed £5,000 each to the *Hospital for Incurables* in Putney and the *Cheyne Hospital for Sick Children* in Chelsea. £10,000 was left to his closest friend, **Ethelbert E Lort Phillips**, who was with him on that fateful expedition.

The rest of his substantial wealth was left to his two brothers - **Arthur** and **William James**. With their inheritance they built the **Frank James Memorial Home** for seamen in honour of their brother; by 1893 it was ready to receive its first retired residents.

The home did not turn out to be as successful as Arthur and William had hoped so they looked to find an alternative, charitable use for the building (which is today a Grade II Listed building on the “At Risks” register).

In the early 20th Century there had been attempts to open a cottage hospital for Cowes and East Cowes, which was badly needed to alleviate the time it took to transport local patients to the *Isle of Wight County Hospital* in Ryde. However, due to a lack of funds, no scheme that was feasible had been identified.

In December 1902 the **Cowes Hospital Committee** accepted a proposal from **William and Arthur James** that the home should be offered to **Princess Henry of Battenberg**, then the Isle of Wight Governor, specifically so that it could be used as a cottage hospital for the twin towns of Cowes and East Cowes - and as a residential home for nurses. This proposal was gratefully accepted - and the twin towns got their hospital.



When the **National Health Service (NHS)** was formed in 1948 the hospital became state-funded (rather than relying on charitable donations). In 1991 a major renovation of the hospital was undertaken, converting the large wards into smaller rooms and, in April 1992 after a £200,000 facelift, the hospital re-opened as a community hospital.

It carried on as an NHS hospital until 30th July 2002 when it closed for the last time. In 2003, the NHS sold the building to a property developer who planned to convert the hospital into eleven units of accommodation and a terrace of town houses. Funding issues have thwarted progress since - though some units are now beginning to come onto the market. But sadly the 21st Century has not (yet!) been kind to the building and it is more in the public eye as another fine building that has fallen into disrepair.

So, **Frank James** was a great philanthropist who, through his love of sailing and membership of the *Royal Yacht Squadron* in Cowes, became well acquainted with the Isle of Wight. He was originally buried in *Kensal Green cemetery* in north-west London (once the most fashionable cemetery in England where such as **Isambard Kingdom Brunel**, **Charles Babbage** and **William Makepeace Thackeray** are buried) but his body was exhumed in 1917 and re-interred in the family plot at West Dean, West Sussex.

Jon Matthews
President

The Burial Acts

Something needed to be done. The situation had grown out of control decades before and ever more so in those growing cosmopolitan cities of England as one entered the Victorian era.

The population explosion was immense. This rose from 13.9 million in 1831 to 32.5m by 1901. Two major contributory factors were fertility and mortality rates. Middle class men might live, on average, to 45. The average lives of workmen and labourers just half that time. Children were lucky to survive to their fifth birthdays. Inevitably the need for burials exponentially increased.

Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723), when considering the question of rebuilding London after the Great Fire, wished to see suburban cemeteries established and burials in churches and churchyards discontinued. He considered the constant raising of levels in churchyards rendered the church damp and more liable to premature decay.

But Wren's plans for rebuilding the city were not carried out; they were approved by the King and Parliament but disapproved by the Corporations of London. The churches were rebuilt on the old sites, the churchyards were again used and the sites of several of those churches which were not rebuilt became additional burial-grounds for the parishes.

One of London's churchyards had, over the centuries, claimed to have been raised by some 15 feet to accommodate corpses, mainly from paupers' graves. There was no great desire on the part of those connected with the parishes to increase their burial accommodation.

London's bubonic plague in 1665 saw fatalities reaching up to 100,000, roughly one-fifth of the population. Burials were in mass graves, known as 'plague pits', which are said to have gouged land across the city.

Hundreds of bodies were said to have been hastily buried in these pits without coffins, care or ceremony. Many of London's parks were latterly formed over their tops.

Rural areas often fared little better where churchyards of those long-established churches, many from medieval times, were long overcrowded. Throughout the country there became the cessation of interments in vaults and graveyards at an ever-increasing rate by order of the Diocese and, evermore so, as one entered the Victorian era.

George Alfred Walker, a philanthropist, sanitary reformer and surgeon, lectured on the insanitary situation of burial grounds and in 1845 formed *The National Society for the Abolition of Burials in Towns*.

Walker had exposed those practices carried on in various grounds. *Spa Fields*, for instance, in the London Borough of Islington was taken as an example.

He issued a pamphlet showing the custom of burning bodies behind a brick enclosure and how the gravestones were moved about to give an appearance of emptiness in certain parts of the ground.

It was computed that, by burning coffins, mutilating remains, and using vast quantities of quicklime, at least 80,000 corpses had been put in a space fitted to hold 1,000. This was not the answer.

Walker, by his lectures and papers, added pressure on Parliament to address the growing issue of burial space. Eventually, the new *Burial Act* of 1852 closed down burial grounds in metropolitan London and allowed larger cemeteries on the outskirts to be established.

The *Burial Acts* of 1852 and 1853 addressed the problem of overcrowded burial grounds. Local authorities were empowered to set up and run public cemeteries and thus reduce the numbers of people buried in churchyards. The 1852 *Act* applied only to London but the 1853 *Act* extended its provisions to the rest of the country.

The cemeteries were administered by burial boards, the members of which were elected by the vestries. Private cemeteries had been set up prior to this legislation so the concept of burial in a cemetery, rather than a churchyard, was not completely new.

However, after the *Burial Acts*, the number of churchyard interments fell very markedly. In March 1885, the first official cremation within the UK was carried out at Woking, Surrey; cremation had become an affordable and discreet option.

The first *Burial Act* was in 1816 and, by 1884, had proliferated to a total of 13 *Burial Acts* inclusive of the various amendments and additions.

It is interesting to note the location of cemeteries on the Island. Many are far away from town and village centres. Such was brought about by the necessity to establish the cemetery within the parish boundaries coupled with the cost of land acquisition. Hence farmland was generally acquired; often much of this was poor agriculturally or of lesser use to the landowner.

St Mary's churchyard was closed for further burials in 1857 in accordance with an *Order in Council* under the *Burial Act* 1853 and under this *Act* the other Cowes churchyards (at Holy Trinity and St Faiths) were similarly closed.

Northwood Cemetery was formed as a result of legislation under the 1853 *Burial Act*. The acquisition of land within the parish boundary saw the cemetery's establishment with the first burial being that of **James Cribb**, a local shoemaker, in November 1856. See: www.friendsofnorthwoodcemetery.org.uk/assets/August-2015-Newsletter.pdf

Geoff Banks

Co-Vice President

Future Events

We start 2020 with many dates for your diary – so now’s a good time to make a note of them in your diary:

Friday 7 th February	Coffee morning - “Things we love”
Friday 6 th March	Coffee morning - “Book and DVD sale”
Friday 3 rd April	Coffee morning - “Easter Tombola”
Friday 1 st May	Coffee morning - “Crafts and Hobbies”
Sunday 3 rd May (pm)	Blitz Walk commemorating the 78 th Anniversary of the <i>ORP Blyskawika</i> ’s defence of Cowes in May 1942
Wednesday 6 th May (pm)	Isle of Wight Walking Festival walk around the Cemetery
Saturday 9 th May (noon)	Isle of Wight Walking Festival walk around the Cemetery
Saturday 9 th May (evening)	Presentation and Exhibition of J Samuel White & Co Ltd , shipbuilders “through the eyes of the Postman” told by Alan Dinnis with postcards and stamps from around the world.
Tuesday 12 th May (pm)	Isle of Wight Walking Festival walk around the Cemetery
Friday 22 nd May (evening)	Quiz Night



All these events will take place in Northwood Cemetery. The Coffee mornings take place between 10:30am and 12:30pm; times of the May events above will be published in the May 2020 Newsletter.

The 2020 AGM will take place on Monday 22nd June at 7:00pm.

The AGM will be particularly important this year as **Peter Almond**, the Chairman, stands down at the end of his three-year tenure and **David Jones**, our long serving Secretary from way back in 2008, is retiring. These posts must be filled at the meeting by a members’ vote.

Immediately after the AGM **Geoff Banks** will give a talk on the **Cowes** and **East Cowes Blitz** in May 1942; the towns’ defence by the Cowes-built Polish destroyer *ORP Blyskawica*; and the devastating effect on the local community.

John Pullen

Manager, Heritage Resource Centre

Jo Mckinnie
Editor

FoNC is a member of the
National Federation of
CEMETERY FRIENDS