



## Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery Annual Report 2018-2019

1. This has been another year of achievement by the Friends, in particular by our gardening volunteers in the field of nature conservation.
2. Long before recent international wakeup calls about the crucial role of insect pollinators, the Friends adopted conservation of the cemetery's habitat as a key goal. Over the years we have fostered its wide range of wild flowers and grasses, enabling resident bees, hoverflies, flies, butterflies and moths to thrive. Recent further plantings of shelter hedges are designed to shelter and encourage birds. We are delighted that during 2018, the many hundreds of working hours put in by our small group of volunteers and their imaginative projects were recognised not only by South and South East in Bloom awards, but also for the second year running by a Gold Award from Kent Wildlife – "Wild about Gardens" section
3. A second key goal of the Friends has been increased use of the cemetery as an educational resource. We continued special efforts to encourage interest by primary school age children and their teachers. This included welcoming 30 children from St Barnabas, who planted a white lilac beside the chapel above re-interment of a Victorian human arm bone dug up by badgers.
4. The topic set for the 2018 Jeffery Hale Awards for primary schools, "Rich and Poor" was chosen to encourage thoughtfulness about the lives and experiences of local Victorians especially children. The Mayor presented the awards in July at a ceremony in the Childrens' Library, and shortly after we published a booklet with a selection of the childrens' poems.
5. For 2019, the topic, reflecting our current focus on conservation activities, is "Trees of Life". We are delighted that a local Wolf Club pack is among the entrants, visiting the cemetery to look at trees and insects and consider ways of respecting nature. More generally, for Easter Saturday 2019, a special nature trail "Cowslips and cuckoo flowers" with quiz sheets to complete, has been planned to introduce today's children and some of their parents to early wild flowers and butterflies that would have been a common sight for their grandparents. A new childrens' trail booklet about flowers, lichens, butterflies and bees is being compiled as a companion volume to the popular childrens' Tree Trail. We plan to link this with other activities to raise awareness of the huge importance of habitat and specific food sources for pollinating insects. This year theme was introduced in our February lecture "Why bees matter and how we all can help" by our Chair Margaret Ginman, a professional beekeeper, and included honey tasting from different habitats.
6. A more general new handout leaflet about the cemetery now being distributed encourages visitors to discover and enjoy a peaceful walk viewing its interesting plants and old memorials. For neighbouring properties and regular dogwalkers, we have updated our leaflet "Woodbury Park Watch" so they know whom to contact if they spot any damage or misbehaviour that needs to be tackled.

7. Turning to other themes, the summer open air concert was once more a highlight of the year. Marking the centenary year of the WW1 armistice, and performed by the British Legion band, it included a flugelhorn solo by the Superintendent of Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, successor to Woodbury Park in 1873 as town burial ground. Launched at this event, our latest booklet Queen and Country celebrates the lives of some of the military and naval men and their families buried here.

8. Other notable lives were commemorated in lectures about Regency artist John Cox Dillman Engleheart, and about Henry Austen, brother of Jane. Illustrated booklets are in preparation following up both these history lectures. The annual cemetery outing in August included a visit to the Austen graves in Tonbridge, and the Engleheart family have commissioned repairs to their illustrious forebear's memorial and that of Dr John Hennen, who married Mary Engleheart and is buried in the adjoining grave.

9. With the purchase of a stock of ISBN numbers for our expanding range of publications, we hope that wider access – and hopefully increased sales – will further promote the Friends' work and attract new volunteers. We have also snapped up the opportunity of having a stall at the Tunbridge Wells Farmers Market as good publicity to increase awareness of the cemetery, attract new Friends and sell our publications.

10. But challenges remain. These include the impact of increasing amounts of building on gardens that formerly helped shelter the cemetery and its habitat. In January, a section of the Listed original sandstone boundary wall collapsed as a result of new construction significantly raising ground level on the 9 Park Road site, then using the Council-owned wall to retain this earth and provide drainage. We have asked the Council to take this up urgently with the developers.

11. More generally, the condition of the paths remains a long-standing concern, with further trampling of their borders. A fresh grant application to tackle this has been made following the hiatus created by the revision and renaming of what is now known as the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Success with this will critically depend on meeting the new mandatory requirements to demonstrate there will be resulting wider and more active participation of the local community in heritage activities there. We need every one of the Friends to consider urgently how they might personally contribute ideas appropriate to a Listed cemetery and volunteer action to achieving this directly or through their contacts with others.

12. As our Treasurers report shows, we have meanwhile been steadily building funds in order to be able to contribute towards major betterment of the paths. In this we have been much helped by generous donations from the Jeffery Hale Foundation, reflecting their admiration and gratitude for the care put into the upkeep of the Hale memorials and their surroundings by the gardening team. As age takes its toll, they too would greatly benefit from some further willing helpers giving a few hours on Saturday afternoons and providing continuity for the future.

13. In conclusion, we commend this report to all our members whose continued support is so vital to the wellbeing of this heritage site. We couple that with our warm thanks to Parks Department for all the help and advice they so willingly provide.

April 2019