



Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

FWPC Annual Report 2020-2021

1. There has been no let-up in the conservation work of the Friends, despite heavy Covid-19 restrictions applying for most of the year. Although we were unable to hold any lecture meetings, concerts or guided walks (with one exception), FWPC Newsletters and the gardening team's annual report have been circulated to members while interested visitors have been kept in touch with some of the interesting projects and achievements of the year. We continue to be represented on the Tunbridge Wells Town Forum and regularly attend their meetings by Zoom.
2. The cemetery's habitat has been further enriched with more new plantings friendly to pollinators and other wildlife. This has been rewarded by a visible increase in the number of butterflies in the cemetery, among them a brood of Painted Lady butterflies raised by an enterprising local family of young naturalists. A new updated nature board is in place below the chapel, replacing its vandalised predecessor.
3. We are immensely fortunate in having such a dedicated group of gardening volunteers, who have put in over 400 hours of painstaking work in the cemetery over the year, recognised in particular by the awards won this year: A Gold Award from South and South East in Bloom and a Silver Gilt from Kent Wildlife. We also retained the national Green Flag status. A base for their new tool shed with associated educational boards has been laid and the shed itself is expected to be erected shortly.
4. The topic set for the 2020 Jeffery Hale Awards for primary schools was "Hidden Treasures" but had to be deferred when schools closed for much of the year. Contact with supporting schools was maintained and they were offered sunflower seeds for the children to grow at home. Individual Jeffery Hale Achievement badges were awarded to those who successfully participated and to a number of members of a disabled group, the Flyerz Hockey Club, who grew some splendid specimens.
5. This has not been a year for bringing out new publications, not least because of restricted physical access to public archives and libraries, but as the mini-history of the Du Pre tomb in the most recent Newsletter shows, research into the fascinating lives of many of those buried in the cemetery continues. We continue to welcome warmly all who would like to join us in this detective work and help share it with others.

6. Other than online activity, Heritage Open Days in September 2020 were largely abandoned three days into the eleven day event. Fortunately, our socially-distanced guided walk there, covering both history and natural history, took place before stricter Covid rules came into play. While other guided walks during the year were ruled out, the surge in outdoor exercise during lockdowns has swelled the number of individual visitors and attracted some new members who had learned about the cemetery through leaflets and a Town Crier article.
7. The gardening team has continued to keep a close eye on the condition of memorials to help keep TWBC Council alerted to any safety threats and to inform the Friends conservation priorities. This work has included drawing the attention of the Council to the deterioration of the plinth supporting the substantial Panton tomb.
8. The Friends continue to watch issues around the cemetery boundaries, liaising with TWBC as necessary. The sandstone walls are under statutory protection as part of the original Listed structures of the cemetery, and in many places are fragile. A particular concern therefore is the spoil piled 6 feet high up against the outside of the section bounding the 9 Park Road development and threatening it with collapse. We have taken this up with TWBC officials and local councillors.
9. Our major financial project continues to be improvement of the paths. The original plans for a comprehensive approach proved too costly, so working with TWBC we continue to explore options and costings; water drainage remains a key issue and may determine different solutions (and different costs) to different sections of the paths.
10. We commend this report to all our members whose continued support is crucial to the wellbeing of this heritage site. We also express our warm thanks to the TWBC Parks Department for all the practical help and advice they so willingly provide.

April 2021