



Friends of Woodbury Park Cemetery

Annual Report 2023-2024

1. The 2023 AGM was held on 25 May in the Camden Centre when, after the formalities, founder member Brian Kempster gave an interesting and amusing talk on Victorian burial customs.
2. Our conservation of the cemetery's habitat has continued with more flower and bulb plantings. The volunteer gardeners completed over 550 hours of work in Woodbury Park Cemetery (WPC) in 2023 and it is their dedication and effort that allows the cemetery to look as good as it does. WPC was entered for the South & South East in Bloom competition, in the churchyards category, and we were delighted to receive a Gold award. Our Green Flag status was re-confirmed for 2023-24.
3. Skinners Kent Primary School won the Jeffery Hale Achievement Awards for primary schools, based on a "Wishing Tree". The winning shield and participation badges were presented in July 2023 by the Tunbridge Wells Mayor.
4. Our Spring plant and craft event took place on St John's Green on Saturday 22 April which saw a mixture of stall offerings and raised a useful sum for FWPC.
5. The Friends' Spring Outing on 26 April went to Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, one of London's "Magnificent Seven" cemeteries where we were given a guided tour by their heritage officer and grounds manager. After a lunch in a nearby East End pub we travelled to The Strand in the West End for a guided tour of the Savoy Chapel (King's Chapel), part of the Duchy of Lancaster estate and home to the Victorian Order. A connection to WPC is that the building was redesigned by architect Sydney Smirke who spent his final years in Tunbridge Wells and is buried in WPC.
6. Our Summer concert was held on 9 July. The Wadhurst Brass Band provided our usual patriotic and pastoral themed music. We were delighted that the Mayor of Tunbridge Wells and other local councillors were able to attend and lend support to the event. The Chair took them to see the Jeffery Hale grave during the interval and they admired the new path which was nearly finished.
7. We participated again in the Heritage Open Days on 17 September when Emma Vidler led a tour of the cemetery covering the history of the cemetery and some of its inhabitants, with a focus on the creative people buried there including the miniature painter John Cox Dillman Engleheart, local artist Charles Tattershall Dodd and Tunbridge Ware maker William Fenner.
8. Talks to members over the winter months included a "Memorable Memorials" evening in November when members presented a favourite or interesting memorial, some in WPC, others elsewhere including Margate and Sussex. On 13 March 2024 we welcomed Times journalist and horticulturist Ann Treneman who entertained us with

experiences from her career and her “semi-retirement” activities in horticulture including her successful entry at the Royal Chelsea Flower Show.

9. After the resumption of memorial repairs in 2022, the last year has been one of planning for the next round of repairs. Burslems have now been given instructions to make repairs to another tranche of memorials, the work for which will start from April 2024 weather permitting.
10. The major financial project for the year was the repair of the paths which have worn away in many places. The first tranche of expenditure has now been completed with a new path from the entrance down to the fountain. Further areas will see new paths in 2024 and we look forward to reporting on the details in next year’s annual report.
11. Membership has remained stable. The committee would welcome approaches from members who may wish to become more involved in running the group, from administrative tasks to the more “hands on” activities at events or in joining the gardening team. Please contact the Secretary if you do and for further information.
12. 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 help and advice they so willingly provide.

April 2024