

Chair's Annual Report – 15.11.2016

I cannot believe that the Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery are commencing their 7th year in operation!

As Chair of such a positive and productive group of volunteers I can sincerely say it has been a pleasure during the past 6yrs for me to be involved and to see how much the group has grown year on year. You have only to visit the cemetery to see the transformation since 2010 - all due to the hard work, commitment and support of so many volunteers.

The Green Flag flying in the cemetery for the 4th year running is testament to the level of community involvement and input.

Being a natural environment there is always work to be done in the cemetery to maintain the area and to keep it looking tidy and welcoming. The monthly Action Days provide an opportunity for volunteers to come together and make a difference – on average we have the support of 15 – 20 volunteers each month. Provided with tools and equipment they happily take on weeding, pruning, planting, grass cutting, brushing up and of course the annual leaf busting! All washed down with refreshments provided by the Friends of St. Helen's Church. We mustn't forget the volunteers who enjoy working in the cemetery so much that they volunteer their time in between Action Days!

Regularly each month 29 graves, registered in our Grave-tending Scheme, have been tidied and washed thanks to the regular volunteer tenders. Feedback and appreciation from the relatives confirms this is a much valued service and will be continued. All monies from the scheme are put back into the cemetery through the purchase of shrubs, materials, tools and equipment.

Once again this year the cemetery has been fortunate to have the support of local farmers Eddie & James Atherton who have kindly donated bedding plants for the Friends to plant in the front walls, pots and borders adding all year round seasonal colour.

As well as regular monthly tasks, there always seems to be a project or two on the go to further enhance the cemetery. Our Friends committee continue to meet 3 times a year to discuss, plan and organise projects and liaise with WBC Bereavement Services to agree on priorities.

This past year alone the Friends group have:

- Fully utilised the 3 new compost bays installed in October 2015 and paid for by a successful funding bid from Warrington Voluntary Action Grassroots Grant
- Created more green spaces by weeding and grass seeding further untidy areas
- Completed and planted up the new barked pathway and steps to provide easier access to one of the older grave sections
- Purchased new and replacement tools
- Held a Spring fundraising lunch event at which £609 was raised for future projects
- Recorded and nearly completed all memorial details - thanks to our volunteer local historian - these will be reproduced on a database to enable the Friends to assist relatives in identifying their loved ones graves
- Worked with the WBC Bereavement Services to get further headstones reinstated along the main pathway (hopefully to be completed by Spring 2017)

- Weeded and gravelled another pathway edging strip to tidy up grave frontages
- Organised the removal of an obstructed tree and old dead shrubs near the main entrance to clear the way for a future project
- Built a gate to tidy up the bin store area

Apart from the work that has been achieved, many friendships have been formed since the Friends group first started and in October 2016 it was warming to see so many of our volunteers get together for a lovely evening of celebration and companionship. It was with sadness though that one of our founders and dear friends Paul was not with us, having passed away this year. He will always be in our hearts and thoughts and will be remembered with fondness.

I am personally very proud of what the Friends volunteers have achieved together so far and wish to thank everyone who has been involved in supporting our aim of 'Improving the Look and Feel of the Cemetery'.

Keep up the good work!
Mandy Eccles

Projects planned for 2017:

- Design and install a memorial sculpture in memory of those buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves
- Produce a data base of all memorial details
- Design and install a heritage board to highlight the cemetery's history
- Provide funding for a tree sculptor to turn an old tree trunk near the Friends notice board into an attractive wildlife feature
- Further pruning/planting to the perimeter borders
- Repainting the front gates
- Continue publicising the work of the Friends to share news and information and to encourage even more volunteers