

## **Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery – Chair's Annual Report – November 2021 - 2022**

Welcome to our Annual General Meeting 2022. It is always good to have this opportunity to review our achievements for another year...and to remind ourselves just what a busy and productive year 2022 has been!

Given this has been the Friend's group's twelfth year in operation, I think I can confidently say that the volunteers are now masters in the general tidying and maintenance of the cemetery, working together like a well-oiled machine! It is certainly wonderful to see how well-attended our Action Days are and to see how willing volunteers are to get actively involved in the physical tasks required each Action Day. With an average of 15-20 attending each month, together we clock up over 600hrs of volunteer time at Action Days throughout the year. What dedication that shows and what a difference we all make together. I know that a lot of time is also given by several individuals throughout the year outside of Action Days, and on behalf of the group I'd like to express our appreciation for the many additional hours those individuals commit.

### **So, what have we been up to in the past year?**

As usual, November and December 2021 saw us all getting stuck in to leaf busting, composting and a pre-Christmas brush-up. Downing tools and coming together for mince pies and mulled wine after the Christmas Action Day is always a lovely way to finish the calendar year and gives volunteers a moment to share a bit of good cheer before taking a break and stepping away from cemetery volunteering until the New Year.

Returning ready for action in February 2022 was, as always, approached by volunteers with renewed vigor and it was a joy to see how keen everyone was to return and tackle yet another year of improving the look and feel of the cemetery. Given the somewhat repetitive nature of the work required, it is heartwarming to see this level of enthusiasm and continued commitment.

With the final scattering of leaves and Winter windfall cleared away, and Christmas wreaths removed during the February Action Day, the cemetery looked revived and ready for the arrival of Spring. What a colorful time Spring is in the cemetery with the swathes of snowdrops, daffodils, tulips and bluebells taking their turn to pop up their heads to offer a cheery welcome to visitors. This time of year, of course, is also when the grass is in its fastest growing phase, so we are extremely grateful to those volunteers who offered to take on the repetitive task of grass cutting throughout the year, keeping the cemetery looking tidy and cared for. In late Spring, the borders were given their annual pruning and clearing, and I would like to thank Pete for making sure this was done in a timely fashion, for engaging volunteers effectively, and for ensuring tools were safe to use in. Also thank you to Pete for all he does in his role as Secretary and for liaising with WBC Bereavement Services (WBCBS) to take away the large waste bags we fill each month.

With the shrubs cut back and dead perennials cleared, the seasonal sunshine can break through to the sleepy borders and bring those dormant plants and shrubs back to life. As they flourished and grew, the Summer and early Autumn months became a time for deadheading, pruning and watering and I wish to thank those volunteers who help keep the plants in the borders, pots and along the front wall in such a healthy state.

The Summer sun certainly did a good job of warming our volunteers and their partners as it beat down on our Afternoon Tea fundraiser held in August. A huge thank you to Anne & Neil McArthur for opening their home and garden, for yet another year running, to host this lovely event, which is a great social occasion as well as raising funds for future works in the cemetery.

Whatever the season, our volunteers always look forward to the call each Action Day to take a break for some well-earned refreshments. This is a welcome sound and a chance to down tools, lift our heads and

## **Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery – Chair's Annual Report – November 2021 - 2022**

get together with other fellow volunteers for a good chat over a warm drink and snack, so I'd like to thank Joyce for organising this. Also, our thanks to the kind family of visitors who donated cakes throughout the year for us to enjoy on our break, it is always great to see that our efforts are appreciated.

Throughout the seasons, come rain or shine (and fortunately we are usually blessed with kind weather) the Grave Tending Scheme team of ladies continued their monthly task of cleaning approximately 30 graves in support of those relatives who are unable to attend their loved one's graves. Thank you to them and to Sheila for coordinating this and for liaising with the families involved.

As well as being hands-on at Action Days, our 9 Committee members have also held 4 meetings this year to discuss and plan actions required, future projects and funding - thanks to Pete for arranging these. Our thanks also to our Treasurer Sheila who keeps the books in good order and has provided an update on our finances at each committee meeting. In her Treasurers report Sheila will be highlighting the maintenance grant we receive from WBCBS, the Grave Tending Scheme income, fundraising events, and successful grant applications. These all require input from committee members, and the admin work that goes on behind these is no-less important to our work in ensuring we have the funds to continue to carry out our work.

Personally, my focus this year has been on applying for grants and for steering the long-term project of Memorial Improvements, this year focusing on the fallen and damaged headstones in Plot 1, the oldest plot in the cemetery. With the funds raised and earmarked for the 2022 phase of improvement works, it was then a slow and laborious task to get the work started. I am delighted therefore to be able to end this year by saying that five large headstones have now been re-instated to their former glory, thanks to the skilled work of Roughleys stonemasons. As a group we hope to continue with this momentum and will be seeking to raise more funds to enable us to complete the rest of Plot 1 in the coming year. We will also be paying attention to tidying sound but unvisited graves in this plot, with the aim of further lifting this age-old section.

I am pleased to say that our good working relationship with WBCBS continues, ensuring the committee can confidently engage volunteers in carrying out the monthly tasks needed, whilst working safely within the guidelines set by them. As a volunteer group we feel valued and respected and know we can approach them if we need any additional help or advice. I am pleased that this year our request to them for an increase to our annual maintenance grant was met favorably, as this will make a big difference to our ability to carry out future projects and ensure we have the resources we need. At our first committee meeting of the new year, we will be reviewing our rolling 5yr plan and considering what more, if anything, we feel we can do to continue our aim of 'Improving the Look and Feel of the Cemetery'.

For now, though, as we close the chapter on yet another successful year, we remember all who have been involved with the Friends group over the years, including those who are no longer with us. I know that they would be proud to know that the passion they once showed for the group is still as strong as ever.

I personally feel very proud to have been Chair of such a positive and active group of lovely volunteers, and want to say a big 'Thank You and Well Done' to each, and every one of you!

Here's to a happy and productive 2023!  
Mandy Eccles (Chair)