Friends of Hollinfare Cemetery – Chair's Annual Report – November 2022 - 2023

Welcome to our Annual General Meeting 2023. It is always good to have this opportunity to review our achievements and remind ourselves just what a productive year 2023 has been!

Thank you to our Treasurer Sheila for producing a thorough breakdown of our accounts and actions for this year, which clearly show where our monies have come from and what these have been spent on this year to enable us to continue our work effectively. Thanks to income from fundraising, grants, grave-tending and donations we are in a good financial position.

This year has been the Friend's thirteenth year in operation. Quite a few of our volunteers have been with the group from the onset and I thank them and every one of the volunteers that have played a part in the success of the group this year and over the years. In total over 100 different volunteers have attended our actions days since our first one in 2011. Over the years the monthly average, whilst fluctuating slightly, has stood at 15-20 per month, which is the same as it is today. The dedication and commitment shown by our volunteers is fantastic and the difference we make when working together each month is plain to see. My thanks also to those volunteers who undertake to spend their time in between action days to add that extra level of care and attention to the look of the cemetery.

Like many Friends groups we are always in need of more volunteers, so we are pleased therefore to have welcomed 3 extra volunteers this year. We need to keep spreading the word, however, to ensure our numbers grow for the future.

So, what have we been up to in the past year?
As usual, November and December 2022 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 December Action Day was again a lovely way to finish the calendar year, before stepping away from cemetery volunteering until the New Year.

With no action day in January, it was lovely to come together again as a group in February ready to tackle 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 the volunteers returning to action days with enthusiasm and ready to get stuck in. Every work force needs a supervisor of course and I want to thank Pete for thinking ahead of action days and preparing, purchasing or borrowing additional tools or equipment required for the tasks - we would certainly not be as productive without his direction. Having a hot drink and snack during action days is a welcome break and keeps us going, so I thank Joyce for looking after us all, and also thank our kind friend who has donated cakes monthly to show his appreciation for all we do.

Thankfully we seem to be fortunate with the weather at our action days, but our volunteers are hardy folk and come prepared for all kinds of weather! As we moved into the Spring months, the cemetery once again burst into colour with snowdrops, daffodils, tulips and bluebells taking their seasonal turn to add their vibrancy. With the grass growing at a fast pace, our grass cutters were put through their paces walking the length of the green swathes of grass and back. Grass cutting in the cemetery is certainly not a one man task and I thank all the volunteers who take on this task during action days and in between - the cemetery would soon look very unloved without their hard work. The paths, pots and borders need constant attention throughout the year, with many volunteer hands needed to help brush and clear windfall, prune, dead head, water, recycle, and cleaning our memorial sculpture - so thank you to all the volunteers who turn their hands to these physical tasks on an ongoing basis. The look and feel of the cemetery gets better and better each year because of all your efforts.

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Each month the Grave Tending Scheme team of ladies quietly clean approximately 30 graves in support of those relatives who are unable to attend their loved one's resting place. Thank you to them and to Sheila for coordinating this and for liaising with the families involved, and raising much needed funds in this way.

Our thanks to local businesses who have continued to support us, including builder Paul Dixon who keeps us topped up with large rubbish sacks and to Eddie & James Atherton who have donated Spring bedding plants and geraniums for the summer. Thank you to Pete & Joyce for looking after these at home until they're ready to be planted in the pots and front walls, giving a fantastic show of seasonal colour.

Outside of the action days our 8 strong committee members have met 4 times this year to discuss and plan actions and projects for the year and arrange fundraising and social activities. This year we have welcomed Julie Lewis from Bereavement Services to our meetings as well as site meetings, which has been useful in further improving communications and working relationships between us and their team. Our thanks to Pete for his role as Secretary and also for kindly hosting our meetings this year along with Marian and Liz.

Two highlights on our annual calendar are our fundraising lunch and our annual dinner. Thank you to friends Anne & Neil for kindly hosting our lunch so admirably and to all who contributed to the delicious buffet lunch and raffle prizes. Also to Irene and Virginia who did a fantastic job of gathering and selling the raffle for this and also for organizing our dinner so efficiently. Both were lovely occasions, once again, bringing our cemetery friends together socially, and at the same time offering an opportunity to celebrate our achievements.

Our main project this year has been to set in motion the next phase of Memorial Improvements to Plot 1. As we know this can be a slow laborious process, and a bit stop start, but the committee feel it worthwhile as it continues to improve the look and feel of the cemetery, especially in the older plots. With the money allocated and work started we look forward to seeing Plot 1 completed in the New Year. Once completed we can pay attention to tidying the unvisited graves in this plot, to further uplift this age-old section. In the New Year we will be looking at the next phase to plan and fundraise for, to keep the momentum going.

As we close the chapter on yet another successful year our volunteers should feel very proud of what they've achieved together. I personally feel very proud to have been Chair of such a positive and active group who are truly valued, and want to say a big 'Thank You and Well Done' to each of them.

Next year will aim to seek more funding via grant applications to continue with memorial improvements and also to fund other projects, like installing a couple of benches near to the Friends storeroom and anything else the group deem necessary to continue our good work. We will also look at publicising the group via social media to spread the word further in order to draw in more volunteers.

To finish, I feel it apt that we spare a moment's thought for 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 that the Friends group is still as strong as ever.

Here's to a happy and productive 2024!
Mandy Eccles (Chair)