

FoHC Annual General Meeting 10.11.15 Chairs Report

This year's AGM marks a special milestone for the Friends group, having been in operation for 5 years. During that time we have achieved such a lot together with so many volunteers and supporters giving freely of their time, skills, donations, contributions and funding.

A big thank you to the Friends 10 committee members who attended several meetings this year to plan actions required for projects identified in the 5yr plan and to organise fundraising events. Members have positively contributed to discussions and planning and offered their support in assisting with bringing projects to fruition. A big thank you to all.

I would like to say a few words of thanks to:

- Pete, our Secretary, for liaising with volunteers and Bereavement Services and for the warmly welcoming and encouraging new volunteers. Also for his endless energy and enthusiasm for keeping projects on track and seeing them through to completion.
- Paul, our Treasurer, for keeping the books balanced as always and for spending wisely when purchasing new equipment and materials.
- Sheila, our Grave Tending Scheme co-ordinator, for the sensitive approach she takes with relatives of the deceased and for the time spent in her correspondence with them. Now in its 4th year the scheme encompasses 27 graves, requiring monthly input from 3 grave cleaners, and brings in approximately £500-£600 per year enabling the purchase of plants, additional tools and cleaning materials.

Like previous years the past 12mths has been a busy and productive one.

Action Days have continued to be well attended with an average of 20 volunteers each month. We have welcomed a few new volunteers this year, which is always heartening. It is good to know that the weather does not put people off and is wonderful to witness the friendship and chatter as volunteers busy themselves with clearing, weeding, pruning, planting, building and memorial recording. Gathering together for a warming cuppa and bacon bap provides a welcome break during the morning and offers a chance to come together as a group. Our thanks to the Friends of St. Helen's Church for continuing to keep us fed and watered!

Volunteering – it has not go unnoticed that there has been a lot of hard work and time given by several volunteers into improving and maintaining the cemetery in between action days. In particular I wish to thank Fred, our man on the ground, who never fails to keep the cemetery trimmed and growing ever greener. Also this year we have been grateful to Freda for her input and green fingers as she tackles the borders, happily weeding, planting and watering. Thank you also to Pete and volunteers for the additional groundwork undertaken to ensure projects keep moving along.

Grave Tending Scheme - this wonderful scheme has continued to prove successful due to the excellent service offered to relatives. Our thanks to Sheila for all her input and sensitive correspondence to relatives and for the much needed funds this scheme brings in.

Fundraising and Donations this year, both financial and in materials, has enabled us to achieve so much more than simply clearing and tidying. The cemetery has maintained its seasonal colour throughout the year thanks to plant donations from local farmers and volunteer waterers. Fundraising efforts of our committee, the local school and Cubs group and the support of several funding bodies, local societies, residents and businesses has also enabled us to complete several projects including

- The Cubs Remembrance Garden
- Completion of the Fox Sculpture with the introduction of 2 cubs
- Installation of the corner seat next to the sculpture
- Planting of more spring bulbs and bedding plants
- Building of new steps and bark pathway flanked by hedging and new pots
- Installation of new purpose built compost bays

Social Events – thanks to all involved in organising events and for contributing prizes, food and selling tickets. A special thank you to Anne and Neil McArthur for hosting the Spring Lunch once again, which raised over £500 towards the new compost bays. Boysnope Golf Club was the venue this year for our annual dinner – a big thank you to Irene and Virginia for organising this lovely evening, enjoyed by over 40 volunteers and for making it an extra special 5yr celebration.

Publicity is important in terms of promoting the good work of the Friends and encouraging more volunteers to join us. This year the Friends have been supported by:

- Hamilton Davies Trust who support Mandy's time for printing and offer a free venue for meetings. They also support the publishing of the 'In the Know' newsletter in which we provide regular contact details of the Friends group for those wishing to get involved. Also for hosting rixtonwihglazebrook.net community website, which enables us to share news and images on the progress we are making and is an outlet for people to download information about the group.
- M44, Warrington Guardian and I & C Times who have freely published our successes, spreading the news wider afield.
- Word of mouth is of course the best form of publicity, so thanks to all the Friends who share their enthusiasm for the work they do and encourage others to join in the fun!

'Working in Partnership' with WBC Bereavement Services is key to moving improvements forward and we continue to build on our good relationship with them. In the past 12 months we have held a couple of cemetery site meetings throughout the year to discuss forthcoming plans and issues. WBC have also held 3 Friends forums enabling us and other cemetery Friends groups in Warrington to share good practice and ideas. Bereavement Services have acknowledged the Friends valuable contribution to maintaining the Green Flag for a 4th year running and the Green Flag report commented on the *'Excellent level of community involvement'*.

Moving Forward

Looking ahead to the next 12 months we will continue with our aim of 'Improving the Look and Feel of the Cemetery' through our regular action days and fundraising. As well as this we are looking to:

- Paint some if not all of the old railings
- Complete recording of the memorial inscriptions
- Produce a heritage board to highlight the history of the cemetery
- Support the continuance of memorial improvements in line with WBC Bereavement Services proposals
- Push for phase 2 of the WBC Tree Care Plan, which originally covered maintenance and pruning of trees to the left hand side of the cemetery. In particular we would like to see the large branches overhanging the pathway and graves removed to prevent any possible damage to headstones, minimise the mossing and slipiness of pathways and improve safety to visitors and Friends volunteers
- Draw up a design and seek funding to install a sculpture alongside the bark pathway in memory of all those buried in the cemetery in unmarked graves
- Discuss with WBC Bereavement Services the future long term plans for burials

Lastly I would like to thank all volunteers for their enthusiasm, kindness and company, making it a pleasure to be Chair for 5 consecutive years. I look forward to seeing what we can achieve together in 2016.

Keep up the good work everyone!
Mandy