



Newsletter 24

Spring 2021

The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery, c/o 100 Enborne Road, Newbury, RG14 6AN
Website: www.fnrnewbury.org.uk

Tel: 01635 30108
E-mail: committee@fnrcnewbury.org.uk

**Nature Walk this Saturday 15th May.
Book your place on our Midsummer Event. See page 12.**

Chairman's Chatter

Brian Sylvester



Hello fellow troglodytes! Well, that's how I feel after virtually a year in lockdown - a troglodyte or hermit. In the whole year I've only managed four days away from home: how about you? Fingers crossed - we're nearing the end now.

An interesting aside occurs; the Latin name for a wren is "*troglodytes troglodytes*". I've asked a member of our Nature Group to expand on this

- see elsewhere for his thoughts. [I'm reminded of the words of a 1970s song "New York, New York - so good they named it twice!"]

Moving on, I recently read a magazine article about research in another field, but I found the author's introduction apposite: he wrote:

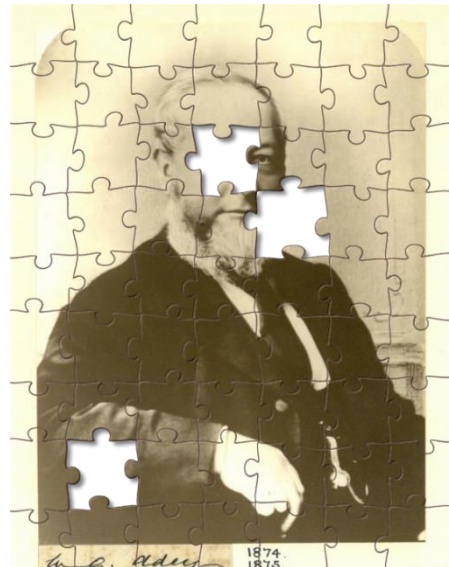
One of the joys of researching any subject is putting together disparate pieces of information and, rather like completing a jigsaw puzzle, creating a coherent picture. Pieces come in multiple shapes and sizes and involve individuals across a wide range of different contexts: social, political, geographic, and even philosophical.

Understanding and explaining the texture or context is essential if one is to bring historical research to life, as is an appreciation of the people involved. For someone like me who has specialised in 18th century history for more than a decade, this can translate into an almost granular awareness of how people

interact within their social and business circles, and the probable outcome of those connections, even when private.

OK - he's referring to the 18th century, but I believe his conclusions apply equally to our research into the lives of those in the cemetery from the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, thus creating our very own jigsaw puzzle of Newbury life. Our tours, monologues, newsletter articles and now Grave and Plant of the month surely bear witness to this. Hence our proud slogan "Taking the Past into the Future".

Finally, it wouldn't be Chairman's Chatter without an expression of appreciation to everyone involved with the cemetery: The Newbury Town Council and their contractors, of course; your committee; group leaders and their teams; the researchers; our thespians and guides; our website guru and the website in-putters; and of course, our esteemed newsletter editor. Sincere thanks to all for your contributions and providing your individual pieces to make up the picture for our coherent Newbury jigsaw.



The Harrolds

David Clow

I am always amazed by what can be found out on the internet. A couple of weeks ago Brian was looking at Ancestry and came across some photos of Frederick Joseph Jesser and Mary Elizabeth Harrold on a website owned by Margot Wheaton. The photos were in quite a poor state, but Brian set to work improving them and was very pleased with the result.



Brian was a little worried about copyright, so we emailed Margot who turned out to be his great grandchild. She not only supplied more information but biographies and photos of Jessie and Floral the daughters - all buried in NRC.



They lived at Kiu Kiang an imposing house Frederick had built in St John's Road when he returned from China. Margot has in the past visited the cemetery and was impressed with all the work we do and our superb website. She confirmed the scandal and family secret which we had discovered, namely that Frederick had married his niece, Mary Elizabeth, which was, **and still is**, illegal.

Fittingly, they have an angel as a headstone which seems to be the custom for those marrying outside the law (Ref. a similar case with Mr Finn of the Phoenix Brewery)

Below are photos of Jessie and Floral (Flora) and the Angel memorial.



So, via the internet we have gained 4 detailed biographies, together with photos, AND Margot wants to join the Friends!

The Wren

Chris Foster

It may come as a surprise that the wren is Britain's commonest breeding bird. But unlike showier species – the blue tits on the bird table or the omnipresent woodpigeon – wrens prefer to be tucked away in the undergrowth.

So much is this secretive behaviour part of the wren's character that it is officially a 'troglodyte', claiming that epithet for both parts of its scientific name, *Troglodytes troglodytes*. The quickest way to tell a wren is present is by its surprisingly bold voice, which, once known, you start hearing everywhere.



Wren
©Anne Thompson

Sharp ‘tick’ notes often run together into rapid bursts like a tinny alarm clock. Its song is a rapid, sweet, liquid warble that echoes as though through a tiny megaphone.

And while they do move furtively, hunting through the vegetation for spiders and other invertebrates to eat, for me wrens have a bold appearance to match their strident voice. Their downcurved beak and eyebrow stripe create a vaguely angry expression, and they’re stocky for a small bird, almost twice the weight of a goldcrest (Europe’s smallest bird) despite being barely any bigger.

The wren’s shape also offers clues to its lifestyle. Large strong feet, a short stiff tail, and stubby rounded wings point to a preference for perching and hopping over flying. When they do fly, they stick to low-level darts from bush to bush, so you rarely find yourself looking *up* at a wren. But, in a metaphorical sense, perhaps we should, drawing inspiration from a bird that lies low but is by no means silent or inactive.

A BIT OF LIGHT INTERTEINMENT

*“WHEN I DIE
I WANT MY HEADSTONE
TO OFFER FREE WI-FI
JUST SO PEOPLE
WILL VISIT MORE OFTEN”*

*Seen in a monumental stonemason’s window.
Bob Carter, Hull*

Thank You Julie

Brian Sylvester

I’m afraid that after her fall, and with other health needs, Julie Goddard has now moved into Ladymead Care Home in Wroughton. Our thoughts go out to husband, Brian, and their family.

Julie has been a stalwart of the Friends and, despite being a Leicestershire Lass, has taken a keen interest in Newbury’s history. She has researched many of our ‘residents’ and written papers about them. She also did a great job typing up the lengthy Victorian obituaries from the Newbury Weekly News - to keep her hand in, she used to say.

We shall miss her erudite contributions, her down-to-earth approach, and her sense of fun. We send her our very best wishes and trust she finds peace and contentment in her new setting.

Diary Dates

23 rd June (Wednesday)	Midsummer Night’s Welcome Evening. See Page 12	Book your place before it goes on sale to the public
--------------------------------------	---	--

Making Sense of the Census

Ros Clow

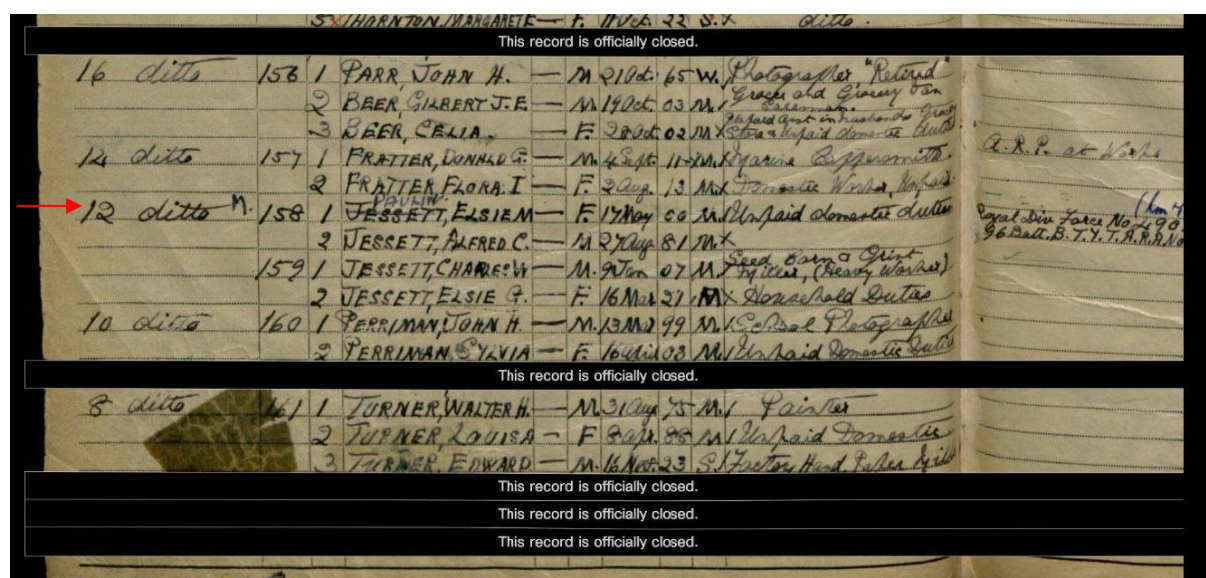
How did you get on with completing your section of the 2021 census on 21st March? We did the online version which seemed straightforward other than the questions about if you lived anywhere else for more than 30 days. We do but there wasn't a section for tatty residential caravan with no mains water or sewerage, so we have gone down in history as having a holiday home!

The 1920 Census Act allows for regular censuses and indeed there was one in June 1921. No individual information is available for 100 years so will we be able to access the 1921 census in June? The answer is 'No'.

When we first became interested in our family history, we attended a weekend course at Urchfont Manor in Wiltshire. We were told then that when the 1901 census was published the computers crashed as everyone tried to access it. We were also told that much of the transcription had been done by prisoners. Copies of the original record were transcribed in two different prisons. If they came back exactly the same that was entered into the digital record, if not they were checked. This took extra time and the 1901 census was not published till 2003.

The 1911 census was transcribed by FindMyPast and they have won the contract to transcribe the 1921 census. At present they are expecting to have it available in January 2022.

The only other comprehensive 20th century record is the 1939 Register. This was part of the preparation for war where the population was recorded with important information like their useful skills. Although genealogists deride this record as less accurate it has one very useful attribute, they updated it over time. So, when I was researching Charlie Jessett, who committed suicide in 1940, it records him and his wife Elsie living at 12, Salcombe Road but



over Elsie's name is written Paulin, which I didn't understand at first. Then I discovered that a few months after Charlie's death Elsie married George Paulin in 1941.

The redacted sections of the record are usually children who might still be alive.

So, can we look forward to the 1931 and the 1941 censuses – if we're still around? Again the answer is 'No'. The 1931 census was destroyed by fire and there was no census in 1941 because of the Second World War.

As we research residents of the cemetery there is a gap between the 1901 census and the 1939 Register. Sometimes local directories help to fill in those gaps. Even so, between 1891 and 1901 we make assumptions that if they are living in the same place, they have lived there all the intervening years but that may not be true. If, like my grandmother, you were prone to doing 'moonlight flits' you could have lived in a multitude of abodes without there being any record. By the way, the 1939 Register not only records her next marriage in 1943, but also the one after that in 1966!

In January FindMyPast will allow access to the 1921 census but they have not yet said how much it will cost. Nevertheless, I have started a notebook where I make a note every time I would have checked the 1921 census, if it were available. You might like to do the same?

Don't forget that you can access censuses even if you do not have genealogical subscriptions through West Berks Library and Oxford Library – free to members.

Monument Recording Group

Doug Larsen



We had to pause the recording during the shutdown which included working outdoors. This was on the instructions of the Council due to the serious problems with fighting COVID.

As soon as things were relaxed, the Cemetery was allowed to open but with restrictions on movement which we took advantage of with a few plucky individuals managing to do some recording.

Now we are free to move as we like with the proviso that masks should be worn when necessary.

This led to the discovery of a number of monuments that had toppled over at some time in the past but only found as we move through the rows of graves.

Elizabeth Capewell passed on the locations of these monuments and Martin Strike and I brought in the muscle (mainly Martin's) and turned over the stones which had hidden inscriptions.

So we continue to progress with this project, always making sure we work accurately for the sake of our beloved "residents."

Thanks again to all those members who contribute in their own way to making the Cemetery accessible and a valuable source of information to our visitors.

The Tragedies of the Sturgess Family

By Paul Thompson

Losing a child is heart-breaking for any parent. For the Sturgess family who lived in Golding's yard, off Cheap Street in Newbury, tragedy struck three times, but only one of those was of illness. Two of their seven children were killed in terrible accidents.

George Sturgess was born in Kintbury in 1862. In his young adult life, he worked on the farms around Kintbury until he met and married Sarah Watts, also of Kintbury, in 1883. By the time of the census in 1891, Sarah and George who was now a carman were living in Gilbert Court, off Cheap Street in Newbury and had 4 children: Rhoda Ann (born 1884), Fanny (born 1886), Elizabeth Harriet (Born 1888) and Sarah (Born 1889).

Life seemed good for the family despite the fact that they were poor, but over the next eleven years, George's family was struck down time and again.

Little Sarah was the first casualty. In 1893 she caught Croup, a virus that can cause inflammation in the upper part of the windpipe and died on May 18th, 1893 at just 3 years old. She was buried in Newtown Road cemetery on May 23rd.

Rhoda Ann Sturgess' life was tragically cut short, but her death in 1894 was one of a selfless heroine. She was born on June 3rd, 1884 when the family were still living in Kintbury. Later reports stated that she had been born with only one arm, so her life was going to be a struggle right from the start.

On the evening of Monday 5th March, Rhoda and her younger sister (it is not reported as to whether it was Fanny or Elizabeth) were playing on Cheap Street near Gas House Lane. The younger sister without warning dashed out into the path of a manure cart that was travelling along Cheap Street and ran between the horse's hind legs. Seeing the danger her sister was in, Rhoda ran after her and succeeded in pushing her sister between the wheels of the cart, so its wheels passed safely either side of her. According to witnesses, Rhoda tried to run out of the other side of the cart but was not able to get clear in time and was run over by the heavy wheel of the cart and died shortly after, though there were no broken bones and her skin was undamaged, apart from a graze on her shoulder and chin.

The inquest returned a verdict of accidental death and no blame for the death was placed on the driver of the cart or anyone else. Rhoda had given her life selflessly to save her sister. She was buried in Newtown Road Cemetery, but we do not know the exact date as the records for that month are missing from the burial accounts, because someone tore the whole page out to pinch the stamp!

Just five years later, tragedy struck the Sturgess family once again. By this time, George and his wife Sarah had had more children, Alfred Henry (born 1892), Ellen (1894) and Florence Annie (born 1897).

On August 29th 1899, Ellen was playing with her sister Fanny and other children in Golding's Yard, off Cheap Street, where the family now lived. Propped up against the wall in the yard was a large tyre that belonged to a timber carriage wheel.

Ellen's sister Fanny, now aged 14, was a witness at the inquest and said that during the children's games, the tyre fell and struck Ellen on the head. The other children who were also caught under the tyre were all unhurt, but Ellen was dead.

The surgeon who attended the scene said that once again, no bones were broken, just a depression of the skull, but on further examination, he found and reported that the shock of the tyre impact had been transmitted through the skull to the base of her neck where the skull had fractured all the way across and that this was the actual cause of Ellen's death. The coroner at the inquest told Ellen's father that he sympathised with George at the second loss of a child as he had also been the coroner at Rhoda's inquest. She was buried in the cemetery on September 1st, 1899.

For George, life did not improve. Just three years later, on October 28th, 1902 his wife Sarah passed away after suffering a cerebral haemorrhage and exhaustion and was buried in the cemetery on November 1st, 1902.

George lived on in Newbury until he died in 1936, aged 73, whilst living in Jubilee Road. He was buried in Shaw Cemetery.

Credits: Thanks to Jackie Groves for her assistance in providing the inquest documents and for confirming the family link between Rhoda and Ellen Sturgess from her own research.

A BIT OF LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Will glass coffins be a success? Remains to be seen.

I saw an ad for burial plots, and I thought: "That's the last thing I need!"

A man was so afraid of dying that he always stayed in his living room.

During the grave diggers' strike, local cemeteries will be manned by skeleton crews.

Next Nature Walk

By Martha Vickers

The Nature Group, a subgroup of the Friends of NRC have recommenced their monthly walks around the Cemetery. We are lucky enough to have several naturalists on the group, all with different specialities and interests so walks are both enjoyable and informative! We also have two skilful photographers.

The next walk will be on Saturday May 15th. We will be meeting at the Cemetery gates at 10.am. All welcome. If necessary, we will break into groups of six.

It would be useful to know how many will be joining us so if you are intending to come, please email: martha.vickers@phonecoop.coop



The Celtic Cross

Brian Sylvester



I expect we can all recall a variant of the old joke ...

How do you make a Maltese Cross?

Answer: Poke him in the eye with your finger!

I can't say that I've encountered any Maltese Crosses in Newtown Road Cemetery, but there's over a dozen Celtic Crosses, so the question should perhaps be...

How do you make a Celtic Cross?

Answer: Put a circle around it.

Not funny, I grant you, but that is what it is – a cross enhanced by a circle: "Why?" I hear you ask.

Like the Maltese Cross joke, it has many variations: here's a few:-

- While the Celtic Cross is certainly a Christian symbol, it has its roots in ancient pagan beliefs at the same time.



-

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF
OUR DEAR FATHERS
WILLIAM JOHN BELCHER
DIED SEP. 12TH 1884
AGED 70 YEARS.
AND ANN BELCHER
DIED FEB. 20TH 1885
AGED 72 YEARS.

[illegible]

Burial Information

Name on burial register: George Brown
Age at death: 45
Date of burial: 09 May 1870
Abode at death: Newbury
(according to burial register)
Burial register information: **Book number:** 1868
Page number: 031
Record number: 2643
Official at burial: The Rev'd. E K Dowdeswell, Curate of Newbury.
Source of information: Burial Register

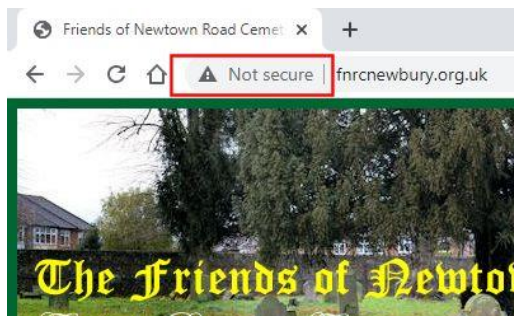


Burial register image
Click image to enlarge

Add to that, birth and death information, workhouse and memorial details, pictures, news articles, biographies... The code for the entire personal details page would fill at least four of these newsletters... yes, I tried it!

And that is just one of the 170+ pages, used to display, add and edit the 36,500+ records in the database.

Not Secure



I have had the occasional comment about the web site not being secure, which has worried some users as it raises thoughts of stealing personal information, which is perfectly understandable.

A secure website is legally required for any site that handles your personal information (such as banks, shops and councils) as they need to protect your

data while you are in their system.

For the friends and our worldwide audience, **we do not hold or require any of your personal information to access the site**, we only hold information about the dead people of our community, who are not subject to the rules of data protection. However, as we have a login process for those that add and edit the material on the site, Google shows the site as “not secure”, but even the logins and passwords for our excellent team of helpers does not include any personal information, so we are still following the rules of GDPR.

So please do not be concerned about the “Not secure” message. It is perfectly safe to use the web site!

Midsummer Night's Plan

Wednesday 23rd June 2021

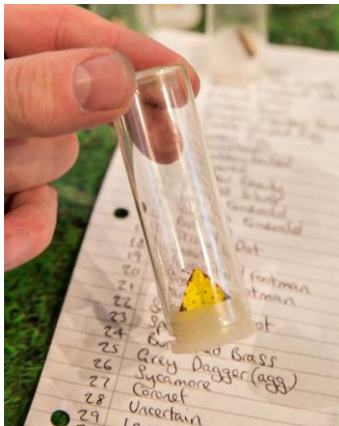
We are planning to offer a Welcome Evening in June. It will be our first event in over a year. We still need to take Covid restrictions into account, so Maureen has spent hours doing complex risk assessments for the Town Council. We need to be able to trace visitors just in case.

So, this is our plan. The cemetery and the Chapel will be open all evening from 6.00pm. **Entry will be by prior booking.**

Entry will cost £5 per person or **£4 per Friend.**

Early entry includes our monologue (*over 14 years only*) by Dominic Isaacs who will tell the life story of Edward Pellew Plenty IV who was a World War 1 pilot, followed by a short tour (Taster Tour) by Ros Clow, based at the Chapel.

Late Entry includes a repeat of the Plenty Performance plus the opportunity to release moths caught in the early hours of that morning.



Displays in the Chapel will include the labelled moth collection and the work of the new Nature Group.

We will need lots of you to be helpers/stewards on the night so we will be offering you the opportunity to attend the dress rehearsal of the Plenty Performance the evening before at 8.00pm, so you don't miss it!

We will not be offering the Find-A-Grave service or refreshments for visitors on this occasion.

We are offering places for the evening to Friends in the first instance. To book your places please use the Compton Players web site, www.boxoff.co.uk, payments are made by credit or debit card using the Stripe secure payment system. There is no reserved seating, but households will be able to sit in separated groups. Thanks to Paul Shave for setting this up for us.