



Newsletter 29

Autumn 2023

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Chairman's Cheerio Chatter

Brian Sylvester

Dear Friends



Over 120 people attended our recent brilliant production of playlets at the Newbury Royal British Legion, so cleverly directed by Ros Clow. By the very nature of our group these performances were sad as obviously they are retelling the stories of people who have passed away over the years.

Nevertheless, the feedback received refers to them being both *'interesting and enjoyable'* or *'engaging and moving'*. One kind critic went so far as to say, *'The whole production was splendid: while each play was individually excellent, being both poignant and informative, with lovely touches of humour in all three.'* A view, I hope, which was shared by all who came. Those who did will remember the show finished on a lifting chorus of the famous World War Two classic "We'll meet again".

Well, dear Friends, that's a point I have reached as I stand down from the role of your Chairman; a position I have had the honour of holding for 13 years. Wow! Time has just flown by, but what an incredible journey it has been for me personally – a positive highlight in my life, along with innumerable others: I've been so fortunate. To have met and worked alongside so many interesting and talented people on such diverse topics, has been a privilege I'll never forget. I trust that you too, like our playlets, have found it to be *'interesting and enjoyable'*. I certainly have.



However, it's not about me, but our collective objective of 'Taking the Past into the Future' and, as ever, I must express our sincere appreciation to all who have been such an important part of this Newbury Town Council (owners of our blessed plot) and their contractors, your dedicated committee, the teams of researchers, the helpers, the actors, our website wizard, and by no means least, the editor of this newsletter. We have made giant steps and I thank you all so much.

As a computer does, from time to time, need a reboot, so let this change prove an opportunity for the Friends to do just that, inspired by a new Chairman.

So now, to the strains of "We'll meet again" I bid you all best wishes, hoping that the blue skies will indeed drive any dark clouds far away. See you at the AGM.

Albert Alexander

Brian Sylvester



Of course you remember Paul Thompson's article on P.C. Albert Alexander – one of the jewels in the crown of Newtown Road Cemetery. It was in the Spring issue of 2020 and is still on our website if you wish to refresh your memory.

And, of course, you'll recall he was the first person to be treated with the drug Penicillin. That was in 1941. His daughter, Sheila, was 7 years old at the time so that makes her nearly 90 now and yes, she's still alive, living in California having married an American serviceman.

She was invited to attend a World Congress of Basic Clinical Pharmacology in Glasgow in July this year, which amazingly she did with her two daughters. Whilst there, they made a whirlwind visit to Newbury, visiting Albert's grave in Newtown Road Cemetery and being greeted by the Mayor, Clr. Nigel Foot.

Before their arrival the Friends carried out a little more research and discovered that two of Sheila's grandparents are also interred in the cemetery so a programme of spit and polish for the gravestones was held, and a set of Albert's war medals was ordered and presented, which was much appreciated.



Granddaughter Linda Willason said "There is really no words - the whole fact we got to come over here, bring Sheila and do all this - we're very grateful."



Heritage Day – September 9th, 2023

Carol Brindley

With the temperature hovering around 30°, over 230 people took advantage of the Town Hall, one of Newbury's most historic buildings, being open to the public as part of Heritage Day 2023. At the very least it was a welcome respite from the sun!

FNRC had a double stand. One display board presented a synopsis of the three playlets being performed at the Royal British Legion



and the other showcased **The Cemetery as a Creative Space** – the theme for this year’s heritage event.

As I designed the display board, it was only when I began looking through photographs on the FNRC website and Facebook page that I realised how much the arts have contributed to the evolution of the cemetery as a communal creative space and how somewhere so quiet, simple and calm can also be so vibrant.

From the past: As many of you know, there are artists, authors and musicians buried



there. Some were famous, like William Henry Gore (d.1942), whose paintings were exhibited at The Royal Academy, and William Cordon (d.1900) whose paintings were commissioned by Queen Victoria. I also decided to pick out just a couple of others who made their mark on the art world: authoress Jane Sarson Cooper Ingham (d.1906) and John Osgood (d.1903) a gifted photographer.

There is more information on our website about these four people. And, of course, there are also plenty of people who sang, played, painted, drew, danced and were creative in many other ways - just for pleasure. I chose to display photos of the graves of Anna Staples (music teacher), Arthur Smith (organist) and Louisa Cave (pencil artist) to represent some of the ordinary people of Newbury who enriched the town with their talents.

From the present: There have been so many wonderful performances and exhibitions in the chapel over the years that I just had to pick a few which caught my eye: poetry reading to commemorate WW1, literature evenings in collaboration with U3A, Halloween mask making with City Arts and stories by candlelight with musical accompaniment, Open Studios artwork and ceramics, school children visiting and then sending colourful crayoned thank you letters and, of course, all the fantastic dramas which continue to bring our records and research to life. The glorious wildlife photography which will feature on our 2024 calendar certainly drew a lot of attention.

The intricate side windows of the chapel
Made by local artists in 2015 depicting the four seasons



@Isabel Carmona
<https://www.isacarmona-art.com/>

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Beautiful drawings sent to us following school visits



**Newtown Road Cemetery and Chapel
Watercolour by Isabel Carmona**

The cemetery and the chapel are a peaceful environment that always inspires me to paint when I visit - the light and shadows always changing and the trees and the tombs create a very special atmosphere where one feels at peace with the world.

@Isabel Carmona

<https://www.isacarmona-art.com/>

And the future: Well, maybe the cemetery is the perfect inspiration for your first gothic short story. Perhaps, like Lennon & McCartney (Eleanor Rigby) or Charles Dickens (Ebenezer Scrooge), aspiring writers could find unusual names among the headstones or burial records – *how about Herodias Radley, Hancock Tinker, Ezra Prismall or Amariah Cummin?* Artists and photographers can play with shape, form, perspective and colour as they wander through the unspoiled natural environment. A new revelation at every turn...

I'm convinced that anyone looking for a creative space will find it at Newtown Road cemetery – and all in the presence of the most beautiful piece of artwork – our own magnificent stained-glass chapel window.

Nature Group

Joan Stacey

There has been a lot of research looking into the lives of many of the people buried in the cemetery and many interesting stories have been uncovered - three of which were vividly brought to life by the recent Resurrection Players performance.



It is important to remember that the cemetery is also home to a wealth of living flora and fauna and that learning about these, and spending time in their habitat, can also be truly valuable.

We have only a small nature group, and we concentrate largely on the plant life because we need people with more expertise to share their knowledge about the creatures, above and below ground, and to help us understand the essential ways in which plants and animals interact.

We continue to make monthly surveys of the flowering plants in order to identify species and note changes in their populations over time and we produce monthly articles, each focusing on one chosen plant; these articles are now circulated to members of the Friends of the Earth movement which we hope will serve as useful publicity.

This year, we have been very pleased to see an increase in the numbers of Pyramidal Orchids which are doing well on our alkaline soil, and we have also seen harebells which do not flower here every year. At our special event days, we use the Chapel to arrange a display of the plants currently in flower and we are available to share information with our visitors.

Indeed, the cemetery is full of graves, but you will find life going on all around them!



Three More Resurrections

Ros Clow

It was a long time coming but we did it. When Covid lockdowns began in March 2020 we already had four scripts in draft form, ready to be performed in the Autumn. In 2021 I decided to use one of the scripts and produced an outdoor performance in the cemetery at our Midsummer Event. Andrew J. Smith became Major Edward Pellew Plenty (1897-1918) for one evening. He was so convincing we asked him to play the part again on Remembrance Weekend later in the year.



We decided to use the other three scripts in May this year, but it was impossible to find a cast. So, the committee decided to delay 20th Century Casualties till September. The Phoenix



Centre still has its ridiculous closing time (9.30pm) so we decided to try the Royal British Legion Club instead.

Casting was still impossible. We couldn't find any interested youngsters to handle lights and sound, set moving or even to play the part of 23-year-old Jack Marshall Evans. I calculated the average age of cast and crew- 70.

One volunteer we did have, from a Newbury Weekly Newsletter in April, was Lance Wright who offered to help us with sound. His early career was in Hollywood and he's more used to working with Robert Mitchum or Robert Hardy than Andrew J Smith. But help us he did.

He put in hours collecting equipment to use for music and microphones. He attended all the later rehearsals in the Chapel. Three of the original Resurrection Players, with us when we put on 'In The Beginning' in 2011, Brian Sylvester, Dave Stubbs and Garry Poulson, agreed to play small parts. Two later arrivals as RPs, Paul Shave and Judith Bunting also came on board.

Andrew had already agreed to play Fred Gardner (committee member John Gardner's uncle). We still needed four seasoned actors who could learn lines! New Era produced Graham Salter and Steve Schollar. We were still two short.

Andrew agreed to take on a second role, Jack Marshall Evans. At least he was under 50! Then I was asked to liaise with the performance poet Steve Wallis to create a new Halloween event with City Arts (see separate article). After we had walked the route between City Arts and the cemetery, I asked for the hundredth time, 'Have you done any acting?'. The rest is history! Steve took the part of Charlie Jessett and made it his own.



Julia Radbourne created costumes and Jan Budgen and David Clow built a ventriloquist stage and burned perfectly good clothes. We also had the benefit of advice from Andy Kempe (Emeritus Professor of Drama, Reading University), who had just produced 'Common People' at the Control Tower, on how non-speaking aspects could be improved.

If you were one of the 130 people who came to see the production, you will know how wonderful they all were. They are even hoping they can do it again some time! But a young, fit person can do the curtain and the lights next time, not me.

This year's Halloween Event

Ros Clow

Late October (27th, 28th and 29th) we are working with City Arts to create a multi-sensual experience. Tickets are on sale at £10 each for families to enjoy something new and exciting.



Participants will begin at City Arts where several different craft activities will be available: decorating a Day of the Dead Skull, making a key ring. They will be gathered together by the Great Memergiser (aka Steve Wallis, aka Charlie Jessett in 20CC) who will give them instructions to walk from City Arts to the top gate (south) of the cemetery via three alleys. Guided along they will encounter three Wise Women: Maiden, Mother and Crone, who will give them information and tokens to take on their journey.

Here we will take over as guides (in fancy dress provided by the Watermill Costume store). They will walk along the south path past the Hopsons and the Doltons and turn left to follow the west walk, past the monkey puzzle tree, the Copas graves, the Toomer grave, Rev William Wilson and Sarah Packer.

At Henry Godwin's grave they will be delivered to the Great Memergiser. What a surprise! He will perform a memergising ceremony, collect their tokens, listen to the clues they have collected. Then he will know who has been memergised tonight. He will point to their grave where their name can be read and then their ghost will appear in the mists in front of the Chapel. (We have a smoke machine!).

The ghost will thank them and announce they must go off to meet their friends or family and exit towards the Lodge. The group approach the Chapel where they are offered a glass of spiced apple juice.

Meanwhile the Great Memergiser hastens back to City Arts to brief the next group. That's all there is to it!

Please can you help? As a guide or a ghost or handling refreshments in the Chapel, three times each night.

Or bring along friends or family: Tickets from:

<https://cityartsnewbury.org/2023/08/12/samhain-at-city-arts/>

Subscription Reminder

Paul Shave



Thank you for continuing to be a Friend. We depend on Friends' donations to keep us going and it's time to renew your subscription. The annual membership form for renewal is on the website. [Click here](#) for the link.

If you're not currently using a standing order for your payments, we would appreciate it if you could - it makes it easier for you and the Treasurer as you don't have to do anything each year. A standing order form is on the website. You can download it by [clicking here](#). Subscriptions are due on 1st October.

If you have received the paper version of this Newsletter, the forms are included.

We currently have 88 Friends.

An Annual Family Gathering

Paul Thompson

Every summer, members of a very extensive family gather together in a place of family significance to meet relatives and hear about all the latest developments in the research of our joint ancestry.

The group is of course the John & Frances West Family Group, and they have a close association with Newbury, as many of John & Frances' relatives come from this area, including Gabriel Cox (1572-1638), a mayor of Newbury, who was Frances' grandfather.

In 2014, the annual gathering took place in Newbury at St. Nicolas Church, and the Friends had a stand in the church hall to help visitors find where their Newbury relatives were laid to rest, which was very well received.



This year was the first annual gathering since Covid, as well as the 300th anniversary of John West's death. It took place at Christ's Hospital School in Horsham, West Sussex; a place where the West charity provides bursaries for members of their extended family to attend a school where they could be properly educated well beyond the means of their parents.



The day started with a welcome from the committee and was followed by a thanksgiving service in the beautiful chapel.

In the cloister, there is a plaque to the Wests that was erected in 1995. A wreath was laid by a former West Gift pupil (who laid the first wreath in 1995), and the newest pupil to receive the gift, who had only arrived at the school a week earlier.



Lunch followed for the students. They gathered outside and marched in house groups into the dining hall to the sound of the school band, which was a spectacular sight for us visitors.

The big news of the event was some research that has been done that links Lady Mary Choke (1576-1635), the wife of the aforementioned Gabriel Cox all the way back to the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne (742 – 814 AD).

Five different trees were presented, all of which took different bloodlines, some through royalty including William the Conqueror, others through the noble houses of Europe, that all lead back to Charlemagne.

This wonderful piece of research, means it is almost certain that among the residents in our humble cemetery, are some that descend from Kings and Holy Emperors!

I wonder which ones they are!

[Author's note: I'm only related to the royal lines by marriage and not direct descent, so there's no royal blood in me... yet!]

Dates for the diary

Tuesday 3 rd October 7:30pm	St Francis de Sales Parish Hall, Warren Road, Wash Common, Newbury RG14 6NH	Annual General Meeting A short business meeting followed by 'real' coffee and cake and our speaker is Dave Stubbs.
27 th , 28 th and 29 th October Sessions at 4:30, 5:30 and 6:30 – £10 per person	City Arts Newbury 10 Hampton Road, Newbury, RG14 6DB	See Hallowe'en article in this newsletter for information and tickets.
Saturday 11 th November 11am	Newtown Road Cemetery	Commonwealth Graves Tour Commemorating those buried or remembered in our cemetery who fell in battle

Harold Sydney Freeman

Doug Larsen

There have been many discoveries during monument recording sessions, but not all as bizarre as the monument to Private Harold Sydney Freeman.

He was wounded on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in WW1, but after many attempts at treatment at the front, the injuries were so bad that he had to be sent home for treatment in a service hospital.

Eventually he returned home to Newbury to recover but was eventually overcome by his injuries.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission decided to erect a standard CWG monument in recognition of the severe suffering undergone by Private Freeman.



The only problem was that they placed the monument on the wrong grave; It was placed in a Freeman family group of monuments, but they were the wrong family. At that time there were many branches of the Freeman family, and the CWG had chosen the wrong one.

This all came to light during a search of the Cemetery when we went to place poppy crosses on Commonwealth War graves, and we could not find his monument.

After much to and fro, in which we tried to persuade the CWG that they had made a mistake, they eventually conceded their error.

Private Freeman had been buried with his mother and father in a family grave under a monument that the family had provided. The CWGC corrected the error and moved their monument to where it properly belonged.

In fairness to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, such mistakes were bound to happen in the frenzy to acknowledge well over 800,000 British Servicemen who died in World War One.

Moth survey for Mid-Summer evening 2023

Celia Pay

On Friday 23rd June 2023 three moth traps (2 mercury vapour and 1 actinic tube) were operated from dusk until dawn down the middle of the cemetery by Paul Black.

A respectable 56 species of macro-moth were found and were listed. The night was warm and still with partial cloud cover.

At the close of the Mid-Summer evening event the moths were duly released. An Obscure Wainscot was trapped, it is normally found in reed bed habitat. Its main food plant is the Common Reed.

Also found was a 'True Lovers Knot' moth, a heather feeder, whose nearest colony is possibly Snelsmore Common.

The numbers trapped is very much weather dependent.



'True Lover's Knot' moth
© Pete Withers
<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>

New Cemetery Calendar

Lynette Edwell

The Friends of Newtown Road Cemetery are producing a calendar for 2024 which features a range of wildlife in the cemetery. It is in full colour with a picture page for each month of the year and the photographs were all taken by group member Andy Cantwell. It will cost £10 and will be on sale shortly.

