



Monthly News from the Cemetery Friends of Spital Cemetery (FoSC) May 2018

April review

Grave cleaning

Phil and Frank were in the cemetery on Monday 16th April cleaning all the commonwealth war graves. It was a quick wash and brush as they look after a total of 18K graves around the country. Their last visit here was in September 2014 but normally they come on an 18 month cycle. The majority of the stones are in Hopton Wood stone but there are a few in Portland and a couple in Woodkirk and one in Botticino, and five (see photo on right) which are private family gravestones. It does not help that many are under trees, but they are all standing straight (like soldiers standing to attention they said) and that the inscriptions, although somewhat worn on some, were still legible from 5m distance so will not be replaced. The view about restoration has changed over the years and now it is felt that graves which are 100 years old should show some of the signs of age. If you are interested please look out for our war graves walks which we will be organising later in the year.



Anzac Day

It was an early start on 25th April but we still welcomed 20 people in front of the chapels in Spital Cemetery at 5am and Australian Barry Telfer, who later sounded his bugle in front of the town hall, greeted dawn from Spital cemetery. It was a moving occasion and Ed Fordham our Vice Chair expressed our feelings beautifully with these words,



"At this hour, on this day, 104 years ago, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, at Gallipoli, made immortal the name of Anzac and established an imperishable tradition of selfless service, of devotion to duty, and of fighting for all that is best in human relationships.

We who are gathered here today in this dawn vigil remember with gratitude the men and women who have given, and are still giving, in our Armed and Supporting Services, all that is theirs to give, in order that the world may be a nobler place in which to live.

And with them, we remember those left behind to bear the sorrow of their loss.

Let us therefore dedicate ourselves to taking up the burdens of the fallen and, with the same high courage and steadfastness with which they went into battle, set our hands to the tasks they left unfinished. Let us dedicate ourselves to the service of the ideals for which they died. Let us, give our utmost to make the world what they would have wished it to be, a better and happier place for all of its people, through whatever means are open to us."

Ed read out the names of the 42 service men and one woman buried here in commonwealth war graves, who had returned injured or sick and a further 24 who died abroad and are buried there or remembered on memorials overseas but are also remembered here in Spital on family graves. The final name was of an Anzac we will claim as one of our own. John Gascoyne who is Reader at St. Leonard's Mission and has long supported the Friends of Spital Cemetery, told us about his great uncle, "Thomas Jepson Gascoyne was an ANZAC, killed 4th April 1917, Passchendale. Named on the Menin Gate. Rank Corporal service number 4715. Born in Whittington and emigrated to Melbourne, Australia early 1900's. He was a famous sprint cyclist in Australia World record for 25 miles in 57 minutes."

We welcomed members of The British Legion, the Chesterfield branch of the Western Front Association and Councillor Steve Brunt who is leading the council's 2018 World War One commemorations working group. Thanks also to Cllr Shirley Niblock and some very dedicated Friends and neighbours for turning up. Photos courtesy of Stuart Church.

The events in town later in the day were captured on video and reported in the Derbyshire Times <https://www.derbyshiretimes.co.uk/news/pictures-video-anzac-day-commemorated-in-chesterfield-1-9133686>

A tourist attraction and walking

Victorian Garden Cemeteries, like Spital, were set up because the church and the state were no longer able to provide the space to bury the dead. These new cemeteries were intended as tourist attractions, as beautiful places for the bereaved to mourn but also where visitors would be 'improved' by reading epitaphs, admiring the art of the memorials and escaping the noise and pollution of town. We tend to forget that Chesterfield was the centre of Industrial England until a short time ago. Marjorie Thompson, a wonderful 92 year old we know, remembered visiting her grandfather, Richard Holmes who was the superintendent of the cemetery and was living in the Lodge House in the 1930s. She said her mother brought them to stay in Spital at the weekends and in the holidays because the air was much better than in Brampton with all the factories.

May is National Walking Month <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/>. Spital Cemetery is only a short 10-15 minutes walk from either the Market Square or from the railway station. Look out for our walk on Tuesday 15th during the Chesterfield Walking Festival <http://www.chesterfieldwalkingfestival.co.uk/> or join Margaret on her monthly general cemetery tour, usually on the second Sunday of the month. Details below.

Liz's recommendation: slate gravestone

During the stone carving and symbolism tour last month one of the participants, Simon, pointed out that the Wragg grave on Elm Way, near the beech tree, is made of slate. It is now over 130 years old but the lettering and carving of a beautiful weeping willow branch (symbol borrowed from Ancient Greece, associated with the underworld and associated with grief and mourning) is still

sharp and clear. So, I've started looking more closely at the materials used in the gravestones and monument. Some stones may be easier to carve but wear more quickly. I found another slate headstone with this beautiful carving of a vase of flowers just before you get to nurse Fletcher's grave.



May dates for your diary

- 12th May task team. 10-12.30 We will be clearing the grass from the raised bed at the top entrance and sowing wildflower seeds. All help needed, all tools supplied. Just turn up with a drink (coffee in a flask) and a smile, outside the chapels at 10am.
- 13th May monthly general cemetery tour 1-2pm meet at the bottom gate
- 15th May Chesterfield walking festival walk no 21. Join Liz on a round tour that will take us from Elder Yard and the Spire out to Spital Cemetery before returning via a giant snail and the train station. Book on the Chesterfield Walking Festival website <http://www.chesterfieldwalkingfestival.co.uk/>

