

FRIENDS OF THE PARISH OF THE ASCENSION BURIAL GROUND NEWSLETTER



Richard Hall

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2022 ARE NOW DUE

Rates: £10 individuals (£5 concessions); £15 households; £25 corporate. Please send to James Clackson c/o Jesus College, Cambridge CB5 8BL. *It would be a great help to our Treasurer if you could set up a standing order (Barclays Bank, sort code 20-17-35, account no. 23322874)*

DATES FOR 2022

Working parties are on Saturdays 10am to noon.

12 February, 12 March, 9 April, 14 May, 11 June, 9 July, 13 August, 10 September, 8 October,
12 November, 10 December

There is no work party in January

To find out more about the Friends, become a member, or update your details, please email the Secretary of the Friends, jptcl@cam.ac.uk or write c/o Jesus College, Cambridge CB5 8BL

Officers of the Friends 2021

President & Newsletter: Alison Taylor

Secretary & Treasurer: James Clackson

The Varied Plots of the Ascension Burial Ground

Alison Taylor

The Ascension Burial Ground is divided into plots for graves that teach us a lot about Cambridge society, the gravestones often emphasising academic achievements and professional positions, omitting normal pious thoughts and minimising even family remembrance. This is most notable in Plot 4. The plots were intended to be laid out in rows parallel to the central path and would normally be filled in order, but from the beginning it is clear that individual choices generally subverted this plan.



Plot 1, the first graves on your right as you enter the Burial Ground was the last area to be laid out in the original cemetery, with the earliest burial in 1910.

It has several small white marble grave-stones for babies around the Chapel, many thought to belong to Americans based at Basingbourn in the 1950s, with a maternity hospital at Wimpole. One records the infant son of Elizabeth and Thomas Bierie, who died in 1957: the father served in the USAF in WW2, and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and his name is inscribed on the US Vietnam War memorial in Washington DC. Graves for academics include James Frazer, best known for his 50-year work on the new discipline of Anthropology, publishing 12 volumes, the basis for *The Golden Bough*, which is still in print and as an e-book. Other academics include Zachary Brooke, Professor of Medieval History who worked in intelligence 1916-1919 and John Cockcroft, leading atomic physicist and first Master of Churchill College. There are also 3 members of the Heffer (bookshop) family commemorated by bronze plaques on a wooden cross, and nearby is John Clay, University Printer.

Mavis Kemp was testing planes for the RAF when she was shot down in 1944. The east boundary hedge of this 20th century extension is deciduous and therefore light levels are good and early spring flowers thrive. Snowdrops, violets, hellebores, daffodils and primroses give a good display and we therefore cut vegetation in early winter so the flowers have space to grow. A late summer cut makes graves visible and accessible again, and cyclamen enjoy the leaf mould and partial shade in autumn.



Plot 2 is the path around the original cemetery, lined with evergreen trees, mostly English and Irish yew, now some 150 years old and giving a sombre and shady aspect as recommended by JC Loudon (1843) for a Victorian cemetery. The graves along this prestigious route tend to be on a grand scale and belong to notable individuals. These include fine Celtic crosses for the academic MacAlister family, a handsome stone for Charles Darwin's son Horace, with his wife Ida (a renowned worker in mental health) and son Erasmus who was killed at Ypres, and a rather weathered traditional gravestone shared by the illustrious Ramsey family. Arthur Benson, Master of Magdalene and author of *Land of hope and glory*, has a massive block of marble to himself. Close by and often overgrown except when snowdrops flower, is the kerb stone for Alfred Marshall, founder of the modern study of Economics.

Muslim burials include the sarcophagus of Raja Bohd Baqir Khan from Chakwal India, and Jomed Ullah and Suna Meah from Ranjnagar Sylhet in East Pakistan.



At the southern end of Plot 2 there are traditional graves of the 20th century, such as the cross for the poet Fredegond Shove and economist husband Gerald (they left a bequest for upkeep of their grave, providing a red rose be always grown there), and in the later 20th century cremated remains were marked by elegant plaques set in the wall.

The shade of mature yews protects graves on the east and west sides still, and gives a suitably serious atmosphere but does not encourage flowering plants. The north end had mature sycamores which were cut down when new housing was built over the boundary. These were replaced with weeping silver limes and, more recently, infant Irish yews, which will flourish later this century.

The unshaded corner near Benson's grave is a mass of snowdrops and daffodils in season.

Plot 3, St Peter's Plot, near the Chapel on the west side, was for residents of the impoverished parish of St Peter's, Castle Street. There is a splendid mix of gravestones and individuals here, including military graves, college servants, a few academics and poignant memorials for children. There are some decorative gravestones, and unusual ones, such as an iron Celtic crucifix for Emma Anable. Several graves here are subsiding, creating a more than usually uneven surface in addition to ant hills and badger holes, so vegetation is difficult to cut or even walk through, but it is a sunny area, which benefits later summer flowers and butterflies.

This year we made the mistake of cutting it too early, which probably caused a drop in the usual butterfly numbers, and we must ensure we adjust the programme in 2022.



Plot 4, immediately north of Plot 3, has a massive roll-call of academics, with Fellows, Professors and Masters of Colleges clearly defined. These include Charlotte Scott who was a star Mathematics student in 1880, a sensation at this time, Richard Jebb (Professor of Greek), Alfred Newton (Ornithologist, Fellow of Magdalene), Walter Skeat (lecturer in Mathematics but became the first Professor of Anglo-Saxon, best known for place-name studies), Robert Ball, (Royal Astronomer at Cambridge), Henry Gwatkin (Professor of Ecclesiastical History, St John's, but best known for his study of snail shells), Frederick Blackman (plant physiologist, St John's), and Charles Wood (Professor of Music and organist at Caius). The one who is best known locally is Arthur Eddington (Professor of Astronomy and Director of the University Observatory, Trinity).

Most of this plot is sunny throughout the year, with spring and summer flower displays, so mowing needs to be quite late in the year and thorough raking is essential.

Plot 5, running the length of the east side of the path is heavily shaded, mostly with an avenue of yew, with some Scots pine, cypress and holly on both sides, so wild flowers are limited. However there is attractive planting on recent graves, often tended by relatives. The north end is mostly visited for Ludwig Wittgenstein, the world famous philosopher who died in Storey's Way. His is a plain flat grave that is constantly decorated with minor offerings. A path has been worn to this grave. Near the central path, lies Agnes Bell Collier, who became the Vice Principal of Newnham College and a close friend of Charlotte Scott (Plot 4).



Plot 6 was not used until 1951. Burials here are laid out in straight lines and kerbs are uncommon, making mowing easier. Recent burials at the north end include elegant and original designs and are well tended. People buried here include a range of Cambridge professionals. Lucy Slater, an early computer scientist who, as a retirement project, mapped and listed the whole cemetery in the 1990s, is buried here with her parents. It would have been her hundredth birthday in 2022.

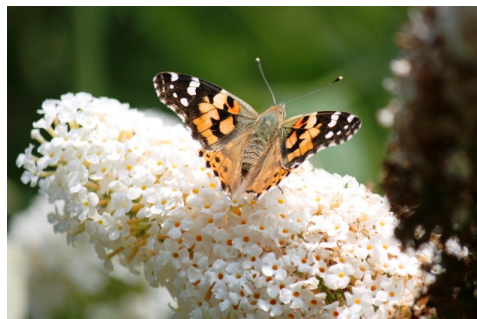
The western side of this plot was bounded in contemporary style with a beech hedge but has grown into mature trees, a stunning sight in autumn. This is another sunny site where summer flowers are encouraged (although we aim to cut cow parsley before it seeds too prolifically), with a cutting regime in late summer and early winter. This allows butterflies to thrive, and insects and amphibians are being recorded. At the far northern end is an area for burial of ashes.

Butterflies and Dragonflies of the Burial Ground

Liz and Richard Hall

This year we have seen 14 different species of butterfly. Regrettably we have not seen Skippers or Commas, butterflies we have seen regularly over the years. This could be down to change in management of the Burial Ground, which is to be fine-tuned for next year. The highlights for us this year were the number of Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers (over 50 of each) and also our first sighting of a Painted Lady at the site.

Brimstone	Large White
Small White	Green-veined White
Orange-tip	Holly Blue
Red Admiral	Small Tortoiseshell
Peacock	Speckled Wood
Gatekeeper	Meadow Brown
Painted Lady	



Painted Lady on white buddleia

In the past the Burial Ground also had a number of Dragonflies and Damselflies, often seen basking on the headstones. Regrettably this year we only observed a few Common Darter Dragonflies and Common Blue Damselflies. Again this could be due to changes in habitat.

President's Piece

Alison Taylor

In some ways 2021 was a disappointing year, as Covid halted aspirations for public tours, talks, educational visits and generally raising our profile, while further austerity for the City Council meant we lost the grounds men who had helped trim the plots, and sign-posting and interpretation boards could not be arranged. However, our Friends and volunteers organised by the City Council enabled our core responsibilities to be addressed: almost all gravestones are visible and legible, unless very worn, and vegetation has been cut and raked twice (never enough for tidy-minded visitors but good for wildlife).

Mark Goldie has made much progress on his updating of *A Cambridge Necropolis*, which he has vastly expanded into a whole book on the Ascension Burial Ground and the surrounding academic quarter, and this should be ready for printing next year.

A number of surveys of wildlife in the cemetery are underway and we look forward to results in 2022.