

Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard

Review of 2017

Introduction

The Friends have been in operation for 5 years and, in that time, have transformed the 2-acre site from an overgrown and unloved space to one of which the church and community can be proud. It is now, as our mission statement says, “a sanctuary for both the living and the dead”. We have received very positive comments from both our neighbours and relatives visiting family graves. It is now an area which is respectful of those buried in the churchyard.

Standing on Wakefield Road, it is now possible to look through to the back of the churchyard.

Highlights of the year

Concert

Once again, the concert featuring Aidan, Juliet, Rob, John, musicians and the Northowram Singers was a great success. The audience of 250 or more thoroughly enjoyed what is now a community event. The profit is our main source of income and generates enough for us to continue to restore and maintain the churchyard. Thanks are due to all concerned especially John Brooke and Angela Monaghan for their superb organisation.



Poet in Residence

We have welcomed Bob Horne as our poet in residence and several of his poems, specially written for us, are published on our website.

Heritage Lottery Fund

The two-year project came to an end in March and was celebrated in June in the presence of the Mayor & Mayoress of Calderdale, the Lord Mayor of Bradford and our Archdeacon. Over that period, we have been able to:

- completely clear the entire churchyard of brambles, rose bay willow herb and the like
- cut back too large saplings
- buy heavy duty grass cutting machinery (this has also included funding through our Council)
- clear every grave memorial, photograph and catalogue them
- develop the website which includes a virtual tour, drone fly-by videos, information about our work and a searchable database of all 11,500 burials since 1680.
- create a hard-standing footpath from one gate to another on Till Carr Lane and produce (with the help of Calderdale Council) walkable paths around the churchyard
- erect noticeboards, 3 information boards and 6 QR posts giving more detailed information
- restore a number of fallen memorials including all associated with WW1, a former Mayor of Bradford and a few in key sites
- install 3 larch benches alongside the paths in a rustic style



The Tower owned by Friends of Friendless Churches (FoFC)

The Tower door architrave had rotted with time and was replaced in matching, correctly lime treated hardwood. [We were sorry to hear that the joiner who did the specialist work – Les Fielden – died prematurely soon after the work was completed.] We are grateful to Friends of Friendless Churches for funding the work. We then painted the door and, so far, no graffiti has appeared.

We were allowed into the Tower and were able to photograph the memorials that had been removed from the old church for safe keeping. The photographs and research will appear on our website.

Matthew Saunders, Director of FoFC, is retiring and we wish him well. He has been a good friend to our group and, without his efforts, there would be no Tower.

The memorials have told stories of those buried under the old church. These include Rev Rich Sutcliffe the curate when the old church was built, John Walker who died on his honeymoon in Naples and his sister Ann Walker, friend of Anne Lister. We also have a collection of photographs of the old church in 1960 and then the sad ones showing the vandalism in the 1970s just before it was demolished. These are shown on the website.

Research

Research into the back stories of some of those buried in the churchyard has been continued by Dorothy & Ian. The resulting biographies are published on the website under People of Interest. During the year articles have appeared in the parish magazine and a couple of talks have been given.

Dorothy has created pen portraits of those who died in WW1 in the centenary of their death and these have been displayed on the Till Carr Lane noticeboard. These centenaries and other news items have been posted on our Facebook and Twitter pages.

Wildlife and Conservation

Update for 2017 – Green Team Report

The churchyard has never been treated with pesticides or herbicides, unlike most of the surrounding fields. This makes it very special, and one of the reasons it is a haven for wildlife.

We are pleased to report that there has been no need to undertake any special work in the Churchyard in respect of environment and wildlife. The boundary ropes for the areas left to go wild have been repaired and tightened. This makes them less likely to be damaged, and for strimming in the surrounding area to be safer and easier.

The roped-off areas, which were allowed to stay wild to encourage insects, butterflies and moths, seem to be effective and the clear demarcation from the surrounding mown area works in practice. We will continue to control, by physical measures, any dominant and unruly plants to maintain as much biodiversity as possible in the Churchyard.

We continue to have our monthly work-parties on the third Sunday of each month, with the exception of December. There continues to be generally a good turnout, which seems almost inversely proportional to how bad the weather is!

We continue with our Bat Watch in May, organised by Calderdale Countryside Service, which always brings in new people and is useful publicity for the efforts that have been made.

In view of the fact that we are at the end of our initial 5-year management plan, it was thought an appropriate time for a follow-up wildlife survey. Halifax Scientific Society have been contacted and the response has been positive. They have no-one currently able to carry out the survey but anticipate recruiting someone soon.

I will end this report with my usual thanks to members of the committee and other volunteers for all the cheerful help they have given over the year.

Alan Greenwood, Green Team Co-ordinator



The display of **spring flowers** last year was wonderful and unexpected. Obviously, daffodils, primula and snowdrops had been flowering but we couldn't see them! The signs are already there of another good spring.

The **new burial ground** has been completely cleared and is being maintained. Many relatives come to remember those buried in more recent times.

Working methods

We have a regular working party on the afternoon of the third Sunday of the month with an average attendance of around 8. The tasks undertaken include clearing litter and removing dead branches, pruning, tidying around graves and general mowing. Occasionally we have volunteers from local companies making a contribution to the community.

The bulk of the work done during the growing season is undertaken by Carl Petch on a paid basis. It is a tribute to Carl that he is also a very regular volunteer at the working parties.

Most of the machine maintenance is done by our volunteers which keeps running costs down.

The future

Wildflowers

We have not had a lot of success so this year, in addition to sowing in prepared ground, we are bringing some flowers on as plugs over winter and spring. The ground is probably and understandably too rich for some varieties to prosper. We have also to bear in mind the ease of cutting so cannot broadcast seed everywhere.

Storage

Unfortunately, the blower house alongside the parish church has been condemned and a new place of secure storage on or close to the churchyard will need to be found and paid for. We are considering buying a steel sea container and locating it on land owned by Lightcliffe Cricket Club. The cost is likely to be around £1500 for purchase & delivery. We will have to insure the container and contents, and this is likely to add about £200 to our annual costs. In return we will sponsor an annual cricket match for the Club.

Trees

We will need to inspect some trees which may need thinning out where there is evidence that headstones will be disturbed and become unsafe. The PCC is responsible for the big trees around the boundary and is investigating one which is undermining the boundary wall.

Litter & dog mess

Litter is not a major problem and is mainly found alongside the boundary with Wakefield Road. The majority of dog walkers are responsible but there are a few who allow their dogs to run freely and don't pick up.

Treasurer's Report

The Heritage Lottery Fund signed us off as having satisfied all their requirements. We have £3800 in our account & in cash. The surplus from our fund-raising concert was approximately £1500.

Stuart Crowther has resigned as Treasurer because of pressure of work, family & study. We are very grateful for his work over the past 3 years especially during the HLF period. Now the lottery project is finished, the accounting will be simpler, and we are looking for a new volunteer.

Acknowledgements

- Calderdale Council for their ongoing work at the front of the churchyard and its co-operation during the year with its officers especially Chris Sutcliffe, Dave Clay & Mark Spencer
- The PCC with whom we work in partnership
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Chris Green for the large-scale mowing in the new part of the churchyard.
- Matt Thornfield for help with the web site
- Yorkshire Building Society for providing us with 2 volunteers for a day
- and all our volunteers.

Ian Philp, Chair of FOSMC

Dorothy Barker, Secretary & Publicity Officer

Our website is www.lightcliffchurchyard.org.uk