

FRIENDS OF ST MATTHEW'S CHURCHYARD ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Introduction

At last year's AGM we had just submitted our bid for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund and were waiting for a decision. Personally I was not hopeful of success first time round so when the email came in March headed "congratulations" we were all delighted. It meant that our ambitious 5-year plan became a realistic 2-year plan. What we report in the next sections indicates how much progress we have made in a year. I am very grateful for the support of the Friends' Committee and our regular volunteers.

Ian Philp

Chair of The FOSMC



Background

The Friends of St. Matthew's Churchyard, Lightcliffe (FOSMC) was set up in 2012:

- 1.a) For the sympathetic restoration, conservation and maintenance, for the public benefit, of St. Matthew's Churchyard, Lightcliffe; and
- 1.b) To ensure the churchyard is cared for in a way which makes it:
 - a place in keeping with the function of burials, with an atmosphere of respect and commemoration for the departed;
 - a pleasant, attractive place for all visitors;
 - a haven for wildlife; and
 - a place that values and protects the local heritage.

The churchyard is owned by St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe, which is located further up Wakefield Road. The tower, all that remains of the Old Church of St. Matthew, built in 1774, was saved by The Friends of Friendless Churches in 1974 when the rest of the church was demolished.

The FOSMC is a volunteer-run, community organisation. Membership is open to any individual or group who supports the aims of the group. At the end of 2015 we had 48 members. A voluntary committee is responsible for the running and management of the FOSMC. The following members were elected or appointed to the Committee at the 2015 AGM:

- Chair – Ian Philp
- Secretary – Angela Monaghan
- Treasurer – Stuart Crowther
- Green Team Coordinator – Alan Greenwood
- General Committee Members – John Brooke, Mike Wood, Stuart Crowther
- Ex Officio Member – Revd. Kathryn Buck

In 2013, we developed a 5-year management plan that set out what we planned to do over the next few years to achieve our aims. Since then, we have been working to deliver that plan.

Churchyard Improvements During 2015

- Much of the middle part of the churchyard has been cleared for the first time in some considerable time with broad paths created and maintained. We have a small contract with the Council to cut these and we have widened them further. Using part of the Heritage Lottery Fund we have cleared many of the memorials sufficiently to take photographs.

- 8 memorials, including 6 from WW1, have been restored under a contract with the Council cemetery team and a further 10 fallen headstones are to be “flipped” so that the inscriptions can be read.



- As this is being written a footpath connecting the 2 entrances on Till Carr Lane is being made 1.8m wide with a surface that is suitable for wheelchair access.

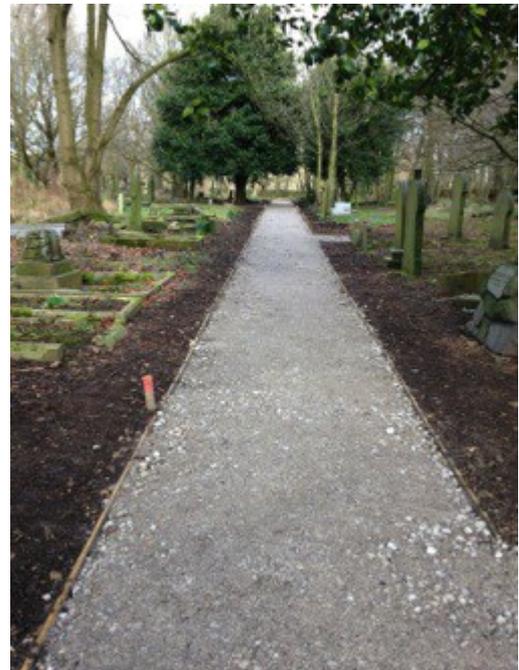
- A large noticeboard is being installed near the entrance on Wakefield Road to carry notices for church, the Friends and other community groups.

- Our new website is now available on www.lightcliffchurchyard.org.uk and will be updated further.

- One of the Friends has been doing research on soldiers who died in WW1 and their families and these will be made available on the website.

- Part of the boundary wall has been repaired.

- The new burial area has been tidied up in a joint venture between The Friends and the Parish Council.



Environmental Progress – Green Team Report

The churchyard is a special place in many ways. As far as we know it has never been treated with pesticides or herbicides, unlike most of the surrounding fields. This makes it very special, and is one of the reasons it is a haven for wildlife. It is our continuing policy to control brambles and invasive weeds by physical removal only. Any contribution is always helpful, however little.

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We have worked to maintain a 'wild component' by roping off some areas of the churchyard where there are fewer headstones. Improving the variety of habitat increases what is called 'biodiversity', or the number of species, and promotes a more complex ecological system, of both plants and animals. There are currently three areas that have been roped off. We try to reduce substantially such invasive plants as brambles, allowing other 'weeds' such as nettles and rosebay willow herb to provide a home to many insects, butterflies and moths. We do have a continuing problem with uncontrolled growth of certain weeds particularly rosebay willowherb outside these specifically roped off areas. Our efforts so far to control this in the central sections have been only partially successful at best, but we will persevere.

One possibility that was mooted was the use of grazing livestock e.g. goats. This followed a visit by two members of the committee to Calverley Churchyard to meet their volunteers. They have successfully kept the undergrowth under control by fencing off a certain part and grazing sheep and goats. This strategy is still under consideration.

The signs that explain the various features to encourage wildlife have survived the weather since they were put in place last summer at the Open Churchyard Event. Calderdale Countryside Service, who brought a number of children from their wildlife group, supported this event. Our thanks, as ever, go to Chris Sutcliffe, Area Countryside Officer for Calderdale Countryside Service, for his help and encouragement.

We installed a 'Bug Hotel' during the year. This is surrounded by rotting tree trunks, which provides both shelter for insects and food for the animals that feeds on insects. There is evidence that the lower section has been used by hibernating hedgehogs.

Our volunteer 'Green Team' work parties continue on the third Sunday of each month, excluding December. The work done here makes a real difference and more volunteers are always welcome. Please do not feel put off if you are not physically able to do much; any contribution is always helpful.

During 2016, we plan to:

- continue to clear the churchyard at regular work parties;
- monitor the areas that have been allowed to 'go wild' for species present, both flora and fauna;
- encourage local school students to become involved in the work on the environment in the churchyard;
- install interpretation boards on environmental and biodiversity aspects of the site;
- explore further the ways we can more effectively control undergrowth in areas where we need to; and
- hold further wildlife events, including a Bat Watch on Tuesday 24th May at 21:00.

