**AGM Report Review of the past year 2012/13**

**\* Working Parties - Wildlife Garden - wildflower meadow. Completion of Section B - to landscape, war graves**

**During the last year the FODC have met most Saturdays each fortnight  as well as the regular weekly Thursday small group under the leadership of Mik Walsh.  Mik has provided the Friends with a more focused working party plan and produced working party schedules to support existing work completed.  The Nature/Wildlife Garden was officially opened and the area blossomed with wild flowers in the summer and drew many wonderful comments about the labour of love in completing and sustaining this fabulous feature.  Section B was completed thanks to extra funds and the support of BwD Council,Darwen Town Council/Crown Awards and Darwen Archaeology Society.  This area needs landscaping and seeding to bring it back to its former beauty.  This means that within two years the Friends have completed the re-erection of both sections C and B and completed much renovation of the sites.  The many visitors have commented on the outstanding work completed and we must thank all concerned with this outstanding achievement.   The management team are now looking at completing section E with an application to Awards for All.**

**The War Grave adoption scheme and the restoration of some old family war graves is complete.  Diane Davies has managed this programme with the Friend volunteers. They have had the adoption groups updated and with the help of Steve Lomas from CWGC placed CWGC plaques on both the entrances to the cemeteries.  Each war grave is logged and researched and will be developed to find out more detail of each casualty.  This we hope will tie in with the Heritage Lottery Bid and give young people, historians and family researchers an insight into the 90 plus servicemen and women that are buried and will given them a perpetual remembrance process.**

**We shortly enter our next phase;- the the Heritage Lottery Bid to find a fitting way of commemorating the start of the First World War.**

**Schools and agencies are now coming together to look at the ideas and consultations made with agencies and the public to ask their views.**

**\* Working with other organisations/agencies. Your Call etc.**

**The Friends have worked with many agencies to support volunteers and we thank especially the students from Darwen Vale, DACA, Groundwork, Probation Payback and Youth Offending team in offering support.**

**The Friends are especially thankful to the BwD'You Call' team - providing vehicles to remove debris and foliage.  During the winter much damage was done to paths and trees and we thank BwD for support in removal of branches and fallen trees and repair.**

**We acknowledge the support during the year of BwD Director, Sayeed Osman’’s team, of Tony Watson, Margaret Keighley, Adrian Harper, Neil Oxley and the Gravedigging team.  It's been uplifting to see other Cemetery groups set up and we were asked to help set up the Friends of Blackburn Old Cemetery.  Susan Smith as a Friend has tirelessly lobbied for the cemetery to be acknowledged and registered with English Heritage and we have met with BwD Heritage Officer to respond to the English Heritage's report to BwD. Special thanks to the support of Brent Stevenson and staff for outstanding services and donations to the FODC – Brent has demonstrated his commitment to the Cemetery and his advice is greatly appreciated.**

**\* Fundraising to support all FODC work**

**Jill Marr heads our funding team with the Friends. We have been supported by many local donations and grants from Crown/DTC Awards, Lloyd Trust, And Civic Society.  We are working towards an Awards for All Grant and the Heritage Lottery Grant.  Jill and her team have secured some smaller grants and along with the Friends Treasurer, Diane Walsh we can claim Gift Aid as a recognised Registered Charity with the Charity Commission. Can I appeal to you to support our Gift Aid programme by making a small gift aid donation?  Envelopes are available from Diane.**

**\* Events - Jubilee Strawberry Tea, Bat Walk, Heritage Weekend**

**The Friends held a Strawberry Tea with support from BwD 'Your Call'. The very popular children's Bat Walk was held. In September we hosted a Heritage Weekend for local family research and tours of the cemetery.  These events have certainly increased the visitors to the cemetery over the year.  We do have concern over public paths on health and safety grounds and have discussed with BwD staff the potential of repairing potholes and roads around the cemetery.**

**\*Service to the public e.g. Grave Maintenance Scheme launch, Christmas wreaths, finding graves - enquiries from all around the country/world**

**During the year we launched the Grave Maintenance scheme after approval of BwD - who are delighted to support us. The scheme is in its early stages and one or two have been started.  We do have a waiting list and copies of the scheme are available to members of the public and relatives who wish to take up the scheme.  All the fees go back into the Friends programme.  Anne Lamont sold Christmas Wreaths to add to her curb laying talent.  We now have several inquiries into finding family graves and work closely with BwD Cemetery Office.   We now receive inquires from far and wide and because of our well set out Web Site receive many requests from all over the UK and the world.  Many visitors having seen material on the web site come along and visit. We have received visitors from USA in April and look forward to visitors from New Zealand in July and Canada in November, gentleman who through our web site, wants to research female war graves in Darwen.**

**\* School visits started**

**This summer will launch our school visits programme.  Over the last year we have received visits from local primary schools and decided to develop these into a more curriculum focused programme, Friend volunteers will tour the cemetery with groups to support the interest.  Many High Schools still require tours to support Humanities and volunteering activities.  Diane Davies and Helen Thomas will support these visit with school resource sheets and materials that will help children understand the various aspects of the history and nature to be found.**

**\* Research - Remembrance Day- Heritage Weekend, heritage walk, digitising registers, researching War Memorials and WW1.**

**Last November over 150 children and young people from 13 schools attended our Remembrance Day Service and local Scouts from two groups attended the Sunday morning Remembrance Day Service.  They then placed crosses on each grave with various VIP's. - a very moving and poignant time.   We will hold another Heritage Weekend in September to support Family Researchers and several Heritage Walks are being planned.   We still have three booklets available for heritage walks around the cemetery.   We continue to update the cemetery registers and we thank all the Friends' volunteers who help. We are now into the 1900's having completed 50 years.  Hopefully these will be available for family researchers in the future.   We continue to develop our relations with the  CWGC in supporting more details of local War Graves information and this will be an ongoing research activity. The remains from Redearth Road were buried in the New Cemetery and Friends laid a wreath.  The War Memorial plaque from Redearth Road is being restored and plans are in hand to find a suitable place for this near the Cross of Sacrifice.**

**\*Web site - continues to gain many HITS and its use for various groups has proved very helpful.  Thanks to continued IT support from Paul Dargen.**

**\* Final thanks.    It’s been another outstanding year - the FODC have yet again proved to the community - just what can be achieved with determination, vision and sheer hard work.  To everyone MANY THANKS and we look forward to an exciting 2014.  Especial thanks to our guest tonight and visitors - I hope you have been inspired.**

**Presented by Chairman FODC John East at the AGM on Wed. 24th April 2013.**