Friends of Darwen Cemetery

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 4 May 2016
at 7.00 pm at the Central United Reformed Church

*Members present: John East, Ineke Bateman, Colin Briggs, John Clemens, Roy Cox, Paul Dargan, Tony Foster, Jamie Haddow, Anne Lamont Jill Marr, Ann Stokes, Lynda van Dijk, Peter van Dijk, Diane Walsh, Kath Walsh, Mick Walsh.*

*Non-members present: C Heys, Harold Heys, P Hancock, E Grecic, E Eastham, O Bauer, Leni Whittle, Alec Stuttard, Karimeh Foster*

*Speaker: Dominic Butler*

**1. Welcome by our Chairman, John East.**

**2. Apologies:** Steve Davies, Brent Stevenson, Diane Davies, Rosemary Jackson, David Foster.

**3. Minutes of last AGM** These were circulated at the start of the meeting. Move that they be accepted was proposed by Mick Walsh and seconded by Jill Marr.

**4. Matters Arising**
 None.

**5. Chairman’s Report** by John East

The sixth year of the FODC has been yet again a busy and yet frustrating year. Lots of success stories from the new refurbished gates and wild life garden path thanks to The Lloyd Trust and DTC/Crown Awards.

The working parties of Saturday and Thursday contributing many hundreds or man hours of voluntary labour working to our project – report by Mick Walsh later. The Grave maintenance Scheme is holding its own with a small number of volunteers.

The CWGC adopted war grave scheme – every one of the 90 + graves adopted by local groups and individuals and the annual service of remembrance - detailed report later.

The frustration of our Heritage Lottery Bid being rejected and then encouraged by the HLB to re submit with some amendments and alterations – we hope to demonstrate both value for money and a total commitment by our local community – from the Lord Lieutenant to local schools – a meaningful structure and the guided tours of the graves and the history of the sacrifice of local men and woman during the WW1 – we think we have an amazing structure planned and tale to tell in perpetuity - to honour over 1300 local casualties from Darwen – although we thought we may have started this September we may have to wait patiently for a result from the HLB.

We were saddened at the sudden death of Joan Briggs, a loyal member of the working parties – we acknowledge her contribution in our vision to restore the cemetery and the valued contribution she gave with grace, good humour and encouragement to all.

Thank you all from local donations to the immense service that our management and trustees have given over the year in whatever role.

We plead to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to work with us in our task to restore, conserve and reclaim our Cemeteries heritage – we thank especially Brent Stevenson for his generous support and the BwD Your Call team.

The team has its vision for the future – one last plea that other volunteers come forward and join us. My final remarks, as it’s the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare’s death, are these!

 “Let's talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth,
Let's choose executors and talk of wills”
― [William Shakespeare](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/947.William_Shakespeare), [Richard II](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1946935)

Bleste be the man that spares thes stones. And curst be he who moves my bones

Words on Shakespeare’s grave in Holy Trinity church, Stratford

**6. Adoption of Annual Report**
 proposed by Colin Briggs, seconded by Roy Cox.

**7. Presentation of Annual Accounts** (year to 31 December 2015) by Treasurer, Diane Walsh.
(audited by A Tracey on 19.4.2016)
 Income for the year £8590, including £5200 awarded by the Lloyd Trust and the Leach Trust, which paid the £5190 needed for the repairs and resurfacing of the Nature Garden paths and £2000 from Crown Paints Community Awards which went towards repairs and repainting of the Lark Street gates.
 Expenditure for the year £10717, including £3589 for the Lark Street gates.
 Deficit for the period £2127.
 Cash balance at 31/12/15 was £4834.

 A detailed income and expenditure account is attached to these minutes below.

**8. Adoption of accounts**
 The accounts were adopted – proposed by Paul Dargan, seconded by Kath Walsh.

**9. Appointment of Auditor**
 Susan Tracey was appointed auditor again – proposed by Jill Marr, seconded by Mick Walsh.

**10. Grounds Activity Report** by Mick Walsh
 Mick described another busy year for our volunteers and a number of projects involving skilled work from contractors. In summary:

Our volunteers contributed 2328 working hours during 2015, and another 696 hours so far in 2016.

Highlights from our volunteers’ efforts have included the completion of the renovation of Burial Section D1 together with its edges and gutters, removal of a bramble thicket in Section H, clearance of decayed trees along the edge of Section 5, topping the rhododendrons across from Prickly Corner, and restoration of the derelict area in the Southeast corner of the cemetery.

With the help of various contractors and professionals, the path to and within the Nature Garden has been completely renovated, the Ashes Garden has been improved with the introduction of granite infill panels, the Lark Street gates have been repaired and repainted, and the Belgian’s grave has been repaired.

Much ongoing ‘gardening’ effort is required in the care and maintenance of restored features, namely the five planted areas, the various hedges, trees and bushes, and the path edges and drains.

Thanks are due to all our volunteers for their cheerful contributions, the Cemetery staff for their assistance, and the Your Call team for taking away large volumes of the rhododendron and other waste we have generated.

Mick’s full report is attached below.

**11. War graves report** by Diane Davies

 Diane was unable to attend the AGM. Her report is inserted here:

**War Graves**

CWGC cleaned our graves in Sept last year 2015, following a phone call from an adoptee. They have now cleaned them 4 times in 15 months. In general, CWGC graves are only cleaned once in 3 years so think we are doing well.

All war graves adopted.

No one on the waiting list at present

**Centenary Flags**

Flags now on 13 graves as they pass their 100 year resting in the cemetery.  12 more due before Christmas 2016 .

**Remembrance Services**

Friday - 107 Children attended from 12 schools

Positive feedback re new updated service with modern tunes.

Sunday - 70 members of the public.

**Heritage Display**

The public display re the war graves has been at

Ashleigh School in May 2015,

Darwen Vale in June 2015

DACA in July 2015

**12. Election of Trustees**

 The ten current trustees are willing to stand again – they are John East (chair), Steve Davies (president), Diane Walsh (treasurer), Diane Davies, Mick Walsh, Jill Marr, Paul Dargan, Tony Foster, Colin Briggs and Peter van Dijk (secretary).

According to our constitution, we are allowed up to twelve trustees. Roy Cox is willing to join us as a new trustee.

John Clemens proposed that these eleven people should be elected as trustees. Seconded by Kath Walsh. Passed unanimously.

**13. Statement about the Heritage Lottery Fund application** by our President, Col Steve Davies, read by John East.

**AGM – HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND APPLICATION SITUATION STATEMENT**

The Trustees recently submitted the bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for financial support for the World War 1 project. Existing supporters include the myriad designers, architects, engineers and project managers who have given their time and efforts without charge; Brent Stevenson who has built the granite interpretative panels with design input from local schools; others who have pledged cash support; and of course the Trustees themselves who have pulled together an imaginative interpretation and activity programme to complement the reflective structure to be built in the Cemetery. After considerable deliberation, however, the Heritage Lottery Fund have now responded, informing us that the bid failed.

The Fund’s appointed bid manager has, however, provided us with practical feedback on the areas of weakness in our application and has invited the Trustees to re-apply. Two areas raised were concerns about the ability of the Trustees to effectively manage the construction. We are backed up by an accomplished project team so we believe we can satisfy this concern. Another comment concerned the perceived view that the activity levels were insufficient as a proportion of the size of bid requested. Other observations will also need to be addressed. The Trustees have discussed the response from the HLF, taking advice from Helen Ashby OBE who assisted with the writing of the application. Helen is very experienced in this area and has been at the helm of many successful HLF applications. She has also had to deal with initial rejection but has always re-applied successfully. Given the invitation to re-apply, and the Trustees’ firm view that this project deserves to succeed, we had no hesitation in deciding that we would indeed re-submit the application. A letter has gone to the HLF to this effect and the next step will be a formal meeting to discuss the way ahead and next steps.

It is clear that the structure will not be completed this year, but we have until 2018 to ensure that it happens within the timeframe of the National World War 1 commemorative period. Our ambition, though, is to deliver it in 2017. In the meantime, we intend to gather even greater support for the project, and to get existing supporters to refresh their commitment. Please help us in this respect by getting friends, families, business and social contacts, and others to express their belief that this project will be good for Darwen and a fitting tribute to those from our town who gave their lives so that we might live in peace and prosperity.

**PRESIDENT - STEVE DAVIES MBE**

John then asked for questions. Jamie Haddow asked whether any of the funds we were asking for would be used to restore the Cemetery. In reply, John said that part of the project was to make it safer and easier to visit the 99 war graves, and this would involve re-erecting headstones of neighbouring graves. Roy Cox said it was noticeable that many people were now restoring their own family graves, and the Cemetery was being used more. John thanked Jill for all her efforts.

**14. Any Other Business**

Karimeh Foster wished to thank the Friends for all their hard work in making the Cemetery so much more attractive.

On behalf of the town, Harold Heys wished to thank Mick Walsh, in his final year as working party leader and co-ordinator, for the splendid way he has led his volunteers in achieving so much.

The formal meeting was then closed.

This was followed by very interesting and informative talk about the Lancashire Lads on the Somme by Dominic Butler, the Assistant Curator at Lancashire Infantry Museum. He gave us the context of the battle, the dreadful death toll on the first day, and the changes in tactics as the battle went on, all illustrated with relevant pictures and maps.

Tony Foster proposed a vote of thanks to Dominic, a man who clearly knows his subject.

2016 A.G.M. GROUNDS ACTIVITY REPORT

By Mick Walsh

We will start with the numbers.

Over the course of 2015 our volunteers contributed a total of 2328 working hours.

This equals almost one and a half full-time staff throughout the year.

This year, so far, we have recorded 696 working hours over a total of 23 sessions, in 7 structured Saturday working parties, and 16 informal Thursday sessions.

Thanks to Jill’s efforts, we have obtained funding to enable us to commission two special projects.

The path to and within the Nature Garden has been graded, consolidated and given a new tarmacadam surface.

The Lark St. entrance gates have been sandblasted, repaired, painted and re-hung after straightening and re-fixing the leaning, displaced and loose stone gate pillars.

Also, from F.O.D.C. funds, we have commissioned the repair of “The Belgian Grave” on Section B and arranged for the installation of granite infill panels between the commemorative wedge plinths in the Ashes Garden.

We have also received practical assistance from a number of other sources.

Simon Thornley provided two loads of wood chip mulch and the loan of tools to handle this for use on the flower beds in the Ashes Garden and Prickly Corner.

The Blackburn with Darwen Council tree team provided a further load of wood chip for application to the Heather bed.

Steve Moss and Rebecca Witcombe of the Your Call team have greatly supported us on several occasions by providing transport and assistance for the removal of large volumes of rhododendron and other waste from site.

The cemetery staff have assisted and supported us in many ways throughout the period

Our own efforts have been directed to a number of restoration and development projects throughout the year.

The restoration of the small Burial Section D1 has been completed with all existing grave structures levelled, repaired and re-fixed, the edging and gutter bordering the section has been reset and missing components replaced and the plot has been levelled and reseeded.

Invading trees, shrubs and brambles have been removed or cut back and treated to prevent regrowth from many individual grave plots within the “New” area of the cemetery and an extensive, impenetrable bramble thicket has been cleared from the south east portion of Section H, revealing many graves which have never previously been seen during our time on the site.

The area extending along the southern edge of Section 5, to the boundary between the “Old” and “New” sections of the site has seen the removal of many large decayed trees and encroaching rhododendrons and the clearance and restoration of this extensive site is now well advanced.

The rhododendron “hedge”, opposite Prickly Corner, on the south edge of Sections 1A & 6 has been heavily cut back and topped and one large, outlying bush completely removed to restore access to many adjacent grave plots.

During work to clear and re-activate gutters and drains at the South East corner of the site it became apparent that this area had been used as a dumping ground, and also that large volumes of silt had been washed down onto the pathway from higher up the site, raising the level of the path surface by several inches. We decided to restore this area.

Dumping on the area between the path and the Eastern boundary wall had substantially raised the level above that of the path and this material was in danger of eroding back onto the path itself. Initial work to clear and level this area had revealed significant quantities of potential building stone. This stone was therefore used to construct a dry retaining wall along the Eastern edge of the lowest path section, and to construct a silt trap beside Section J to intercept further eroding material.

The wall is finished; landscaping and some planting of the recovered area is now almost complete and the removal of accumulated silt from the lower section of the path is progressing well.

Our continuing Grave Maintenance Scheme is serviced on four working parties throughout the year, when a total of 15 grave plots are weeded and generally tidied.

Much of our volunteers’ efforts are now directed towards the continuing maintenance of the increasing number of restored areas and features.

We now have 5 major formally planted areas (the Ashes & Nature Gardens, the Heather Bed, Prickly Corner and the planted areas associated with the Cross of Sacrifice and the Redearth Rd & Park Rd. memorials.). There are several rhododendron and privet hedges and many pollarded or reshaped trees and shrubs all of which require regular “gardening” care throughout the growing season.

 Many sections of path edges and drains have been restored but these still require frequent attention and clearing due to blockage caused both by fallen leaves and branches and silt washed down from the higher levels after heavy rains.

In conclusion I would like to end my final annual report as your site and volunteer co-ordinator by expressing my thanks and admiration to all our volunteers who give cheerfully of their time and efforts, often in challenging weather conditions and beset by the eccentricities of my direction. Without your continued support and commitment, the works described and shown this evening could not have been achieved.