**Friends of Darwen Cemetery**

**AGM Working Party Report**

**26th April 2017**

This report summarises the work carried out by the volunteers during 2016 and the plans for 2017.

I would formally like to thank Mick Walsh, for the last 12 months and for his continued support and guidance throughout the coming months. I would also like to thank the volunteers for all their hard work and perseverance through all weathers.

**2016 SUMMARY**

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| Saturdays | 809 hours |
| Thursdays | 1456 hours |
| Total | 2265 hours |
| Costed at National Heritage Lottery rates | £19,215 equivalent |

**2016 DETAILS**

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, along with the further cutting back of the eastern boundary hedge, revealing many graves which have not 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 and also 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. It was therefore decided to restore and upgrade this area.

Initial work to clear and level this area 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 and weir beside Section J to intercept further eroding material. The several inches thickness of silt which had accumulated in the lower sections of the path were removed to restore the original surface and gutters and re-open the existing drains. This material was used to repair eroded sections further up the path.

The area between the new retaining wall and the eastern boundary has been cleared of weeds, levelled and planted as an informal flower bed.

Work has continued on a number of long term projects with further path edges and drains cleared, the base of the canopies of most of the larger conifer trees affecting grave plots have been raised to give access, basal suckers have been removed from additional lime trees within the site and fallen, storm damaged trees and limbs have been removed/made safe as required.

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

Graves included in our Grave Maintenance Scheme have been serviced on four occasions during the year

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.

**2017 PLAN**

During 2017 we will be holding 25 formal public working parties on the following dates:-

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 14th January 2017 | 28th January 2017 | 11th February 2017 | 25th February 2017 | 11th March 2017 |
| 25th March 2017 | 8th April 2017 | 22nd April 2017 | 6th May 2017 | 20th May 2017 |
| 3rd June 2017 | 17th June 2017 | 1st July 2017 | 15th July 2017 | 29th July 2017 |
| 12th August 2017 | 26th August 2017 | 9th September 2017 | 23rd September 2017 | 7th October 2017 |
| 21st October 2017 | 4th November 2017 | 18th November 2017 | 2nd December 2017 | 16th December 2017 |

As in previous years the formal working parties will continue to be complemented by weekly informal Thursday morning working parties, which commenced on the 19th January 2017.

All working parties will run from 10.00am till 1.00 pm unless, by exception, extended hours are required for specific tasks.

In addition to the regular Friends working parties we may host volunteer sessions for outside groups from industry, schools and other community and charitable groups. The aim of these sessions is to provide a complete experience with an identifiable end result. The assistance of volunteers who are able to provide hours during the working week will be required to facilitate these events.

**Maintenance –**

Regular, recurring jobs which can be planned and approximately scheduled well in advance.

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| Commonwealth War Graves  Grave Maintenance Scheme  Special Gardens, (Ashes, Nature, Prickly corner),  Cross of sacrifice, and War memorials  Paths and Roads  Trees  Privet Hedges –  Sections 1 and 1a, boundary wall south of South Lodge.  Heather Bed  Himalayan Balsam  Japanese Knotweed | Access routes kept clear and obstructing growth removed from adjacent areas.  Maintenance will be carried out at four dedicated working parties during the year, 8th April, 1st July, 23rd September & 16th December.  In view of our other commitments, we will not actively promote this scheme but will consider new requests for inclusion on an individual basis in the light of the existing work load.  Rhododendron hedges clipped and kept tidy.  Flower beds weeded and replanted as required.  Gravelled areas weeded and raked.  Lawned areas cut and kept tidy.  Gutters and hard areas maintained and cleaned.  Gutters and grates kept clear.  Sucker growth from Lime trees removed.  Rhododendron bushes trimmed  Low hanging branches on confers and hollies removed to expose grave areas  Clipped and shaped.  Weeded and trimmed.  Weed repressant chippings added when available  Pulled up as soon as the plants become large enough to handle.  Ensure growth is not spread to uninfected areas. |

**Restoration –**

Targeted activities intended to bring existing or former features back into acceptable condition.

* Individual jobs which, once completed, will require little or no further input.
* Jobs which involve new planting or other ongoing change and will require adding to the maintenance programme once completed.

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| Rhododendron hedge on section H and behind the cross of sacrifice  Laurel patch on east corner section F  Paths running to nature garden  Boundary wall area section 5  Gutter Section G  Invasive bushes sections E, 2 and A | Continue to reduce the width and height of the large overgrown Rhododendron hedge on section H to uncover grave plots and improve the aesthetics at the main entrance.  Reduce the height of the hedge behind the cross of sacrifice to come in line with the garden hedge at Potters View. This would also make the cross visible from the rest of the cemetery.  Reduce the size of the Laurel bushes within this area to expose specimen trees currently hidden behind. Particular care will have to be taken with the removal and disposal of offcuts due to their poisonous nature.  Continue to promote natural growth on 3 of the paths to prevent erosion and deter vehicular access.  Transplant saplings recovered from other areas within the cemetery to replace fallen trees within this naturalised area.  Continue the restoration of the gutter and edgings opposite section D1  Removal of Brideswort and a rambling rose. May require chemical treatment. |

**Development –**

Changes to aid maintenance or access, improve aesthetic impact, or meet an educational/information requirement.

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| Heather Bed  Site opposite prickly corner | On a rolling programme and when funds permit, replace old plants with new.  This plot was originally occupied by a now demolished site store/workshop and has subsequently been used to deposit miscellaneous waste and grave parts. The area appears to be , at least partially, hard surfaced beneath recent deposits and would provide a useful temporary holding area for bulky materials for use within the “Old” cemetery and an off road assembly point for material awaiting removal from site. This would necessitate opening up the frontage onto the roadway to improve free access and clearing and levelling the ground surface. |

**Special Projects –**

One off stand-alone projects, often with external funding and/or input.

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| WW1 project  Stone steps and small boundary wall section G  Investigation of C of E chapel mound | This major project is still in the planning and development phase with a funding bid in progress. This project will be the main focus for the year should the bid be successful.  The steps in the northern slope which were usable 50 years ago have collapsed and become dangerous and partially hidden in the grass. With the expertise of Mick Walsh we could look to reconstruct these steps and possibly create a small retaining wall at the base of the grass slope using material on site.  Investigate the possibility of exploring the archaeology of this site. |

Although not the responsibility of the Friends, the clearance of the rubbish piled on the site of the former Roman Catholic chapel needs to be considered. The accumulated rubbish not only attracts fly tippers but is unsightly and detracts from the aesthetics of section D where the single commonwealth war grave of Private Farley is located. The use of mechanical equipment will be essential and therefore the assistance of the council or a private contractor will be required.