**FODC Chairman’s Report 2019**

I am delighted to present this report of the Friends activities in 2018. Two years ago, our then Chairman, John East, marvelled on the transformation that had taken place in the cemetery since the group had been established. I can only echo his comments.

A vast amount of work has taken place in the Cemetery during 2018 and this can be easily seen by anyone walking through the cemetery. In the first half of the year a considerable amount of time was taken up with the construction of the war memorial. Through Stevenson Memorials, Malcom Whitaker commences working on the structure on 4th January. He worked through some horrendous weather to ensure the memorial was constructed in time, we owe him and Brent are grateful thanks. At one stage the memorial was just a breezeblock wall until Mick Walsh and Darwen Terracotta produced the excellent wickerwork effect. It was our President, Col Steve Davies who suggested that the unveiling should take place on 1st July and at times it was touch and go whether we would meet this deadline but we did. This was achieved my excellent teamwork so we need to thank everyone concerned. We need to thank Peter van Dijk for organising everyone on the day and Paul Dargan for masterminding the parking arrangements. We also need to thanks our sponsors – The WM & BM Lloyd Trust, The John Frederick Leach Trust, Crown Paint – Community Awards, Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund, Darwen Town Council, Darwen Terracotta and Stevenson Memorials. Our thanks also go to our President for organising the impressive guest list and to the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire for unveiling the memorial.

The General Data Protection Regulations became operational in May. Following a review our procedures and policies we can report that we fully comply the regulations.

During the year there was a possibility that contaminated slit from Whitehall Park could have been dumped in the cemetery. Fortunately, we have prevented this from happening.

Diane Davies continues to coordinate the War Grave Adoption scheme and the Act of Remembrance services. The service this year fell on the very day, 100 years ago, that the armistice was signed 100 years ago. As a result, the two services were very well attended.

Paul Dargan continues to coordinate the Grave Maintenance Scheme which has resulted in more graves being added to workload.

The Friends’ working parties continue meeting each Thursday and alternative Saturdays and their work is carefully planned and recorded by Jill Marr. Jill will be reporting more fully on the work that has taken place.

We keep campaigning for dog owner to use the pop bags and bins provided.  We are pleased to report the signs have now been erected at each on the entrances reminding dog walkers of their responsibilities.

At the commencement of the report I mentioned the war memorial and it was after the unveiling that John East stepped down as Chairman and I was appointed to replace him. John is proving to be a hard act to follow. It was through his efforts to improve the cemetery that the Friends of Darwen Cemetery group was established. John went on to recruit many of the volunteers. John, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all your hard work. I am pleased to report that he continues to be one of our trustees. One of John’s early wishes was to research all the war dead in the cemetery. We have achieved this for those who lost their lives during the Great War – copies of the book are still available.

In order that we continue John’s work we need volunteers so we appeal to Darwen residents to come along and help. Helping does not always mean working in the cemetery but we need people with admin and other skills. So, come along and help.

Finally, I would like to thanks everyone connected with the Friend of Darwen Cemetery, those who support our work in one way or another and we look forward to another successful year.

--

  Tony Foster