**Minutes**

**Friends of Darwen Cemetery
AGM
at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 29 June 2022***to be held at Darwen Heritage Centre*

Present:

Members: Tony Foster, Peter van Dijk, Lynda van Dijk, Graham Ardis, Diane Walsh, Jim Taylor, Mick Walsh, Kath Walsh, Ineke Bateman, Jamie Haddow, Glenda Brindle.
Visitor: Doris Moulden

Welcome and opening remarks by our Chairman, Tony Foster

**Business of the Annual General Meeting**

1. Apologies: Paul Dargan, Jill Marr, Hanneke van Dijk, Brent Stevenson, John East, Alan Walton, Ronnie Haslam, Sammy McCusker, Anne Lamont.
2. Minutes of previous AGM: Approved
3. Matters arising: None
4. Presentation of the Chair’s Annual Report for 2021.

Tony said thank you to all the volunteers for all they do to improve the appearance of the Cemetery, especially to Anne Lamont whose sterling efforts on Section 2 show what the Cemetery should look like.

Thanks also to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for agreeing to provide headstones for the graves of Squire Haworth and John Farnhill.

Diane Davies’s modest assertion that she couldn’t run the annual Remembrance Service for Schools without the help of the other Trustees was put to the test in 2021, when ill-health meant that she couldn’t run the service at all. Happily, her detailed guide lines enabled the remainder of the Trustees to run a successful event.

At that Remembrance Service, we dedicated a bench to Richard Westhead, the veteran who planted poppy crosses on all the War Graves in the Cemetery for many years. That task has now been taken over by local school children, under our guidance.

We have again helped local people to “find a family grave”, a free service which has yielded a few donations to our funds.

In the summer months, we get complaints from the public over the height of the uncut grass. The responsibility for grass cutting lies with the local council, not with us.

As our regular volunteers get older. we need younger volunteers to ensure that our work can continue in the long term. There is no indication that the local council is likely to direct more resources in the direction of the Cemetery.
5. Presentation of Accounts for 2021.

Diane Walsh presented the Accounts for 2021.

We generated income of £3106 during the year. Nearly half of this (£1517) came from payments for grave make overs and subscriptions to the grave maintenance scheme. Thanks to Paul Dargan for supervising the scheme and to Alan Walton for work on restoring graves. Donations from Anne Lamont’s wreaths raised £290. Other donations raised £1280. These came from Darwen Town Council (£250 towards the bench), the Lloyds Trust (£250 towards the new lawn mower), the Shuttleworth family (£500 in remembrance of Richard Westhead), and sundry other donations.

Our total expenditure was £3293. Tools and machinery (purchasing and servicing) cost £524. A new lawn mower cost us £250. Insurance was £696. We spent £900 on re-erecting headstones and £500 on the Richard Westhead bench. Materials for grave maintenance cost £214. The remainder was spent on Remembrance Day poppies and wreaths, Website costs, printing, postage and stationery, and other sundry expenses.

Our cash and bank balances fell slightly over the year from £5450 to £5263.
6. Adoption of Accounts – proposed by Mick Walsh, seconded by Glenda Brindle, passed unanimously.
7. Appointment of Auditors - John Painter will perform this duty again, with our thanks.
8. Report on Working Parties

Graham Ardis presented Jill Marr’s report.

In 2021, the Covid pandemic restrictions meant that there were no working parties before March. Thereafter, there were 20 fortnightly Saturday sessions, comprising 596 volunteer hours. The weekly Thursday group accumulated 1134 hours of effort in 38 sessions. This yielded a total of 1730 hours, equivalent to £23700 worth of unpaid labour.

The volunteers maintained the traditional areas we have been looking after since the group was established in 2010: the Nature Garden, the Ashes Memorial Garden, Prickly Corner, the Heather Beds, the WW1 Memorial, the Cross of Sacrifice, the Walled Garden and the Ashton Memorial.

We trimmed trees and shrubs, repaired road edges and drains, dealt with invasive plants and fallen trees, trimmed hedges, and removed and dealt with the subsequent waste. These tasks have helped to keep the site attractive and safe for visitors.

Four Saturday sessions were dedicated to the Grave Maintenance Scheme, which looks after about 35 graves on a quarterly basis. These events are now marked by a get together with drinks and cakes as a thank you to our volunteers. Particular thanks are due to Alan Walton for getting graves ready to join the scheme.

To ensure social distancing during the Covid restrictions, volunteers adopted individual sections to work on. This has resulted in special attention being given to Sections A, K, G, 2 and 5a.

The agreement between the Council and the Good Friends Group for the cutting of the grass was terminated after 2020. In 2021, the Council resumed direct responsibility and promised to cut the whole site at least twice a year. The grass was kept to a reasonable length, for which our thanks go to Sammy McCusker and her staff, with whom we had a good relationship throughout the year.

Plans for 2022 have to take account of the fact that volunteer numbers are falling and average age is rising. The proposal is to concentrate effort on the areas we traditionally cared for, rather than trying to maintain the whole site. Keeping the Cemetery clear of Himalayan Balsam remains a priority.

However, we do intend to restore those parts of Section G nearest the WW1 Memorial wall to make it safer for people attending events such as the Remembrance Services. We have already cleared vegetation covering the graves and now intend to re-erect headstones and reinstate kerbs.

Discussion of Jill’s report highlighted the current problem in sections where the grass has not yet been cut this year. The grass is very high and dense so that it impossible to see a safe way through. It was felt to be disrespectful that it is too dangerous for the public to get to family graves. Surely, the Council has a duty of care towards the public. Tony Foster undertook to raise the matter at the next Darwen Town Council meeting in a bid to get a message back to Blackburn with Darwen Council.

Glenda Brindle said she was getting positive responses from local schools about this year’s Remembrance Services, so she welcomed the work on improving Section G nearest the WW1 Memorial.

1. Election of Trustees

Diane Davies has resigned as Trustee. We thank her for all her contributions over the last 12 years, in particular for being our leading organizer for Remembrance Services, War Graves and Schools Liaison.

The remaining ten retiring Trustees are standing again – they are Tony Foster (chair), Steve Davies (president), Glenda Brindle (secretary), John East, Diane Walsh (treasurer), Mick Walsh, Jill Marr, Paul Dargan, Peter van Dijk and Graham Ardis.

Jim Taylor proposed that all ten be re-elected, seconded by Kath Walsh. Passed unanimously.

New Trustees can bring new ideas to our deliberations. According to our constitution, we are allowed up to twelve trustees. We would welcome nominations for fresh Trustees.

1. Any other business

Graham Ardis will attend First Aid training to be given by the Red Cross or St John Ambulance, the cost to be covered by FODC.

The Trustees will endeavour to find ways to attract younger people to volunteer and to keep them involved for more than a couple of weeks. People with an interest in Wildlife or the Environment could be targeted. Maybe, using social media could be a way of reaching them.