**Minutes**

**Friends of Darwen Cemetery AGM   
at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 28 June 2023**

*at Darwen Heritage Centre*

**Present**:

Members: John East, Lynda van Dijk, Peter van Dijk, Jill Marr, Diane Walsh, Jim Taylor, Graham Ardis, Paul Dargan, Ineke Bateman, Anne Lamont.

Guests: Jason Price, Melissa Dubrowski, Patricia Dubrowski

**Welcome and opening remarks** by John East on behalf of our Chairman, Tony Foster,.

**Talk by Jason Price**.

Jason described how he worked to make mowing easier and access safer by sinking headstones into the ground and by burying kerbstones within the grave. He gave good and comprehensive answers to questions from the floor. John’s thanks were echoed by a round of applause from the audience.

**Business of the Annual General Meeting (**chaired by John East)

1. **Apologies**

Tony Foster, Hanneke van Dijk, Mick Walsh, Kath Walsh, Jamie Haddow.

1. **Minutes of previous AGM.** Approved**.**
2. **Matters arising:** None.
3. **Presentation of the Chair’s Annual Report for 2022** (read by John East)

Tony thanked the volunteers for all their efforts over 2022, and welcomed the new volunteers who have joined us this year. The general public appreciate what we do, but are disappointed by the tardiness with which the Council cut the long grass in the summer. We have invited local councillors to attend our sessions on Thursdays and Saturdays but none came along to see us during 2022.

Tony welcomed the improvements made to Section G enabling safe access for the public attending the Remembrance Services in November; also, the work done by the volunteers on reviving Sections A and H.

The Remembrance Services were well-attended, and the local schools continue to be enthusiastic about the placing poppies on War Graves. Thanks to all who helped.

We have produced a new leaflet for distributing to the public outlining our plans and achievements. We have introduced QR codes so that people with smart phones can learn more about different aspects of the Cemetery during their visits.

Graham Ardis has attended a First Aid course for us. Alan Walton has become our graveyard detective for finding graves and renovating them. Paul Dargan has overseen the Grave Maintenance and War Grave schemes. Anne Lamont has shown by her hard work on Section 2 what a well-maintained cemetery should look like.

Diane Davies and Glenda Brindle have resigned as Trustees because of pressures of other work. We will miss their contributions, especially in liaising with local schools.

Mick Walsh is unable to attend regular working parties because of his medical condition. In the past, he was instrumental in designing and building the stone seat in the Nature Garden, designing the WW1 memorial wall and designing and producing the tiles on the wall. We miss his expertise but are glad that we can still call on him for his advice.

1. **Presentation of Accounts for 2022.**

Diane Walsh presented the accounts.

Income for the year was £2736, derived from Grave Maintenance subscriptions and charges (£1571), donations for wreaths (£190), a contribution of £600 from Stevenson Memorials towards raising headstones, and £375 from sundry donations.

Expenditure was £3711, of which £2640 was for raising fallen headstones, mostly on Section G. Other expenditure items included £255 on materials for grave revivals, £183 on tools and maintenance and £167 for the first aid course. The remainder went on Remembrance Day costs, website costs, insurance and other sundry expenses.

The deficit for the year was £975. Cash and bank balances stood at £4288 on 31/12/2022.

1. **Adoption of Accounts**

Proposed by Graham Ardis, seconded by Paul Dargan, passed unanimously.

1. **Appointment of Auditors**

John Painter, proposed by Graham Ardis, seconded by Jill Marr, passed unanimously.

1. **Report on Working Parties**

Jill Marr presented her annual report on the work done by the volunteers. Her full report will be entered in the archives.

In summary, we had 24 Saturday sessions and 46 Thursday sessions in 2022, during which the volunteers provided 1603 hours of labour, valued at £20651 in equivalent labour costs.

Volunteers continued gardening and maintenance tasks at the formal gardens and memorial areas, including weeding, trimming bushes, cutting grass and sweeping paved areas.

General maintenance was undertaken in other areas, including trimming trees and shrubs, removing balsam and bridewort, clearing path edges, removing suckers from lime trees, clipping hedges and clearing drains and gutters.

Four sessions were devoted to Grave Maintenance, caring for over 35 graves. These sessions ended with coffee and cakes provided by and for volunteers as a way of thanking them for their efforts.

We paid Jason Price to re-erect headstones and bury kerbstones on Section G to make the area safe for people standing there during Remembrance Services. With some help from Jason, we created some steps adjacent to the Richard Westhead bench to allow easy access on to Section G.

Alan Walton repaired grave surrounds on Section 5A, found lots of lost graves following enquiries from the public, and prepared graves to enter the Grave Maintenance Scheme.

Thank you to all our hard-working volunteers.

Our plans for 2023 are to continue formal Saturday morning working parties and informal Thursday morning sessions. We will continue to tend the formal garden and memorial areas, and perform the quarterly Grave Maintenance. A special project has been to tackle Section H.

Section H has been long neglected. It has not been strimmed by the Council for several years. It has become inaccessible and overgrown with rampant brambles, ferns, willow herb and multi-stemmed sycamore. Following complaints from the public, we have spent much effort on many sessions during the early months of 2023 to make the section accessible by clearing the vegetation from around the gravestones. By May, we had cleared 80% of the section. However, because the Council has not yet strimmed the area, the undergrowth has returned with a vengeance during June and the section is now inaccessible again. This is a huge disappointment. A formal complaint to the Council is necessary.

At the end of her presentation, Jill was thanked for all her efforts over the year.

1. **Election of Trustees**

Glenda Brindle has resigned as Trustee. We thank her for her contributions, in particular for liaising with schools and helping with organising Remembrance Services.

We are pleased that Steve Davies has agreed to continue his links with us as Honorary President.

The remaining retiring trustees who are standing again are Tony Foster (chair), John East, Diane Walsh (treasurer), Mick Walsh, Jill Marr, Paul Dargan, Peter van Dijk and Graham Ardis. Their re-election was proposed by Lynda van Dijk, seconded by Jim Taylor, passed unanimously.

We would welcome new trustees to bring new ideas to our deliberations. According to our constitution, we are allowed up to twelve trustees. Please let us know if you would like to become a Trustee.

1. **Any other business**

Paul Dargan said there are seven War Graves needing someone to adopt them, out of the 101 that there are in the Cemetery. He also told us that there will be 38 graves in the Grave Maintenance Scheme up for renewal in September. If they all renew, this will raise £1140.

John East concluded the meeting by stressing the importance of the friendship between the members of the group and the great satisfaction the volunteers derive from being members. He thanked Jill’s family for using their tractor to move the great volume of trimmings we removed from Section H. He also thanked Melissa and Trish Dubrowski for bringing their professional expertise about cemeteries.