

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF
THE FRIENDS OF HIGHGATE CEMETERY TRUST**

Held on Wednesday 30 April 2014 in the Cemetery Chapel

PRESENT: John Shepperd (Chairman), John Caird (Vice-Chairman), Matt Lewis (Finance Trustee), Penny Linnett (Hon Secretary and Minute-taker), Eddie Daley, Brent Elliott, Ian Kelly, Peter Knight, Alastair Martin, Ceridwen Roberts and John Waite (Trustees); Janet Wolf and Margaret Butt; a total of 40 FoHCT members including trustees and protectors

IN ATTENDANCE: Ian Dungavell/Hilary Deeble-Rogers (Highgate Cemetery Ltd)

APOLOGIES: Adam Cooke and the Revd Dr Jonathan Trigg

1. Approval of minutes of the sixteenth Annual General Meeting (2013)

The minutes were agreed and there were no matters arising.

2. To correct the minutes of the fifteenth Annual General Meeting (2012)

The correction of the reference to The Reverend John Fielding was approved.

3. Chairman's report

The Chairman gave his report on the activities at the Cemetery since the last AGM; much of this was covered in the Annual Review which was substantially more informative than in previous years.

Burial sales had remained healthy and were in line with budget – not just with sales to “the great and the good” but also to local residents. Since the year end, the positive trend continues, with sales if anything ahead of budget. He commented that, in a recent email exchange with a grave-owner following a funeral, the family had been most complimentary on how Justin Bickersteth and Victor Herman had handled the arrangements.

There has been a dramatic change in the experience offered to visitors – the open gates, using the chapel, joint tickets; the ability, at weekends, to book for a tour later in the day and payment by credit card; all these have been well received and tours are now full or close to even in mid winter. However these changes were not due to a desire to turn the Cemetery into a theme park – the need for courtesy and respect to grave-owners would remain paramount at all times.

Some 70,000 people visit the Cemetery annually and, with over 200 Trip Advisor reviews, 90% of tours are rated either excellent or very good – testament to the hard work of the volunteers. The new Highgate Cemetery website had over 250,000 hits in the past year.

In terms of the public face of the Cemetery, the Events Committee have arranged some excellent talks – the recent Faraday talk was fascinating, even for non-scientists, and the Douglas Adams talk particularly well attended; more talks are planned.

Thanks are due both to the Events Committee and to Lizzie Wells for editing the newsletter - a highly professional publication and a great credit to the Cemetery.

Behind the scenes, Jean Ettinger and her team continue to progress work on the burial registers database; at trustee level, Matt Lewis has given invaluable help with the accounts and Adam Cooke has provided much legal advice.

Routine administrative work continues apace – a new staff handbook has been prepared and insurance and electrical surveys undertaken; an asbestos survey will shortly take place and a disability audit is planned. A Governance working group has been formed to review the Articles of Association, which govern the way the Cemetery operates, and a trustee away-day has recently been held to consider the longer term issues facing the Cemetery and what the future vision should be.

The North Lodge has been restored for use by the landscape volunteers and the Rossetti/Moon paths have been repaired using an experimental new surface which is weathering well so far. Heritage trees are being identified and prioritised for attention and recent planting of verges has taken place with Alastair Martin planting 1,000 ferns, the purchase of which was financed by the Pateman Memorial Fund – thanks are due to Peter Knight for his work on this fund-raising.

The Pateman Memorial Fund has also funded the acquisition of storage facilities for the archives and work is underway on cataloguing the documents in our records.

Work on monument restoration continues, thanks to Eddie Daley, with 140 restored last year. War graves are the current focus although work on paths and other monuments continue and remedial work to the north wall will also be required.

Most excitingly, the Chapel bell will shortly be restored – it was made in 1837 by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry who have been contacted and are delighted to be involved again; there will be an electronically programmable striking mechanism with a manual override to enable use at specific occasions.

A guidebook, hot off the press, has just been prepared with huge input from Ian Dungavell. With 48 full colour pages and an informative text, it will retail for £5 although all active volunteers will receive a free copy. It is expected that some 5,000 would be sold per annum - the size of the initial print run; it can easily be amended/updated in subsequent print runs so everyone was asked to pass on comments.

Thanks were due both to staff who really do ‘go’ the extra mile and to the commitment of all the volunteers without whom we could not survive and prosper. Two trustees were standing down this year – John Caird and Alastair Martin – who have both made a huge contribution; John has been active for many years and it was his vision to be more welcoming to visitors – the new gates would be thought of as the “Caird” gates. Alastair has provided invaluable landscape expertise and thanks were due to both; they will always be welcome future guests.

4. Financial statements

Matt Lewis presented the financial statements for the year – these had been circulated in summary form to all members before the meeting and full copies are available on both the FoHCT website and on the Charity Commission website.

Income overall was up by 8%; a slight fall in burial income being compensated by a 38% rise in visitor income, which now accounted for nearly 1/3 of all income – showing the key role played by volunteers. Expenditure fell during the year despite the ongoing monument restoration programme (£200,000) – costs in 2011/12 had been inflated by the chapel restoration. Overall there was a surplus of £168,000 before investment gains; the investment portfolio rose by £0.5 million giving year end net assets of £4.1 million, comprised of cash and investments.

Trustees had reviewed the management of the investment portfolio to check on the costs of the advice/quality of service; Newton benchmarked well to comparative fund managers and it had therefore been decided to leave the portfolio with them.

The 2013/14 budget provided for a similar surplus - notwithstanding the continuing monument programme and unbudgeted costs on drainage work as a result of the bad weather this winter, visitor income and burial sales are holding up well.

5. Auditors

Hammonds were re-appointed as auditors and the trustees were authorised to fix their remuneration following a vote which was passed on a show of hands.

6. Election of trustees

The Chairman explained there were three vacancies and three people standing. Ian Kelly and Penny Linnett were due to stand down after serving for three years and offered themselves for re-election. Trustees had identified the need for someone with experience of the burial industry and were delighted that Neil Hollows, already known to many as a volunteer guide and also a funeral arranger with the Co-operative, was standing for election as a trustee. The Board was therefore happy to recommend the election of all three nominees, each of whom addressed the meeting.

7. Protectors' report

This had been circulated in advance of the meeting; there were no questions. The Chairman explained that The Reverend Dr Jonathan Trigg had decided to stand down and that Margaret Butt had come to the end of her term of office but had kindly agreed to offer herself for re-election. Richard Morris, a former trustee with years of experience with the Trust's finances, had agreed to stand as a protector and would be welcome support to Margaret Butt and Janet Wolf.

8. Any other business

Amongst the points raised in discussion were:

- how did last year's visitor numbers compare with the previous year? The Chairman answered that, prior to the introduction of the joint ticket, reliable information wasn't available due to double-counting problems; in future much better numbers would be available;

- what had been the impact of abandoning concessions and should this not have been the subject of wider consultation? The Chairman answered that, in common with many other charities, it was felt that concessions were not compatible with the charity's aims and that this was rightly a decision for the appointed board to take and not Friends. In response to a further question, Ian Dungavell said he had not received correspondence from any visitor disappointed at having to pay the full entry price;
- what had been the cost of repairing the East Cemetery toilets? The Chairman replied that it had been £7,500 to connect up to the Thames Water sewer and £3,000 for repairs within the East Cemetery; it had been hoped that the existing drains would be sufficient (indeed they had been approved by both the architects and Camden Council) but sadly things proved otherwise due to the Cemetery's antiquated drainage system;
- an assurance was sought and given that Remembrance Day 2014 would be appropriately and formally commemorated given the 100 years' anniversary of the outbreak of WW1;
- were any more special tours planned? The Chairman said there would be some this summer and new ideas were always welcome;
- what had actually happened with the wallabies? The Chairman said "they bounced in and they bounced out".

Thanks were expressed to all trustees, volunteers and friends on the immense progress that had been made.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded.