

Friends of Heene Cemetery

Annual report

September 2024

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CHAIRPERSON REPORT 2023/24

In May 2023, we were allowed to re-enter Heene Cemetery, after four months of safety checks and laying down of unstable memorial crosses was completed by Worthing Borough Council.

Sadly, we had missed holding a Spring open day to see many of the spring flowers, and the ivy and bramble had started to establish itself again. Our volunteers set to, working hard to tidy areas, ready for our June open day and tours and the weather was kind to us.



Our first event of the year was a joint celebration with St Botolph's Church, celebrating 150 years since the consecration of Heene Cemetery and the first burial. We had many new visitors who also very much enjoyed our first "Stories in the Street" with Carol Sullivan.

Sadly, a week later, our store bench was raided and we lost many of the reference books and cards our volunteers use to identify the vast number of species we have living in this precious site of biodiversity, we care for.



Our "sing-a-long soiree with Roly's rogues" was postponed from July to early August, due to some very wet and windy weather conditions. It was a great success, and everyone enjoyed a warm sunny evening of entertainment.

Once again, we achieved the Community Green Flag award for 2023/2024, and the dedicated hard work of our volunteers, to achieve this, is greatly appreciated. They have ensured that the following criteria is met.



- A WELCOMING PLACE
- HEALTHY, SAFE AND SECURE
- WELL MAINTAINED AND CLEAN
- ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT
- BIODIVERSITY, LANDSCAPE AND HERITAGE
- COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
- MANAGEMENT/ACHIEVEMENTS

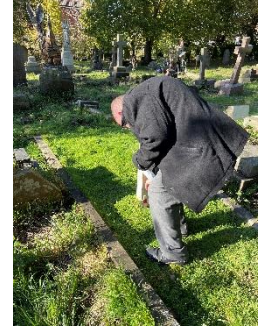
Despite the major understaffing of Worthing Borough Council environmental services, our Park Ranger Anthony, tackled the hard work of strimming all open areas in the cemetery in preparation for the open day. We are very grateful for the support and encouragement we receive from Worthing Borough Council and many other services and groups.



CHAIRPERSON REPORT 2023/24 (cont.)



Our final event of the year, was our annual Remembrance Gathering where the Mayor, Standard Bearers, Bugler and Sarah Nathaniel of CWGC, provided a wonderful short service in memory of our 8 commonwealth war grave burials and 24 family memorials to military members buried abroad.



Throughout the year we had many visitors “dropping in” when the gates are open and we are working there. Everyone is welcome to visit us on a Tuesday or Saturday afternoon between 2pm-4pm.

After advertising with Community Works, we welcomed several new volunteers towards the end of the year, who have taken to helping in many of the roles necessary to make the Friends of Heene Cemetery the success is it today.

Friends of Heene Cemetery are about to grow and build from the foundations laid over the last ten years. The committee have been working hard to produce a new roles document whereby volunteers can share the unseen administration and responsibilities of running a successful group.

Thank you, once again, to all our volunteers and supporters who enable us to continue this valuable and vital work in the centre of an urban area. Sue Standing – Chairperson FoHC

Treasurer's Report April 2023 to April 2024

During the last financial year, the group stayed within budget and our income was greater than our outgoings. This was partly due to the increased membership fees and the low demand on funds from the heritage team. Membership fees now account for 30% of our income.

Maintaining and improving the website was the biggest cost to the group, followed by the purchase of bird seed, and general maintenance materials. Other fixed costs included: insurance, administration and room rental.

We were fortunate to have several donations from friends and supporters and relatives of the buried. Open day events and heritage tours, the sale of items including Rob Tomlinson's greetings cards and talks by Sue Standing brought in very welcome extra cash.

In the next financial year, we have the advantage of having gained at least one substantial grant.

Friends of Heene Bank Balance at 6/4/2024					
Date	Bank Balance	Petty Cash	Total Income	Total Expenditure	Income - Expenditure
06/04/2023	£3,530.59	£32.20	£1,251.73	£1,697.51	-£445.78
06/04/2024	£3,607.15	£77.80	£1,337.49	£1,285.33	£52.16
Income				Expenditure	
Members and Supporters	£418.00			Heritage	£32.00
General Donations tours, open days, soire, gate donations, talks	£762.49			Insurance	£129.72
Sales of cards, jam etc	£140.00			Website - maintenance	£680.16
Bank Interest	£17.00			Website - improvements	£153.33
				Cemetery maintenance	£117.24
				Bird Food	£126.88
				Admin & Misc	£46.00
Total Income	£1,337.49			Total Expenditure	£1,285.33

Pat Brownbill September 2024

Treasurer

FoHC Heritage Report April 2023 to April 2024

The heritage team of Liz Lane, Carol Sullivan, Matt Bury, Jackie Rooney, Maggi Martin, Angela Levy, Sue Standing, Sophie Watts and Pat Brownbill continued the work of identifying and writing about everyone buried in the cemetery. At the end of April 2024 all 1960 burials had something written about them and most had a full life story including details of where they lived, what they did and where they died.

Matt has written blogs on the 'The Crimean War' and 'The East India Company' which have relevance to some of the buried. Pat has produced a breakdown by sector of the occupations of the buried. Carol wrote about the typhoid victims and Sue has given talks about the work of the cemetery to groups including the Goring Gardening Society. Carol, Jackie, Angela and Maggi have taken part in cemetery open days showcasing stories of the buried. Sue worked closely with Sarah Nathaniel to bring to life the war dead at our Remembrance Service.

Sue and Maggi have written heritage articles for the Worthing Journal. Carol has written stories for the bi-monthly magazine "Inside Goring" which have had extensive interest. Since the start of the magazine, 23 stories have been published.

We have our own dedicated 'HeeneCemetery.org.uk' family tree in 'Ancestry'. All our burials have a record in this tree which are each linked to an average of six family members bringing the total number of records to over 14,000. The screenshot below is our Ancestry record for Margaret Harriet McCarthy nee Ronayne.

The screenshot shows the Ancestry profile for Margaret Harriet Ronayne Heene 1829M. The profile includes a portrait of an elderly woman, her name, birth date (15 Feb 1869), birth location (Dungourney, Cork, Ireland), death date (15 Aug 1950), and death location (Palace Court Hotel, Worthing, West Sussex, England). Below the profile are tabs for 'Facts', 'Hints', 'Gallery', 'LifeStory', and 'Explore'. The 'Facts' tab is active, showing a timeline of events from 1869 to 1877. The 'Sources' tab shows various records including the 1911 England Census, 1939 England and Wales Register, and Ancestry Family Trees. The 'Family' tab shows parents (John Ronayne and Bridget Fitzgerald), siblings (Michael John Fitzgerald, Ethel Katharine McCarthy, Herbert Edmund McCarthy, and Muriel Harriet McCarthy), and spouse and children.

Year (AGE)	Event
1869 (AGE)	Birth 15 Feb 1869 • Dungourney, Cork, Ireland 3 sources
1870 1	Birth of sister Cornelia Ronayne (1870-1953) 04 Mar 1870 • Dungourney, Cork, Ireland
1871 2	Birth of brother Edmond Phillip Ronayne (1871-1949) 10 May 1871 • Dungourney, Cork, Ireland
1872 3	Birth of brother John William Ronayne (1872-1952) 1 Jul 1872 • Dungourney, Cork, Ireland
1874 4	Birth of sister Mary Teresa Bridget Ronayne (1874-1935) 01 Jan 1874 • Donickmore, Dungourney, Cork, Ireland
1875 6	Birth of brother Joseph Michael Ronayne (1875-1943) 1 Apr 1875 • Dungourney, Cork, Ireland
1877	

From April 2024 we have started work on finding new information about the burials including photographs, family information and wills. The work on wills is possible because we have been successful in gaining a grant from the Council's Infrastructure Levy. We also have plans to write about notable family members of the buried and to write more blogs including one on Worthing's glasshouse heritage.

Pat Brownbill September 2024

Heritage Advocate

Membership report April 2023 – April 2024

There were 32 members made up of:

- 16 conservation members,
- 8 researchers and
- 8 supporters.

At a glance: species counts / a lichen survey / a delayed Spring / the impact of volatile weather and climate / butterfly and insect population decline / glyphosate / the new website / a Sussex Local Wildlife Sites initiative survey / comparison with rewilding / 'meadowland with graves' or 'a graveyard with trees'?

Species counts

	12 / 2020	12 / 2021	10 / 2022	9 / 2023	9 / 2024
Amphibians	1	1	1	1	1
Arachnids	6	10	16	19	20
Birds	22	36	37	37	38
Butterflies and moths	20	29	46	54	60
Flowering plants	174	184	200	212	221
Fungi	29	31	32	33	82
Insects (other)	32	56	103	155	203
Invertebrates (other)	13	25	25	25	27
Mammals	5	6	6	6	6
Non-flowering-plants	24	24	24	24	24
Reptiles	2	2	2	2	2
Totals	328	404	492	569	684

We continue to benefit hugely from the participation of our skilled and enthusiastic volunteers. In addition, Stuart Ball, an amateur entomologist with excellent photography skills, pops in from time to time. Off-site, we are supported by a network of county recorders (and others), specialists in their field, whose work is co-ordinated by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Center. To all involved, giving freely of their time, the species counting project remains indebted. It remains a collective endeavour; thanks to all who participate.

[You might find the work of the Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery interesting (at <https://fothcp.org/>). Their 27 acre cemetery park – also a wildlife site – had recorded 1,111 species (August 2024 figures). They use a combination of sweep nets, transect surveys, pitfall traps and mist nets.]

Lichen survey

The year since the last AGM started with something of a coup in the form of a visit in October 2023 by the President and Data Officer of the British Lichen Society (from Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum). They added a further 46 species to our survey count (correctly appearing in the fungi row of the table above). The cemetery, they reported, had a reasonable total of lichens for an urban site in a fairly polluted environment. Additionally, headstones do not date back centuries, as in other graveyards, so typical numbers for a 'good' cemetery could be three times higher. They added that we should ensure that good light levels are maintained by discouraging large-scale tree growth – a theme that will recur in this report.



Beehives

After much debate, the beehives were finally removed on 19th April 2024. The first two had been put in place in 2016. A further couple arrived in 2018. Between 100,000 and 200,000 honeybees (approximate high summer numbers) had the cemetery as their base for between six and eight years. It's too soon to know what effect their removal will have on the cemetery's wild pollinator species (anticipated to be a positive one), but we hope that the next six to eight years may reveal this. There are however, larger factors that will influence this, as can be seen below. (By coincidence the first species noted after the removal of the final hive was the small Lathbury's Nomad Bee, which was seen within a metre of where the last hive had stood, a place where few of us had ventured for many years.)



The wettest spring since 1986

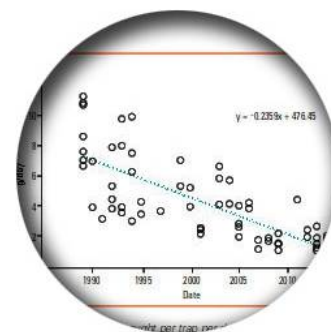
Last year's lock-out by the Council between February and May 2023, which lasted 94 days, meant that volunteers struggled to keep abreast of the growth of the cemetery's vegetation. That struggle has continued into and through 2024, being aggravated by an extraordinary amount of rainfall. Spring 2024 was the wettest since 1986. March, April and May were also the warmest on record, with temperatures being high overnight. The growth of vegetation simply took off. A two-metre tall Water Figwort plant appeared for the first time since it had been noted in August 2018 by Sue Denness of the Sussex Botanical Recording Society. (Interestingly, Professor David Streeter of Sussex University says that these plants grow to a maximum of just one metre. Spring 2024's rainfall had clearly left a mark!)



The cemetery's usual spring flowering was therefore held back this year. When it did emerge in full flush, visitors seemed thrilled with the spectacle, making it something of a local attraction.

Insect decline

The hugely variable weather with its swings from extreme to extreme has undoubtedly impacted butterfly, moth and insect populations. More so than many recent years, anecdotal observation and scientific measurement testify that 2024 has been marked by devastating insect declines. Read widely and you'll encounter these observations globally, not just in Britain. Climate is clearly a driver of this. Bee and hoverfly species in Britain have become 42% less widespread than in 1980. 80% of British butterfly species have declined since the 1970s. Who knows what might have been lost since the cemetery was created from meadowland in 1873?



Insect populations can increase or decrease 100-fold or even 1,000-fold from one generation to another, so one cannot predict how next year will look. What we can say with some certainty is that the value to insects (let alone us and the wider community) of us supporting the cemetery's floral and plant diversity will be immense.

It does not help, of course, that West Sussex sprays our verges, including the patch right outside the cemetery gates, with glyphosate (aka 'Roundup') several times a year. This herbicide, banned by Worthing Borough Council, is thought to be a carcinogen and is known to be neurotoxic to insects. The impact on the town's and the county's environment will be very considerable.



The website (current and new)

All new species records find their way onto the website. Of the 684 records (at the time of writing), all but 27 have been photographed in situ (with the understandable exception of a further 46 lichens).

Since the last AGM, new blog posts have been contributed by Philippa (on roses), John (on lichens) and Rob (on wasps). Members and supporters are invited to contribute to this endeavour.

A new website is currently undergoing a complete rebuild and redesign. This aims to make a better job (than the current website) of presenting all of the work of the Friends (the burials, the species and the blog posts). Species will enjoy a more accessible presentation with users being able to run searches that straddle different species families. For example, trees, which belong to as many as 15 different species families, will be able to be shown together as one of the “often requested groups” (showing 21 different tree species). Other multi-family groups being given this treatment are bees (24 species), beetles (17), crickets and grasshoppers (7), dragonflies and damselflies (5), hoverflies (30), invasive plant species (4), mosses (19), umbellifers (5) and wasps (19). (Numbers valid at the time of writing.)



In a similar fashion, users will also be able to see everything listed and grouped by species families, which will make for quite a compelling presentation.

Launch may be before the end of the year.

The Sussex Local Wildlife Sites initiative survey

You will recall that the Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) designation was awarded to the cemetery in 1992 in recognition of its ‘old meadow’ community, ‘a much threatened habitat’. That designation changed to a Sussex Local Wildlife Site in 2018 and we have for some time been awaiting our first visit to survey and advise us. Dan Watkins of the Sussex LWS initiative made contact and visited the cemetery on 9th July 2024. We shan’t receive the resulting report until next year, but it was confirmed that the cemetery won’t be losing its treasured LWS designation.

Ecologically, Heene Cemetery’s importance is as a slice of countryside in an urban setting. Its meadowland origins contribute to that with the remarkable biodiversity that we see today. Of the 11 plant species listed as being typical of *British NVC community MG5* grassland, Heene has 10. This habitat is uncommon in southern England.



Dan’s take-away advice was that (a) we need to instigate and maintain a variable strimming regime and (b) we need to put a brake on the encroaching trees and their thickening canopies. Failure to manage this long-term will inevitably result in the reduction and perhaps eventual loss of the ‘old meadowland’ character of the cemetery.

Dan thought that our species records showed a comprehensive list that covered a wide variety of taxonomic groups.

Implications for volunteer workers

Retarding the onward march of trees within the cemetery (including thinning branches that overhang from trees on St Michael’s Road) needs to be carried out with some determination. This should also include taking out some of the many small Elm, Goat Willow and Holm Oak trees.

We have on file a 1996 report from the Sussex Wildlife Trust that advocated the removal of Sycamore, Willow and Elm saplings in the centre of the site. It was something that Dan had endorsed when he visited Heene this year. At a Dome Cinema screening in June of the film 'Wilding' about the Knepp Estate's rewilding project, Isabella Tree participated in an on-stage Q&A to a packed house. It was fascinating to hear her say that without their large herbivores (Old English Longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs, and Red and Fallow deer) the Knepp estate would quickly revert to woodland.

At Heene we are not engaged in a rewilding project. We deliberately intervene to leave access to many of the graves and ensure that pathways allow access round the site for volunteers and public alike. Even so, volunteer workers will need to perform the role of Knepp's large herbivores to ensure that the trees don't take over.

In terms of historical sequence, we need to ensure that Heene resembles 'meadowland with graves' rather than 'a graveyard with trees'. Protecting the meadowland character of the cemetery should be one of the top priorities of the volunteer workers.

The future

New members may appreciate the following from last year's environmental report:

As you know, the cemetery was closed in 1977. The Disused Burial (Amendment) Act of 1981 stipulates that a building may be erected on consecrated ground if there are no objections from the personal representatives or relatives of anybody interred within the last 50 years. This protection may therefore lapse for Heene Cemetery in 2027.

The legal complexities may be abundant but, at the least, the more that can be done to identify and highlight other reasons why the cemetery should be preserved for the future the better.

Its status as a Local Wildlife Site does not in itself provide legal protection, but the Sussex Wildlife Site Initiative maintains that by following a carefully thought-out management plan and documenting the biodiversity that a site has, an LWS can "be given due consideration in the planning and developing process". The ongoing species work is an attempt to do just that.

The work of the Friends is certainly raising the profile of Heene Cemetery within the community – and beyond. It is increasingly being seen as a cherished community asset. This is thanks as much to the work of the conservation team, as it is to the often unseen heritage team – or the species surveys. The combination of all three offers an unusual mix. A deeper social past dressed in an uncertain environmental present and future may serve to speak to a broader sense of vulnerability. At every level, the cemetery is a place for contemplation. The graves without the flowers or the flowers without the graves would be a lesser treasure.

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