

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by – HILDA MACLEAN – 2007 Churchill Fellow

To investigate visitor education in historic cemeteries – UK, France

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Signed: Hilda Maclean

Dated: 20th December 2007

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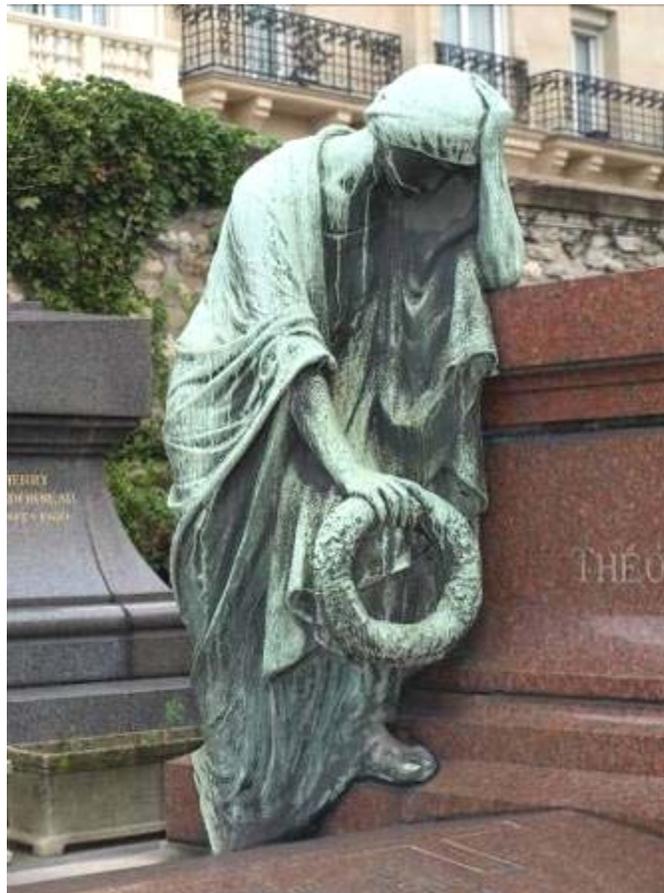
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Introduction

The Churchill Fellowship enabled me to travel to England, Scotland and Paris in order to meet with volunteers who devote their time showing visitors around cemeteries and churchyards and strive to ensure their preservation. I also had the opportunity to investigate the technical aspects of monument preservation and restoration and took an excessive number of photographs.

I extend my appreciation to the Churchill Trust for the opportunity to study in a field completely unrelated to my professional career. The publicity generated by the awarding of the Fellowship greatly expanded my network of contacts both in Australia and overseas.

I would like to the Secretary of the National Federation of Cemetery Friends (UK) who provided assistance in planning the trip. The Federation's website www.cemeteryfriends.org.uk was invaluable as it listed its' members' events so that the greatest use could be made of the time available. I am also grateful for all of those people who took time to show me around their home towns and welcomed me into their homes.



Montmartre – Paris Typical of the quality of bronze sculptures

Executive Summary

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The Fellowship travel was undertaken between the 5th September and 19th October 2007. The aim of the Fellowship was to visit historic cemeteries and churchyards where some form of visitor education program is in place. I attended Open Days, did guided walks, met with members of cemetery and other volunteer groups, participated in working bees and workshops, collected pamphlets, photographed signage and headstones.

Highlights

- Glasgow Necropolis, tour program in conjunction with the Glasgow Merchant's Festival
- Père Lachaise
- Arnos Vale Open Doors Day activities
- Kensal Green Catacombs Tour
- Climbing a 15th century church tower at Aylesbeare
- The hospitality of cemetery friends organisations everywhere

Recommendations

To provide quality visitor education programs in Australian cemeteries, it is necessary to:

- Identify potential groups of visitors and their needs
- Research graves of interest and produce information
- Erect informative signage
- Provide exhibition, working and storage space onsite

Implementation and Dissemination

- The information gathered with assist local cemetery Friends groups implement educational programs which may consist of guided walks, talks, exhibitions, publications and signage.
- Findings will be disseminated through articles submitted to cemetery Friends newsletters, genealogical publications and websites
- Presentations are being made to cemetery, genealogical and local history groups
- Accepting invitations to guest lecture on the role of volunteers and the built environment at tertiary level

Fellowship Program

5th – 6th Travel to London, England

6th – 7th September 2007, London, England

- St James, Piccadilly
- St Pauls, Knightsbridge
- Brompton Cemetery (Art Exhibition)

8th September 2007, Bristol, England

- Arnos Vale (Open Doors Day, Book Launch and Guided Walk)

9th – 10th September 2007, London, England

- Hammersmith Cemetery
- Fulham Cemetery
- Brompton Cemetery (Guided Walk)
- Highgate East Cemetery
- Highgate West Cemetery (Guided Walk)

11th – 13th September 2007, Devon, England

- Aylesbeare Churchyard (Local history project)
- Bickton St Mary (Intact churchyard)
- East Budleigh Churchyard (Wild churchyard movement member)
- Withycombe-Rawleigh (Relocated Churchyard)
- Tavistock – Dolvin Road (Disability Access Project)
- Tavistock – St Eustacius (Preserved Devon Slate)

14th – 16th September 2007, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, England

- East Anglia Building Conservation Fair
- Hardwick Road Cemetery (Working Bee and Guided Walk)

17th – 18th September 2007, Norfolk and Suffolk, England

- Colney Wood Green Burial Ground
- Norwich – The Rosary (first cemetery in England)
- Southwold – St Edmund (fine collection of mortality symbols)
- Bury St Edmunds

19th – 23rd September 2007, Glasgow, Scotland

- Glasgow Necropolis (Four guided tours)
- Ramshorn Burial Ground
- Gorbals Rose Garden (converted cemetery)
- St Mungos Cathedral

24th – 29th September 2007, Edinburgh, Scotland

- Warriston Cemetery (Health and Safety Issues)
- Scottish Genealogical Society (Monumental Inscriptions)

- Greyfriars Kirkyard (Ghost Tour and Guided Tour)
- Carlton Old and New Burial Grounds (Open Doors Day)
- Canongate Kirkyard
- St Cuthberts Kirkyard

30th September – 7th October 2007, London, England

- London Metropolitan Archives (collection of cemetery books and records)
- Nunhead Cemetery (Friends working bee and National Federation of Cemetery Friends)
- Kensal Green Cemetery (Guided Tour and Exhibition)
- St Annes Soho

3rd October 2007, Southampton, England

- Southampton Old Cemetery (Guided Tour)

8th – 12th October 2007, Paris, France

- Père-Lachaise
- Montmartre
- Montparnasse
- Invalides
- Catacombs

13th October 2007, London, England

- St Margaret's Lee (Churchyard and exhibition)

14th -15th October 2007, Birmingham, England

- Lickey Churchyard
- St Phillips Cathedral

16th – 17th October 2007, Cambridge, England

- Guided tour of Cambridge's churches and yards

17th – 19th October 2007

- Travel to Brisbane, Queensland

In addition, any churchyard or cemetery encountered en-route was visited and photographed regardless of its intrinsic educational value.

Visitor Education Programs

Cemeteries are the stepping stones to the past. They are an invaluable repository of family, social and local history, demography, epidemiography, art, verse and even arithmetic. They are, however, an underutilised resource; in many cases, unloved except by small bands of volunteers, usually call Cemetery Friends. One of my goals was to collect as much information as possible on how cemeteries could be further exploited for educational purposes.

There are many mechanisms which can be employed to provide an educational experience to a visitor to a cemetery or churchyard. These can be implemented by a group of cemetery or other volunteers, the local authority or the two in co-operation.

Visitors

Visitors to burial places come for a variety of reasons. The first ones which come to mind are the recently bereaved. They are usually looking for a place of peace and contemplation. Their needs must be respected above all. Other visitors can be broadly categorised as follows, although some people would claim membership to more than one category.

- Genealogists, local and family historians
- Fans
- Sightseers
- Nature Lovers
- Exercise devotees

The UK, like Australia, has experienced a boom in the number of people researching their family history. Programs such as the BBC's *Who do you think you are?* now showing in Australia, feature celebrities researching their roots and often show them finding their ancestors' graves in cemeteries and churchyards. Unfortunately, the reality for most genealogists is that many cemeteries are overgrown, inscriptions illegible, headstones toppled, burial records missing or most likely, an unmarked grave. Friends have a role in helping locate graves, cleaning off the undergrowth and recording inscriptions.

Fans and sightseers make up the bulk of cemetery visitors to the well-known cemeteries such as Highgate and Père Lachaise. They are often in possession of publications such as *Who's buried where in England* or *Permanent Parisians* which point visitors to a particular grave be it Karl Marx or Chopin. Once they have located their objective, they may wander around for a while looking for something else that may interest them.

Sightseers appreciate the artistic beauty of the monuments, often seeking out the work of a particular artist such as Eric Gill, or a genre such as bronze sculpture. They are not so concerned with the identity of the deceased but of the artistic value of their monuments. The major cemeteries of Paris; Père Lachaise, Montmartre and Montparnasse are renowned for their sculptural treasures, and numerous photographic books have produced about them.

In large metropolitan areas, cemeteries and churchyards are the only green space. As such, they become refuges for flora and fauna, much of it endangered. Conservationists would like to see less radical cemetery maintenance to encourage the return of grass species etc. which

can put them in conflict with the genealogists who would rather not wade through waist-high grass to find their ancestor's headstone.

Depending on local by-laws, larger cemeteries are a favourite with joggers, walkers, fitness trainers and their clients and dog walkers (on and off leash). Most visit the cemetery daily, often at dawn or dusk when the site is not staffed. Some of these exercise devotees may have a deeper interest about learning about the site which is not met due to their routines.

The acceptance of children on guided tours varies greatly from organisation to organisation. Children under the age of eight are not allowed on the guided tours of Highgate's Western Cemetery although they can enter the Eastern Cemetery. The Friends of Southampton Old Cemetery allow children of all ages on their tour.

Access for disabled visitors and children in strollers in cemeteries can be extremely limited due to the roughness and/or steepness of the terrain. In order to improve visitor access, the Tavistock Town Council (Devon) has created paths in the Dolvin Road Cemetery to create a circuit allowing a good view of the monuments (at a safe distance).



Tavistock – Dolvin Road A “wheely” friendly path

Education Programs

Cemetery visitor education can take a variety of forms and are often used in combination. These include but are not limited to:

- Guided walks
- Nature walks
- Open Days
- Talks
- Exhibitions
- Display boards
- Signage
- Self-guided walks
- Publications
- Websites

Guided Walks

A number of cemeteries visited conducted guided walks. The majority of these were conducted by the resident Friends group, but burial places without a permanent group had volunteers from local history groups to show visitors around. In a notable exception, the Park Rangers from the Glasgow City Council conducts free tours in addition to those conducted by the Friends of Glasgow Necropolis. Most organisations asked for a small donation to cover their expenses.

Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust conduct guided tours with trained guides daily from March to November and on the weekends from December to February. Tours cost (10 September 2007) was £5 which included permission to take a very limited number of photographs for personal use. The tour lasted only an hour and had a rushed feel. There was no opportunity to linger and enjoy the sights. There is an entry charge of £3 (including photography) to the Eastern Cemetery. Visitors are free to wander, most in search of the grave of Karl Marx. Highgate is the only cemetery visited which charged for photography.

In contrast, the Friends of Brompton Cemetery's tours are variable in length; its course determined by the interests of the guide and participants. The tour I attended on the 9th of September started at 2pm and finished at 5.30pm as there was so much to see and photography was actively encouraged. The tour would have lasted longer, however we were running out of daylight. The Friends of Hardwick Road (Kings Lynn) welcomes its walkers with a cup of tea. The tour I went on included a special demonstration on the types of stone used in monumental masonry and the durability of each.

Ghosts Tours such as Edinburgh's City of the Dead Tour of Greyfriars Kirkyard is run by Blackhart, a commercial operation, which works out of the gate lodge of the Kirkyard. I was impressed by the amount of historic fact incorporated into the commentary and not at all afraid of the Mackenzie poltergeist.

I had the opportunity to go on four tours of the Glasgow Necropolis as I had timed my visit to coincide with the week-long Glasgow Merchants Festival. As the Glasgow Necropolis was established by the Glasgow Merchants, the Friends of Glasgow Necropolis conducted daily

tours supplementing the ones conducted by the Glasgow Necropolis Rangers. Each tour was conducted by a different guide, who brought their own expertise to the commentary. Each tour lasted well over an hour and was very comprehensive including not only biographical information, but information about funerary symbolism, ornamental plantings and Scottish History. As the cemetery is dominated by a huge statue of John Knox on a column, the history lesson was a given.



Hardwick Road – Learning about stones



Glasgow Necropolis – Typical Tour Group

One of the most visited cemeteries in the world, Paris's Père Lachaise has to contend with a large number of fans heading to a small number of monuments namely; Jim Morrison of *The Doors*, Chopin, Oscar Wilde and Edith Piaf. Most fans do not need a map, the path is well worn. Armed security officers patrol around busy areas and the one overseeing the behaviour of visitors to the Morrison monument spoke good English and was happy to give information. French language general tours are available every Saturday and first and third Sundays, and selected week days. Special themed tours are held monthly. Most English-speaking visitors use maps which can be purchased by vendors outside the gates. English language tours are generally available on weekends and with private guides.



Père Lachaise – near Jim Morrison's grave



International visitors at Chopin's grave

Nature Walks

I was surprised by the number of cemeteries which featured the natural environment in their walking programs. The majority of walks I have come across in Queensland have biographical or historical themes. The Friends of Arnos Vale produces a leaflet *A walk on the wild side* which discusses the symbolic significance of cemetery plantings such as ivy as well as its role in the ecosystem. I saw walks advertised for fungi, butterflies and lichens. Although not a traditional cemetery, the Colney Woodland Burial Park, Norwich, has extensive walking program, with the focus on introducing children to nature. On the 14th of August 2007, the Burial Park hosted the *Secret Squirrel's Tree Trail* for children under eight.

It is worth mentioning the Nature in Churchyards movement, which encourages the non-mowing of churchyards and cemeteries during the summer months to encourage the preservation of native grasses and habitats. As such, some burial grounds have waist-high grass for many weeks of the year. However, this can make life difficult for visitors who can not find the grave they are looking for.

Other cemeteries and churchyards have set aside a portion of land, generally without monuments, as nature reserves. The Friends of Hardwick Road are replanting indigenous plants to provide a buffer zone and wildlife corridor.



Colney Wood Burial Park



Devon – All Saints, East Budleigh

Open Days

Many cemeteries only had tours available in conjunction with other events. Open Doors Day in Edinburgh (29th September 2007) gave participants the opportunity to enter buildings which were not usually open to the public. Carlton Old and Carlton New burial grounds are always open to visitors, tours are irregularly conducted. The tours I attended on this day were by members of the Cockburn Society and Open Doors Day volunteers.

Arnos Vale Cemetery participated in Bristol's Open Doors Day (8th September 2007). The Friends of Arnos Vale opened the Non Conformist chapel where they had put up displays and sold refreshments. The newly published *Arnos Vale Bristol: a Victorian Cemetery* was available for sale. They had arranged a vintage hearse to be trucked in, much to the delight of the gentlemen visitors. The Friends conducted tours through the accessible areas of the Cemetery. Arnos Vale, like many other formerly private cemeteries, had been closed for

many years, neglected and left to become overgrown with brambles and stinging nettles. The Friends surveyed the visitors to the Open Day to ask them what sort of tours and programs they are interested in. The Friends of Arnos Vale works closely with the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust which was created to run the cemetery when it reverted to public ownership. The Trust recently obtained a £4 million plus Lottery Grant which will be used to restore the Anglican and Non-Conformist Chapels, the East Lodge and employ an education officer commencing in November 2007. The East Lodge will be used as a family history research centre while the chapel will be used for educational purposes.



Arnos Vale – Open Doors Day 8 Sep 07



Edinburgh – Open Doors Day 29 Sep 07

Talks

As the British weather doesn't necessarily allow for year round outdoor activities, some cemetery groups have talks on related topics such as monumental symbolism or Victorian Era mourning customs during the winter months. The groups best able to do this are those who have access to a building on site, usually a chapel or gatehouse. Hardwick Road's chapel was demolished in the 1970s and the gatehouse is in private hands, in use as a studio. Southampton Old cemetery is in a similar situation, having its talks off-site at a Church Hall. Many groups I spoke to would like to have more talks but finding a suitable (i.e. free) venue for 15 – 30 people with facilities for laptops and data projectors was a problem.

Exhibitions

Both Brompton and Kensal Green cemeteries have chapel space which can be used for exhibitions. On Friday and Saturday 7th and 8th of September 2007, the Friends of Brompton Cemetery hosted *A Chorus of Idle Footsteps*, a mortality-themed installation by artist Laura Bacon.

St Margaret's at Lee, a suburb in the south-east of London has one of the city's few intact churchyards. The site is listed by English Heritage, as are some of the monuments. Edmond Halley, second Astronomer Royal, and of the comet fame, is buried there. St Margaret's church hosted *Exhibition on Victorian Architecture, Art and Decoration* for four weeks in September and October 2007. At the exhibition, it was possible to watch a newly-released DVD called the *Old Churchyard of Lee* produced by the Blackheath Historic Buildings Trust. The DVD showed the monuments as well as giving biographical information of those interred

and historic background of the surroundings. This DVD was a fine example of an educational resource in a new medium. It is available for sale.

Display Boards

Where venues are available, cemetery groups utilise static display boards. The Friends of Hardwick Road had a display at the East Anglia Building Conservation Fair in order to attract new members. Friends of Glasgow Necropolis used small mobile boards which they pulled out when conducting their tours. The already restored West Lodge at Arnos Vale features display boards donated to the Friends. Local history study centres in local libraries were the most receptive to displaying and distributing cemetery materials.



Arnos Vale – Open Doors Day



Hardwick Road - East Anglia Building Conservation Fair

Signage

As volunteers can not be available at all times a cemetery is open, signage and self-guided walks are particularly important. The Rosary Cemetery at Norwich has small signs scattered throughout the cemetery featuring both biographical and biological information. Particularly informative signs are found at Nunhead and St Margaret's, Lee both located in the south-east of London.

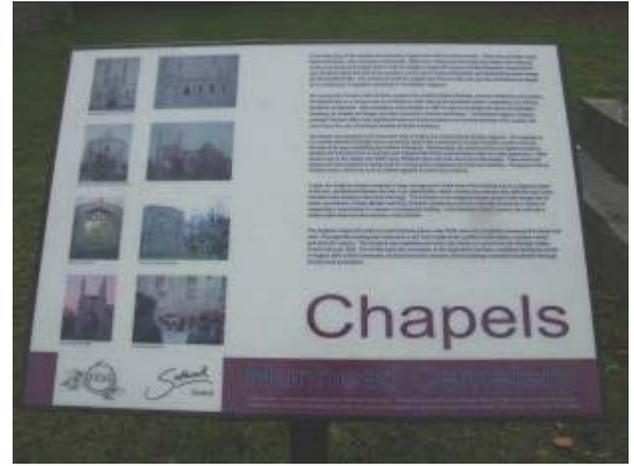
At the very least, a sign at a burial place should state the year the first burials took place (and last burials, if closed to new interments) as this information is very useful for family historians. Also helpful would be a contact number for where the burial records/monumental inscriptions can be consulted. An indication of the size of the burial ground helps the visitor plan their visit as does a map showing the various portions. A plan marking the burial places of the famous makes visits from their fans more efficient. Paris's "Big Three" cemeteries use directory boards of this type.

Very few of the unattended cemeteries visited had informative signage but almost all had signs warning of potentially unsafe monuments. This has been a major issue in the UK of late, with some municipalities, notably Edinburgh, laying flat headstones, thus affecting the

type of work Friends are able to carry out in cemeteries. Where headstones have been laid face-down, monumental inscriptions are not able to be collected or published.



Norwich – The Rosary - Biographical and wildlife information



London – Nunhead – Thematic Sign

Self-guided Tours

Many cemeteries and churchyards have self-guided walking or driving tours, depending on size. These incorporate both location maps and commentary as well as directions on how to find a particular grave. Most self-guided tours I collected fell into two main categories: general (giving overall coverage of the cemetery) and thematic. Example of thematic walks include; *The Dickens Connection* and *Victoria Cross Holders*, both at Kensal Green and *Titanic Victims at Southampton Old Cemetery*. These pamphlets or booklets are often found at local tourist information centres, heritage and family history centres. Cemeteries with websites may have self-guided tours available for download. With the number of cemetery visitors now owning MP3 players, it is now possible to provide self-guided audio tours, similar to those provided at galleries and museums. By having files available for download onto the visitors own equipment, this eliminates the need for staff/Friends to be available check out/in equipment and collect deposits.

Publications

In recent years, cemeteries and Friends groups have received funding from various sources to publish definitive histories of their sites. Kensal Green, for example, has had major hardback book of 448 pages published about it. Other cemeteries have produced books featuring the stories of those buried there. *The Good Grave Guide to Hampstead Cemetery*, *Fortune Green* by the Camden History Society is a good example of a biographical guide. [Andrew Fisher, Australia's first Labour Prime Minister, is featured.] Where possible, Friends sell their publications onsite or via the web as there is a steady demand from visitors wanting souvenirs if their visit. Postcards, greeting cards and Christmas cards are particularly popular due to their light weight.

Cemeteries and churchyards have been inspiring artists for generations. Photographic collections are particularly sought, although these tend not to be produced by Friends groups due to the publication expense. Black and white drawings, however, are more feasible to

publish. Artist Bernard Lavell has produced twenty-two drawings for the publication *Sketches of Old Southampton Cemetery*.

Again, there is an emphasis on publishing wildlife-related materials. *Trees and Shrubs of Nunhead Cemetery* is only one of many examples I collected.

Websites

The most effective way for a cemetery or churchyard, especially one with few financial resources, to communicate information to potential visitors, is to construct a website. A website needs to have opening hours and transportation instructions, so potential visitors can plan their visit. Websites can include historic information about the burial site, biographical information about those buried there and information on the natural environment. There is the opportunity to upload video clips and MP3 files to enhance the educational experience.

School teachers, preparing excursions to cemeteries, are particularly grateful for any resources which can be downloaded, printed and given to the students, preferably without the need to edit. Activities include arithmetic (calculating at age of death/date of birth/average age of death), local and family history and composing verse.

Most of the cemeteries visited belong to organisations the National Federation of Cemetery Friends (UK) which allow members to share knowledge and increase exposure for themselves.

The Role of Volunteers

Underpinning the majority of visitor education programs in historic cemeteries and churchyard are the volunteers who dedicate their time and resources to the preservation and conservation of their sites. I found that, without exception, volunteers have developed an encyclopedic knowledge of their burial ground, its permanent residents and its transient ones. Within a volunteer group, there will be a wide range of interests from funerary finery to fungi, burial rituals to bird watching.

Cemetery volunteers enjoy the companionship of others with like interests, even though they may not be shared with the wider population. Encouraging people who have little experience and apprehension of death to enter a cemetery, is their collective goal.

Volunteers gain a wide range of skills from their work. At Nunhead, Conservation Volunteers assist in the removal of noxious weeds, such as Japanese Rag Weed, from cemeteries and attend training courses to develop skills using tools. Training to be a cemetery guide increases public speaking and interpersonal communication skills.

The number of hours devoted by volunteers to their cemetery work was largely determined by their employment status. The majority of Friends interviewed could "happily spend all day here if it wasn't for the 'day job'." "There is always so much to do around here." The one thing in common was the degree of joy and enthusiasm everyone had about their work. It was infectious.



Nunhead, London – Working Bee



Nunhead, London – Welcoming visitors

Recommendations

Identify potential groups of visitors and their survey needs

Are there are groups of visitors which haven't been identified up to now? Have current visitors been surveyed for their opinions and level of visitor satisfaction? Are repeat visitors being catered for by a variety of tours/talks? Is there any provision for disabled visitors? School children? What materials can be produced at different age levels to tie in with the local curricula?

Research graves of interest and publish the information

Some of the most interesting stories belong to people whose names are not remembered today. Besides biographical information, information about the times which a person lived in is of particular interest. What were the living conditions like? How high was the infant mortality? Once a story has been put together, it can be used in a number of ways; on a walk, subject of a talk, in a pamphlet or book, on a sign or on a webpage. On Open Days, have actors in period costume act out vignettes of these 'forgotten lives. These were a particularly popular item in the Open Days I attended.

Erect informative signage

Appropriate signage can provide visitor education year-round when the site is unattended by either paid municipal staff or volunteers. The responsibility for the provision of signage can be a co-operative effort between Friends, local history and wildlife groups and the local authority. In many cemeteries, where signage was present, the council provides the sign and the groups, the information. Durability is an issue for signage and an amount needs to be budgeted regularly for their on-going maintenance and replacement. However, the placement of signage can be an issue as it can lead to conflict with another group of visitors, the artistic photographer who doesn't want a 21st century sign in the middle of their photograph of Victorian Era monuments.

Provide exhibition, working and storage space onsite

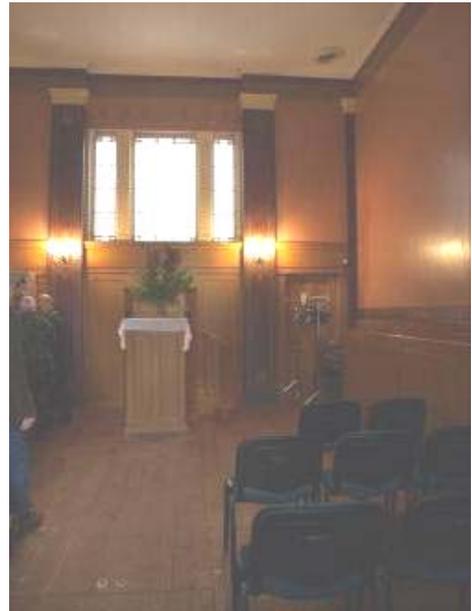
Cemetery Friends groups need to have at the very minimum a lockable space on-site for the storage of records and tools. Having space on-site greatly multiplies educational opportunities such as talks and exhibitions. The Friends of Kensal Green have both the Non Conformist chapel and a purpose built gallery/kitchen which can be hired out for exhibits,

talks, services, even weddings. They are in an enviable position. Most cemetery groups in both the UK and Australia do not have a home of their own, which become a problem when a large amount of valuable material is donated to a group and it cannot be stored securely. Even securing a notice board from the municipality was a problem for one group who placed all of their notices on their 'message tree'. In order to encourage the general public to donate an hour or two cut back the under growth, many Friends groups provide basic hand tools. These have to be stored somewhere.

By encouraging the alternative use of facilities such as chapels to increase the number of legitimate visitors to the site, there is a resultant reduction of vandalism and graffiti. Burial grounds which appear neglected attract an undesirable element which discourages legitimate visitors.



Who's there? Glasgow Necropolis



Kensal Green – Non Conformist Chapel