



# UNDERCLIFFE CEMETERY NEWSLETTER



## Bradford's History in Stone

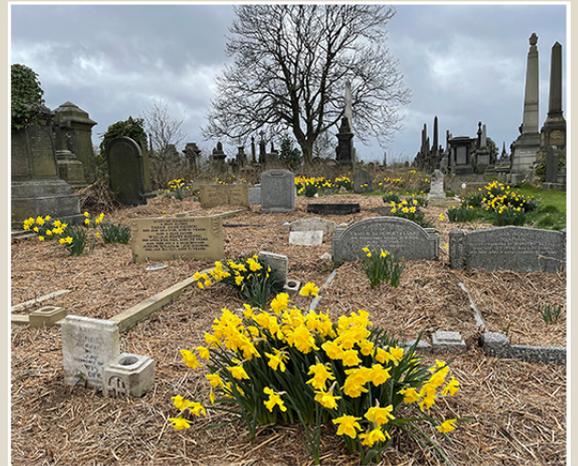
### • Vice-Chair's Comments •

The emergence of spring is heralded by the cheerful sight of daffodils 'fluttering and dancing in the breeze' across Undercliffe Cemetery's 26 acres. It is also the time when our industrious grounds volunteers switch from their wintertime undergrowth clearance projects to those that revolve around grass-cutting activities in order to maintain a presentable appearance. The recent arrival of an intermodal (shipping) container has added significant storage space for the tools and equipment used by the groundwork team whose members continue to make significant inroads into the undergrowth, thereby revealing many long-hidden memorials. Interesting inscriptions are passed to our enthusiastic volunteer researchers for investigation.

New discoveries continue to be placed on the website, and to be incorporated into this year's exciting programme of tours which began in March under the supervision of our experienced guides. The Charity's ever-widening social media profile attracts new interest in the Cemetery from around the world.

Day-to-day management of the Cemetery is vested in our very capable Registrar and Business Manager. The Charity's fourteen Trustees continue to meet at three-monthly intervals. Three sub-committees - Management, Operations, Education and Promotions - hold their meetings every six weeks. We are extremely grateful - and delighted - to have upwards of forty-five volunteers (the highest number to date) who are dedicated to the immediate welfare and future preservation of Undercliffe Cemetery, which is deservedly one of West Yorkshire's greatest heritage features.

John Jackson



### • Tours •

Our popular Cemetery tours are back with a bang and continue to grow in popularity. First up was the 'Winter Tour' led by research volunteers Sue Crossley & Gaynor Haliday, which featured the fascinating stories of some of the more affluent Bradford families (Illingworths, Holdens, Andertons, Singletons, Atkinson-Jowetts and Bankarts) whose remains lie under rather majestic monuments in the Historic Core of the Cemetery. For our second tour (Highlights of the Cemetery) a number of research volunteers each chose a favourite 'inhabitant' whose story had particularly piqued their interest.

Both tours sold out quickly (though not perhaps as speedily as the Death, Disease and Squalor, scheduled for 28 May, which it seems the bloodthirsty public are itching to hear about!).

With our digitisation project and groundworks' team continually finding new subjects for us to research, we're never going to run out of interesting people to talk about and we have several more tours scheduled. Please see Cemetery website or previous newsletters for details. Remember, it's wise to book early to secure your place. We don't like having to turn people away, but we are limited for numbers. And remember - there'll be delicious refreshments available before & after the tours.



## • Volunteer Profile: Aoife Sutton •

### The liveliness of studying death: How a 'macabre' topic has become a fulfilling career path

I am delighted to be joining the Undercliffe Cemetery team as a trustee this year and can't wait to get involved with the team in several ways – including public engagement, education, and outreach. Having worked as a historical tour guide in Ireland, I am looking forward to helping with the Cemetery tours – perhaps focusing on individuals within the Cemetery who have not been featured previously. The Dying 2 Talk project and our ambassador co-produced resources is something I would also love to bring to the Cemetery; allowing young people to take part in some great activities in a fun way whilst learning about its historical relevance. My experience working with young people in talking about death-related historical topics will work well at Undercliffe. I am also keen to get involved in looking at the archives! I am currently looking through medical school archives for my own research and can't wait to see what Undercliffe has waiting to be revealed. It is my social media outreach, love of historical cemetery photography, and interest in death-related topics which has allowed me to get involved with Undercliffe Cemetery.

#### Here's a little more about my background:

Death has become my life in so many ways. I lost one parent when I was 19 years old and another when I was 25 years old – both were very young and died in very different circumstances. Personal bereavement has likely shaped my professional study of death, and I have found that working in a career focused on a 'macabre' subject, has often been such a lively, enriching experience.

I am currently studying for my PhD at the University of Bradford in the School of Archaeological and Forensic Sciences. My research looks at the acquirement and retention of anatomical specimens from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and what they can tell us about death and dying. Studying such human remains allows me to understand subjects linked to the living today, including discussions on what we want to do with our body after we die, the study of medicine and anatomy, and how the public view these type of human remains on display in museums across the country. With outcry related to events such as the Dinner and Dissection event, which intends to dissect a replica of the 'Elephant Man' Joseph Merrick, it is clear the anatomical collections and the dead they retain, are still so relevant today.

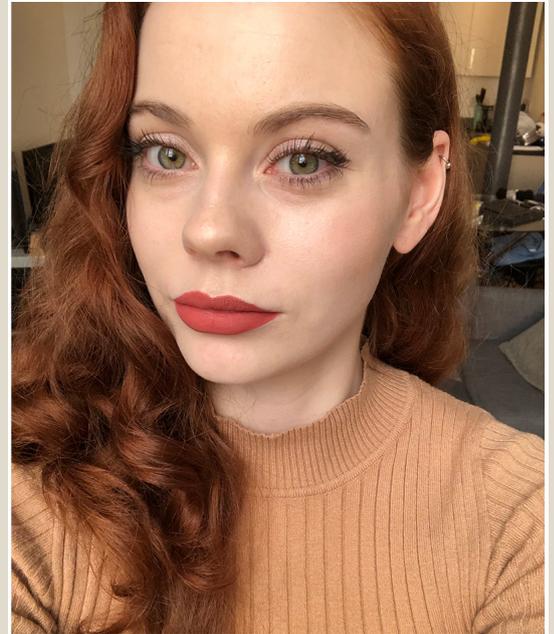
As an archaeologist, I have had the privilege of observing and training in modern embalming and mortuary practices. Why would an archaeologist be interested in such things? The best way to understand the dead in the past in my opinion, is to work with the contemporary dead and those who care for them. Working with the recent deceased has allowed me to grasp the emotional side of handling the dead in the past. To immerse myself in death industry work has been an incredible experience, one that was enlightening, surprisingly lively and touching. Death work does not have to be morbid but should always be respectful.



I work on two fantastic projects which encourage opening up conversations about death and dying – the **Dying 2 Talk Project**, which is aimed at young people, and the **Continuing Bonds Project**, which uses archaeology to engage in meaningful discussion. Both death-related projects have been fun, rewarding and a great way to meet new people. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, talking about death and dying has been so beneficial to many, and archaeology has been a great way to achieve this. As part of Dying 2 Talk, we have held Festival of the Dead events in local schools to allow young students the chance to discuss and interact with the topic of death in an enjoyable manner – the events have been a great success.

So, if you are thinking of a death-related career, or perhaps have become more interested in death as a subject, it is not all doom and gloom! Social media is full of death positive accounts, especially on Instagram and Twitter. Death studies can be linked to all sorts of subjects – including the funeral industry, archaeology, history, psychology and so much more.

So next time you are enjoying a graveyard stroll, enjoy the peaceful surroundings and think about how interesting death can be. You can find me on Twitter [@pathbodies](#) and Instagram [@pathologicalbodiesproject](#) – click on the links underneath and join the conversation!



## • Steven Schofield •

Previously an academic researcher at Bradford University and Manchester University, co-founder of the Project on Demilitarisation, and more recently, a freelance writer, Steven Schofield shares his thoughts on what Undercliffe Cemetery means to him.

### Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford

I've had a strong affection for the Undercliffe area of Bradford, ever since moving in with a friend after a difficult break-up in my late twenties. I was introduced to Jude during a party at my new home. She smiled at me and, as in all the best romantic novels, my heart literally skipped a beat. For reasons, even today, that I can't quite fathom, she agreed to meet up and thirty-five years later we are still living in Undercliffe and have two wonderful, grown-up children.

When Joel, our eldest, was born, I came back from the hospital on such an emotional high that I couldn't sleep. There was only one place to go for a midnight walk and that was Undercliffe Cemetery, despite the date, Friday 13th, and a full moon! Climbing the steps from the main entrance and walking the long, wide pathways, led me to the panoramic view of Bradford, the moon hanging in the sky and the city's corridors of red and yellow lights shimmering below in the cold, night air.

The Cemetery is a Victorian architectural treasure, standing proudly at the top of the long hill spiralling out east from the city. Any real historical reference to the district only begins with the Civil War, when parliamentary forces in Bradford successfully repelled an attack by a much larger, royalist army that had been encamped in Undercliffe fields. (A reminder, also, that before the industrial revolution and the expansion of the city, Bradford was an important agricultural area, particularly for dairy products.)

A wide, central promenade splits the Cemetery in half, with an extraordinary range of monuments and gravestones, reflecting the class divisions of emerging Northern capitalism. The largest family plots of the mill owners and wool merchants dominate the skyline, followed by the more modest, middle-class graves, to the sporadic outcrops of small, austere, grey slabs with the barest of epitaphs for the poor.

Given the historical and architectural significance of the Cemetery it beggars belief that, by the early 1980s, it had fallen into neglect and disrepair. Disgracefully, it was sold for a pittance to a property developer who immediately began to demolish buildings, including the chapels, and asset-stripped the ironworks for scrap. Local people, outraged by this architectural vandalism, pressurised the council into declaring the Cemetery a conservation area as the first stage in purchasing the site. A voluntary organisation, which eventually became the Undercliffe Cemetery Charity was established, and an MSC Scheme was commissioned to begin the restoration of the Cemetery. When this came to an abrupt end, the work was carried on by a dedicated group of volunteers, and the graves and pathways were gradually reclaimed.

For me it has been important, even vital, as a sanctuary for quiet reflection because of ongoing health problems. Shortly after moving to Bradford, I contracted TB in what was a small outbreak originating in a city-centre pub. Although the drug treatment was successful and I live an active life, my immune system has been damaged, leading to recurrences of flu-like symptoms and periods of severe tiredness that seem to be triggered by chemical pollutants. The Cemetery became a sort of refuge where I could rest-up and do short walks as I recovered.

I have a route that takes me around my favourite sites, including the Quaker graveyard – many, slightly raised but flat, rectangular stones that, in its simplicity, stands in stark contrast to the baroque ostentation of the monuments nearby. At the other end of the Cemetery is the grave of Bob Cryer, a stalwart Labour MP – a good place to stop and look out over the view of Bradford and reflect on the importance of the city for the Labour movement, including, of course, the founding of the Independent Labour Party. Lastly, on my way back home, is the grave of the Chief Druid who, interestingly, was secretary of a Victorian charitable organisation.

The Cemetery has also been used as an atmospheric film location, most famously in a scene from the classic 60s comedy *Billy Liar*, starring Tom Courtenay and, recently, in the TV series, *Peaky Blinders*. It was also the natural choice for a video that I made of one of my own compositions, 'In Memoriam'.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, there has been an added dimension that I could never have anticipated. Lockdown was unprecedented, foremost as a medical emergency that would take a terrible toll in severe illness and death, but indirectly, as a form of environmental experiment, unprecedented in advanced, industrial economies. Over the first three to four weeks of lockdown in March/April 2020, there was virtually no traffic, nor any aircraft flights. My walk with Jude through the Cemetery became almost a daily event, accompanied only by a birdsong chorus of extraordinary beauty and clarity.

For me it was a revelation to stand over a city that was devoid of the steady background drone of cars and lorries echoing up and across the hills. There was also a quality and freshness to the air that was palpable, and a sense of well-being invigorated by the wonderful, sunny weather that stretched out for weeks on end. This was a strange mix of emotions – knowing that an awful disease was taking its grim toll, but also a sense of revelation and even, celebration of the beauty of nature, and the potential to improve the quality of urban life.

A contemporary philosopher poses this challenge: are we good ancestors? How will our children and grandchildren judge us in the context of Covid-19 and the climate emergency? Did we make a difference, or at least, attempt to make a difference? Looking out over Bradford from Undercliffe Cemetery is probably as fine a place to contemplate those questions as any on the planet.

Steven Schofield, January 2021

**What does Undercliffe Cemetery mean to you?  
We'd love to hear your stories, so do get in touch.**



## • David Wayman •

### Our latest grounds volunteer

While living in Bradford, I often enjoyed walking around and exploring the Cemetery, which I think is a marvellous source of local history. My favourite inscriptions are those that provide some biographical details, and it can be fascinating to learn what people did for a living in the nineteenth century, particularly those involved in the textile industry, and also what they did for fun – there are so many comedians, puppeteers, theatre managers and innkeepers buried at Undercliffe! It also tells us a lot about the class system in those days – compare the magnificent funerary of the mill owners with the many unnamed paupers' graves to be found.

Therefore, when I retired in 2020 it seemed a good opportunity to get involved in the upkeep of the place. A notice on the wall of the lodge directed me to the website; I contacted Andrew and he invited me to come along one Tuesday morning, which I did. I met the team and over the first few weeks tried various activities, including litter-picking, hedging and strimming. After a sedentary career, I didn't bring any particular gardening or maintenance skills to the team but soon developed a tolerance for strimming – which I hadn't originally taken to – so continued with that through the remainder of the first summer. In the first winter, I selected a patch of overgrown graves and, week-by-week, cleared it of brambles and ivy, etc., and was happy to complete the task by the end of the winter. I took photos of the uncovered gravestones and published them every week on our Facebook page, thinking that these inscriptions might not have been seen for decades. However, towards the end of the project I was gently informed that the same patch had been cleared about three years previously!

As a team we have cleared many areas of the Cemetery which had become badly overgrown, but it is a Sisyphean task and we could really benefit from some new volunteers.

I am hoping to get more involved in the environmental aspects and ecology of the Cemetery in future; there is a balancing act I think, between our ongoing attempts to keep the monuments free of overgrowth and encouraging wildlife. People visiting the site enjoy both, so it would be good to get the balance right.

As a retired person I have benefited greatly from volunteering at Undercliffe. Working outdoors in the fresh air, in all weathers, has been good fun, and of course the cheerful companionship of my fellow volunteers has been priceless. I've even been entrusted recently with driving 'the buggy' (occasionally), which is a character in its own right, and as I got rid of my car when I retired, this is a rare chance to get behind a wheel!

I don't live in Bradford these days, but I still look forward to my weekly excursion to Undercliffe and hope to continue as a volunteer for many years to come.



## • Three fascinating finds •

Within just a couple of weeks of serious bramble incursion removal and sapling growth excavation, the volunteers found memorial stones to the following fascinating people:

1. Harry Brook Chambers, killed at Spion Kop, Natal – the home of the Zulus and a truly legendary battle in British military history
2. John Butterfield who departed this life 'in his 105th year' in 1870.
3. Edwin Hey, Officer of the Knights Of Templar.

All three stones are in sections Uncon K & L at the end of the Promenade, at the Undercliffe Old Road side.

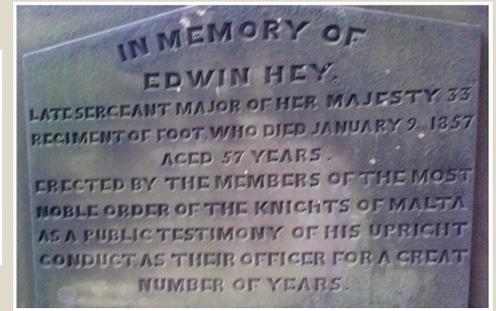
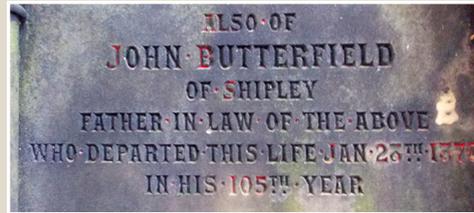


As we've said elsewhere in this newsletter, we are and will always be respectful of Mother Nature and the beauty forthcoming, but, as you can see in the photo showing a huge plinth having been pushed off its base above Edwin Hey's stone, we have to exercise some control to ensure the stones and stories that come from them can be seen. At the moment, none of these newly discovered stones are safely accessible to the general public. Of course, we'll try our very best to change this but safety has to be the overriding priority.

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Harry Brook Chambers' story will be included in our New Discoveries tour on 25 June and research work is being done to validate John Butterfield's truly remarkable age of 104 and we hope to have conclusive evidence for our next newsletter!

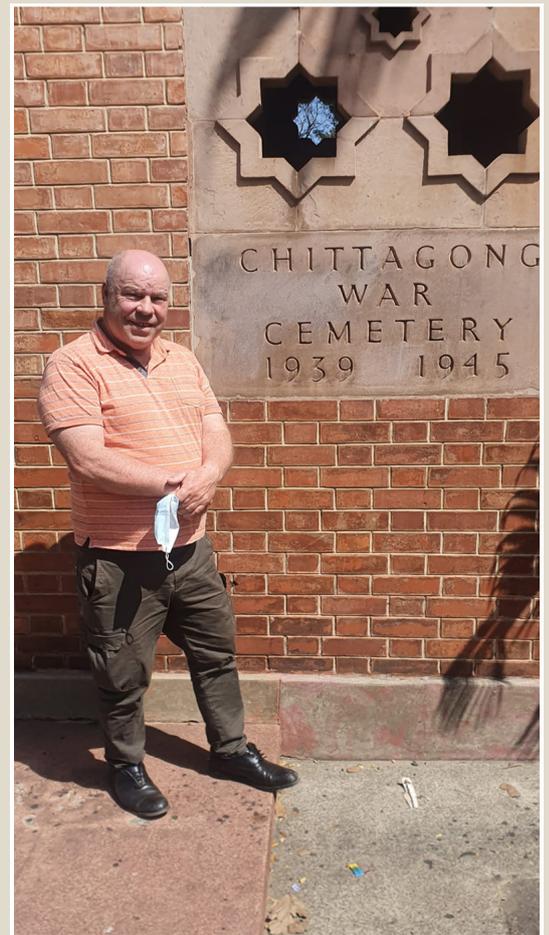
Keep reading our newsletter and social media updates as we continue to unveil our new finds.

## • Interview with Graham Swain • Gravedigger and Volunteer

Graham probably needs no introduction for many of the Undercliffe Cemetery community – professionally, he has been digging graves here for eleven years or so (and for many more years elsewhere), but during this time he has become increasingly involved as a volunteer. Graham prefers to dig a grave on the day of the funeral to ensure that it remains in the best condition possible, and comes early in the day with the team (Craig, John & Keith) to do this. Prior to his involvement, the traditional hand-dig method was used at Undercliffe, but Graham has shown that careful use of the mechanical digger can be just as successful. Once the grave is ready, the team continues with the important work of 'righting' grave stones that are collapsing.

After the funeral service has taken place, the team backfill and ensure that the area is left tidy. Graham knows the different areas of the Cemetery well, and the conditions in some sections that can make digging more challenging, adapting his approach accordingly. Although some may think it an easy job, Graham points out that grave-digging is a skill that takes a long time to perfect. But not content with honing his practical skills in Bradford, he has been pursuing his interest in cemeteries much further afield.

Initially, Graham decided to do a two-year course in religious studies, then an Urdu language course to better communicate with those trying to arrange appropriate Islamic burial in Bradford. This proved to be a springboard into travelling the world, developing an extensive knowledge of cemeteries, burial customs and culture more generally. I lost track of his travels pretty quickly in our conversation, but places he has visited include Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Iraq, Tunisia, Papua New Guinea (where, apparently, cannibalism was still permitted), The Cook Islands, and Samoa (where he encountered the 'Fa'afafine': an official 'third gender' that I had never heard of).



In all these places, Graham has made the cemetery an essential port of call, but there is often a charitable purpose too. Most recently, Graham has been in Bangladesh, returning with a local group following two previous visits, delivering support for schools, mosques, and a huge refugee camp for Rohingya Muslims. There will have been some distressing sights on this trip, but Graham remains upbeat, even when the going gets tough.

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His work has been particularly challenging during Covid. When lockdown was introduced, he describes how difficult it was to source the materials needed for Islamic graves, while the number of burials increased dramatically. Graham managed to continue to provide short-notice burials through incredibly early starts (4 a.m.), and a dedication to sourcing or creating the materials required. It is good to hear that his commitment has recently been recognised in a special Covid award from the Council for Mosques. Beyond all things cemetery-related, Graham is a keen supporter of Bradford Bulls, and is active in a number of associated charities.

What is striking about Graham is his openness to other cultures and ideas, making him a fascinating person to talk to if you get the chance.

Thank you, Graham, Craig, John and Keith, for all the work you do to help maintain our wonderful Cemetery!

**Jacqui Ambler**

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## • Bat Boxes •

As part of the Cemetery's commitment to respecting and nurturing wildlife and preserving the habitat of those creatures who have made the Cemetery their home, one of our volunteers, former woodwork teacher Chris Haxby, has been busy making bat boxes. These are in addition to the bird boxes he previously made (and which were featured in an earlier newsletter) and will be installed at suitable locations around the Cemetery. Hopefully we'll be able to share some photographic evidence of the new home owners.

**Watch this space!**



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## • New Volunteer Event •

A very wet and miserable morning at Undercliffe for our Volunteers' event on 12 April, just our luck! However, three hardy souls braved the downpour so let's welcome Kevin, Andrea and Geoff to the team. Hopefully, with better weather, we'll see more of you in the coming weeks. Thanks to Pam for demonstrating the Undercliffe supplied waterproof gear.

We will be running this event again later in the year when hopefully we'll be basking in glorious sunshine.

**No excuses next time!**



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**and finally...**



Just to add a little bit of drama to our ever popular tours, we've been making a few additions to the Undercliffe Cemetery dressing up box; however, we are a bit short of Top Hats. If anybody has one (or two, or three) and you'd like to donate it to a worthy cause then give us a shout.

As the saying goes, 'all donations gratefully received'.

Now... who's going to volunteer as Morticia?

As the saying also goes...

**Watch this space!**

