

# UNDERCLIFFE UNCOVERED

## TALES FROM OUR TOMBS



### • Chair's Comments •

We are constantly on the lookout for areas of the Cemetery that have not been fully utilised. Even single plots or small groups of plots are of interest. When we had finished digitising the first half of the Cemetery, the so-called Uncon section, in an instant the database was able to tell us that there were 523 plots that had never been used. Where were they and why had they been missed? Our investigations began. As part of the digitisation, the grave book was included. This book records the order numbers of every burial, in every plot. We soon discovered that 165 of the plots were marked 'Not to be Used'. There may be different reasons for this but one reason is certainly that some of the plots are adjacent to huge monuments and digging alongside one of these monuments may well undermine its foundations. However, planting them with bulbs or other small shrubs may be an option. Perhaps our new Flora and Fauna team who start work from 10 a.m. Wednesday, 6 March can look into this. Why not join us? We will be planning our work for the year and starting on a new raised bed adjacent to the chapel areas.



The two photos illustrate some of the work we have already been doing. As part of a tree survey, Tim and Stephen measure the circumference of one of our oldest trees to try determine its age. Andrea and Zahabia look back on the planting they have done in one of the new small raised beds close to the Otley Road entrance. Chris, one of other volunteers, built two of these in order to narrow the entrance and stop unwanted vehicles entering the Cemetery.



Many plots are underutilised and families still have the burial rights for these but perhaps the latest generations don't realise this.

**If you want to know more about family plots please contact our office – we will be glad to help.**

**Steve Lightfoot**

### • Storm Damage •

Sadly, the Cemetery didn't escape the effects of storms Debi and Pia in November and December. As the picture vividly shows, a large and established cypress tree at the edge of section H Uncon near the listed Moulson monument was felled. Fortunately the tree missed the monument and there appears to be no damage to the stones in the fall site. The tree remains are being removed and a full damage assessment carried out. Thanks to all those involved.

National Tree Week in November prompted us take stock of the large range of trees we have at Undercliffe: holly; ash; yew and horse chestnut being just a few. We really do try our best to look after them but some things are beyond our control. Please have a look at our Facebook page for some pics and tips on how to identify specific tree types.



## • Book Donations •

We've recently received several large donations of military books – thanks again to the donors – and if anyone would like to add to our collection, please call in at the Cemetery. Our intention is to have them available to read to our members. Another great reason to join our Membership Scheme; see our site for details.

<https://www.undercliffcemetry.co.uk/support-us/donate/>

## • Lister Lane Cemetery, Halifax •

We recently hosted a visit from a very good-sized group of fellow cemetery enthusiasts and volunteers from Lister Lane Cemetery in Halifax. Last summer, on a very wet day, they had shown a group from Undercliffe round their cemetery and we reciprocated. We hope and feel we're doing a good job here at Undercliffe but we're never shy of looking at how we could improve what we do; sharing ideas and practices with other cemeteries has to be a good idea. We're planning more of these visits and hostings so please let us know if you or anyone you know in cemetery circles wants to be involved.

After our event, we were delighted to see Lister Lane awarded The King's Award for Voluntary Service, just as Undercliffe received one of the queen's final awards for voluntary service last year. Well done all. It's really heartening to see that those who tirelessly volunteer to preserve our historic cemeteries are being recognised for their efforts by those in high circles!



The King's Award  
for Voluntary Service

## • CWGC •



We recently hosted a regional meeting of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission volunteers run by Liz Smith, their Public Engagement Co-ordinator (North). Liz and her father are local to us and have been long-standing supporters of Undercliffe for many years – as is the CWGC which is always keen to help us maintain the hundreds of headstones we have here.

We provided a short tour covering some of the most interesting stories and range of CWGC headstones that have been in place and added to over the years and it was great to hear from so many of the volunteers how impressed they were with how we remember the fallen.

## • Xmas Party •

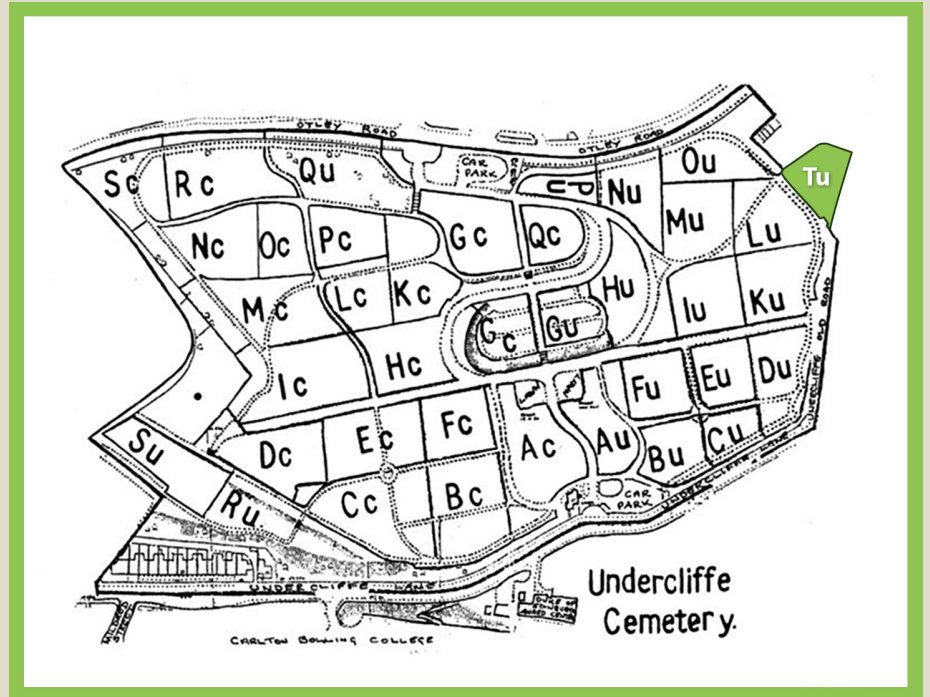


Many of our volunteers enjoyed a very jolly Christmas meal (and drinks!) at the George and Dragon, Apperley Bridge. As you can see, a great time was enjoyed by all. And if that's not a good enough reason for you to join our Tuesday morning volunteers' team, we can't think what is. Do come and join us; spending time in a cemetery isn't as miserable as you might think!



## • T Section •

Here's a tremendous recent example of how the work of our research volunteer group dovetails that of the groundwork team. The mammoth task of digitising the old Cemetery burial records continues; many fascinating stories are being revealed through researching the burial records that relate to the T section in the Unconsecrated part of the Cemetery. The area had become so overgrown and desolate it's not even recorded on our maps as T section! It's an area behind K and L section on the map image. Recently, lots of work has gone into reclaiming the ground, which is one of the most densely populated areas. It wasn't used for burials until 1906, fifty-two years after the Cemetery was opened, and comprises an area around the farmyards and a stone yard used by stonemasons for burials elsewhere.



It has none of the magnificence and splendour of other areas, indeed there are not many headstones visible at all – a combination of nature repossessing them or the fact that many of those interred in this section couldn't afford a headstone. There are several 'Cemetery Company graves', more commonly known as 'pauper's graves'. The burial orders record many interesting occupations, including several hawkers, ice cream men and an organ grinder, and not forgetting seven victims of the Great War, only one of whom has a marked burial place.

When the weather improves (we hope) next spring, we'll be planting some flowering shrubs. Bulbs have already been planted, and we'll be creating new pathways marked out in wood chippings. The before and after pictures will be worth seeing, so **watch this space**.

## • Tours •

We're busy preparing our schedule for the upcoming tours' season and finalising the dates. There are some exciting projects in the planning, but we're keeping our powder dry for just a bit longer ...

**Keep watching** 

