

UNDERCLIFFE UNCOVERED

TALES FROM OUR TOMBS



• Chair's Comments •

Welcome to the spring newsletter; this unusually warm weather for the time of year has seen the Cemetery bursting into life, accompanied by the annoying buzz of our strimmers as the grounds team do battle with the rapidly growing grass! Fortunately, we have managed to recruit not one, but three new volunteers over the past couple of months, so a hearty welcome to Les, Paul and Julie.

Recently, we were also delighted to welcome representatives of Bradford Council with the aim of declaring the Cemetery a listed 'Local Nature Reserve', preserving parts of Undercliffe as a haven for fauna and wildlife, hopefully working alongside the *Bradford Botany Group* to create a habitat management plan which could include the creation of a wildflower meadow with the introduction of native plants to attract new species that, with a nod to Bradford's woollen industry, will include teasels. A full report will be included in the next newsletter – in the meantime, keep an eye on our Facebook page for more information as it becomes available.



On 14 June we are pleased to be hosting the AGM of *The National Federation of Cemetery Friends* (NFCF) of which Undercliffe Cemetery is a member, representing groups of volunteers interested in conserving cemeteries both large and small. The Federation was set up in 1986 with about 12 members and now has around 140 groups throughout the UK actively caring for cemeteries and churchyards as well as associates with complementary interests. The NFCF AGM is hosted by a member group in a different location every year, with the added incentive of a guided walk around the host's cemetery. Members welcome the opportunity to visit stands of other societies, share problems and learn of updates on current issues such as monument safety or digital memorial recording.

Finally, work continues on our new burial area – with a potential space for approximately 90 new plots this will ensure the survival of Undercliffe as a working cemetery for many years to come. Watch this space!

Tim Hardy

• 2025 Tours •

This year of 2025, which recognises Bradford as the UK City of Culture, offers many opportunities in our Tour Schedule to recognise that prestigious award. Many of the events acknowledging this through the year will be arranged at short notice, so we can't let you have a full list of them in this newsletter as we would normally. Please keep watching our website and Facebook pages for updates. Our longstanding Trustee and tour guide John Jackson ran our first tour of the year themed 'Creation, Desolation and Restoration', an excellent three-word summary of Undercliffe Cemetery's long history! It was very well attended and may well be repeated in future.



BRADFORD 2025
UK City of Culture

• Death Cafés •

Undercliffe Cemetery
Death Cafés

MARCH
Mon 10th 11.30–1.30pm

APRIL
Sat 5th 11.30–1.30pm

MAY
Thurs 8th 1.30– 4.30pm
Wild tea walk & Death Cafe

JUNE
Wed 11th 5.30– 7.30pm

FREE to everyone. A supportive space to talk about death, dying & grief. Hot drinks & snacks provided.

No booking required
Find out more text Nicola 07914495626
office@undercliffcemetary.co.uk
The Lodge
127 Undercliffe Lane
BD3 0DVV
FREE PARKING

We've recently started hosting a series of Death Cafés, which offer a supportive space to talk about death, dying and grief. These aren't unique Undercliffe events; they are increasingly being held all over the UK – where we have a taboo about 'Death'. This certainly wasn't the case in Victorian times when the Grim Reaper was looking over your shoulder every day, so we're encouraging people to talk about and consider it more. The subject is handled appropriately and sensitively; here's one interesting comment that came from someone as they left our first one: 'we laughed more than you'd expect'.

Two more Death Cafés are in the pipeline – dates and details on the poster. No booking required and the events are completely FREE. Drinks and snacks will be provided and a washroom is available along with free parking, please use Undercliffe Lane entrance. If you, or if you know of anybody who may be interested, please spread the word.

If you require further details, text Nicola on 07914 495626



• Graham Swain Grave Restoration •

Yet more sterling work from Graham Swain and his team straightening a badly leaning large monument on a path-facing popular walkway. Pictures show the monument before, during and after their efforts. Substantial and long-running root growth from an adjacent tree had left the monument in a precarious state of imbalance; people can walk past safely and confidently now!



The time and effort Graham and his team put into their work – most of which isn't as readily visible as this one – is really appreciated. We might start doing a newsletter supplement to cover his work! Of course, we'll have future opportunities to share the fruits of their labour, but in the meantime, thanks very much gents!!!



• Getting Ready for Spring & Summer •

As the ground volunteers' autumn and winter works finish, their efforts will be more focused on grass strimming across our very fertile 26-acre site. Stewart Field is pictured servicing some of our trimmers in readiness; we have a good few now but they get lots of use and anybody who can provide others, new or old, please let us know! Similarly, if you'd like to join our enthusiastic grass strimming/lawn cutting team, why not join us on a Tuesday? Your efforts will be much appreciated and we're confident you'll enjoy yourselves!

Benefits of Volunteering

1. *Good for your mental health*
2. *Prevents loneliness and isolation*
3. *Gives you a feeling of purpose*
4. *Helps you meet new friends*
5. *Increases physical activity*



• Ground Scanning •

We've been delighted to offer the facilities and opportunities of our site to the University of Bradford's School of Archaeology and Forensic Sciences team. As well as giving a large number of them practical experience in their studies, particularly around the areas of the old and sadly long-gone former chapels, we get to see the potential of our proposed new burial site. The team brought a 3D Ground Penetrating Radar scanner capable of going down 15 metres. This really is an exciting time for us to open up a new, large unused area for new burials, singularly the most significant income stream for us. To emphasise once more, Undercliffe Cemetery is not purely an historic site reflecting Bradford's rich history in stone, it is still a working cemetery and we hope to expand as a site for new burials. Work is progressing well with this; more detail will follow and if you're interested in our current burial or ashes committal services, please contact our Registrar.



• Volunteer of The Quarter – Rachel Curtis •

How did you get involved?

I retired in 2022 and was keen to get involved in some local volunteering in the outdoors. I had first come across Undercliffe Cemetery in the late 1980s when I worked at a Social Services office on Barkerend Road. We needed somewhere to have a team away day and this took place at the newly opened lodge at Undercliffe, and I discovered the Cemetery then. I continued to visit occasionally and brought visitors to see it when they came to Bradford. I also went to a great tour as part of Bradford Literature Festival once. So, I decided to check out the volunteering options at Undercliffe Cemetery once I retired. I contacted the team and arranged to come up the following Tuesday and I've never looked back.



cont.

cont.

What is it that you do?

My practical skills are limited but, in the summer, I mow the grass, maybe help with strimming, and generally help keep the place looking good. In winter, I muck in with all the clearing and tidying jobs. It must be said I'm not much use if the mower stops working but there's always someone else who's very capable of sorting that out. I enjoy learning the stories behind the people buried in the Cemetery and love being outside all day summer and winter – well maybe not when it's pouring with rain.

Is there something specific that you are particularly proud of/pleased with?

I'm most proud of is how we work together as a team. There's not one piece of work that I can take any personal responsibility for, but as a team I think we do a great job in looking after the place and keeping the balance of Undercliffe being a significant historic treasure, a working cemetery, and a beautiful green space for wildlife.

What does the future look like for us volunteers?

I think the future is rosy for the volunteers. It's great to see new people come along and get really involved as well as bringing new skills and ideas. We all get something out of coming along on a Tuesday – exercise, fresh air, banter, camaraderie, sense of achievement – and even sometimes a piece of pie or cake!



Rachel, far left, with the rest of the crew.

• Monty Python •

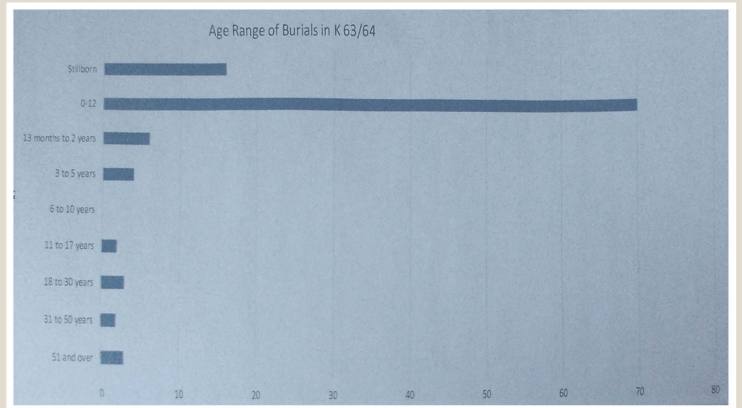
Undercliffe's Filming Links

In previous newsletters, we've covered Undercliffe's popularity as a venue in many films and television programmes and here's another one from the early 1970s. Michael Palin of Monty Python fame is from Sheffield and many Yorkshire locations were used in his own and Monty Python productions. Here's a couple from Monty Python, one looking up from Harrogate Street with both aforementioned lodges in the background and Messrs Jones, Chapman, Idle and Palin from left to right leaving through the Otley Road gates. If you've any others we might not have seen, please let us know.



• Paupers' Graves •

Andy Joyce, one of our research volunteers and tour guides, often covers the subject of paupers' (or Company) graves for those all-too-many unfortunate folk who couldn't afford a burial in their own or a family plot. Undercliffe has many plots where several people were interred in the same grave, usually until it was full, and Andy's particular favourite is one in the Unconsecrated section surrounded by several large gravestones and other monuments, which always begs the question, 'How did they get more than 60 bodies in this small area?'



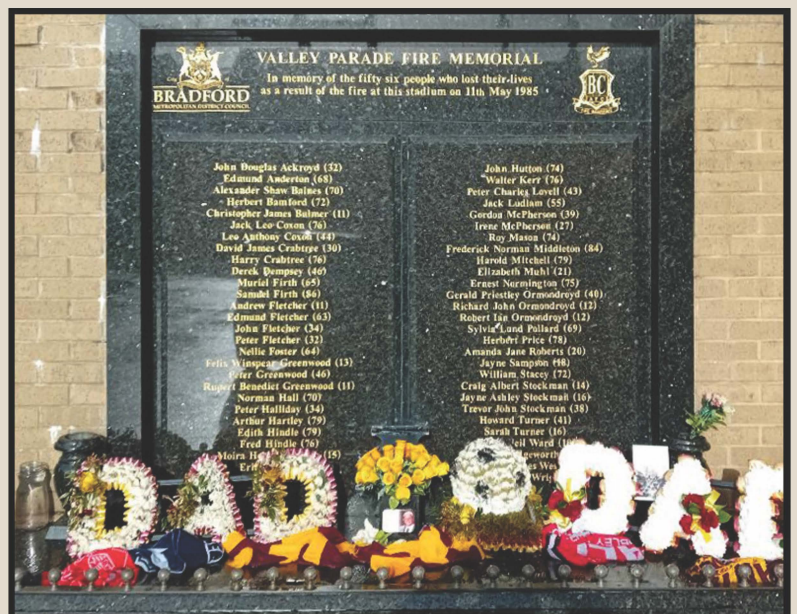
Plot 'K' Consecrated. Graves 63 & 64.

It's not the one with the highest number of burials though.

Recent research by student Emma Brownridge has revealed one in Consecrated K section, opened in 1880 and quickly filled with 110 poor souls of various ages (see image above). Much recovery work has been completed in this particular section recently – the grave is immediately to the right of the daffodils. Of course, these will soon be less visible, so we'll need to get Andy to point it out any interested visitors on our future tours!

• Bradford City Fire Disaster •

Finally, as well as being Bradford's City of Culture, 2025 also marks 40 years since the Bradford City fire disaster at Valley Parade on 11 May 1985, when 56 people lost their lives. One of our research volunteers recently discovered in her work with our digitisation project the burial record of John Hutton, one of the 56 who died. He was very local, living at Hatfield Road in Undercliffe. His plot, very close to the lodge was unmarked and overgrown so we tended the plot, made and erected a marker and plaque as pictured. John is remembered at Valley Parade on the memorial as pictured, top of the second column.



IN MEMORY OF

JOHN HUTTON AGED 74

HATFIELD ROAD UNDERCLIFFE

DIED 23 MAY 1985 12 DAYS AFTER BRADFORD CITY FIRE

OF INJURIES RECEIVED AT VALLEY PARADE FIRE

REMEMBER

THE 56

11 MAY 1985

A crew making a film about the fire disaster recently visited Undercliffe; they'd been told that many of Bradford's cemeteries, and Undercliffe in particular, were places where many people came for tranquillity and solace to help with their loss at that tragic time. Can we please ask that, as you see references to the fire disaster as we approach 11 May, you remember John Hutton and the other 55 who went to watch a game of football and never came home.

