



Registered Charity No. 1160314

The Friends of St Peter's Newsletter

Number 9 – Autumn 2017

Introduction by the Chairman of the Trustees

The Trustees of the Friends are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded us £907,000 for the proposed transformation of Rectory Lane Cemetery. James Moir and his team are to be congratulated on the success of the bid and thanked for all their hard work. An article by James on this exciting project appears elsewhere in this Newsletter and we shall shortly be announcing the names of those who have been appointed as Community Engagement Officer and Project Manager. I specifically draw attention to James' plea towards the end of his article for further volunteers.

I also commend to you two articles by Christopher Green on the Cowper Society, which is now over forty years old, and on the Monumental Brasses in the Church concerning their recently completed conservation.

We are hoping to hold two social events in 2018, one in the spring or early summer and the other in November to coincide with the centenary of the armistice which brought the First World War to an end. Further details will be announced as soon as possible.

We welcome ideas and suggestions from our members, and indeed other readers, as to what you would like to see the Friends doing for you and for the whole Berkhamsted community. Please do get in touch. Peter Williamson (peter.williamson47@btinternet.com)

The Cowper Society Presents...

For more than forty years these words have appeared on posters and flyers promoting concerts, recitals, theatrical performances and other entertainments in St Peter's, the Court House and formerly also All Saints church. But what is the Cowper Society and who are its members? It all began when the Court House was being restored in the 1970s and a *Court House (Appeal Campaign) Committee* came into existence. When the restoration was complete, the members of this committee, no more than five or six in number, had evidently not exhausted their energy or enthusiasm. With the blessing of the PCC they transformed themselves into a *Cultural Activities Committee* and by the middle of 1976 they were calling themselves The Cowper Society. Why Cowper? Who better than the poet William Cowper, born in Berkhamsted Rectory, to inspire a group dedicated to promoting the arts in Berkhamsted on behalf of the parish church.

The purpose of this newly created Cowper Society was to realise the potential of St Peter's, the Court House and All Saints church as venues in which the wider community could enjoy music, theatre, talks and exhibitions. For many years the Cowper Society operated under the aegis of the PCC and more recently under the Friends of St Peter's. In practice however it has been a largely independent and self-regulating group. It has always had two main roles. On the one

hand, for its members to devise and present events themselves, and on the other hand to provide the practical support to enable other groups and individuals to bring performance into the churches and the Court House.

This has meant not simply putting up the posters around the town and providing front-of-house on the day. The Cowper Society has raised the funds to purchase, among other things, staging and a top quality grand piano – an instrument that has made it possible to invite highly regarded recitalists to perform in St Peter's. The Cowper Society also organised the appeal to raise the money needed to fund a major restoration of the main organ in the church. This in turn has made possible a programme of more than thirty organ recitals since the inauguration of the restored instrument in 2011. The Cowper Society also raised the funds to pay for the Millennium window in the north aisle, engraved by David Peace and Sally Scott and celebrating the work of William Cowper and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In all since it was formed the Cowper Society has raised over £54,000 to put towards new furnishings and improved facilities in St Peter's and the Court House.

Who then are the members of the Cowper Society? Over the years it has attracted individuals involved in the musical and literary life of the town and people active in the care of the buildings where the performances take place. In truth, the Cowper Society is more in the nature of a committee than a society and membership has been self-perpetuating, largely by invitation. That said, the essential qualifications for membership are a fund of original ideas and a willingness to move pews, set out chairs, erect staging, and be there to welcome the audience.

The Cowper Society presents . . . What has the Cowper Society presented over the past forty years? The first event was a concert on 18th December 1976 at which ticket sales amounted to £49.05 and a fee of £25 was paid to 'The harpist'. Since then the Cowper Society has had a role in some 300 or more events. Sometimes drawing on the Society's own members and friends to write and perform literary entertainments, mostly on local themes. More recently the Cowper Society has organised a regular programme of talks during the winter months, attracting many distinguished speakers on a wide variety of topics. On other occasions, the Cowper Society has been there behind the scenes making sure that everything is in place so that others can bring their talents to Berkhamsted audiences.

If you think you could play a part in this active and forward-looking group, why not contact the Chairman, Penny Abbott <penelope.abbott@btinternet.com>

Monumental Brasses Newly Displayed

The conservation of five monumental brasses in St Peter's church has recently been completed. This was a project already taking shape when the Friends of St Peter's was formed in 2013 and the Friends took over the responsibility for raising the necessary funds. In the end a major part of the funding came in the form of a generous donation from Berkhamsted School, supported by grants from the Francis Coales Charitable Foundation and the Monumental Brass Society.

Of the five newly conserved brasses, only one has returned to the position it occupied prior to conservation. This is the brass representing a man in armour typical of the late 14th century. He is generally regarded as John Raven, esquire to the Black Prince. This brass is once again in place among the choir stalls on the east face of the stone pillar in the St John Chantry where it has been warmly welcomed back by members of the choir. The other brasses have been relocated on the wall in the north aisle. Here they are much more readily accessible to view than they were in various different parts of the church prior to conservation. They also complement the brasses similarly displayed on the other side of the church on the wall of the south aisle.

Among the newly conserved brasses are those commemorating Robert and Katherine Incent, the parents of John Incent, Dean of St Paul's and founder of Berkhamsted School. Katherine is shown in her burial shroud with an inscription giving the date of her death and mentioning the gifts given by her son, John, 'unto thys chapelle of Saynt John', the place where Katherine was buried and where her brass will originally have been set in a slab covering her grave.



Katherine Incent – before and after restoration

Robert Incent was also buried in the Chapel of St John. Of his brass we now have only the inscription. The figure was seen by Chauncy, probably in the 1690s but is now lost. The inscription records that Robert was 'servant unto the noble pryncesse lady Cecyle duchesse of York', the last royal resident in Berkhamsted Castle and mother of Edward IV and Richard III. The inscription also records the year of Robert's death (1485) and unusually the cause of death. He 'dyed at the grete swetyng sykenesse',

a virulent fever that first appeared in England in 1485, brought some believe from France by the followers of Henry Tudor, later Henry VII.



Inscription under the Katherine Incent brass before and after conservation



Also in the north aisle is a brass bearing an inscription in Latin verse and formerly part of the memorial to John Waterhouse and his wife Margaret who both died in 1558. Prior to conservation this brass was fixed down on the sill of the window behind the tomb of John Sayer in the Lady Chapel. The other parts of this brass, an inscription and two shields, form part of a wall monument in the Chapel of St Catherine. The real interest of this brass is its back. This is a palimpsest, a brass cut out from an earlier brass and engraved on the its back. A replica of the earlier brass is now displayed alongside the Latin verse inscription. It is part of the brass of a London goldsmith, Thomas Humfre and his wife Joan, with part of the inscription, including a fine engraving of St Jerome in the initial letter. Rather remarkably, another portion of this same brass survives, also as a palimpsest, in the parish church of St Margaret at Isfield in East Sussex.

Lastly in the north aisle is a brass in the form of a half figure of a priest in mass vestments of about 1400. He is traditionally regarded as Thomas Brydde, rector of Berkhamsted in 1406. Prior to conservation this brass was in a Victorian setting in the floor of the clergy vestry, formerly the chancel, and rarely seen by anyone other than the clergy and the servers.

Throughout this project to conserve these important memorials we have benefitted from the guidance of Martin Stuchfield, President of the Monumental Brass Society. Our warmest thanks are due to him. He has visited St Peter's on several occasions. He has given generously of his time and provided both wise advice and practical assistance, not least the delicate task of fixing the brasses in their new locations.

Rectory Lane Cemetery

Since the last Newsletter, the very best news was received in July – the Lottery Fund had awarded the Friends of St Peter's Berkhamsted £907,000 for the transformation of Rectory Lane Cemetery from a 'Dead Space to a Living Space'. This is a massive tribute to all those volunteers who have worked tirelessly to take the project through the Start Up and Development Phases since 2014 and so arrive at a point where the capital works can now begin.



Board members and staff of the Heritage Lottery Fund with the Rectory Lane Cemetery volunteers, on their visit in May 2017. A wettish day but everyone was smiling!

Over the next 3 years the space will be transformed to include a Garden of Remembrance, a Wildlife domain and a dedicated area for picnics and live performances. Better pathways and facilities for disabled visitors are also planned. These will be in addition to maintaining and restoring many of the original features such as the walls, memorials and the Sexton's Hut, which will become an information resource for visitors.

Of course, the HLF funds will go a long way to buying the professional services and skills needed, but we will still need to raise a further £30,000 in partnership funding. The PCC have generously underwritten the sum but it is essential the Project replaces this over the next three years.

At the same time, the website will be vastly expanded to include the stories - which are already extensive – of those buried in the Cemetery and its history. This is a particularly touching account received from a recent visitor:

I think there comes a time in later life that you think of those things I really must do, I had promised myself to find and mark the grave of my twin siblings in my home town Berkhamsted.

I always visit St Peters Church, where there is a lot of family history. On a visit (in 2016), I picked up a Parish magazine YB and was delighted to read about the Rectory Lane Cemetery project, consequently I contacted James Moir who was happy to meet me recently with the parish records and we tracked down the area I remembered visiting as a child. It was a very moving moment.

Thinking of that day has sent me tumbling down a rabbit hole of childhood memories. I remember it was a sunny day July 1944, I was seven, I went to the Chapel Street Infants school, I came home for lunch as a neighbour who was a taxi driver I think Mr Wilmore also had a daughter Barbara whom he bought back so I was lucky enough to get home too.

When I got to our back door, a neighbour Mrs Groom opened the door so I was very surprised, I asked where's my Mum? She said she wants to see you upstairs, I thought 'my Mum in bed?!'

When I peeked around the door Mum was propped up in bed and said "Go and see who is in the cot - it's your new brother and sister!!"

Two tiny babies with very black hair, one each end of the cot, were quietly sleeping there, I noticed a lot of cotton wool peeking from their necks and they were covered in warm blankets.

I was so excited of course I had no clue my Mum was pregnant, she looked tired but happy, Mum asked me to run up the road to our neighbour Mrs Keen to ask please could we borrow her twins' first hats as my Mum had had twins, I ran what felt like the wind!

I was quickly upstairs again and Mrs Groom helped me to put the little white crotchet hats on - they looked so sweet.

I went back to school and couldn't contain my excitement telling everyone that I had a new brother and sister it was hard to sit still!

When I got home Mrs Groom was still there so I said can I see my Mum and those twins she said go up and see your Mum. She was propped up in bed and I looked over to the cot it was empty where have they gone I asked?

Mum said they were very poorly so they went to heaven with the angels.

In later years I learnt that the midwife had christened them before they died, Anne and Anthony. They were put in small white coffins and buried about three graves down on the top left of the Rectory Lane cemetery, against the wall.

Mum took my sister Joy and I sometimes to have a look at the plot on the way home and told us not to forget them, Mum always used to say what age they would be every July 21st.

Now my family and I can have the opportunity to mark their passing with a plaque on the cemetery wall above their graves. Thank you for all involved in this lovely project, I wish I was closer to give a hand.

Best regards Valerie (Bull Potter Mowbray)

Following a competitive recruitment process, we shall shortly be announcing the names of those appointed to the roles of Community Engagement Officer and Project Manager.

Programme of Events

November – December 2017



5 th Nov	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
18 th Nov	Bring a Bear Concert	1.00 p.m.
23 rd Nov	Charity Fashion Show	7.30 p.m.
25 th Nov	Bridgewater Sinfonia Concert	7.30 p.m.
3 rd Dec	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.
9 th Dec	Bring a Bear Concert	2.30 p.m.
10 th Dec	Berkhamsted Choral Society Concert	7.30p.m.
11 th Dec	Cowper Society Winter Talk	8.00 p.m.
12 th Dec	Chiltern Arts Concert	7.30 p.m.
23 rd Dec	Chiltern Chamber Choir Concert	7.30 p.m..
7 th Jan	Rectory Lane Cemetery working party	2–4 p.m.

Rectory Lane Cemetery cont...

As the backbone of the Project, the next three years also offers lots more opportunities for volunteers to engage with the Project – if you can spare time, please do come and help with the following:

- Market stalls helpers – once a month on a Saturday morning
- Guides who can help to share the interesting features of the site
- Neighbourhood leaflet droppers
- Fund raisers
- Social media gurus
- Gardeners who can help our 2 hour working parties every first Sunday of the month, or adopt a grave and look after it at times to suit you



Volunteer Amanda Williams has adopted graves beside the Three Close Lane entrance path

This is just a taster and by no means exhaustive - you probably have a skill we didn't know we needed! And keep an eye on the website.

To get in touch please email jamesmgmoir@aol.com or visit www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk

James Moir

Become a Friend

To join the Friends please use this application form (or a photocopy of it). Alternatively, you can download an Application Form from the Friends website:

www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk

Personal Details:

Title:
Full Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Telephone:
Email:

Subscriptions

Individual	£12
Family	£20
Corporate	£50

Gift Aid

My subscription payments **should/should not** be treated as Gift Aid donations (delete as appropriate)

Bankers Standing Order

Bank Name:
Bank Address:
Postcode:

Please pay The Friends of St Peter's Church Great Berkhamsted, A/c No. 64109216, NatWest Bank (60-02-21) the sum of:

£	Amount in words
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Beginning on :

Date:

and annually thereafter until further notice, charging my account:

Account Name:
Sort Code:
Account Number:

Date:

Signature:

Please return this form to: Paul Crosland, 11 Upper Hall Park, Berkhamsted, HP4 2NW