**Newington Cemetery Interest Group Committee Meeting**

Minutes of meeting: Wednesday 28 March 28 2018

**Attended**: Tony Harris, Dennis Smith, Robin Boyd, Barbara McNaught, Carolyn Walker, Ellen-Raissa Jackson, Barbara Blows.

**Apologies**: Robin and Morag MacCormack, Dave Stone, Iain Wilson

**Minutes of meeting of 24 January 2018** were agreed.

**Snowdrop Walk** 25th February – Review

The weather was good and so was attendance: 50 visitors and 11 volunteers. CW’s route and map were useful, but next year we should make more copies as people tended to walk off with them. Thanks in part to the frosty weather, the snowdrops were out in force, but to note for next year, we should hold the walk the week before (2nd week of February). The publicity worked well and posters in community centres, churches, shops, and the Inch all seemed to draw people to the event. It was agreed that it was a good idea to have people demonstrating what the working party does during such events.

*CW to write a paragraph about this year’s walk for the website.*

**Biodiversity**

TH reported back on the meeting on 12th March with Susan Falconer (City of Edinburgh biodiversity officer) and CW, IW, BMcN, ERJ and TH.

Susan Falconer was very enthusiastic about the cemetery and our work. She was clear that we should retain and manage trees, especially mature ones. We should embrace both standing and fallen deadwood and try to compost materials on site and create more habitats. She was encouraging about removing and controlling non-native species, particularly laurels, and possibly sycamore saplings, to let in more light. We should retain some ivy where it is safe to do so, put up more bird boxes and create more bug hotels.

She encouraged us to collaborate with other groups and provided some helpful contacts. She suggested that posting regular items of interest on social media can help hold interest and keep people on board.

She emphasised the importance of recording and monitoring what we see in the cemetery and take some steps to consider how to measure and monitor the effects of our actions. She recommended the iRecord app, which is free and can be used to photograph and identify plants etc as well as providing a geolocation. All observations can be useful data and those who are not comfortable using a smartphone can create records by hand. We can submit observations to the Wildlife Information Centre.

TH suggested that the group try out a test area for management, possibly near the catacombs. CW suggested that we pick at least 2 areas (including by the new rowans and bench). Following SF’s suggestions, we can survey those areas first and then measure the effects of management. There was general agreement for this approach.

RB noted that work had been done at Haddington to prop up fallen stones. *RB to contact Haddington to find out how they funded the work.*

**Recent contacts to “info”** & other outside contacts– anything arising (BB)

BB noted that she has had issues with emails not reaching TH, which led to delays in replies, but this appears to be fixed. BB updated the group on correspondence.

Nigel and Sally Griffith have offered to fund the poster for next year’s snowdrop walk next year and to share information about our events. This was welcomed by the group.

An inquiry about Judith Pritica grave (which is not in the Jewish section) was resolved.

*ERJ to email Nadia Bessos asking for help to test app to record wildlife etc.*

**Working Party update**

B McN reported back on the work party of 19 Feb, which had 11 volunteers. Work continued on clearing ivy from the catacombs, which are now much improved. CH and Hazel Dunne planted camellia near the benches. Work was done on planning for the snowdrop walk.

Work party of 19 March was cancelled because of the stormy weather and took place on 26 March. There were 9 volunteers and work concentrated on the top of the catacombs and preventing new ivy growth. *DMcN to bring a step ladder to the next working party to allow us to tackle the top edge.*

R MacC, M MacC and HD planted hyacinth and daffodil at the bare end of the cemetery. Other volunteers planted snowdrops beside the restored JVS Taylor grave.

A section of moss was moved from stones by the catacombs to the bug hotel as a new roof.

**Future Work**

B McN suggested that we carry out grass seeding for bare patches and tackle work that will not disturb nesting birds.

TH intends to carry out trial wire brushing and chipping on the paint on the railings around the Jewish section. We are still waiting to hear back from CEC about replacement railings and paint.

An urgent issue was raised about cars driving over the grass at the entrance. BB had helped a woman who had accidentally driven over the first graves and got stuck. It was suggested that we ask the Inch for large stones that we could paint white or construct a small hurdle out of stakes and saplings.

**War memorial**

CW met Iain Anderson – CWGC manager for Scotland, Iceland and Faroes. He noted that the CWGC makes a distinction between commemorative and official stones and only look after the latter. They will put in a new stone when there is a fallen stone that they cannot lift (for official graves). These are mostly granite and some Portland stone and should not be painted or scrubbed. CWGC need a power jet to wash the memorial wall and are considering applying a fungicide, so we must be aware of that when planting and leave space behind. CWGC is also considering repointing the wall and fixing the apron, which has sunk. CW has the correct contact if we need to report a problem with a war grave.

CW checked that CWGC would be happy for us to plant scented wintersweet in a pattern in front of the memorial and IA agreed. There is a cost for that as we would need about 21 plants (circa £200 at full price) to be planted at the end of the summer. *CW to research, contact the Inch*.

**Catacombs survey**

TH updated the group on the survey. The students plan to send out a short summary report in the next few weeks, containing the key findings from the geophysics survey. The summary suggested that no large air-filled void corresponding to the central vault was found (unlike at Warriston). If there is no big cavity, it would allow the council to fill in the subsided area.

**Activities & Events 2018**

It was agreed that FNC would participate in Doors Open Day 2018 on the Sunday afternoon (30 September).

TH noted that 2018 is the Year of Young People (age 8 to 26) and we could tie this in to doors open day. He noted that many of the war grave burials would be considered young persons now. TH suggested we home in on one story. Another possibility is to organise a family event related to the first burial in the cemetery, which is Muirhead, given that we have research on him. More work could be done on what distinguishes his school, what life was like for a schoolchild at that time and how he got to school. Another grave that could be a focus is the scouts. This needs further thought but FNC could contact the scout group and/or Prestonfield School about a possible project.

The Fungus Walk is to be held on a Sunday in October – *CW to check possible dates*.

It was agreed that we should hold another event in June for erection of the nature signs, with a working party element, to keep the events momentum going. ERJ to organise using existing materials etc.

**GDPR**

TH reported on the impact of GDPR on the group’s relationship with GPCC and the future structure of the group. GPCC is happy for FNC to remain an interest group of the community council, but has agreed that it is for the members of FNC to decide its future structure. ERJ is to be the main GPCC contact for the interest group.

In the immediate future, we need positive affirmation that people want to be contacted. TH suggests we use info@newington-cemetery.org.uk. *TH to draft an email to cover us under GDPR.*

TH and DS had studied the Friends of Parks and Cemeteries template and concluded that it had difficulties, including a poor constitution and having to take out insurance and set up a bank account. It was agreed that this did not need an immediate decision. *TH to circulate a document for discussion*.

There was a discussion about the website and the need for a better procedure for updating news and events (including reports of working parties etc), as well as the pressure on the webmaster, Magnus Hagdorn. It was noted that MH is extremely busy and that it would help if someone else could be authorised to post material to the site. There was also some confusion about where contacts to the different addresses go and how to use the separate addresses. It was agreed that *B McN and TH should contact MH to discuss emails, setting up an additional authoriser to post material and the details for the Twitter account (password etc)*.

*DS to check website for any other issues*.

**AOB**

BMcN met Peter Gentleman who suggested that the council is dumping earth from other cemeteries to fill in the depressions. He was hopeful that CEC had a view to turning stones the right way round (face up) and setting them at an angle.

The nature sign text has been checked and cleared by RSPB Scotland and Susan Falconer. *ERJ to circulate draft text for the gravestone imagery sign.*

**Next committee meeting: 23 May 2018**, 7.30pm at Priestfield Church. Future dates to be agreed at that meeting.

**Future working parties: 16 April and 21 May.**