

Friends of the Cemeteries Meeting

Wednesday 11th March 2026

In Attendance: Derek Mackenzie Committee Clerk
Kate Heeley Cemeteries Administrator
Mark Lewis Head of Estate & Operations
Mel Jones Friend of the Cemeteries

Others: Angela Brooks and one additional member of the public

Apologies: Duncan Enright, Jane Doughty.

Cemetery Regulations

The CC provided an overview of the revised Cemetery Regulations distributed in March 2025. The updated regulations have had a positive impact on improving consistency across the cemeteries and are now being implemented and enforced. This approach aims to improve the overall management and experience for all cemetery users.

Hug in a book

The CC gave a brief overview of the positive feedback received regarding the *Hug in a Book* initiative. The resource provides a supportive and sensitive approach for individuals who are grieving or preparing for the loss of a loved one.

Ashes Scattering Bed

The CC provided an update on the ashes scattering bed at Tower Hill Cemetery. The current signage has been identified as untidy and will be improved.

The scattering bed has been positively received by cemetery users. Praise was given to the Works Team for maintaining the area and ensuring the pebbled surface remains tidy and covers areas where plants are not in bloom.

A member of the public asked whether this facility was only available at Tower Hill Cemetery. The CC confirmed that the possibility of introducing a similar area at Windrush Cemetery will be explored once the new Operations Manager is in post.

Memorial Monolith at the Windrush Cemetery

The CA reported that the memorial monolith has now been installed, and several plaques have already been added.

The monolith is intended to maintain a natural appearance. The existing natural crack will be monitored for moss growth or signs of deterioration.

Several plaques previously attached to tree guards will be remade and relocated, at the families approval, onto the monolith to reduce obstruction during routine tree maintenance.

Administrative Changes

The CC and The CA explained that all cemetery users are issued with the Cemetery Regulations when they become Exclusive Right of Burial (EROB) holders. This ensures grave responsibilities are understood and in particular the specifications relating to memorials and gardens.

Updated burial charges for the new financial year have been circulated to Funeral Directors, Memorial Masons and other cemetery users. Correspondence included updated documentation and clear instructions for completion of forms, including required signatures and supporting information for:

- Memorial permits
- Notification of interments
- Transfer of EROB ownership

Supporting documentation may include forms of renunciation or statutory declarations.

The Friends of the Cemeteries meetings have also been highlighted in correspondence, encouraging cemetery users to attend future meetings.

(EROB – Exclusive Right of Burial holder / deed holder for a grave plot.)

Closed Cemeteries maintenance update

The closed cemeteries are currently under review, particularly the ecological area. This area is being monitored by the Biodiversity and Green Spaces Officer, together with the representatives from St Mary's Church.

The HE&O noted that some members of the public have expressed concerns about the area appearing untidy; however, the natural appearance is intentional. Signage explains the ecological importance and purpose of the area.

Annual inspections of tomb structures are currently underway.

Mel asked that additional communication be provided when testing work is carried out, as over zealous taping during a previous inspection had caused concern among residents.

Dog Fouling and Anti-Social Behaviour

The CA and The CC discussed ongoing sporadic reports of dog fouling and dogs being off leads within the cemeteries.

It was noted that some cemeteries operate a no-dogs policy; however, this is difficult to enforce due to public walkways running through Windrush Cemetery and the open layout of Tower Hill Cemetery.

Dog fouling is not permitted and will be addressed if observed by cemetery staff.

Revised signage is being considered, although care will be taken to avoid excessive signage outside of designated notice boards in order to reflect the cemeteries as a place of reflection.

Anti-social behaviour was also discussed. The CC and The CA emphasised the importance of reporting such incidents to the police via **101**, either by telephone or online. Increased reporting may help encourage greater police presence and patrols.

Cemetery Inspections

Monthly cemetery inspections have been introduced alongside the twice-yearly memorial safety testing programme.

The monthly inspections are currently carried out by The CA and a senior member of the Works Team this will switch to being the Operations Manager when appointed.

These inspections review both cemetery sites and include:

- signage and notice boards
- general tidiness and maintenance
- mowing and reseeded
- compliance with Cemetery Regulations

The CA highlighted that small issues, such as soil being left on pathways or a dripping tap remaining unrepaired, would be reported promptly to the Works Team to ensure quicker resolution.

Mel and the public attendee commended the Works Team for their dedication and the compassion they show while working in the cemeteries.

The HE&O agreed that the team provides an excellent service and that improvements can continue where issues are identified. Recent examples of prompt maintenance work include:

- repairs to lighting at St Marys to the thanks of the Almshouses
- replacement of lighting at Windrush Cemetery toilets
- repair of the tap at Windrush
- restoration work to sections of the Tower Hill wall

Tower Hill notice boards are currently being renovated following vandalism and weather damage. One board is difficult to open, and another requires the front panel to be reattached before new signage can be displayed.

All agreed that the notice boards provide useful and inclusive communication for cemetery users.

The third notice board at the Tower Hill entrance by the lodge would also be updated as it was agreed it was under utilised.

Feedback from FOTC

Mel reflected on previous meetings and the increasing number of public attendees. She also noted the significant improvements made to the appearance and management of both cemetery sites in recent years.

The seasonal planting, including daffodils and the Windrush meadow area, were highlighted as particularly positive features.

Mel expressed her appreciation to the staff of Witney Town Council, including both the administrative and Works Teams, particularly those who have served the council for many years.

The public attendee also commented on the support received when discussing a sensitive matter with The CA in the administration office.

Mel confirmed that Friends of the Cemeteries meetings will continue to be held twice yearly in **March and September**.

The CA confirmed the response to a question raised at the previous meeting regarding cemetery gates during funerals. Gates are not closed; however, signage is placed at the entrances indicating that a funeral is in progress. The Works Team are present before, during, and after funerals to prepare the grave, assist where required, and reinstate the grave following the service.

Funeral Directors and other cemetery users are invited to attend future meetings, and reminders will be issued prior to meetings.

Newly appointed Staff

The HE&O introduced two new Works Team members, who have recently completed their inductions and are now working with the team.

He also confirmed that a new **Operations Manager** has been appointed and is expected to start between mid-April and early May.

Tower Hill Gate Soft-Close Mechanism

Mel raised that the soft-close mechanism for the Tower Hill gate had not yet been fitted. She understood that the Council were in possession of it and were due to fit it in September 2025. The HE&O confirmed this would be addressed and installed as soon as possible.

Memorial Plaque Request – Corp John S. Christiansen

Mel raised, on behalf of Witney Museum and a local historian, a request for a memorial plaque to commemorate **Corporal John S. Christiansen**.

Corporal Christiansen was buried at Tower Hill Cemetery in 1918 before being disinterred and repatriated to New York, USA in 1920.

The CA has been managing the administrative work relating to this historical case and will present a proposal to the **Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Committee** on **16 March 2026**. The proposal includes an example plaque and reference to the Find a Grave memorial ID, which contains additional historical and genealogical information.

Next meeting to be held 21st September 2026 - 11:00am in the Gallery Room