

Section 12 Postscript

The final session of the working party was held on the afternoon of Sat 5 Jul 2008. The remaining graves were tidied to the accompaniment of the Widcombe Wobblers, a local folk band. This was followed by a tour of the cemetery given by Phil Bendall and Brenda Beeton who gave a history of the cemetery and a selection of its more interesting and colourful occupants.

A presentation was made by Richard Wales, on behalf of the Widcombe Association's Committee, to Brenda Beeton for organising the work.

For those unable to attend the tour on that date, a second tour took place on Sat 26 Jul 2008. This included two Widcombe councillors, Ian Gilchrist (Lib-Dem), who had worked as a member of the working party over the past 18 months, and Brook Whelan (Con). Brenda Beeton, on behalf of Widcombe Association's Committee, presented a rosemary bush to Phil Bendall for his work on the project .

A summary of the work carried out appeared in *The Bath Chronicle* (17 Jul 2008 p18).



Reproduced by permission of *The Bath Chronicle*



Clearing ivy during the final session



The introduction to the tour



David Waterstone & Abbey representatives Alan Morley & Charles Curnock



The tour at Benjamin Bellamy's grave



The Widcombe Wobblers



Brenda Beeton pointing out Sir William Twysden's grave

Photographs courtesy of Jeremy Boss

An 18-month project to tidy up a 19th century cemetery has been completed - after 1,000 hours of work by volunteers.

The last working party organised by the Widcombe Association at the Bath Abbey Cemetery, Prior Park, was accompanied by music played by local band the Widcombe Wobblers.

There was a tour of newly-revealed memorials and the afternoon concluded with a champagne tea.

The work started because the cemetery had become overgrown, despite Bath and North East Somerset Council mowing the paths every few weeks during the summer and performing an annual strimming.

Ivy had grown so much that some crosses had become top-heavy and had been blown over in gales.

Over the past 18 months, volunteers put in more than 1,000 hours of effort to remove undergrowth and catalogue the memorials.

The cemetery, which opened in 1844, was designed by landscape architect John Claudius Loudon, who also designed cemeteries at Cambridge and Southampton.

There was around one burial a week in the 19th century but over time this figure dropped to fewer than five a year.

The abbey authorities closed the cemetery in the mid-1990s, although families who already have plots can still arrange burials there.

The five-acre cemetery has 2,000 graves which house a total of 4,000 people.

To help people find their relatives' graves, volunteers have copied the memorial inscriptions, photographed headstones, produced maps and checked dates. The association is going to distribute the information to the council, the abbey and some libraries to allow family historians to access the information.

Among those buried at the cemetery are men who served in the Peninsular War, at Waterloo and Trafalgar, during the Indian Mutiny, the Crimean War, the Boer War and the First and Second World Wars.

There are bishops, admirals, lords, slave owners, actors, dancing masters, and private governesses, as well as members of the colonial civil service, clergy and missionaries who served around the world.

Brenda Beeton, who led the volunteers, said: "We hope our work has made the cemetery more accessible to everyone.

"It is a lovely, peaceful place to explore and the views are wonderful."

For those wanting to explore the cemetery, the association has produced a Tombstone Trail leaflet, which is available from Prior Park Garden Centre.