Friends of Flaybrick

Summer 2023

Stained Glass Windows

When the chapels were built in 1864, plain glass was fitted to all the windows. In 1918 Rev J R Guy, vicar of St James Church, promoted a fund to establish a War Memorial in Flaybrick Cemetery to honour those who fell in the Great War. The fund found generous support and on 17th January 1920 the Bishop of Chester, Dr Paget, dedicated the memorial at Flaybrick Cemetery. The three apsidal windows designed by Jas Powell and Sons of London were in memory of Thomas Gostenhofer.

The chapel was last used in 1975 and as the building fell into disrepair the stained glass windows were removed for safe keeping in 1981. They were placed in storage at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum. (WAGM)



Central window

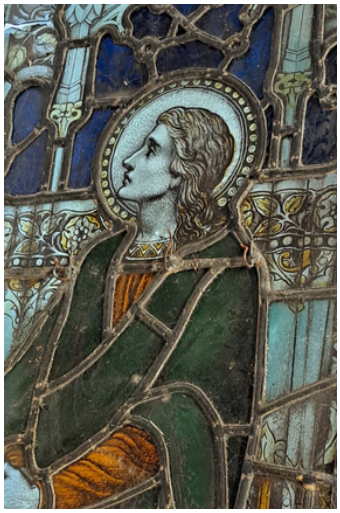


Left hand window

In 2021, the then curator of the Gallery Colin Simpson, found that two of the three original drawings for the design of the windows were for sale. With the help of the Friends of Flaybrick these were purchased in December 2021.
In March 2023 the Curator Niall Hodson, allowed the Friends to view the paintings and the stained glass windows. This was the first time since 1981 that the windows had been seen.



The 'missing' right hand window



Detail from the left hand window

Following this, one of the Friends carried out some research to try and find the missing painting. It was found that it had been sold at auction in London in 2020. He contacted the auction house, who in turn contacted the purchaser. After hearing about the first two paintings the purchaser very kindly agreed to donate the third painting to the WAGM so that they could be kept together. The donator wishes to remain anonymous and the painting is now in storage at the museum.

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Queens Award for Voluntary Service

In 2022 the Friends had the great privilege of being nominated for the Queens Award for Voluntary Service (Now the Kings Award). On a snowy December day, members of the committee showed two of the Merseyside Deputy Lord Lieutenants (MDLL) around Flaybrick. As the Friends still have no accommodation of their own and the Tam O'Shanter room was already booked, Wirral Golf club kindly allowed us to use their meeting room. The committee spent several hours explaining to the MDLL how the Friends group operates and what has been achieved in the last 30 years. We now have to wait (with everything crossed) until November to find out if we have been successful. Even if we are unsuccessful in our application, it has been an honour to be nominated.

QR Codes.

Some time ago it was decided to trial temporary QR codes placed next to certain graves around Flaybrick. When scanning the code you are taken to the flaybrick.org website and can read the biography of that person. The trial involved using wooded posts and laminated QR codes. It was decided that as there was very little vandalism we should change the temporary posts for more permanent posts. We have now installed 10 steel posts with plastic coated aluminium QR codes fitted to the post. We intend to put information posters in the notice boards explaining the codes and how to carry out a 'self guided walk'.

Guided walks.

Our guided walks, led by Rob Dolphin, returned in April. Blessed with good weather each month, over a hundred people have attended each walk so far. The group has had to be split in two and the 'apprentice guide' David Smith drafted into service.

Dave Hill.

Sadly, one of our stalwart volunteers, Dave Hill, passed away recently. Last weekend his daughter, family members and volunteers met at Flaybrick to plant a tree in Dave's memory. A plaque has also been attached to one of the benches on the main drive. Dave will be sadly missed by all the volunteers.



New QR code post at Mary Mercer's grave.

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Alfred Bigland MP

Many of our members and of course those who come along on our guided walks, will know the story of Alfred Bigland, the former Birkenhead MP who founded the legendary first world war Bantam Brigades. These Brigades were made up of those men originally deemed too small for enlistment because of the lower height limit of 5ft 4 inches.

Alfred's importance to the town is demonstrated by the plaque placed prominently inside the entrance of Birkenhead Town Hall, recognising his work in bringing about the creation of the Bantams.

Alfred is buried at Flaybrick and it was a cause for concern when his headstone was partly dismantled during a safety check, for reasons which subsequently proved to be unjustified. When Frank, one of our members who now lives in Croatia, offered to make a one-off donation for a specific purpose, we suggested to him that the restoration of the Bigland stone might be appropriate. He agreed, subject to cost and to everyone's delight, the restoration estimate came within the available budget.

Recently our group's chair arranged to meet Frank during his visit to Merseyside and take him along to see the completed work. Lunch was included in the visit although not charged to The Friends of Flaybrick!

To illustrate the work done, here are two photographs; one showing the way the headstone was left after the 'inspection' and the other, taken during Frank's visit to see the result of his generosity. As can be clearly seen, the cross is now returned safely to its rightful place atop the grave of this great man.



Bigland grave before restoration.



Alfred Bigland MP



Frank inspecting the restoration.

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Tree walk and labelling

Flaybrick has an incredible 650 trees making it the most intact of all Edward Kemp's landscapes. Within its walls there are an estimated 160 different species and since the 1990's tree labelling has been carried out to enable the public to fully appreciate Flaybrick's arboreal richness. In the last years around 20 new labels have been put up. The aim however, is not to label every tree, only the different species. I would estimate that another 100 labels are needed to finish the work. That said there is also a process of identification, as the planting records from the last 30 years are not complete. Also, the cherry trees on the main drive were planted before the Friends started in 1993. During the recent blossom period detailed photographs were taken of each tree to enable accurate identification.

In the image you will see that the labels are of the same colour and size common to all arboretums. They have the common name, the Latin name and finally the country or region of origin.

The Tree Register of the British Isles has categorised three of the lime trees as county champions. The American limes in CE6A are county champions, one for height and the other for girth. The other champion is the weeping lime in CE8 which is a county champion by girth.

In the image from 2018 you can see me receiving the blue label for the American Lime tree from the director of the register, David Alderman. Also present is the tree recorder for Cheshire.

Because the tree register is a record of living organisms, some trees are downgraded over time or equally they could be promoted. That is why the cut leaf beech tree is incorrectly labelled as a county champion.

Our guided tree walk will be taking place on Saturday the 28th October, timed to enable us to showcase the wonderful autumn colours of Flaybrick's trees. A lady from another part of the UK has already booked accommodation to ensure that she can do the walk!

John Moffat



John receiving a Blue Label for the American Lime tree.



Golden Holly



Example of label.

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Interpretation Boards

Several years ago steel framed ‘interpretation boards’ were installed around the cemetery. They aim to give the viewer information about the area they are in ie The Chapels. Initially, temporary laminated inserts were fitted in the boards to see if they would be vandalised. After a successful trial Wirral Council agreed to pay for the new inserts and five were fitted. When the Friends approached the Council for the remaining inserts they were told that due to budget restraints they could not finance them. The Friends have now found a printer who can satisfy our needs and have started to design and replace the remaining temporary boards with permanent inserts. We hope to have them completed in the next few months.



New interpretation board insert on the 'Founders Aisle'.

Remembrance Day 2023.

This year's Service of Remembrance will be held on Saturday 11th November.
It is hoped we will be joined by a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside and as usual we will be inviting local representatives. We also plan to include children from local schools.
Keep checking our website and social media platforms for further information as we get nearer to the day.
You are invited to join us at Flaybrick Chapels from 10.30am.

Membership

Membership renewals for 2023 are now overdue. Please consider renewing your membership. For further information, see our website, Facebook or ask a volunteer. Thank you.

