

It's Your Neighbourhood report

Name of group: Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery

Date of visit: 26 June 2025

Name of volunteer assessor/mentor: John MacLennan

Introduction

Hidden away within the Home Farm, part of the Hartwood or Lanark District Asylum, is the Hartwood Paupers Cemetery. Its care was taken over several years ago by a proactive Friends group who ensure this area of tranquility is maintained. What these Friends have achieved, dumfounded this assessor, and its memories will remain for years to come.

Pillar A – Community Participation

Over recent years, the Friends have attended to major grounds maintenance tasks such as the overgrown vegetation, locating grave lair markers, and making sure the trees & shrubs are pruned where necessary by liaising with North Lanarkshire Council who have the overall responsibility for the site maintenance but have devolved it to the Friends. Many of the mature specimens have Tree Preservation Orders on them, and it is clear there is a level of professional engagement between the Council and the Friends. However, no way is this a typical graveyard in how it is cared for. The 'love' the Friends have for those interred is obvious, and one excellent example among many is the erection of a gravestone to Patrick Tierney and, by using local social media in Kildare, ensured his family knew of his background, and then liaising with Father Thomas Brady, Royal British Legion and military personnel, to arrange a dedication service for Patrick.

Another example of vibrant community engagement is telling the story of the Polish Princess, whose life is commemorated in the graveyard. Perhaps this engagement could be re-worded as 'telling the story of those whose last resting place is within this quiet spot'.

An interesting example of engagement with the wider community must be how Jane Mather, when looking out of the train window 'tween Fauldhouse and Carfin, noticed within the autumnal mist the towers of derelict 'Hartwood' and started to research its story; this then led to her partnering up with Margaret McSeveney, a key mover in Spotlight Shotts, an organisation committed to reinvigorating the once thriving local arts scene, and together writing and performing a fairie story about the paupers cemetery, which was performed as part of the Edinburgh Fringe in 2024, as well as within the graveyard.

The restoration was funded via the National Heritage Lottery Fund and its success has been showcased at Holyrood, and is reckoned to be an exemplar to other graveyard and cemetery groups with whom there is now ongoing liaison such as with Friends of Southern Necropolis, Glasgow, the highly successful Green Flag Award Community Award winner (and also another group supported and recognised through It's Your Neighbourhood).

There is an active and regularly updated Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery Facebook page, on which numerous social and community activities are highlighted including the Remembrance Service, especially as one considers several of those incarcerated were veterans suffering from shell shock, nowadays PTSD. The 'Friends' work closely with other groups such as Campfire History who will be part of the Lanarkshire Climate Festival session in mid September at the Cemetery. Via their Facebook page, a link to Radio Clyde developed which resulted in a broadcast about the history of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery.

One strange observation that made the assessor think was that those interred are the responsibility of the NHS, mostly because the families were often not aware of the relatives being patients at Hartwood and no fault nowadays of the NHS were never told of their deaths. Making the memories of those interred alive to all is a driving force in the ethos of the Friends.

Pillar B – Environmental Responsibility

What is impressive about Hartwood Paupers Cemetery is that it is such an environmentally rich site. One highlight must be the apiary, with three very productive hives which were certainly buzzing at the visit time. Perhaps with their honey being 'Pure Dead Brilliant', for which there is a waiting list, the spirit of this is clear to see - no drab name but humour! Funding for the apiary came from Blacklaw Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, which is a proven example of how the group works successfully within the wider Shotts community.

Throughout the graveyard is a wide range of pollinator friendly flowers such as colourful hardy annuals, as well as brambles and raspberries in the nearby hedgerows, both ideal for foraging.

The group's compostable toilet is an added benefit to the site, and certainly essential when considering the number visiting at any time of day and night.

Another excellent idea is the role they play within Shotts Seed Library by collecting seed within the vicinity of the graveyard.

The majority of the plants being grown were locally produced, and it was clear plant exchanging is a key part of their work.

Perhaps one highlight on 13 September, as well as those mentioned above, will be a '*nature-centered event that connects us to the land, its history, and simple actions that support a healthier planet*' and is part of the Lanarkshire Climate Festival. This event will include a Nature Walk, with the visitor taking "*a peaceful guided walk through the cemetery grounds, identifying native plants, trees, and wildlife while reflecting on the natural and cultural stories this space holds*" or, if that does not appeal, why not "*get your hands in the soil and help to restore local biodiversity by sowing wildflowers that support pollinators, beautify the space, and create a living legacy*". And what is better than socialising via Campfire History and imbibing nonalcoholic refreshments amid others. What a well-structured programme, with something for all ages and interests.

Part of the work of the Friends is to ensure the history and heritage is maintained, with the story being told to all, which includes many sad historical facts such as the graves being single sex thus two females interred together and not husband and wife, and researching the cause of death which in the 21st century becomes an eye-opener as well as discovering those within the LGBT+ community were ostracised and imprisoned in Hartwood, plus simply being aware that no coffins but only shrouds were used at time of burial. One first class task the Friends have carried out is excavating to find the lair markers, repainting them and also repurposing slates and adding lair numbers as markers.

It was excellent to see two memorial benches constructed from recycled plastics, and how the 1,250 souls buried here are remembered. Close to the apiary there is a wooden bench giving a view of the whole cemetery, which is one of peacefulness.

The area surrounding the Paupers Cemetery is biodiverse rich, with the visiting fauna being recorded which includes bats, birds and butterflies (and that is just the 'Bs' !). Nesting owls are another feature, while larger fauna include badgers and foxes visiting - one could add the 'residents' have an attractive place to spend eternity!

This is just a brief resume of what the Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery have undertaken to develop this environmentally rich location and leaving a strong desire to return to absorb the peaceful and natural atmosphere around Hartwood.

Pillar C – Gardening Achievement

In conjunction with North Lanarkshire Council, the Friends have ensured this cemetery is maintained in a sympathetic manner. With most of the tree specimens having Tree Preservation Orders, it is with the Council their care sits. It needs to be remembered, however, that the cemetery was under the Council's care for numerous years, but it took the determination of the local community to produce the current attractive landscape which was achieved by cutting down the overgrown vegetation and opening up the cemetery space. Without this community input, nothing would have occurred. Their routine maintenance includes hedge trimming, regular grass cutting and the provision of large floral planters filled with a range of hardy and half - hardy annuals as well as herbaceous perennials, all of which benefit the bees and other pollinators. The plant choice is not haphazard but informal.

There is also an emphasis towards medicinal and healing plants, some of which have been gleaned from the remains of the hospital grounds. Edibles also feature among the growing flora.

The sympathetic approaches in greenspace management have resulted in an informal and relaxed environment, which is welcoming to all who visit.

Areas of achievement.

As noted in 2024, the major achievements include continuing in being a resource base for those wanting to know more about those interred within the cemetery, with one current example being liaising with the descendants of Patrick Tierney and arranging a service to commemorate his life.

Another success must be the telling of the story via TRACS and at the Edinburgh Fringe. This clearly shows a group that delivers a community project beyond the usual parameters.

The 'Pure Dead Brilliant' honey is a 'wow'. What an innovative name for the honey. Related to the production of honey is the skills base established in bee-keeping, with the willingness to share.

Local skills and knowledge are incorporated into the group's delivery such as those of 'William' in developing the palette of flora and fauna. Is it fair to say the key members **all** play an active role in the group's development - something often lacking in other groups.

The wider community will be looking forward to Lanarkshire Climate Festival, with delivery at various environmental projects throughout the county, and what is being planned for the Pauper Cemetery with its informative yet informal structure. It is also clear that the success of this county-based event has the potential for future sharing by those within the group due to their effective networking with interested organisations throughout Scotland.

Recommendations/suggestions

Continue with the present momentum and 'tell the story' of Hartwood to all, emphasising how society has changed and is more tolerant, but also making sure such a society continues in years to come.

Continue being supportive of other local community groups, be they 'arts' or 'environmentally' themed as well as the Lanarkshire Climate Hub Larder.

Consider hosting open days for other 'Bloom' styled groups, as well as those with an interest in historic cemeteries. Is there scope to have a range of meetings at other 'Friends of Cemeteries' and use the Keep Scotland Beautiful network to publicise them?

By structured liaising with the Council, investigate if there are similar Keep Scotland Beautiful campaigns, awards or accreditation that the Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery could consider. Is there scope to be part of the Green Flag Award - Community Awards or Heritage Accreditation?

Or do I just mean, continue being yourselves, and hopefully continue to dumbfound all who visit!

Overall level achieved: Level 5 - Outstanding