

It's Your Neighbourhood report

Name of group: Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery

Date of visit: 25 June 2026

Name of volunteer assessor/mentor: John MacLennan

Introduction

Perhaps imagine noontime temperatures close to 30.C and a sweltering heat, and it will be clear to realise that this oasis of tranquility beckoned me on the visit day and unsurprisingly Labhrain and Rhona, my two contacts, found me sitting under the shade they created and managed and where I was looking out to the habitat around numerous unmarked graves of those who died in Hartwood Hospital, a psychiatric hospital near the town of Shotts. Although the history of how these patients were treated and buried may be sad and upsetting to some, their memory is sympathetically cared for by the Friends. It is not in fact sad, due to the care the Friends have given by creating a wildlife habitat amid well cared graves. And I was not alone sitting in the cool and close by were others reading or just watching bees, hoverflies and moths/butterflies passing. In 2025 I was dumbfounded at what had been achieved, and in 2026 I longed to arrive so that I could absorb the ambience.

Community Participation

It is clear to all that the community has adopted Hartwood Paupers Cemetery. Much of the history was detailed in the report in 2025 and is relevant still in 2026. There is still input from North Lanarkshire Council whose support regarding Tree Preservation Orders continues, while for ease the grass maintenance has been devolved to the Friends.

With Lanarkshire's First *WooWoo* Composting Toilet and security cameras in place (not within the toilet!), the Friends find it of interest noting who visits the area in a 24 hour timeslot; these include the local police (*to use the toilet!!*), late teens/early twenties who visit to chill out but are behaved, and numerous visitors from Hartwood Village, Shotts and further afield. Although it could be logical to have brown 'tourist related' signs to guide visitors, it was decided that these would not be beneficial as there are ample other methods of seeking information for those wanting more information of Hartwood's heritage, with the best example being the Friends webpage <https://www.fohpc.com/> as well as their informative Facebook presence <https://www.facebook.com/groups/922448381938628/about>

One interesting project being explored is 'Voices from the Grave', which is being co-ordinated by Lanarkshire Songwriters with a CD being released later in 2026. I can't think of any other IYN group that has considered such an idea.

As noted below, there is a good link with Lanarkshire Climate Action Hub and the Friends will once more participate in the Lanarkshire Climate Action Festival which runs from 7 to 20 September. Being an 'Open Door' to the wider community is clearly one of the aims of the group.

The Friends continue their involvement with Camp Fire History which is an ideal medium for all to learn and exchange social history.

Although much of the day to day work is delivered by the Friends, the North Lanarkshire Council team can be called upon for heavy manual and practical work, and also involved, in recent months at the Cemetery, are corporate work groups with a squad from SKY, Livingston enjoying themselves. This SKY group came by word of mouth - in other words, as is obvious to all, by telling friends and neighbours about the proactive and inclusive Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery it flourishes.

The Friends don't dwell in the past but remember by dovetailing it into their activities. Not many IYN groups would consider marrying up the generations of fathers who were resident in Hartwood with today's inclusive families and then highlighting this on Father's Day. This quote associated with this is just one example of their ethos, *'As we are all custodians of local history, we also take a moment to reflect on the generations of fathers whose stories form part of our community's heritage and whose memories live on through the families they helped build. Whether you're spending today with loved ones or remembering a father no longer with us, we send our warmest wishes to everyone marking Father's Day.'* And in a similar vein for Summer Solstice, *'Happy Summer Solstice from the Friends of Hartwood Pauper Cemetery! Today we celebrate the longest day of the year and the beauty of the season. As we enjoy the warmth and light of midsummer, we also take a moment to reflect on the lives and stories of those who rest at Hartwood Pauper Cemetery'.*

Before concluding this section, although dating from 'lockdown times' this YouTube clip with BBC Scotland's Ian Hamilton probably tells the story better than me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQCotnc8F3o> [The Hidden History of Hartwood Hospital Asylum](#)

Environmental Responsibility

As noted above, the Friends of Hartwood Paupers Cemetery are active within Lanarkshire Climate Action Hub and play a role in the annual climate festival. It must be stressed that the Friends live and breathe biodiversity and there are numerous examples of how successful they are. From entering the cemetery beside their compostable toilet, to the apiary which is buzzing with activity, ample evidence can be gleaned. While sitting in the shade, during the visit, the range of bird songs that can be heard had been noted, with a list that included blackcat, chiff-chaff, greenfinch, swallow, swift, willow warbler, woodpecker, wren, and a host of tits, to mention just a few. Identification of these is carried out via an 'app.' and while others would just say they have a good avian community, the Friends are proactive in identifying them.

And it is not just avians that the Friends are aware of as, with the ongoing recording by their security cameras, they are able to show people the presence of badgers, hedgehogs, and tawny owls, although it was a concern to hear that the regular pest in the apiary is slugs, even though their hedgehog does his best. Having a productive apiary means there is a need for continuity in flowering plants which is clearly happening. The apiary is managed by organic means, with even a reluctance to smoke the bees, and, by the use of lemon balm, varroa mites are controlled.

The hives are populated with Buckfast bees, which were selected over a century ago in Devon and are a docile strain highly popular with beekeepers partly due to the genetic pool created by Brother Adam which includes good temper and calm behaviour.

Bats such as pipistrelle are to be seen, with bat boxes in use, plus it was excellent to be reminded that 'their' MSP, Clare Adamson, 'is proud to be the Species Champion for the common pipistrelle bat and is looking forward to working with the Bat Conservation Trust and Scottish Environment LINK via the current and future sessions at Holyrood. These bats face real pressures in Scotland, from loss of insect populations and habitat change, to disruption of roosts in buildings and other human impacts. While there are signs of recovery, they still need protection and action. We need to encourage bat boxes, support the creation of insect-rich habitats like woodland and water, improve monitoring, and ensure Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy is fully delivered'.

I had to smile when being told 'it was the year for lobelia' and the explanation was the collection of viable lobelia seed in 2025 had resulted in a high germination; it is also worth highlighting that the pans of seedlings were fungal disease free which is an added benefit. Could this be due to their organic growing methods? Or more care being taken than professional growers?! Their skills and experiences in seed collecting and harvesting is worth sharing with other IYN groups.

Inter-related into environment responsibility is foraging skills, and passing these on to those who visit is another objective of the Friends.

Gardening Achievement

The main criteria of the Friends is to ensure Hartwood Paupers Cemetery is an attractive, yet relaxing, place to visit. Being a cemetery, the maintenance role sits with North Lanarkshire Council but, as noted above, much of this has been devolved to the Friends, such as grass cutting, while tree care lies with the Council but at the request and guidance of the Friends. For example, a semi unsafe *Taxus baccata* was removed in the past year although this removal is not obvious. The wood is stacked nearby for future use, perhaps as a bug hotel.

It is not a twee graveyard, and care has been taken to ensure the original design with lines of *Taxus baccata* are retained and under which are the numerous graves.

Within the surrounding shrubbery and trees are ample plant material to support pollinators but, with a range of annuals, biennials and short-lived herbaceous perennials, elements of colour are provided. Intermingled with these are plants with healing properties and medicinal herbs reminding the visitor of the past links with hospital care. As noted above, seed harvesting takes place and an obvious skill in this has developed. There is not a refined planting plan with its restrictions, but a random informality that has grown, giving the result of a hybrid of Gertrude Jekyll and a West Highland graveyard!

Areas of achievement

Although not highlighted above, there is an excellent use of interpretative panels which explain to the visitor the location of the graves, the history of the site and issues of biodiversity. The methodology in use compares favourably with those of local authorities, especially as they blend into the landscape. From a horticultural perspective, the harvesting of seed which is free from the numerous seed borne pathogens is remarkable - it sounded so easy to do.

The apiary must be the queen's crown amid the coronettes (!). This is a working colony which is educational to all, and congratulations must be given to Rian, one of the 'hands on' beekeepers who is also a 'grass keeper, and general handyman' in achieving his Master of Engineering with first class honours. So often when visiting groups, the message is of inactivity from the younger generation, or lack of time to do what is necessary in caring for a group. Here, at Hartwood Paupers Cemetery is clear evidence of a small group who are achieving and doing so in a relaxed manner.

Recommendations/suggestions

Tell your story far & wide.

Invite Beechgrove to visit!

Invite Holyrood's Climate Action Committee to visit! Or take your story to them.

Overall level achieved: Level 5 - Outstanding