

## **SLIDES 1-4**

We are FOCCT! But who are we really? Personnel, how we started, what it is that we do. How we raise the money, what it costs to do things

## **SLIDE 5**

What's the point of this though? A lot of time, sweat, volunteering, writing, and for what? Two arms of the thing here: respect for those past, and education for the future. As we've been doing this thought we've both come in for criticism, and had plenty of criticism to throw around. Because Tod's graveyards are in a right state (we'll get onto the reasons for this later) and a lot of this is down to how we (we here, we more widely) view graveyards and engage with the idea of death. We spend a lot of time thinking about what we want to happen to us when we die...but what about 25 years after? 100 years after?

So here are some of the myths we've encountered and occasional accusations hurled at us – see what you think of them, if you share some of them, and hopefully I'll have changed your mind by the end of this talk.

## **SLIDE 6**

Myth 1: It's only old graveyards that get overgrown, if it's a mess then no one must want to visit them anyway.

## **SLIDES 7-9**

Before photos of CC. It only closed in 2009, and the garden of rest is still open, so clearly this wasn't a case of "no one wants to come in here".

## **SLIDE 10**

Rules around closed CofE graveyards and local councils being obligated to take them on when parish asks. How does that look post-austerity? (not good). Non-conformists in different situation, their graveyards are essentially private property and it's easier for them to close a chapel and sell the yard if it's full up and they can't financially look after it. Photos of Eastwood.

So ok, struggling parishes and councils can't look after them, that means volunteers can right? Well we can in theory but there are rules. Mention faculties, mention oversight, CC's particular overlap of council/PCC, conservation/bereavement services departments. H&S training – if there's only one person sorting all volunteers out for the entire borough, how fast do you think things move?

Explain how faculties work, what can and can't take place, who needs permission for what.

Rules can be a pain, but they mean less likely that atrocities will occur. But when they do, it's because of the third and fourth myths. We'll get to that. But for now...

### **SLIDES 11-12**

Myth 2: Dead people who weren't famous aren't very interesting, and you'd have to be a real weirdo/nerd/boring person to be interested in this sort of thing.

Ok, well, guilty as charged, but we think we've proven that the "common" dead are more interesting than you think – otherwise we wouldn't have been asked to give a talk.

### **SLIDE 13**

Gravestones are the visible remainder of a life. Their size and cost, even existence, tell us something about the person's legacy. They also hold valuable info. Gravestones telling us about people who are otherwise lost in the record. Boy "lost in the North Sea" – no death certificate because his body was never recovered.

Lack of a gravestone is also significant. Article from 1930s about how the elderly dead are invisible to a large extent because if they died at the workhouse they have no stone. Only well off or comfortable older people are remembered. On the other hand, children are often remembered on a stone because their working parents can afford to commemorate them and they're more valued.

### **SLIDE 14**

They're people like us – Tom Hardman who was known at school for being a funny lad, got asked to perform comic songs etc. at various events, got carried away or had nerves or something and ended up an alcoholic, dead at age 22 from advanced effects of it. Sarah Taylor, born in 1836 to a travelling tallow chandler and his wife. They moved on and had more.

### **SLIDE 15**

Father buried in Macclesfield and now has a playground built on top of him – mother and sisters in Sutton-in-Craven. Unmarked grave there discovered with

the help of their own Friends Of group and a little deduction from the very helpfully annotated burial registers.

### **SLIDE 16**

John Helliwell, railwayman who invented a fishplate and got into an argument with a much more educated coworker about whose invention it was. Annie Marshall, who killed herself aged 14 after a rumour went round her workplace. All our suicides especially...so many stories that touch on our experiences now. Nathan Ogden under the school who gambled everything away, widows who carried on the business when their husbands died, war graves, publicans. Sarah Taylor and Grace Bell, lost children from between the census who are now present in family trees because of our research. This could be an entire hour.

Point being that the people of the past were just like us, just with different societal constraints on them. We can learn from them all, regardless of whether their lives were “noteworthy” or they accomplished something that brought them fame. Irish graveyard man – the graveyard is a card catalogue of lives, like a library, there for those who look to discover. Maybe we need more of that because the next myth is the one that has caused us the most problems, because it’s meant standing up to professionals who everyone assumes would have these places’ best interests at heart...

### **SLIDE 17**

Myth 3: Lack of respect for these places is a modern thing – only teenagers vandalise graveyards!

Oh boy.

Firstly, let’s talk about some historical abuses of graveyards. Generally burial places ARE treated with respect but that’s a very instinctual thing that doesn’t necessarily come from faith, but from avoidance of these places as unclean. Once you start to consider that, you can see how things might go wrong. Those things sometimes come from a secular view but not always. We’ll get to that later.

### **SLIDE 18**

Enon Chapel: built in 1822 by a Baptist minister, the Rev. Howse, overtop an open sewer. There was a crisis in London (one of many) over burial space and he offered very good deals for putting bodies in the vault below the chapel floor. It already had an open sewer in it so no one really noticed the additional

smells coming through. It took 17 years of smells, “body bugs” coming up through the floor and getting into worshippers clothing, and flies before the Commissioner of Sewers looked into it. His thoughts weren’t “omg wtf” but “huh, better cover that sewer so there’s no cross-contamination”. So bodies kept on going into the crypt. By 1842 Howse had taken money for 12,000 burials! It’s believed that older bodies were over time dumped into the Thames or into builders ditches and that it was common to see skulls getting bowled down the streets around the chapel by children. After he died in 1842 the new owner reopened the chapel as a dance hall, which proved very popular partly because of outrage and partly because the Victorians were the ultimate edgelords. Come 1848 the dance hall had run its course and the next owner decided to exhume and reinter the bodies elsewhere at his own expense

### **SLIDE 19**

And made a parade out of it.

### **SLIDE 20**

St. Martin’s in the Fields: in 1858 the parish of St. Martin’s in the Fields, Camden Town, decided to move along some bodies which had only been buried there a few years previously after another oversubscribed graveyard had to be emptied. The reason for THIS exhumation was so that they could build expensive houses on the land. The incumbent vicar’s income had fallen off because there was no more room to bury anyone in that space, so no burial fees, so he and the PCC there decided to lie to the Diocese and claim that there weren’t any recent burials in that spot and none at all that would be disturbed if they built some housing there – the idea being that the income from the housing would make up the difference and they would all share in the takings. Thinking that the neighbours would rather have more posh houses nearby than a commoner’s graveyard, they went ahead with their lie and got a faculty for the works, but the builders went about the work so disgracefully that the neighbours rebelled. Public meetings were held and a mob actually stormed the site and tore down the hoardings that were blocking the view that had been hastily put up not long before. Ultimately the Bishop of London was called into judge what had happened. There were reports of the construction workers getting drunk, messing about with the bodies, and having parties after dark. In the end the consistory court ruled that the faculty had been honestly come by and was not a lie but an honest misunderstanding...but that the bodies had to be reinterred and this could never happen again.

Ironically, a few decades later in 1871, another part of the burial ground here (an unconsecrated bit) was sold to the National Gallery so they could expand. This was also controversial because not only were there repeats of the builders not being very respectful, but some of the bodies were NOT moved on to the expected reburial spot, but were crushed up with other construction spoil and sold to a company who was working on some railway sidings and roads in Kennington. Children were bringing home finger bones they said they'd found in the street, and the complaints there allowed the bones to be traced back to St. Martin's. This time the Secretary of State had to get involved, and he ordered that "the remains, as far as possible, should be collected, placed in boxes, and conveyed to Woking for re-interment". The dead of St. Martin's have had an exciting and exhausting afterlife.

Nowadays, what sort of things can happen? Not this kind of thing surely!!! Well, currently controversy in Ribble Valley over plans to build a crematorium on land where a former asylum hospital and graveyard are attached. Pushback from a Friends Of group there but finding difficulty with the CofE Bishop there who has approved of the council's plans. And of course there's Christ Church....Spitalfields, that is.

#### **SLIDE 21**

Spitalfields info: in 2012 a nursery building was erected on part of the consecrated, but disused, graveyard here. This case took seven years and nearly £1mil to litigate. Ultimately the Cour of Arches (ecclesiastical court) ordered that the building be given ten years before being torn down and a restoration order carried out – this means everything must be returned to how it was by 2029. Everyone from the vicar to the churchwardens to the school governors had put "recklessly" and "deliberately misleading" information on the planning applications, faculty application, and subsequent appeals in order to get the building put up. When bodies were uncovered during building works, they were reinterred elsewhere in the graveyard with a ceremony, but the works then continued despite this meaning they ought to have paused and revisited the faculty application.

#### **SLIDE 22**

The local council was also slated, and even the London Diocesan Board of Schools came in for strong criticism – "reckless and flagrant misconduct" – for

carrying on with the construction of the building even after being advised that it was potentially unlawful.

### **SLIDE 23**

If you're hoping to hear some controversial things about OUR Christ Church, then you just have. The two cases are not identical but similar. We're waiting on the Diocese of Leeds registrar to make the consultation period public, but in short: the school built an extension in 2002 on part of the graveyard without proper Diocesan approval, without exhuming any bodies, and having knocked over the stones and moved them downwards and out of place without permission and losing fourteen of them.

### **SLIDE 24**

There's also a fence that has posts driven directly into grave plots. It's a mess, and a big one, and we know what's being asked for from the school side but we suspect it will not be granted. The current Diocese of Leeds Chancellor is the same Chancellor who was on the Court of Arches there in 2019.

So as you can see, the abuse and misuse – what we at least would call a misuse – of graveyards isn't a historical issue, and it isn't relegated to just young people or even just secular organisations. Why is this though? Why would people ride roughshod over graveyards, and why would they be allowed to? People might not always like the tone we take when we talk about how graveyards in Todmorden have suffered but there's a reason we're so strident – these places haven't had anyone speaking up for them properly for years, maybe decades. They need strident defenders as nothing else has worked for them! Here's myth number 4 then, and the one that we at FOCCT disagree with most strongly:

### **SLIDE 25-26**

Myth 4: "The dead are dead, so who cares?"

What's all the fuss about, they're just a load of dead people? They're of no use to us, they're inconvenient, they're a financial burden, they're dust, ignore them or get rid of them. Some of these statements have been made to us, to our faces, and some to people who the speaker didn't realise were sympathetic to us. Oops.

### **SLIDE 27**

The dead ARE a problem in that they just keep coming. This isn't an overpopulation issue – Todmorden's town council was holding meetings in the 1880s about "the cemetery question" because even then they were beginning to run out of room. And yes, in the age of austerity and dwindling congregations, and increasingly elderly congregations, graveyards and even church buildings are now albatrosses around the necks of parishes and borough councils.

A thinktank has recently released a report suggesting that even CofE graveyards should move to a 50-year leasing system to deal with demand on ever-dwindling graveyard spaces, and potentially making this retrospective – how that will work is unclear.

Caring For God's Acre/English Heritage project now to scan and record all burial registers and make photographic and 3D record of all CofE graveyards in the country. Laudable! But its focus is on "visible monuments". Lots of smaller stones get lost under grass, and when you think of the state graveyards can get into...what's the point of this project if it isn't going to be thorough? Even those who understand the value of stones don't really understand.

But think about the stories you heard earlier and about all those real people who had lives like yours and mine. How DO you respect the dead and respect the needs of the living? Well, that's a leading question I think. Why are the two presented as mutually exclusive, or competing interests? The answer to that is, unfortunately, in our experience, because old graveyards are easy targets. The dead don't argue. The long-dead don't always have living relatives to fight their corners. And the overgrown dead...well, if no one visits them then they get forgotten about, and once they're forgotten about no one notices when a dance hall opens up on them. Or a school building gets erected on top of them.

## **SLIDE 28**

Who DOES speak for the dead? National Federation of Cemetery Friends. Friends Of groups nationwide – of course not all will be members of the Federation. Some are able to work very well with their host churches or councils! But some have encountered the same things we have, or even worse.

## **SLIDE 29**

You get a lot of pushback when you stand up for the dead and you have to be stubborn, and ornery, and do the necessary research. You have to have PR skills

too. You don't have to be an historian or an archaeologist or religious either – our group is made up of all sorts and everyone is approaching the graveyard from a different perspective. The shared philosophy though is “we have a lot to learn from the dead and how we deal with them must be fair and respectful”. Or in other words, “respect the dead – you will be joining them soon.”

### **SLIDE 30**

I'll leave you with the question I asked at the beginning – those of you with clear, firm, ideas about how your end of life and funeral will look; do you have the same clear ideas about what things look like 50, 100, 200 years later? Does it matter to you? It mattered to people buried in these times, when both a gravestone and the right to have one was a major expense. How do we honour that in spite of everything else? We do. We simply have to. Because what does it say about us if we don't? And what will the future decide to do about us if we set the precedent that the memory of us ceases to matter once we're gone?