



Friends of Bath Jewish Burial Ground

## FRIENDS OF BATH JEWISH BURIAL GROUND

# Newsletter

No 1 - November 2006

**The Friends of Bath Jewish Burial Ground was formed early in 2006 with the aim of restoring the site. It is a collaboration between the Combe Down Heritage Society and the local Jewish community.**

**Visitors are welcome by arrangement; please contact the Secretary.**

### **Celebration of 17th September**

This event was designed to raise the profile of the Friends as we prepare our plans for the restoration of the site. It was a successful day with the Mayor and the Press in attendance. Many other Council representatives were invited.

Judith Samuel published the definitive history of the Jews in Bath and we were delighted that she was able to come down from London for the occasion. Several brief speeches were made to welcome the guests and to explain our work.

We are grateful to Committee members Alex Schlesinger and Rosemary Simmons for providing and hosting convivial refreshments. A number of important contacts were made.

### **Open Day of 29th October.**

As part of Bath Open Week the Burial Ground was open for several hours and no less than 250 or so visitors much appreciated the opportunity to visit the site. There was an exhibition, put up by the Heritage Society, summarising the history and its relation to the 19th Century Bath Synagogues. Several tomb-stones



had notes about the deceased and, as further historical research proceeds, this will become possible for many more. The display stimulated much interest and will help to generate support. There was particularly important networking with visitors who were able to add to our knowledge of the previous use of the ground.

### **MICHAEL HARRIS**

It is with great sadness that we have to announce the death of one of our committee members, Michael Harris, who was Heritage Officer at the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

I first met Michael on my initial visit to the old Jewish burial ground at Combe Down. I joined an impromptu discussion about the possibility of forming a society to renovate the graves and find a new use for the old prayer house. From the start, Michael was enthusiastic and positive. He willingly joined our broadly based committee as the Board of Deputies' Representative, and he regularly interrupted a

busy schedule to journey down from London to attend our meetings until ill health prevented him.

I am sure we will all remember him with the greatest of affection. His passing is a very real loss to us not just as a committee member but as a genuine friend.

### **Restoration of the cemetery.**

Our plans to restore the Cemetery will need a substantial grant. We visited the site with the regional manager of the Heritage Lottery Fund earlier in the year and she showed interest in our plans. We are guardedly confident that we will be able to obtain funding, which will need to be from several sources, and we already have some 'pump priming' from subscriptions and donations received so far. However, a major problem is ownership. Trustees died, we think in the early part of the 20th Century, and there is no Title. We are working on this with the Board of Deputies. Meanwhile we will continue to recruit Friends and fund-raise.

### **Membership.**

Subscriptions and generous donations have just brought our funds to four figures. We now have 85 members representing 68 families. Do tell any friends who might be interested, or who might wish to visit or want information (see contact below).

### **Visitors to the cemetery.**

Local interest following the Open Day led to us showing further visitors around. Three members of the Friends are available to take visitors round by arrangement. Brochures and other details are available.

### **History and research**

The extensive work by Judith Samuel culminated in the publication of 'The Jews in Bath' published in 1986 in *Jewish Historical Studies of the Jewish Historical Society of England* and in *Bath History* that year. Further research by the Combe Down Heritage Society's Chair, Rosemary Simmons, has been augmented by contributions from local Friends and new contacts. We are keen to glean more (the Secretary's details are below) and we have information for those interested. (*See [www.bathjewishcemetery.org.uk](http://www.bathjewishcemetery.org.uk)*)

### **The Chantrey Plaque.**

A member of the Chantrey family in Bath has the memorial plaque of an aunt which they wish to be put up near the grave of a relation here. The plaque was removed from a Brighton cemetery which has closed. The Friends, assisted by a generous donation from the family, will have it mounted on a wall near the grave.

### **Email addresses**

To get up-to-date news, please let the secretary have your email address. If you have not had this newsletter by email, this means we have not your email address on file - please email it to <[m.aylett@homecall.co.uk](mailto:m.aylett@homecall.co.uk)>. We have 31 and are keen to add to this to avoid the postage stamps, envelopes - and the work of stuffing them for the 37 others!

### **THE COMMITTEE OF THE FRIENDS OF BATH JEWISH BURIAL GROUND**

Alex Schlesinger *Chair* (*Bristol Jewish Burial Society*), Norman Marks *Treasurer*, (*Bristol Progressive Synagogue*), Rosemary Simmons (*Chair, Combe Down Heritage Society*), Richard Sermon (*B&NES Archaeological Officer*), Peter Walters.

**Information and enquiries:** Malcolm Aylett *Secretary*