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Clean-up For Benefactor's Grave

The final resting place of one of the areas greatest ever benefactors has been given a new lease of life, thanks to the efforts of a local cleaning company and local history volunteers.

William Holland Ballet Fletcher, as Lord of the Manor of Aldwick, was the last private owner of Aldwick Lodge, which became Hotham Park House following the purchase of the house and grounds in 1946 by the former Bognor Regis Urban District Council; many of trees enjoyed in the park today, which opened to the public the following year, were planted by Mr Fletcher, a keen horticulturalist.

Following a family tradition of public service, Mr Fletcher had been a pillar of town and county society, being patron of numerous charities and societies, Magistrate, Mayor of Worthing, Chairman of BUDC, Chairman of the County Education Committee and benefactor of many churches. He opened the Marine Park Gardens in 1936 as Chairman of BUDC, from whom the council had purchased the land at auction; he did though retain the rights to the foreshore and Tamarisk hedge, so as to guarantee their continuance.

Although his house and grounds were purchased from his estate in 1946, having no surviving close relatives, his estate valued at approximately £300,000, was equally divided, as per his will, between hospitals at Chichester, Worthing and Brighton. Land he owned at Hawthorn Road and Nyetimber Lane and leased to Bognor and Pagham Cricket Clubs respectively was given to the clubs in perpetuity for use as sports grounds.

Unfortunately, by a slip of the pen, there were no funds bequeathed in his own will to pay for his own gravestone, which had already been made but not installed for his late wife Agnes who had died 2 years before him in 1939, and with whom he was to share the plot; the stone instead eventually being used for the stonemason's own grave in Chichester Cemetery.

Thus, the grave of a man who had left a mark on the community itself remained unmarked, although WSCC did rename Bognor Regis County Secondary School the William Fletcher School in 1959, only surviving until 1967 when it was renamed again following the introduction of Comprehensive education.

That was until 1976 when keen local historian John Hawkins set about changing that. Unfortunately, initial requests for contributions to the estimated cost of £60 fell on deaf ears. The formation in 1979 of the Bognor Regis Local History Society gave John renewed energy to find the funds, which had now escalated to £150. In 1980, a simple stone was erected in a quiet corner of North Mundham Churchyard, (where his brother had been Vicar) joining those of William Fletcher's family nearby.

Earlier this year Society members noted that the stone had weathered considerably, such that the inscription was illegible. Initial thoughts about an appeal for funds to clean the stone, were quickly put to one side, when Alan McTernan, of the Exterior Cleaning & Maintenance Company, offered to undertake the clean-up free of charge.

Mr McTernan said, "I live in Fletcher Close at Nyetimber, so I was only too pleased to help ensure that the memory of the man after who my road was named was honoured. Also, the volunteers at the

History Society do a great job at the Museum and I always try to help those groups who do so much for the town; it's all about trying to help each other."

Chairman of Bognor Regis Local History Society, Greg Burt, said "We are indebted to Alan for his generosity in ensuring that William Fletcher's stone can now be clearly read by visitors to the churchyard. We hope that our successors in another 30 years time will ensure that it is still readable, as William Fletcher's legacy lives on in many of the public parks and open spaces we are still enjoying today."

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Media Contacts

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