



Bradford Through The

The restoration team re-installing the Celtic cross. Their work is meticulous and respectful



Brad

One of the volunteers repairing the Celtic cross



Grave restorer Graham Swain cleans the inscription bearing the family names



The Troman family grave before the restoration



Placing the restored plinth back on the plot



RESTORING GRAVES AND THEIR STORIES

EMMA CLAYTON finds out how a team of volunteers is restoring damaged family graves

THERE are many stories of families, and of war, beneath the graves in Hirst Wood Burial Ground.

A team of volunteers have been unearthing some of those stories while carrying out painstaking repair work to broken headstones and overgrown plots in the Shipley cemetery.

One restoration has been captured in a remarkable video produced by local history YouTube channel Bradford Through The Lens.

Riaz Ahmed, who set up the channel, exploring hidden stories from Bradford's past, has joined forces with grave restorer Graham Swain and his team, Hirst Wood Regeneration Group and St Paul's Church in Shipley. The burial ground is an extension of St Paul's churchyard. The team is restoring a number of graves that are in a poor state or are open.

Says Riaz: "Hirst Wood Burial Ground has been neglected for years, there has been plenty of vandalism to graves. Myself, Graham and St Paul's Church are all working together, with our own skills, and we're asking for help from the local community. All our work is voluntary, to raise awareness and save our local history."

In the video, Dangerous Open Grave Restoration Hirst Wood, Graham and the volunteers are working on the Troman family grave, which has lain damaged and open for 20 years. A Celtic cross has collapsed into the grave, along with some original stone. Graham explains that a crane is attempting to lift the cross and plinths out, in one go. "There are three bodies in there, we have to be careful we don't take the next chamber out," he says. The team hoists the cross out of the damaged grave. Graham thinks the family may have been of Irish descent, because of the Celtic cross.

William Robert Troman, his wife Fanny and their daughter Barbara are buried there. As part of the cross is retrieved, Graham says the headstone has likely been vandalised and pushed over, which has broken the chamber. As well as the fallen cross, the plinth became eroded and also collapsed. The team lays new slabs over the grave then puts the original plinth on, then the cross. Cleaning the grave highlights the name William Robert Troman, born November 27, 1855, died January 17, 1928. William married Fanny Green in 1885. In 1901 he was a manager at a foundry and ironmongers. They had six children, all born in Market Drayton. By 1911 the family moved to Commercial Street, Shipley. William was an ironmonger.

The team's next project is to restore the Gill family grave at Hirst Wood. In 2002 David Whithorn, a regular contributor to the T&A's nostalgia pages, wrote an article about a damaged grave at the site, bearing part of an inscription: 'Also of their three



Graham Swain, right, and the team with the newly restored Troman family grave at Hirst Wood Burial Ground

sons Sam, John and Herbert who were killed in the Great War'. Other parts of the grave indicated the family name was Gill. Researching the family, David discovered they lived at Nearcliffe Road, Heaton. John Gill Snr was a joiner, along with his eldest son, Sam. John Gill Jr was a stonemason and Herbert a painter. Completing the family was Fanny, John Snr's wife, and two daughters, Mary Ann and Dorothy. John, the father, died in 1911, aged 47. "The realisation that Fanny had lost her husband then all three sons in the Great War spurred me on to trace their stories," wrote David. He discovered that Pte Sam Gill enlisted into the 2nd Bradford Pals in 1915. On the evening of June 30 1916 Sam marched to assembly positions in Serre. The troops stopped to pick up equipment at a site where there was a large, freshly dug pit. Sam was one of the many casualties of the Battle of the Somme the following day. "Sam Gill died of his wounds and was buried in that pit he would have marched past less than 24 hours before," wrote David. Like his brother, Pte John Gill went to France in 1915. He is recorded as having been killed in the Ypres Salient on September 24, 1915. While it doesn't record casualties, the battalion war diary reveals that shellfire from a bombardment on enemy lines came just above the trench and the men were ordered to keep their heads down. "Casualties of 'friendly fire' weren't always documented in war diaries," says David. "John was buried just behind the lines. Remarkably, his cross survived the war, found in battlefield clearances, but

there was no sign of a body. Such memorial crosses were later removed, as permanent 'Memorials to the Missing' were being constructed. John Gill is commemorated along with 54,000 others 'missing' from the Ypres Salient, on Menin Gate in Ypres." Pte Herbert Gill joined the Seaforth Highlanders (4th Bn), which held recruitment drives in Bradford, and went to France early in 1916. Wrote David: "Of the three brothers, Herbert saw the most action, fighting on the Somme then the Battle of Arras. In August 1917, the battalion took positions on Plickem Ridge - the area where Herbert's brother, John, was killed. Herbert died of wounds and is buried in Dozinghem Military Cemetery. Herbert was married with a daughter, Emily, who married in 1939 died in 1945, with no children. Neither Sam nor John married. Their sister, Mary Ann, had a child in 1921 but the baby died the same year. Mary Ann died in 1930. The other sister, Dorothy, never married and looked after her mother. Dorothy died in 1980 - the last of the family. "There are no known descendants. No one to care for their grave," wrote David. "The Gill family lost their three sons in the Great War, their mother and sisters' lives marred by its consequences too. They're all gone now and one day their grave, and their story, may be lost too." Not if the Hirst Wood restoration team can help it... * View the video at: <https://youtu.be/6Q3VYthoSM?si=JbQCMWXSh5p5SWaa>



Sam Gill died in the Battle of the Somme