

St. Thomas' Road Gate

At our AGM in early February 2018, the subject of the St. Thomas' Road gate into Earlham Cemetery was raised. It was agreed that we should contact Norwich City Council to raise our concerns.

Background

The St. Thomas' Road pedestrian gate was installed in 1912 but has been kept shut for many years. We think the gate was last open in the early 1980s – certainly by the early 1990s it was permanently locked.

The gate has recently been re-opened to allow access into the Cemetery.

Concerns

1. Disturbance to wildlife

The gate allows access to what had been a quiet corner of the Cemetery, which provided refuge for wildlife. (This was the "wildlife area" of the Cemetery for many years.) Increased footfall, especially if visitors have dogs (see point 3 below), will lead to disturbance.

2. Damage to paths and bulbs

Unlike other gates, the St. Thomas' Road gate leads onto soft grass and unsurfaced paths. Use of the gate will lead to unsightly damage to the grass and nearby paths.

Already there is some evidence of this:

1. The path nearest to and parallel with Earlham Road at the south of the Cemetery (between burial sections 39 and 40) is becoming wider and muddy and snowdrops and other bulbs by the path are being trampled. Over time the path will become wider and more bulbs will be damaged.
2. The track from the tarred drive to the gate is becoming churned up by vehicles travelling to and from the gate to lock and unlock it.

As the track becomes muddy, anyone walking between the St. Thomas' Road gate and the tarred drive is likely to avoid it.

The quickest and most direct route from the gate to the tarred drive is across burial Section 1, where there are graves.

In time the increased footfall is likely to create a new, informal path across the corner of Section 1. (After the Dereham Road gate was opened permanently in the early 1990s, a similar informal path across graves cut across the corner

of Section 27. This has only recently been blocked off.)

3. The track from the tarred drive to the gate runs next to one of the houses at the top of St. Thomas' Road (no. 19). The owner of this property has already had to put in extra drains to cope with water run off from the Cemetery during heavy rain.

Daily vehicle movements to lock and unlock the gate will compact the ground. This will increase the amount of run off, as water will be unable to soak away. This could lead to flooding and damage to property (potentially at a considerable cost to Norwich City Council).

3. Dogs in the Cemetery

Dogs (other than assistance dogs) are not allowed in Earlham Cemetery. However, an increasing number of dog walkers are using the Cemetery. In some cases, dogs have been allowed to run off the lead and there have been instances of dogs fouling pathways, graves and memorial plaques.

The St. Thomas' Road gate is adding to the problem. It is being used by locals walking dogs on a regular basis and during the recent snow there were lots of dog footprints leading to and from the gate.

4. Other Antisocial Behaviour

Last summer drug dealers were conducting their business in this part of the Cemetery. Having another gate open will make it much easier for them to enter and leave the Cemetery unobtrusively, slipping away before the police can find them.

Recommendations

We would like Norwich City Council to take steps to remedy the problems being caused by the opening of the St. Thomas' Road gate.

The simplest and cheapest measure would be to keep the gate closed and locked, as it has been for many years.

But if the gate is to be kept open, we recommend:

1. Put up a "no dogs" sign by the St. Thomas' Road gate, clearly visible even when the gate is open. The "No dogs" policy should also be enforced.
2. Either prevent vehicles from driving to the gate from the tarmac path or provide a robust but porous surface to the track between the tarred drive and the gate, to prevent the ground from being churned up and to allow rainwater to seep into the ground, rather than running off.

Friends of Earlham Cemetery,
6th March 2018.