

THE

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BEECHWOOD

MAGAZINE

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Beechwood

Letter from the editor

Dear Beechwood Community,

As we step into a new year, we do so with optimism, purpose, and a clear line of sight on the transformational work ahead. Beechwood's mandate has always been anchored in remembrance, but your continued partnership has allowed us to broaden that mandate: to be a national gathering place where history, community, education, and future aspirations intersect.

The months ahead will be defined by forward momentum. In 2026, we will commemorate the 25th anniversary of the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces. This milestone is more than an anniversary; it is a strategic inflection point. A quarter-century of honouring those who served has prepared us to chart the course for the next 150 years. Together, we will reaffirm the National Military Cemetery as a place where Canada's military story continues to evolve, and where families, veterans, and serving members stand together across generations.

We are equally energized by the significant programming and events on the horizon. The coming year will bring an expanded slate of ceremonies, cultural commemorations, and national initiatives that reinforce Beechwood's role not only as a place of memory, but as a place of belonging. Our Under the Maple Leaf – Respecting the Canadian Flag program will continue to scale up, offering Canadians a dignified way to retire the flags that have marked their homes and communities. These engagements, rooted in respect and national symbolism, strengthen Beechwood's position as a steward of Canadian identity.

At the same time, we are broadening our leadership in death and grief literacy. Our Signature Event Series such as Death Dialogues, Death Cafés, and After Death Dialogues, will expand further in the year ahead, bringing experts, families, and spiritual leaders together to normalize conversations about death, provide practical literacy, and support informed, compassionate decision-making.

We will also introduce The Wind Phone, a new space designed to support personal healing and reflection, further evidence of Beechwood's commitment to innovative, culturally sensitive grief support.

Our blog series, children's resources, social stories, planning tools, and dedicated spaces for reflection ensure families across Canada have access to the guidance, knowledge, and support they need. This work affirms Beechwood's evolving role as a national learning space, where people can approach death with openness, preparation, and dignity.

As we look forward, we remain future-focused and accountable to the communities we serve. Beechwood stands ready to lead, to innovate, and to continue honouring Canada's past while creating meaningful opportunities for the future.

Thank you for your trust, your partnership, and your unwavering commitment to Beechwood. Together, we will continue shaping a national institution built on dignity, inclusivity, and remembrance.

Thank you,

Nick McCarthy

Director of Marketing, Communications and Community Outreach

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French Translation and Proofed Re:word.

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Visit us online to learn more about Beechwood, the National Cemetery of Canada, and read back issues at:

We want your feedback on how we are doing!

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Events Calendar

***For further details and to register visit [Events at beechwoodottawa.ca](https://www.beechwoodottawa.ca)**

Gulf War Commemoration Ceremony – 35th Anniversary of the End of the Conflict - 3 March 2026 - 11:00am

Unsettled Settlers: Irish Catholics, Irish Catholicism, and British Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1819–1840 - 25 March 2026 - 6:30pm

Reopening of Macoun Marsh - April 22, 2026 - 1 p.m.

Dutch Remembrance Day Ceremony - 4 May 2026 - 1:45pm

Echoes of Valour: HMCS Trentonian and the Corvette Navy - 6 May 2026 - 7:00pm

Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in World War II Ceremony - 8 May 2026 - 10:30am

RCMP Veterans' Association, Ottawa Division Annual Commemoration and Vigil - 23 May 2026 - 10:45am

Veterans Motorcycle National Memorial Remembrance Ceremony at Beechwood - 7 June 2026 - 12:45pm

Second Annual Ceremony - Under the Maple Leaf: Respecting the Canadian Flag - 17 June 2026 - 7:00pm

Honouring Soldiers of Suicide - 12 September 2026 - 7:15pm

Annual Police and Peace Officers Memorial at the RCMP National Memorial Cemetery at Beechwood - 20 September 2026 - 10:45

CSIS National Memorial Cemetery Remembrance Ceremony - 5 November 2026 - 10:30am

No Stone Left Alone - NCR Girl Guides Ceremony - 7 November 2026 - 2:00pm

RCMP Annual Veterans' Week Memorial Service and Commemoration ceremony - 8 November 2026 - 10:45am

Amicitia France-Canada Remembrance Day Ceremony - 8 November 2026 - 2:00pm

National Military Cemetery's Annual Remembrance Day Service - 11 November 2026 - 10:45am

Interested in learning more about Beechwood Cemetery? Take a tour of the grounds!

Beechwood will be offering 4 tours a month throughout the spring, summer, and fall. See the dates now on the website calendar.



End-of-Year Review

By Andrew Roy, President and Executive Director

At this year's end-of-year review, after reflecting on everything Beechwood accomplished in 2025, one word stands above the rest: adaptable. And while some may wonder how a cemetery can embody adaptability, the answer lies in how we continue to innovate, evolve, and respond to the changing needs of the communities we serve.

A defining achievement of the year was the advancement of the National Military Cemetery (NMC). To ensure future generations of military families have dignified, meaningful places of rest, Beechwood unveiled a new columbarium in spring 2025, an anchor feature that blends the strength and history of Canada's military heritage with modern design.

This addition is a cornerstone of our broader commitment to providing more options and expanding future capacity, as we enhance existing sections and plans to develop the new section of the NMC that meet both current and long-term needs. The structure and path forwards ties seamlessly into our commitment to ensure military families will have access for decades to come.

Stewardship of the natural environment also shaped our work this year. The Macoun Marsh rehabilitation project, temporarily halted during a critical construction phase, demanded resilience, patience, and strategic refocusing. During the pause, the Foundation strengthened the project, securing funds for added raptor poles, enhancing habitat designs, and improving long-term ecological outcomes. Phase 1, which ensures safe hibernation areas for turtles during construction, is already underway, and major restoration efforts, such as cattail removal, are expected to begin as this publication reaches our readers. The delay ultimately allowed us to improve the project and reinforce our environmental leadership.

Another major advancement has been the development of Beechwood's future green burial area. Responding to a growing desire for environmentally conscious choices, the Beechwood team designed a natural, meadow-inspired landscape that preserves trees, restores native plant species, supports soil health, and reinforces our sustainability mandate. This new section will open in the coming year, offering families an ecologically grounded alternative and expanding the range of options available at Beechwood.





2025 also underscored our need to remain operationally agile. The two Canada Post strikes disrupted mail delivery, communications, and donor outreach at a critical moment. In response, the Beechwood team expanded digital communications, increased personal outreach, and created alternative engagement pathways. The decision to pause the fall magazine edition was a deliberate, responsible choice that ensured our readership received this expanded special edition without delay or compromise. These efforts reinforced how essential flexibility, creativity, and strong community relationships are to our mission.

Taken together, these developments highlight a central truth: Beechwood is actively planning for the future growth of our city. We are working to provide more burial options, open new sections, enhance existing ones, and develop our grounds in ways that respect our heritage, strengthen community access, and meet the evolving needs of Ottawa's families.

Beechwood is not a static place. It is a living national institution and a part of the community, one that adapts, plans, and grows with purpose.

As we look toward 2026, adaptability will continue to guide our work. We move forward grounded in our mission, committed to the families we serve, and confident in our ability to build thoughtfully for generations to come.



A Hidden Gem Within Beechwood Cemetery

By Jean-Pierre Bacle



The Mausoleum completed in 1875 with limestone from the quarry pond.



The quarry pond in early spring 2025. A southeast view showing the gently sloping limestone in the foreground and adjacent wetland vegetation and limestone cliffs in the background.

Established in 1873, Beechwood Cemetery serves as the site for both the National Cemetery of Canada and the National Military Cemetery of the Canadian Forces. Its landscape features flat to gently rolling terrain, wooded groves, carefully tended gardens and winding roads, embodying the 19th-century rural movement that aimed to create park-like spaces for public reflection.

There are some hidden gems within the cemetery's landscape. Among them is a small quarry pond that has undergone a notable transformation over time. Located east of the Amicitia Monument along the White Lined Road, the quarry pond is well hidden and sheltered by its surrounding vegetation. Access is on its north side via a narrow passage through thick shrubs that can easily be missed if unaware.

The site, formerly an active quarry circa 1875, was a source of limestone for building material and landscaping. Evidence of limestone structures abound throughout the cemetery. Photo #1 illustrates a sealed mausoleum that dates to 1875 and was built from limestone. Little is known about the quarry's operations during its active years. However, based on anecdotal information and historical maps, the quarry likely remained active until the turn of the 20th century.

Quarrying took place along an exposed bedrock outcrop that lies to the south of White Lined Road. The geology is primarily limestone bedrock dipping gently towards the south. Quarrying resulted in rainwater collecting in the deeper portion of the quarry. This, combined with groundwater seepage through surrounding fissures in the bedrock, contributed to forming a pond over time.

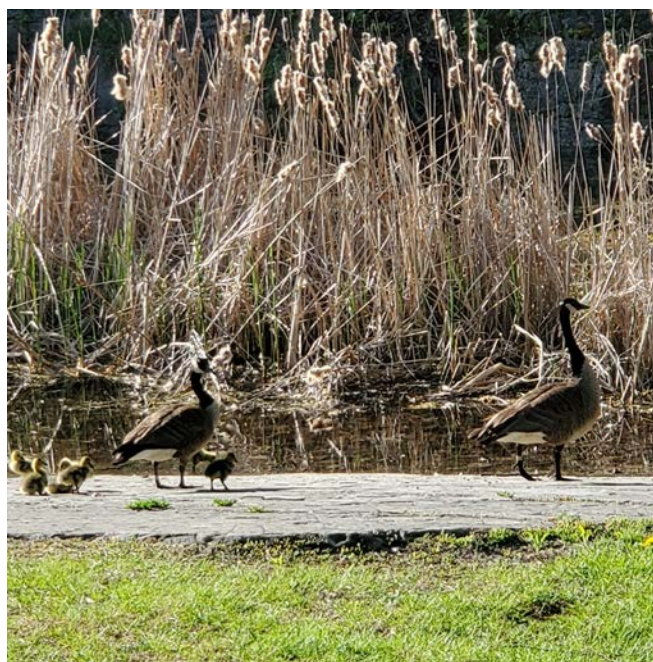
The quarry's footprint or excavated area is about half an acre (1,800 m²). The amphitheater-shaped quarry has cliff walls that range from 4 m to 6 m forming a semi-circle around the pond. Over time, vegetation has grown and diversified, and the pond area gradually turned into a wetland as evidenced by the prominence of narrowleaf cattail (*Typha angustifolia*). Photos 2 and 3 show the wetland's natural colours during two different seasons. The water depth for the most part is shallow but could exceed a metre along the edge of the cliff. As this wetland has no outlet and water movement is restricted, organic matter will continue to accumulate in the pond. This will result in a further change in the ecosystem to water-tolerant shrubs and trees.

For over 125 years, the abandoned quarry has slowly restored itself to the natural condition of its surroundings and has now become a hot spot that attracts a wealth of flora and fauna. Photo #4 illustrates waterfowl foraging the pond area. The author as a citizen scientist has gradually documented the biodiversity of the quarry pond since early 2024. To date, over 50 species of plants, 40 species of birds, and a half dozen species of mammals including 4 species of bats have been recorded. Invertebrates, reptiles, and amphibians are up next in the survey. The number of recorded species is expected to increase as more site investigations are planned throughout this summer and fall.

The protection and site management of the Beechwood Cemetery's staff of horticulturists and groundskeepers ensures that the ecosystem will remain healthy. To our visitors who enjoy the calm and serenity of Beechwood Cemetery, a pause at this hidden gem offers an opportunity to witness the rewilding of a quarry.



The quarry pond in October 2024. A view showing the western end.



A pair of Canada Geese adults with chicks in spring 2025.

Jean-Pierre Bacle is a retired Canadian graduate of the University of Ottawa living in both Ottawa (near Beechwood Cemetery) and Alexandria, VA. His background is in geography, and natural sciences. Since retiring, he's engaged in citizen science activities ranging from wildlife monitoring and natural resource education.

The Forgotten Homes of Ottawa and the Mystery of Who Remembers Them

By Erika Wagner, Programming and Fundraising Coordinator

A short walk from the St. Laurent Boulevard entrance into Beechwood Cemetery lie three unassuming stone monuments. They sit side by side, quiet and dignified, bearing the names of the Protestant Orphans' Home Plot, the Protestant Home for the Aged Plot, and the Home for Friendless Women Plot.

To the casual visitor, these stones may appear like any other in the vast, rolling landscape of Canada's National Cemetery. But they mark something far more profound: the resting places of Ottawa's most vulnerable — orphans, elderly men and women, widows, and abandoned women who, in their lifetimes, knew hardship more intimately than comfort.

In the late 19th century, long before government welfare programs existed, it was up to local communities to care for the most vulnerable. In Ottawa, that responsibility was taken up by a group of philanthropic citizens, many of them women, who established these community homes.

The Protestant Orphans' Home opened in 1865, founded by the Ladies' Protestant Benevolent Association. Their objective, as one of them wrote, was to raise funds to provide "...the relief, support and education of orphans and other destitute children and the relief and support of destitute widows and for affording temporary refuge for female servants out of place." The women's part of the home became known as "the Refuge Branch of the Orphans' Home of the City of Ottawa."

Meanwhile, the Home for Friendless Women opened in 1887. As expressed in an annual report, the home's purpose was to provide "a temporary shelter and employment to any homeless, friend-less women, without reference to creed, nationality, age or condition, at any time, night or day; the only condition of admission being a desire to forsake sin and a willingness to comply with the rules of the Home."

It's first location on Wellington Street was soon replaced by a large three-storey house on Cambridge Street. Financing came, in large part, from a laundry service run by the Home. Women learned to work the steam mangle, press clothing, and become skilled laundresses, all while earning reasonable wages. The laundry business was so successful that in 1917 it brought in over \$15,500 in revenue.



The Protestant Home for the Aged, founded in 1889, was originally created to provide care for elderly men. A substantial stone farmhouse on Bank Street was purchased and transformed into what became known as Abbotsford House. Later expansions included a major addition designed by James Mather (who is buried at Beechwood) in 1895. The home eventually evolved into the Glebe Centre, which continues to serve Ottawa's seniors today. Its sister institution, the Bronson Memorial Home for Protestant Aged Women, began in the Bronson family residence and later moved to a new building at Bronson and Albert. This home remained active well into the 1990s.

All three institutions played critical roles in their time. But over the decades, as social services became more centralized and publicly funded, the homes were gradually closed or absorbed into larger systems. The Protestant Orphans' Home and Home for the Aged disappeared from city directories by the late 1960s; the Home for Friendless Women ceased operation even earlier.

Though the institutions faded, the people they served did not vanish without a trace. From 1918 through the mid-1920s, Beechwood Cemetery provided dedicated burial plots for residents who died in these homes. Before that, those who passed away were buried in the "free ground" or the "poor ground," areas with no grave markers.



In 2013, thanks to those walking the grounds of Beechwood and

remarking that it wasn't right that these community plots were unmarked with names, they banded together to fundraise for a plaque. This bronze plaque shows all the names of those buried in the 3 community plots.

And then there was the mystery.

For years, visitors at Beechwood noticed something curious: large floral arrangements would appear at the foot of these monuments, seemingly at random. No one knew where they came from. Visitors speculated it might be descendants, or perhaps local historians paying tribute. It became a quiet mystery, one that added an air of reverence and even a bit of folklore to these modest graves.

The truth only emerged recently.

As it turns out, the flowers were placed by Beechwood staff themselves. There has been a long-standing tradition that after a funeral service, if no one wants the floral arrangements, staff choose to place them at these graves, and that of the Garden of Angels. It is an act of anonymous kindness. A silent gesture to say: you are not forgotten.

Want to visit? The monuments are located just inside the St. Laurent Boulevard entrance to Beechwood Cemetery, along the path marked with a yellow line.

Fun Fact!

Did you know that Beechwood Cemetery refers to its grave locations as "Lots" and not "Plots"? There are only two locations with an exception to that rule: The 3 Protestant Homes and the Masonic Burial Plot located in Section 37.

Eternal Vessels: Urns from Ancient Times to Today

By Nicolas McCarthy, Director of Marketing, Communication and Community Outreach

The use of urns as a symbol in cemeteries is a practice steeped in history, reflecting changing cultural attitudes toward death, remembrance, and the afterlife. From their origins in ancient civilizations to their prominent role in the Victorian era and continuing significance in modern memorial practices, urns offer a fascinating symbol to explore societal shifts in commemorating the deceased.

The use of urns dates back thousands of years, with some of the earliest examples found in ancient Greek (700–480 BCE) and Roman (753 BCE–476 CE) cultures. These civilizations used urns to store the cremated remains of the dead, symbolizing the containment of the soul and the eternal nature of life after death. The urns were elaborately decorated with scenes from mythology, daily life, and the deceased's achievements, serving as both a vessel for remains and a tribute to the individual's life.

In ancient Egypt (3150–332–30 BCE), urns held a special place within the elaborate funerary practices that defined the civilization's approach to death and the afterlife. Unlike the Greco-Roman tradition of cremation, ancient Egyptians practised mummification, believing that preserving the body was essential for the soul's journey in the afterlife.

They used canopic jars, a type of urn, to store and protect the internal organs removed during mummification. Each jar was dedicated to one of the four sons of Horus, who were believed to guard the organs. These jars were intricately designed, often featuring the head of the deity they represented. The use of these urns underscored the Egyptians' belief in the afterlife and their meticulous efforts to ensure safe passage for the deceased's soul. The symbolic significance of these urns was profound, as they represented both protection and the promise of eternal life, which resonated through their religion and cultural practices.

During the medieval period (500–1500 CE), the practice of cremation disappeared in Europe due to the influence of Christianity, which favoured burial over cremation. As a result, urns became less common as actual containers for cremated remains but persisted as symbolic motifs in funerary art. The Renaissance saw a revival of classical art and symbolism, including the use of urns in tomb sculptures and epitaphs. During this time, urns were typically depicted alongside other classical elements, such as columns and draped figures, emphasizing the return to ancient ideals of beauty and remembrance.

The Victorian era (1837–1901 CE) marked a significant resurgence in the use of urns as a prominent symbol in cemeteries. This period was characterized by a deep fascination with death and mourning, driven by high mortality rates, particularly among children, and the influence of Queen Victoria's prolonged mourning for her husband, Prince Albert.

Victorian urns were rich in symbolism, representing the soul's journey, the fleeting nature of life, and the hope for resurrection. Common motifs included:

- **Draped Urns:** Symbolizing the shroud covering the deceased and the transition from life to death.
- **Funerary Urns with Flames:** Representing the eternal flame of the soul and the hope for an afterlife.
- **Garlands and Wreaths:** Signifying victory over death and eternal life.



The designs of these urns were often elaborate with intricate carvings and detailed ornamentation reflecting the Victorian era's love for elaborate decoration and attention to detail.

The Victorian era's obsession with death was also reflected in the creation of garden cemeteries (much like Mount Royal in Montreal, Mount Pleasant in Toronto and Beechwood in Ottawa), which were designed as serene, park-like environments where the living could reflect on the deceased in a tranquil setting. Urns became a common feature in cemeteries of this era, adorning graves, mausoleums and memorials. The placement of urns in these garden landscapes symbolized both the containment of the deceased's remains and the eternal nature of their spirit.

Victorian mourning customs further solidified the urn's role as a significant symbol. Mourning periods were strictly observed, with elaborate rituals and attire that emphasized respect for the deceased. Urns, often incorporated into memorial jewellery and household items, became a tangible connection to the lost loved ones, serving as a constant reminder of their presence.

During the Victorian era, there was also a notable shift in the use of religious symbols. Traditional Christian symbols, such as the cross or the IHS (a monogram symbolizing Jesus Christ), were often deemed too Catholic by the predominantly Protestant society of Victorian Britain and America. This aversion led to a preference for more neutral, classical symbols like the urn, which could convey themes of mortality and remembrance without specific religious connotations. The use of urns allowed mourners to express their grief and honour the deceased in a manner that was seen as more universally acceptable and less sectarian.

As society moved into the 20th century, the use of urns in cemeteries evolved with changing attitudes toward death and memorialization. The rise of cremation as an accepted practice led to a resurgence in the practical use of urns as containers for ashes. However, the symbolic use of urns also persisted, adapting to contemporary styles and materials.

Modern urns are often more streamlined in design compared to their Victorian counterparts, reflecting current preferences. Yet, they continue to serve as powerful symbols of remembrance and the eternal nature of the soul. The use of personalized urns, incorporating elements that reflect the deceased's personality, interests, or achievements, has become increasingly popular, providing a unique and meaningful way to honour their memory.

In today's cemeteries, urns play both practical and symbolic roles. The increased acceptance of cremation has made urns a common choice for storing cremated remains, with a wide variety of designs available to suit individual preferences and cultural traditions.

The symbolic use of urns continues to evolve, reflecting contemporary values and beliefs about death and remembrance. Many modern cemeteries incorporate urn gardens, where beautifully designed urns are displayed in a natural setting, blending the Victorian tradition of garden cemeteries with current environmental and aesthetic sensibilities.

The enduring presence of urns in cemeteries continues to reflect our evolving attitudes toward death, memorialization, and the ways we honour those who have passed. The journey of the urn from a practical container for cremated remains to a multifaceted symbol of life, death, and remembrance highlights its significant role. In contemporary society, the urn remains a poignant reminder of our connections to the past and the enduring nature of our memories.

Note: *Nicolas McCarthy writes a monthly article for the Funeral Chronicle Magazine. This article was first printed in September 2024 and is reprinted with permission.*



Capturing the Seasons of Beechwood

Nathan Pigeon, NP Photography

After photographing Beechwood for years, I learned that the estate has a very special interaction with the sunrise. Starting at the east gate at dawn has become a kind of ritual for me. By following this interaction through the seasons, I have come to understand how much Beechwood is a place of life. The sun's rays dancing between the trees, the morning mist giving a soft glow to the dew-covered tulips: it's a beautiful landscape that lends itself to nostalgia for precious moments spent with loved ones.

Winter is one of those seasons that comes with its own challenges and rhythms. Instead of chasing the sun, I found myself juggling between light sources. Beechwood puts on a magnificent light show along its entrance, illuminating the old conifers that welcome visitors. My hope was to capture this interaction with one of my long exposures, as a car drove through the lights, adding its own story to the scene. This season also invites a less dynamic approach when taking photos during the day. My favorite time is after a snowfall, when monuments and their details are beautifully dusted with the best winter has to offer. It forces you to slow down, take in the small details, and appreciate the calm that follows.

Spring is all about timing. Beechwood plants 35,000 tulips each year and makes sure they are all at their best. Getting the timing right with the sun and weather can be a challenge, as they are spread throughout Beechwood. If you're lucky, you might even capture a lone tulip standing tall in the middle of the green grass. This is the work of a distracted squirrel, much to the chagrin of the horticulture team, who put so much effort into arranging the tulips.



During the summer, Beechwood is a hive of activity. The park has its own beehive and even welcomed a duck at one point. I even saw a squirrel settle into the Beechwood reservoir. The wildlife always surprises me at Beechwood, because you don't expect to find it in the heart of Ottawa. It's sometimes hard to stay focused when you hear a woodpecker doing its rounds or a large family of turkeys walking around.

Fall is one of my favorite seasons at Beechwood. They have a wonderful collection of trees that provide a beautiful backdrop for the monuments and military installations. For example, it's taken me a long time to capture a photo of a specific water fountain near the main entrance. There was always something lacking until a beautiful red maple provided the ideal backdrop for it.



From the Cemetery to the Crash Zone

By Kirk Sharkey, Foreman at Beechwood Cemetery

I never expected Beechwood Cemetery would end up in a demolition derby, let alone place fourth, but here we are.

It started last year. I was walking through the shop and half jokingly said, “We should enter a car in the Metcalfe Fair derby next year.” A few laughs, a few raised eyebrows, and then silence. Then someone said, “Actually, why not?”

So we bought a used six-cylinder Honda Accord. Nothing special, just a car with some life left in it and the bones to survive a few hits. We parked it in the back lot and slowly began prepping it in our spare time. We stripped out the seats, ripped out everything we didn’t need, and started reinforcing the body. We welded in plates so the doors wouldn’t fly off and made sure the whole frame was solid, but not too solid. In derby world there are rules. You can’t just armor up and expect to roll through everyone. Too much plating and the officials will pull you off the track.

Before the derby, the inspectors looked over every inch of our car. They checked how much plating we used, how it was welded, and where we reinforced it. It’s all about fairness. You’re allowed to build smart, but you can’t build a tank. We passed. Clean build, no cheating. That was a good feeling.

We painted the car bright and bold, slapped a big “103” on the side, a tribute to Section 103, the military section at Beechwood. That number meant something. It wasn’t just a car in a race. It represented a piece of our history. Something about the contrast of a cemetery and a demolition derby just worked. Honouring the past while crashing full speed into the present.

When derby day came, I handed the car over to Bruno Lampton. The guy can drive, aggressive but smart. Perfect for the arena. He put on his helmet, no seatbelt, just like the rules say. In a derby, you’ve got to be able to get out fast if something goes sideways. Fire, rollover, whatever. Safety is top priority, but so is a quick exit.

Bruno rolled out onto the dirt with a few dozen other beasts ready to bash. From the sidelines, it was electric. I stood with the rest of the Beechwood staff, who had transformed into our pit crew.

Bruno took some big hits. I winced more than once when another car slammed our rear quarter or sent us spinning. But the Honda held up. And so did he. Smart hits, solid defense, good instincts. Before we knew it, we were still out there in the finals, going head to head with the last few cars standing.

We finished fourth overall. Not bad for a bunch of first timers from a cemetery.

Looking back, it was more than just a wild night at the fair. It brought our team together in a new way. After hours, away from the formal setting of Beechwood, just a group of coworkers building something loud, rough, and proudly out of place. And yet somehow, it fit.

We’re already talking about next year. New car, new tricks, maybe a few more plates. Don’t worry, legal ones. The derby’s in our blood now.

And somewhere in a dusty corner of the Beechwood shop, there’s a dented Honda Accord with the number 103 still painted across the side. Bent, bruised, but not forgotten. Just like the stories we carry.

