

ABOUT CARING FOR GOD'S ACRE

Caring for God's Acre (CfGA) exists to promote, conserve and enhance the natural and built features of churchyards principally, by working with community and special interest groups, and by drawing on the skills of a wide range of partner organisations. There is no other comparable organisation that addresses both the nature conservation potential and the built heritage of these unique, sacred sites or that seeks to promote their potential for lifelong learning and as a community resource.

The charity has four part-time staff and two regular volunteers, and is governed by an elected Board of Trustees. It has sound financial management and a proven track record accrued over nine years. It is also an integral part of a growing national network of organisations interested in the conservation of churchyards and burial grounds.

The work programme for 2003-2006 focused on three major projects: a Lifelong Learning Project funded by Heritage Lottery Project that provided opportunities for lifelong learning with community groups, professional organisations and schools; a Rural Heritage Project funded by Defra and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation that promoted surveys of the natural and built features of churchyards and, working with local groups, helped them develop appropriate management plans; the Mow a Meadow Project funded by the Local Heritage Initiative which helped develop techniques for grassland management in churchyards.

The work programme for 2007-2010 builds on two projects for which funding has already been secured: the Churchyard Task Team Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which recruits, develops and manages volunteers that can work in churchyards, but which particularly focuses on training in practical heritage skills and under-represented groups. Further small projects have been delivered. The Leominster Priory Project, the Malvern Hills 'Exploring Churchyards Project' and the Wye Valley AONB 'Exploring Churchyards Project' which all received funding in 2008/09.

CfGA has also made a unique contribution to the development of a national network, through hosting a two-day conference in Ludlow (May 2006) at which the concept was launched, and through providing speakers and workshop leaders for conferences elsewhere. It currently provides the secretariat for the National Network of Churchyard and Burial Ground Conservation.

A Feasibility study for CfGA and Social Enterprise was completed in August 09.

Funding was secured in 2009 from the Church and Community Fund and Shropshire Hills Sustainable Development Fund to develop information sheets for the CfGA website and Action pack.

A new website has been produced (Sept 09) with funding from the Conservation Foundation through their Parish Pump Programme and a bid to Shropshire Hills LEADER fund for a 'Sacred Spaces through the Ages' Project is in the application process (Feb 10)

1. CfGA AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 CfGA is a registered charity (Number 1084504) CfGA works with groups of people in support of projects in churchyards and burial grounds of all denominations and of civil (i.e. non religious) burial grounds. The charity's objects are: *to promote for the benefit of the public and for the advancement of education, the conservation, enhancement and interpretation of the natural and built features of churchyards and burial grounds.*

1.2 CfGA has the following aims:

- a. To research and monitor the needs of communities in the management of churchyards and burial grounds to work with them on the solutions.
- b. To increase the number of churchyards and burial grounds managed for the conservation and enhancement of the natural and built heritage, by providing advice, information and support.
- c. To increase awareness of the natural and built features within churchyards in order to promote and support their conservation and enhancement.
- d. To enable community groups to create opportunities for enquiry into and celebration of churchyards and burial grounds.
- e. To build and broker partnerships to further its work.
- f. To develop the Caring for God's Acre organisation in order to form a viable structure able to work flexibly in partnerships with local groups, and with learning, sustainability and regeneration networks.

1.3 Caring for God's Acre's began as a pilot scheme in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) between 1997 to 2000. In May 2000 it became an independent charity, and extended the geographical area of operations to cover the Diocese of Hereford, principally the deeply rural counties of Herefordshire and South Shropshire. Within this area its outcomes have proved to be significant in involving small communities and achieving regeneration activity. It also extended its remit, continuing with its initial focus on nature conservation within churchyards and burial grounds, but also developing a commitment to lifelong learning, and a greater understanding of the built environment, and of the role of churchyards in tourism and economic regeneration. This inclusive approach to the conservation and enhancement of churchyards and burial grounds has encouraged parish interest groups e.g. schools, local history groups, and individuals to become involved in community projects based on these sites. **In April 2008 the constitution was changed to allow CfGA to work outside of the Hereford Diocese with any group that required advice or support.**

2. CfGA's UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

2.1 There is no other comparable organisation that targets churchyards and burial grounds specifically, which are unique places that require specialist help and advice. The churchyards themselves are legally defined; they are sacred spaces with high community interest; they are historic sites; and they provide a haven for wildlife. They are also part of the attraction offered to visitors and interest groups (genealogists, conservationists, local historians etc) who visit rural towns and villages.

2.2 Because of the broad remit that churchyards and burial grounds offer, CfGA works in partnership with a large number of groups encompassing the five major areas of its work:

- Nature Conservation, e.g. Wildlife Trusts.
- The cultural and built historic environment, e.g. Local Authority Archaeology Dept's
- Lifelong learning, e.g. County Learning Partnership's
- Tourism, e.g. the Churches Tourism Group
- Community, e.g. the County Volunteer Bureau

2.3 CfGA has also made a unique contribution to the development of a national network, through hosting a two-day conference in Ludlow (May 2006) at which the concept was launched, and through providing speakers and workshop leaders for conferences elsewhere. It currently provides the secretariat for the National Network of Churchyard and Burial Ground Conservation.

2.4 Caring for God's Acre has directly inspired further projects to start up around the country. These include the Wrexham Sacred Spaces Project and Gwent Living Churchyard Project. Many individual parishes across England and Wales have also been supported.