

# 3. Recreation and Learning – Things to Do



*This sheet explains how burial grounds can be excellent places for education, learning and enjoyable activities. Nestled in the heart of communities, they can be used as outdoor classrooms, full of natural, local and social history.*

## WHAT BURIAL SITES CAN OFFER

### Local history

Burial grounds are repositories of local histories and there is a current resurgence in interest in family history. People are drawn to investigate burial records, cemetery registers and memorial inscriptions. These not only chart family histories but also immigration and settlement patterns.

### Built heritage

Burial grounds are valuable sites for built heritage. They may contain monuments, memorials, preaching crosses, lychgates, sundials or gargoyles, some dating back to the Middle Ages. These monuments give a tangible connection to the past in a manner which history books can never achieve. Guided tours to learn more about built features can be popular.



### Cultural heritage

Burial grounds are important to our cultural heritage, going back over a thousand years. They reflect fashions in landscaping, architecture, stone carving and verse. Churchyards were once the hub of the community with markets, games and archery practice taking place within them. There is interesting folklore attached to some of their features such as ancient yew trees. Local churchyards and burial grounds give people a link to the past and an understanding of their cultural and local heritage.

### Natural history

Although small in size, churchyards and burial grounds harbour a disproportionate amount of important species, from the smallest lichen to large ancient trees. For example, Britain is the world's stronghold



for ancient yews and three-quarters of these are found in churchyards. Since 1945 98% of flower-rich grassland (once widespread in the countryside) has vanished and many burial grounds act as havens for this old grassland and its associated animals. This natural haven, often on people's doorsteps, can be of interest to the natural history amateur and specialist alike.

### Creative inspiration

The tranquillity, aesthetics and spiritual nature of burial grounds makes them inspirational places for creativity including art, poetry, photography and writing.



### Take some time...

To look at your site and list the features that you think will interest visitors.

Find local people who can lead a guided tour, chat to a school group or write a visitor leaflet. However large or small, your burial ground will have something to offer.

Consider running an event as part of National Cherishing Churchyards Week, held in the second week of June each year. See the Caring for God's Acre website for more details and a registration form.

### Coppice crafts and greenwood working

Burial grounds are great places for running craft days which can be used to thank volunteers or enthuse new people. You may be able to make things from prunings generated on site:

- Stools from rounds of a felled tree.
- Trellis from hazel or willow coppicing.
- Christmas wreaths are simple to make using holly, ivy and other decorative leaves, seed heads or cones.

Consider having a craft person at an event, a basket weaver or bodger perhaps.

### ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Burial sites make excellent venues for youth groups such as schools, playgroups, Sunday schools, wildlife groups, holiday clubs and groups in the scouting

## INVOLVING PEOPLE

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movement.

Many who manage churchyards and burial grounds actively encourage visits by these groups to help inspire young people.

Consider holding activities for children during any fetes and fairs taking place. Always remember to carry out a risk assessment before a group visit.

Things to do:

**Rubbings** – the old favourite – memorial rubbings, bark rubbings or stone rubbings. All that's needed is paper, crayons and safe memorials or trees! Ask permission before using memorials.

#### **Draw or photograph your favourite memorial**

– young people spend some time looking around the site and then choose their favourite memorial to draw or photograph. This may be a statue, a carving or an inscription. This can appeal to all ages, not just children!

**Treasure hunt** – make a list of things children can search for and find: a purple flower, a carved cross, a feather, a spider's web, 3 green leaves etc. Photocopy the list (or use drawings for younger children) and encourage the children to explore and find the treasures.

**Minibeast safari** – one way of exploring the minibeast world is to look under stones and to shake branches over a white cloth and simply watch what scurries off!

Alternatively children can use a pot and carefully encourage minibeasts into it with a small paintbrush,

for a closer look. Remember to talk with children about not keeping the creature in the pot too long and replacing it where they found it.

**Tree bingo** – draw or photocopy leaves from your site on to paper. Children use the sheets and search for the leaves. Include some folklore and uses for the different types of trees. This will make the activity more appropriate for older children. The Woodland Trust website has useful activity sheets as well as outlines of leaves that you can use.

**Collect fallen autumn leaves.** Children find leaves and thread them on a shoestring. They can then take them inside and make a mobile, a collage or simply take them home on the string.

**Make masks** out of card. Before the session pre-cut the eyes as this can be difficult for children to do.

Thread elastic through the sides of the mask. Stick double-sided sticky tape to the mask and encourage children to find and stick on grasses, petals and leaves.

**Tree dressing ceremony** – this is based on old customs from around the world. It highlights our responsibility for looking after the trees and reminds us of their enormous cultural and environmental importance. It can include storytelling, dance, music, or hanging ribbons and special prayers on your chosen tree.

**Education pack** – available in English and Welsh, our education pack is full of activities and ideas.



#### **Useful contacts**

Caring for God's Acre, [www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

Common Ground, [www.commonground.org.uk](http://www.commonground.org.uk) – for ideas and inspiration!

The Woodland Trust children's activities, [www.naturedetectives.org.uk](http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk)

#### **Useful reading**

Caring for God's Acre Education Pack, [www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

Play Lightly on the Earth, Nature Activities for Children 3 to 9 Years Old – Jacqueline Horsfall, Dawn Publications