

# THE LYCHGATE



## The Beautiful Burial Ground



**We are delighted to announce that we have been awarded a grant of £586,700 by the National Lottery for a major new project, the Beautiful Burial Ground.**

We have been developing this project over the past three years and it will address an important issue - despite their importance, most burial grounds are under-recorded and the heritage, history and wildlife relatively unknown.

This project will work with volunteers to unlock the secrets of these fabulous places and share that information with everybody.

Budding naturalists and historians across England and Wales will be supported to fully record the range of wildlife and historic buildings and monuments to be found in their local burial grounds.

By creating a lasting and accessible record of the built heritage, social history and biodiversity of thousands of these precious community sites, the project aims to inspire more people to visit them, and to encourage their future care.

Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: 'We are delighted to award this grant to the Beautiful Burial Ground project. Our burial grounds are truly precious community spaces; now this project will allow visitors to these sites to appreciate their unique wildlife and history, as well as the calm, reflective atmosphere they provide.'

Four new team members have been recruited to work on this project which will soon be in full swing. Do contact us if you would like to find out more.

[info@cfga.org.uk](mailto:info@cfga.org.uk)

## Sign up to our e-newsletter

If you would like to receive our quarterly e-newsletters, please send us your e-mail address or sign up directly on our website. Each issue contains short articles with links to current news in burial ground conservation.

## This year the spring is particularly welcome after a long, cold winter and we hope you enjoy this edition of the Lychgate

**The main news from Caring for God's Acre is the success of our bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for our Beautiful Burial Ground project. We're delighted that this will be going ahead and grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their grant.**

This project will employ new staff members, taking our staff up to seven. So this spring is a time of change for us because, as well as recruiting new staff, we are also saying goodbye to our Office Manager, Ferol Richards and our Conservation Volunteer Coordinator, Ben Mullen. Ferol will

be starting a well-earned retirement and Ben has a full-time job nearer to home with the Biodiversity Information Service based in Brecon. We wish them both well in the future and are very grateful for all their hard work for the charity.

Please join in with the

Beautiful Burial Ground project and get out exploring and recording in your local churchyard or cemetery. It's also time to register events taking place in Cherishing Churchyards Week from the 8th to the 17th of June. There's a form on our website or you can phone up and let us know what's



happening to celebrate and involve people in these fantastic places.

## We are excited to be involved with the Discovering England's Burial Spaces project. Project Manager, Dr Nicole Beale, tells us more:

Researchers from the Universities of York and Glasgow are working together with several community groups to develop a new system for recording graveyards and cemeteries. This Historic England funded project will result in a pilot national database for burial space research archives and provide community groups across the UK with a toolkit for finding out more about

their local graveyards and cemeteries.

The Discovering England's Burial Spaces (DEBS) project is investigating the history and archaeology of burial spaces like as churchyards and cemeteries. By working with community groups, researchers will better understand the past of these places but also imagine how they might be used in the future.

This research aims to answer several questions:

How can we work together to understand the archaeology of burial spaces?

How can new digital technologies be used to support this process?

What role do historic burial spaces have in the future, particularly as conventional religious observance changes?

Can these spaces be used to enhance personal and community wellbeing in new ways?

The DEBS project will result in a national system for sharing research findings from

surveying graveyards and cemeteries and a centrally supported set of guidelines for recording and interpreting burial spaces. The national database will also enable research already carried out by community groups to be published and shared with the wider research community and the public.

The team will be creating free to use materials, including a mobile app and a website with downloadable field guides.

Dr Nicole Beale:  
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<http://debs.ac.uk/>



Burial grounds have resident birds which can be found year-round, winter visitors such as fieldfares and redwings migrating from colder climes, and summer visitors. This winter saw many migrant hawfinches which flocked to yew trees to eat the berries

**In April and May, the summer visitors arrive, with swallows and martins swooping over the grassland with their distinctive chatter. You may be lucky enough to have swifts nesting under the eaves or within a church tower. For many of us, their breath-taking aeronautical displays and screaming call are the sight and sound of summer. Other summer visitors set up territories which they will patrol and defend, using song to show that a territory is occupied and to attract a mate. The pair will then remain within that territory, finding nesting sites, nest building material and food for parents and young. Despite having migrated hundreds or thousands of miles, once on territory they will remain within that specific area.**

As well as the summer visitors, many of the resident birds also choose to nest in churchyards and cemeteries as they are often great for birds, containing sources of food and sites for nesting. Look out for robins, chaffinches, dunnocks and wrens. A particular classic is the goldcrest. Every churchyard and cemetery seems to have a goldcrest providing they contain a yew tree. This tiny bird is often unnoticed but listen for a high-pitched tinkling

song. Goldcrests can be hard to see as they stay within the cover of the yew for much of the time. With patience you will see it, Europe's smallest bird, with a gold crest down the back of its head like a mohican.

Try to get up early one May or June morning and listen to the dawn chorus in your local burial ground. The first birds you are likely to hear are the thrushes; blackbirds, song thrush and mistle

thrush. Thrushes sing from prominent perches with loud melodic voices – the opera singers of the chorus. Song thrush repeats a single phrase three times whereas the blackbird has a flow of varied notes.

After the initial chorus, things quieten down a little and you can pick out some smaller, quieter birds. Greenfinch has a characteristic, nasal 'zweeee' call and are often found nesting in holly.

Chaffinch has a distinctive rattling song, starting slow then speeding up to finish with a flourish – think of a fast bowler running up to the crease in cricket.

A particular bird of burial grounds is the spotted flycatcher. They can be seen flying out from a perch, such as a monument, catching an insect in flight and returning to the same perch. The call is 'see-tucc' with a clicking tone to the second syllable.

We would love to know what birds you find in your local burial grounds, particularly if you have spotted flycatchers, a declining species that can be helped with the simple provision of nest boxes.

# The Five Steps

We are often contacted by groups who want to change the management of their burial ground but don't quite know where to start. We have developed a simple five step process that groups find really useful

**Planning the management of any site helps to keep work under control. Rather than responding to problems or overdue tasks, there is an opportunity to consider what resources you have (money, people's time, tools) and what can be reasonably achieved. By going through these five steps you can produce a management plan that is realistic and achievable!**

Groups often find that going through these steps helps gather momentum in the community and draws new volunteers to the site.

## **1. Research existing records**

Find out what information already exists. Has anyone undertaken a species survey or recorded the memorials? Have you any designated monuments? Ask around and you may be surprised at what has already been done. You may have local naturalists who have been recording in your burial ground and the Family History Society may have already recorded your memorials. Contact your local Biological Records Centre/ your local authority's Historic Environment Officer or Archaeological Officer. You can also find information about existing records via the Historic England Archaeological Archives and your Local Heritage and Learning Centre. You can conduct research online via the Archaeology Data Service (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/search.xhtml>) and the

Heritage Gateway (<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/>).

## **2. Map the site**

It is a good idea to obtain as accurate a map as possible at a manageable size (A3 or A2). You may well have an existing map or can download one from the internet.

Mark on key features such as entrances, boundaries, orientation, areas of current use, trees, areas of spring bulbs, existing management. This is your base map, giving a starting point for deciding what to do where.

## **3. Plan what you want to do**

Involve people and talk through issues at this stage. It is a good idea to have aims for example 'This burial ground is cared for in a way which makes it attractive for visitors, a place in keeping with the function of burials and a haven for wildlife.'

Where will you have spring bulbs? Are there places where monuments with interesting inscriptions and lichens are covered with brambles?

Take a clean copy of your map and mark on what will happen where. (See map opposite).

Once the priorities for work have been agreed, produce an annual and a three-year work plan.

## **4. Inform people**

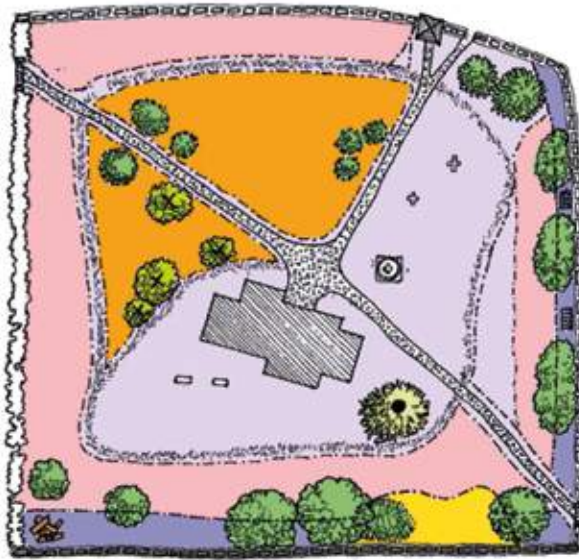
Let people know what you are doing and why. Change often provokes concern and the more you inform people, the more support you will have.

You might choose to pin up a notice with your map. Could someone write an article for local paper or parish magazine? Do you have an open day or fete when you could speak to people or have a display?

## **5. Review the plan – is it working?**

This is an important step to do at the end of each year – after all the plan is only a guide and can be changed if anything is not working. Ask your management group, the local community and visitors. Write any changes into the plan and don't forget the most important step - celebrate your achievements!

This article is based on our Action Pack sheet – 'The Five Steps to Churchyard and Burial Ground Care.' This can be found on our website or contact us for a paper copy.



## Management Map

100m

- Short Mown grass
- Medium Mown grass
- Long grass
- Tussocky
- Manage Nettles + Scrub.
- yew trees, clipped annually
- Compost Bins
- Deadwood Pile
- Repair gaps in Wall
- Veteran Yew  
- Remove Ivy + Elder

### Management Notes

20/11/2013

**Walls:** - Repair the gaps in the southern wall; volunteer days with professional waller. Remove plants first, keep moist and replant after. Gaps measure 3m, 5m, 1m.

**Hedge:** - Low priority, leave gaps for now.

**Short grass:** - No change except collect all cuttings and put into compost bin.

**Medium grass or spring meadow:** Cut after bulbs have flowered, following that cut regularly with mower blade set to 10cm.

**Long grass:** - Pet shop keen to buy small daisies. Make a hand sifter + then introduce long grass cut followed by haymaking. Council will take cuttings if weather too bad for hay making.

**Tussocky grass:** Cut half each year and compost

**Nettles + Scrub:** - Cut nettles when doing long grass cut + include in hay. Cut scrub to ground every 3 years, so trees don't establish.

**Yew Trees:** - Remove ivy from the veteran yew (tree surgeon). Cut elder + other plants under yews every year. Keep trimming the clipped yews.

**Hazels:** - Low priority, leave now but plan to coppice in the future.

**Compost Bins:** Make 2 bins from pallets + use one annually. Put old compost heap into a bin or take home for gardens.

**Woodpile:** - Stake the 4 corners of the woodpile and start to stack deadwood in it.

### Annual Work Plan

KEY	WHAT	ACTION	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
	Tussocky grass	Cut once per year or every other year												
	Long grass / summer meadow	Cut and remove or make hay												
	Nettles	Cut with long grass												
	Medium grass	Cut regularly and remove												
	Short grass	Cut regularly and remove												
	Veteran yew	Remove ivy, remove elder beneath												
	Clipped yews	Clip annually												
	Other trees/shrubs	Prune shrubs												
	Volunteer tree inspection	Check all trees												
	Scrub	Cut to ground level												
	Compost bins	Rotate use, mix/empty												
	Walls	Repair wall remove new ivy growth												
	Woodpile	Create and top up												

### Three Year Work Plan - no need to include tasks which take place annually

ACTIVITY	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Repair wall			
Prune shrubs			
Build compost bins			
Start managing for long grass and nettles			
Start managing for tussocky grass			
Remove ivy and elder from yew			
Cut scrub			

The Management Map, Annual Work Plan and Yearly Work Plan together form the **Management Plan**



## Ray Allen tells us how St. Michael's on Greenhill has become a Churchyard for People and Wildlife

**St. Michael's Churchyard is located on a Greenhill in the southern part of the City of Lichfield. Reputed to date back to pre-Christian times, and with a total area of 9 acres, it is thought to be one of the five largest churchyards in England. It is in two parts: the old, closed churchyard of 7 acres; and the "New" 2-acre area. The old churchyard is now closed for burials. Both churchyards are public open spaces, well used by many people in the community.**

A working group of six members was set up in 2014, because of concerns that people felt about the poor state of the churchyard, which, because of poor management for many years, had become very overgrown. There were few wild flowers, lots of brambles, holly and ash saplings; a poor and untidy compost area; and many of the paths had disappeared. The churchyard generally looked uncared for.

The PCC commissioned a local land surveying firm to produce a topographical survey which gave us a clear view of the churchyard and the tasks that needed to be done. I was then asked to take on the responsibility of acquiring a Management Plan for the churchyard.

I compiled a survey

to find out the views of the congregation and local residents about the churchyard. Another member of the congregation interviewed people as they were walking through the churchyard. The survey results were interesting. Most people wanted the peace and tranquillity maintained, but they did not like the impenetrable areas caused by the overgrown vegetation.

With this information obtained it was decided to contact Caring for God's Acre for help in producing a Management Plan for the churchyard. Harriet Carty came to see the churchyard and then presented her findings to the churchyard group. A few weeks later a detailed 21-page 3 Year Management Plan arrived; and an extremely helpful Burial Ground Action Pack arrived. Because of

its size, Harriet suggested zoning the churchyard to make management less onerous. Colour-coded maps helped with this. The management of a meadow area and planting of smaller clusters of wild flowers, together with the creation of clear woodland with a series of paths were excellent and very welcome suggestions. She also said that composting needs to be better organised and overgrown areas cleared to allow more light so wild flowers can grow. Another valued comment was that grass cuttings should be removed from mown areas to reduce soil fertility and enable more wild flowers to grow.

We have now set to work implementing the Plan. A Working Party has met regularly since October, 2017 and, along with the Community Payback

Team and help from a skilled tree maintenance man, we have worked hard to dig out brambles, holly seedlings, rampant growth of ivy and weeding of graves. The results are clear for all to see. We now have a mass of bluebells, wild garlic and many other spring wild flowers. The churchyard has been opened up for nature and nature has seized the opportunity it now has. The positive comments from passers-by and church members have been most encouraging. The churchyard is now a much more welcoming place.

Added to this was the recent news that we had been awarded a National Lottery Awards for All grant of £10,000 and a locally funded Biodiversity Grant of £1,500. These grants will enable us to do even more to manage our churchyard so it is truly a churchyard for people and wildlife.

*Ray Allen*

# A-Z of Churchyard Conservation

# B



## is for Bumblebees

In the UK we have over 250 species of bees. These consist of 25 bumblebee species, one honeybee species and the rest are solitary bees. This piece is about the bumblebees

**We often read that bumblebees are great pollinators of our crops and therefore have a key role in producing much of the food that we eat. However, they are also key in the pollination of many wildflowers. So the fewer flowers we have, the fewer bees can survive, leading to less flowers being pollinated and so on, in a downward spiral. Wildflowers are often important components of complex food chains, so their decline has a negative impact on a whole array of other wildlife.**

Bumblebees only feed on flowers. Therefore, they need far more plants than similar species which also eat leaves or roots. Their colony-based lifestyle means they need enough flowers between March and October to sustain between 40-400 sterile worker bees for the lifespan of the colony (in

order to produce the new reproductive bees). On top of this, many of our rarer bumblebee species forage less than 1km from their nests so they need to be near areas that are diverse and flower rich to provide enough nectar over enough months for the colony to survive.

This is where managing

a burial ground in a sensitive way can help. Although small in size, old burial grounds can harbour a high density and diversity of wildflowers. This is because they are often the oldest enclosure in the area and contain unimproved, relatively undisturbed grassland

which is now rare in the wider countryside. They are essentially remnant patches of the wildflower meadows that were once widespread in the wider countryside (a habitat which we have lost 97% of since 1945).

We can offer advice on how to sensitively manage the grassland in your burial ground so feel free to contact if you would like some top tips! We would also love to know what bees you have in your burial ground so do let us know.



## A Natural History of Churchyards

Published in March, this new book by Professor Stefan Buczacki is a lovely read for all of us who admire or care for churchyards. It describes the history of churchyards, their place in the landscape, along with their rich plant and animal life. It is a perfect book to hand to anyone who may be doubting the value of burial ground conservation!



**We are looking forward to welcoming Alex Logan as the new Co-ordinator for the Churchyard Task Team. Many volunteers have been with us for over 10 years so we are confident that Alex is arriving to safe hands.**

Most of the work in the summer will be scything and raking – one of the team's favourite tasks! We use scythes because they are peaceful whilst being just as efficient as a strimmer.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Allchurches Trust for their generous grant of £1,250 to purchase more scythes and other much needed tools.



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## Have you seen our mini films?

Last year we released four new films that can be viewed on our website and on YouTube. They last between 2 and 5 minutes each:

- Five Steps to Churchyard and Burial Ground Care;
- The Importance of Grasslands;
- Grassland Management;
- Cherishing Churchyards Week.



Thank you to all of our members; with your support we can:

- Employ our core staff; Harriet, Andrea and Pru;
- Run our helpline; answering your calls and queries via phone, email or through visits;
- Maintain our resources and information including the website;
- Produce this newsletter and maintain the charity;
- Let people know about burial ground conservation through general publicity and social media;
- Develop new projects and initiatives to support groups managing burial grounds;
- Support our Shropshire based volunteer team and team leader, Alex, who is funded by the Jean Jackson Trust.

**Please get in touch:**

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