

St. Michael on Greenhill: A Churchyard For People and Wildlife.

St. Michael's Churchyard is located on Greenhill in the Southern part of The City of Lichfield. It is much older than the Church and is thought to date back to pre-Christian times. With a total area of 9 acres, it is one of the 5 largest Churchyards in England, the others being Lindisfarne, York, Glastonbury and Canterbury. For many centuries it has been the principal burial place for the citizens of Lichfield and several of the neighbouring villages. The Roman settlement at Wall, known historically as Letocetum, lay within the parish of St. Michael's until 1845. It is possible, therefore, that the burial ground is of Romano-British origin and was founded to provide a final resting place for Christians of the 3rd. And 4th. Centuries.

The Churchyard as seen now is in 2 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.

The father, mother and brother of Dr. Samuel Johnson are buried in St. Michael's Church and there is a memorial slab to them in the central aisle. We can be sure that Dr. Johnson was very familiar with the Churchyard and probably visited it regularly during his time in Lichfield.

Some well-known and some not so well-known people are buried in the Churchyard. There is a memorial slab for Trumpeter John Brown, of the Charge of The Light Brigade, who is probably buried here. Members of some of the poet Philip Larkin's family are also buried. Their graves and headstones are grouped together alongside one of the paths. In 1810, the last three men to be hanged in Lichfield were buried in the Churchyard. Their crime was forgery and a small headstone in their memory can be seen near the Church Tower. The most striking monument is Chancellor Law's Mausoleum. Chancellor Law was Chancellor of Lichfield Diocese from 1821 and he was a great benefactor of Lichfield. He had the Mausoleum built for his wife who died in 1864. What is particularly interesting about this is that it included a clock with 2 dials which were illuminated at night by gas. Built on the side of Trent Valley Road, travellers on their way to Lichfield's Trent Valley Station could tell the time. The tomb of the MP Louis Petit can also be seen; and a local man, Robert Bridgeman, known throughout Lichfield Diocese, is buried in the Churchyard. Sadly, Bridgeman and Sons, makers of Church furnishings, are no longer in business.

The natural features of St. Michael's Churchyard make it a very beautiful sacred space. There are over 500 trees, both deciduous and evergreen, with some rarities such as the Japanese Cork Tree and the Oregon Maple. Most of the common British tree species are present and there is an avenue of crab apple trees leading up to the Church door. The Churchyard is also noted for its fine display of snowdrops in the early months of the year, followed by crocus, daffodil, bluebell and wild garlic as the Spring arrives followed by cow parsley lining the paths in early Summer.

Other wildlife can be seen, including woodpeckers; foxes; lichen on gravestones and tree branches; fungi; mosses; spiders; and insects such as moths, butterflies and grasshoppers.

In the Autumn of 2017 a Working Party was formed, the aim being to look after the Churchyard and encourage even more wildlife. The Working Party meets on a Saturday morning once a month throughout the year.