

# THE LYCHGATE



## Dancing with Bees

Join us for an afternoon with *Brigit Strawbridge Howard*

**This year we are delighted to welcome Brigit Strawbridge Howard to our AGM where she will give an illustrated talk on the wonderful world of bees.**

Brigit is a naturalist, wildlife gardener, bee advocate and has just released a book 'Dancing with Bees' a beautiful memoir of reconnecting with the natural world and discovering a particular love for bees. There will be copies for sale and the talk will be followed by book signing along with a chance to view displays accompanied by tea and delicious homemade cake.

The talk is free to members and £5 for non-members.

Please book early to avoid disappointment  
[info@cfga.org.uk](mailto:info@cfga.org.uk), 01588 673041.

1.30-3.30/4pm Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> November at the Bishop's Palace, Hereford.



## 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.

**In 2020 Caring for God's Acre will be 20 years old. Throughout this time, we have been raising awareness about how brilliant burial grounds are and supporting those fantastic people who manage them, usually on a voluntary basis.**

It's thanks for you, our members that we are still here, still doing this vital work and growing in our capacity and influence with every passing year. It's not always been easy, (the current economic situation is particularly challenging), but it's always been fascinating, with the enthusiasm and commitment of

the people we meet; working away in their own 'patch,' giving us inspiration. Please help us to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Join in with The Year of the Burial Ground; tell people about Caring for God's Acre and keep supporting and encouraging us!



# Year of the Burial Ground 2020

**2020 will be the 20th Anniversary of Caring for God's Acre and we are celebrating with a 'Year of the Burial Ground'.**

During the year we will be partnering with experts and organisations to raise the profile and celebrate the unique heritage within these special sites.

There will be many ways of becoming involved:

**• Attend one of our conferences**

We have organised two 'Beautiful Burial Ground' conferences in March. These days will bring together experts for a packed

itinerary – inspiring attendees to investigate and record in burial grounds and show how records can be used to help with management decisions and interpretation.

More details to be released later this year but in the meantime, here are the dates for your diary:

- Thursday March 12th National Museum, Cardiff
- Thursday March 26th The Circle, Sheffield

**• Enjoy our detailed monthly blog posts from experts in the field**

From memorials to migrating birds, visit our website or sign up to our e-newsletter to learn fascinating facts about all things burial ground related.

**• Submit your wildlife sightings**

To our new Beautiful Burial Ground database and look up what wildlife is in a burial ground near you!

**Run an event as part of Love your Burial Ground Week**

Sure to be the biggest yet – the second week of June.

**Enter our Photographic competition**

More details to be released in December.

**Use the year to raise the profile of your own burial ground**

Contact us for press release templates and ideas for articles to go into your local newsletters.

**Join us on social media**

Using the hashtag #yearoftheburialground so we can make contact, retweet and see what you are up to.

*If you want to be involved please e-mail Prue and she will e-mail you our Year of the Burial Ground Information Pack later this year – [info@cfga.org.uk](mailto:info@cfga.org.uk), 01588 673041*





# Volunteers keeping busy

**It's been a busy few months for our Shropshire based volunteers as we're coming to the end of the scything season. This year has been very varied because, in addition to our regular volunteering task days, we have taken on contract work as part of making the team more financially sustainable.**

These have included restoring a wildflower meadow area at Onibury and rebuilding a dry-stone wall at the Quaker burial site at Almeley, Herefordshire. Rebuilding the wall proved very interesting and illustrated the value that a stone wall has to the local ecology, particularly to the local amphibian population. We found smooth, and great crested newts and a resident toad within a small section to be rebuilt.

We are part way through a programme of working with South Shropshire Youth Forum funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. On several days in the summer holidays I met up with

Rich Morley, youth forum coordinator, who had up to eight energetic youths with him from the local area. They built an impressive bug hotel and reptile/amphibian hibernaculum, coppiced a hazel tree and created a habitat pile with the sticks and ended the session by having a barbeque.

Another project we have been involved with is a volunteer verges project pilot scheme also funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund where certain key roadside verges have been left to grow and scythed/raked off in the summer in the same way we do with our wildflower meadows. Several volunteers

helped with this and we scattered green hay from local churchyards rich in botanical species to boost the diversity of the verges. The aim of this project is to restore and enhance this important habitat and create corridors between wildlife rich sites.

We recently held a small celebration to mark our longest serving volunteer Martin Garland's 400<sup>th</sup> day of volunteering with the charity over the last decade. Martin enjoys the peace and tranquillity of the 40 or so churchyards we visit to undertake conservation work and always surprises me when he tells of his career as a jet pilot flying all over the

world. Quite a contrast to the gentle swish of scythes between the yew trees and gravestones and the hushed rustle of bank voles and slowworms disappearing out of sight as we approach.

Another of our fabulous volunteers, Vicky Barnes, completed her first half marathon and raised £400 for the charity. Vicky had to undertake an intense training regime for months before the run and what an achievement!

Thank you to all our volunteers for another great year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex'.

# Recording update

**In 2018 we launched our Burial Grounds recording form, making it easier for everybody to submit their biological records via our website. This spring and summer we were thrilled to see the form taken up by lots of enthusiastic recorders, so much so that we can only mention a fraction of those involved.**

Here is a glimpse of some of the highlights:

Shropshire county ecologist Dan Wrench kicked off the year with snowdrops in February, followed up by a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Three recorders did a spot of birdwatching in Norfolk; highlights included Barn Owl and Little Owl.

In March, one of our Shropshire volunteers Anna McCann, met with a hedgehog whilst botanising at St Chad's in Montford. I took the opportunity presented by a March wedding to take a look around King Charles the Martyr in Newtown; a site with botanical potential and deserving of a more in-depth survey. At Falmouth Cemetery, Kevin Thomas shared records for 6 different types of bees whilst Richard Comont of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust recorded a wide array of species groups at Wyche: All Saints, Worcestershire, including plants, fungi, birds, insects, crustaceans, and molluscs.

April saw records pouring in as our conservation volunteers noted species whilst out and about, including plants, birds, amphibians and reptiles. Down by the seaside Val Appleyard submitted the first of many records for Woodvale Cemetery, Brighton, continuing



to submit records almost weekly throughout 2019. Margaret Markland and Jane Ing kindly contributed to the Shropshire Burial Grounds botany efforts and a training day at Hopesay rewarded participants with Slowworms and both Smooth and Palmate Newts.

As we came into May our local volunteers continued to make records as did Tammy Stretton from Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust who is recording in Welshpool Cemetery, now seen as a potential Local Wildlife Site. Back in Norfolk, Martin Greenland was spotting

birds, butterflies and bees to name but a few species groups, and we saw records coming in from Herefordshire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire in particular. At the end of May we ran a memorable BioBlitz at the wonderful York Cemetery, where we were joined by mammal, invertebrate, lichen and moss experts. I managed to make a brief visit to Holy Trinity Goodramgate, a tiny churchyard providing some respite from the hustle and bustle of central York.

Our second BioBlitz of the year was held in June at St Michael's Lichfield, organised with the indefatigable Ray Allen. We were supported by a whole host of recorders, resulting in records for

126 different species, and bringing the total for the churchyard up to an amazing 1,258. The Dartmoor based Moor Meadows group got stuck into churchyards and together we have encouraged churchwardens to manage areas of their churchyards as wildflower meadows.

In August we received a record of a Grass snake from church warden Jim Logan of Bromfield, this species is known to use compost heaps for laying eggs (look out for empty egg cases). We were lucky enough to have John Walters recording invertebrates for us in South

Devon, Buckfastleigh and South Brent; check out Twitter for his excellent invertebrate illustrations. Carole Tyrrell has been making plant records throughout spring and summer at the Grade 1 listed Brompton Cemetery in London, and she hasn't stopped there, visiting other lovely cemeteries such as Greatness Cemetery.

As the summer months progressed, more and more records came in from all over England and Wales. During this time our Community

Coordinator George ran 64 training sessions which also yielded many records and we now have burial ground information from 33 counties and 592 burial grounds.

We've had records from churchyards, chapel yards, cemeteries and green burial sites. Individuals have joined in as have church groups, families, interest groups, local authorities, professionals and local environmental records centres. We've worked with people with

complex health needs who find burial grounds refreshingly accessible, blind or partially sighted people who have learned bird song, children who have made their first biological record.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted records. We would love to keep this recording momentum going, please help us further the coverage of recording next year. You can submit records via our website, post, or send us an email [liam@cfga.org.uk](mailto:liam@cfga.org.uk).



# Birds in Burial Grounds

**The UK's birds are in trouble and burial grounds can help. Turtle Dove has experienced a 93% population decline since 1970. Over the same period, other species with spectacular "crashes" in numbers include Spotted Flycatcher (86%), Starling (78%), Nightingale (73%), House Sparrow (71%), Cuckoo (63%), and Song Thrush (50%), along with many other familiar and well-loved birds.**

The reasons for this are many: (climate change, intensification of agriculture, environmental pollution in various guises and illegal persecution) but habitat loss is among the most significant. Birds require a habitat that will provide food, shelter and a suitable nesting site. Such amenities are provided by nature reserves as well as a range of non-traditional habitats such as gardens, military bases, motorway verges and railway embankments. Among these desirable habitats are burial grounds!

Why are these areas attractive to birds? Most obviously, they are often 'islands' of enhanced biodiversity in a surrounding 'sea' of often impoverished habitat. This is clearly the case for an urban churchyard, for example, surrounded by paved and unvegetated land uses, as in the inner city or industrial areas. However, it may be equally true of a rural site if surrounding fields support intensive types of agriculture with heavy pesticide and herbicide use. Burial grounds are, of course, usually relatively small compared to the area used by a highly mobile creature like a bird, and will act as production and dispersal sites, 'seeding' the surrounding areas with more unusual species. They will also receive incomers from poorer habitats, so that what constitutes a 'churchyard bird' will depend as much on the surroundings as the characteristics of the churchyard itself.

Burial grounds are frequently quiet and undisturbed habitats,

ideal for nesting and rearing young. They are also often stable ecosystems (many having been unchanged for centuries) with ancient trees and pastures and have escaped the excesses of fertiliser and herbicide use characteristic of farmed land and even gardens. They typically have mature tree cover, both native and exotic, broad-leaved and conifer, with tree groupings, hedges and sometimes a shrub understorey. All of these provide a variety of food sources and nest sites. A mixture of tree types is valuable to birds that raise several broods in a breeding season, which start early and may use a conifer as a nesting site for the first nest, when deciduous trees are leafless, and may switch later in the season. The best sites offer a wealth of nesting, feeding and roosting sites including external building walls with buttresses, gargoyles, grotesques, ledges, nooks and crannies, towers and spires, moss- and lichen-covered memorial stones, walls and crypts, ivy-covered trees and stonework, lawn-like short grass, meadows, shrubs, 'untidy' areas and fruit- and seed-bearing plants.

What bird species are commonly found in churchyards and burial grounds? Remarkably, there are not many surveys available but those that I found mention 66 species. Among these are:

• The thrushes – *Blackbird, Song and Mistle Thrushes* and winter visitors, *Redwing and Fieldfare*,



*Robin, Goldcrest, Wren, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and Starling, Blue, Great and Coal Tit.*

- Finches – *Greenfinch, Siskin, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Brambling, Redpoll, Hawfinch, Bullfinch and Linnet.*
- Pigeons and doves – *Woodpigeon, Stock Dove and Collared Dove.*
- Crows – *Carrion Crow, Rook, Jay and Jackdaw.*
- Various raptors – *including Barn, Tawny and Little Owl, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.*
- Swift, Swallow and House Martin.
- Warblers – *Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler.*
- Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

On this list alone, there are nine species on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern and eleven on the Amber List – clearly burial grounds have the potential for nurturing some of our more threatened bird species while supporting healthy populations of our commoner, much-loved species.

*Written by John Arnfield, Chair of Shropshire Ornithological Society. See the blog section of our website to read John's article on How to improve burial grounds for birds.*



# A-Z of Churchyard Conservation

## E is for Epitaph

**An Epitaph is a short text honouring a deceased person. Strictly speaking, it refers to text that is inscribed on a tombstone or plaque, but it may also be used in a figurative sense.**

As well as our passion for burial grounds as reservoirs of biodiversity, at Caring for God's Acre we are also interested in the fascinating social history that they contain.

We recently talked to the Heritage Resource Centre in the small market town of Bishop's Castle, just a few miles from our offices in South Shropshire, about some unusual headstones that cast a light on the town's history.

### **The African's Grave**

The best known of the headstones is a Grade II listed headstone with the inscription:

*Here lieth the body of ID  
a Native of Africa  
who died in this Town  
Sept 9th 1801*

*God hath made of one Blood, all nations of Men.  
Act 17 ch. ver. 26.*

This inscription raises a number of questions. Who was ID? Why was an African in rural Shropshire at the very beginning of the 19th century? And most intriguing of all, who erected this beautifully carved and embellished headstone at a time when it was mainly the graves of the rich that were marked with a stone. A likely clue is the quotation from the Acts of the Apostles, which was frequently used as a text by the Abolitionist movement. ID died just six years before the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act and the stone was added to the 2017 English Heritage list of "Sites of Memory" which commemorates the bicentenary of the Act.

### **The Honest Burgess' Grave**

The year after ID's death another equally rare inhabitant of the town died, and was commemorated in a lengthy and detailed epitaph on his headstone, which reads:

*To the memory of Matthew Marston. He departed this life May 29th 1802, the oldest Burgess of the Borough. His steady and uncorrupt conduct presents an example*

*to his brother Burgesses for perpetual imitation, and a useful lesson to the Parliamentary Representatives of the Borough, that Opulence and Power cannot alone secure independent suffrage.*

Bishop's Castle was a notorious Rotten Borough at the time and it was said that the most lucrative occupation of the townsfolk was bribery! In the year Matthew Marston died, winning the election cost the 2nd Lord Clive (son of Clive of India) £10,188.2s.6d, including £6,515.3s.4d for entertaining the burgesses in the local pubs, £1,285 for ribbons, £511 for a band, £107.17s 6d for strewing flowers and £31.10s for five strongarm men from Bridgnorth.

### **The French Napoleonic Colonel's Grave**

Bishop's Castle was a parole town during the Napoleonic wars and a number of French officers who had been taken as prisoners of war were housed in the town. One of these, Louis Paces, Lieutenant Colonel of Light Horse, Knight of the Orders of the Two Sicilies and Spain died in the town 1814 and was buried in the churchyard. The inscription on his headstone is in French and was presumably erected by his fellow officers.

### **And finally...**

A plain headstone marks the grave of Bishop's Castle's very own French Lieutenant's woman. In 1813 Mary Morgan married a French officer who later returned to France with their young son Louis, leaving Mary behind. Louis became a whaler and travelled to New Zealand where he married an Aboriginal princess. Descendants of the marriage recently visited the town to honour the memory of their ancestor, who lived to the ripe old age of 82, and to share her extraordinary story.

What interesting or unusual headstones do you have in your local burial ground? Do they give you a new view on the history of your local community?

*Caring for God's Acre is currently supporting a project with the PCC and the Heritage Resource Centre to conserve and investigate the history of a number of Georgian tombs. The information above comes from research carried out by Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre and other local history groups.*

# FAQ

**Question:**

*I am a member of CfGA and would like to support you more. What can I do to help?*

**Answer:**

A great question – there are various ways!

- You could set up your membership payment as a direct debit which will save us on administration time.
- If eligible, please Gift Aid your membership and we can claim an extra 25% from the government.
- Inspire a friend or your local church/ burial ground team to become members.
- Host a fundraising event – such as a coffee morning.
- Consider leaving a gift in your will.

## Sowing the Seed of God's Acre

We are delighted to receive a grant of £1,500 from the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund for our project. Through this grant we have been surveying ten burial grounds within the AONB, where little or nothing is known about the flora and fauna. We held a grassland management session which included meadow management training; supporting volunteers and sharing best practice. Yellow Rattle seed collected from meadows within the AONB has been sown into areas of churchyards that are being managed as meadows. Yellow Rattle suppresses grass growth, making the management of these sites more sustainable going forward.



## Invite a friend to become a member, and if they join we will send you a surprise thank you gift

Increasing our membership is a vital part of our strategy to ensure the charity has the core funds it needs to keep afloat. If every member inspired another individual or group to join it would greatly help. Please consider doing this and if you would like Prue to e-mail or post you a membership form that you can forward to others, just contact her on the details at the bottom of the page. Thank you in advance!

A big thank you to Sara Burnham from St George's Church in Orleton who organised a coffee morning in July which raised £50 for the charity

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

- Employ our core staff, Harriet, Andrea and Prue
- Run our helpline – answering your calls and queries via phone or e-mail
- 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 across the country
- Support our wonderful Volunteer Team

**Please get in touch:**

**01588 673041** [info@cfga.org.uk](mailto:info@cfga.org.uk)

**Caring for God's Acre, 11 Drovers House, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 9BZ**

**Charity No: 1155536**



Editors: Dr Ian Dormor, Trustee and Andrea Gilpin

Design: Blast Design  
[www.blast-design.co.uk](http://www.blast-design.co.uk)

- CfGA is grateful for financial support from the following:
- National Lottery Heritage Fund
  - Habitat Aid
  - The Millichope Foundation
  - Natural Resource Wales
  - Aviva Community Fund
  - Jean Jackson Trust
  - AllChurches Trust
  - Calor Rural Community Fund
  - Ecclesiastical Movement for Good Award
  - Golden Bottle Trust
  - GML Ltd
  - Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund