

1. Involving Volunteers



This sheet gives guidelines on how to involve volunteers in the conservation of your burial ground.

'Many hands make light work'

Involving people in managing your burial ground has a great many things to recommend it:

- You share the workload and large or expensive jobs can become manageable.
- You involve your local community and get a chance to explain what you are doing and why, which can build local support.
- Volunteers start to become ambassadors for a burial site; they talk about what they are doing to friends and neighbours and can, in turn, recruit more volunteers and generate goodwill.
- Volunteers may bring different skills and experience to your group, such as gardening, plant identification or links to local schools.

ATTRACTING VOLUNTEERS

Managing a churchyard or burial ground in a way that is sensitive to both wildlife and people brings with it tasks that are varied and interesting. These may include creating compost heaps, putting up bird and bat boxes, finding out what species of wildflowers there are, scything meadow areas, dry stone walling and tree pruning. There will also be a need for someone to produce posters, publicise events through local media, organise tasks and keep people in contact.



Wood Anemone

In order to get a strong team of volunteers together and maintain enthusiasm and momentum, it is helpful to understand some of the barriers that stop people from volunteering.

These include:

- Lack of confidence.
- Lack of time.
- Have dependants.
- Work commitments.
- Don't know about it.
- Think it is not their problem as they are not part of the congregation.



- Think they have nothing to offer.
- Lack of awareness of the interest the site has to offer.

With the right planning and publicity, many of the above barriers can be overcome.

Planning a work party

Consider:

- What will the people who volunteer be doing?
- How many volunteers are needed?
- How long is the task likely to take and will it become regular? A regular day is easy to remember.
- Is the level of publicity suitable for the task? Will the task involve many people or a few?
- Which days and times will suit most people who might volunteer?
- Toilet and hand washing facilities. If you do not have a loo, is there one nearby that can be used? A village hall or pub perhaps or can you hire a portaloos?
- Offering light refreshments during or at the end of the task.
- Who will undertake a risk assessment? (See sheet D2, Health and Safety).

Looking after volunteers on the day

Tell volunteers what the structure of the day will be in advance: when you will stop for tea or lunch, when you plan to finish. Make it clear that they can leave whenever it suits them.

Go over any health and safety issues.

If a new person turns up on a task day make sure that they are welcomed, given something to do which is appropriate to their abilities and interests. Don't assume prior experience, explain a task carefully and demonstrate tool use.

Have some interesting information available about the site. Do a quick tour and point out features of interest

to new volunteers, including telling them about the management plan and the reason for the task they are helping with.

Be prepared to find something to do for everyone who volunteers, no matter what their abilities. As well as physical jobs there are others such as: making tea, bringing cakes, taking photographs, recording plants and wildlife, writing articles for local press.

INVOLVING PEOPLE

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Think about transport if people are coming from further afield. This might be lift sharing or offering to pay a bus fare.

Don't overwhelm new volunteers! Give them time to get to know you and to decide how much time and commitment they want to give.

Publicity

- Try as many angles as possible; word of mouth is often the best.
- Put posters in the church porch, village hall, local pub, shops and community notice boards. Create simple flyers so that people can take information away.
- Put work party details in the local paper or issue a press release.
- Is there a community website?
- Start publicity a month in advance.
- Register with your local Voluntary Action office.
- Hold indoor slide talks or guided walks in the burial ground.
- Make it appealing – 'Cake and Rake' days or a 'Scything Saturday' – with food!
- Link in with national initiatives. Newspapers and radio will pick up on national initiatives and give your event a higher profile.

Some possible initiatives are:

National Nest Box Week
National Volunteers' Week
National Tree Week

- Join in with national 'Love Your Burial Ground' week during the second week of June each year – contact Caring for God's Acre for information.
- Make sure that a friendly member of your group acts as a point of contact and put a phone number on to any publicity.

Keeping volunteers

Welcome people at the beginning and thank them at the end of every event, giving information about what happens next and when.

Find out what individuals like to do and what their interests are.

Help them achieve what they have come along for. This could have been to meet people, gain skills, look at wildlife or get fit.

Could one of the group keep an eye on everyone to make sure they are happy, and to introduce new people?

Think whether you can welcome children to your work party. Are there suitable tasks for children and could someone do activities for younger ones while the adults work? (See sheet D3, Things to Do, and also our Education Pack which has a great many activities for children). You may get many more volunteers if events are family friendly.

Compile a scrapbook of tasks with pictures of people, achievements and interesting wildlife for everyone to look at. N.B. If taking photos of children or vulnerable adults you need written permission from a parent or carer so have a simple form ready and explain to the adult what the photo will be used for.

See if the group would be interested in some training or in sharing skills. Ask around for what skills local people have: identification of wildlife, making bird or bat boxes, sketching memorials or wildflowers perhaps. Put on a training morning.

For larger specialist jobs such as dry stone walling you may want to hire a trainer to teach new skills to your group (see sheets A11, Caring for Stone Walls and D5, Applying for Grants).

Once your group is established, recognise special events like birthdays or the anniversary of the group.

Useful contacts

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

County Voluntary Councils, www.wcva.org.uk

Volunteering in Wales, www.volunteering-wales.net

Wales Council for Voluntary Action, www.wcva.org.uk

Useful reading

Education Pack - www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

National Cherishing Churchyards Week – www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

National Nest Box Week – www.bto.org

National Tree Week – www.treecouncil.org.uk

