

Flowery grassland in burial grounds



INTRODUCTION

Flowery grasslands with their breath-taking beauty and buzz of wildlife have almost vanished from our countryside. Once commonplace, now only fragments remain. Incredibly, churchyards and cemeteries are sometimes the last refuge in the parish for this wonderful but increasingly rare habitat.

Old grasslands may often be preserved in burial grounds, for here, they have escaped the developer, the plough, spraying of herbicides and the regular application of fertilisers. Where this habitat is present, a wide and colourful array of flowers may still be seen, from the rich yellow and orange of eggs-and-bacon, to the pink of betony and blue of scabious. These diverse grasslands are not only beautiful, in their own right, but are also a haven for wildlife. Butterflies dance across the flowers seeking out nectar, bumblebees collect pollen to feed their broods, small mammals take refuge in the longer grass and, in the autumn, colourful waxcap fungi appear.

Your churchyard or burial site may be the most ancient enclosed piece of land in a parish, town or city. The grassland will have been relatively undisturbed, re-seeding naturally for hundreds if not thousands of years. It will also have been both mown for hay and grazed by animals during its time as a burial ground. A benefit of this continuity of management over a very long time is a rich diversity of grasses, flowers and animals. This old unimproved grassland was once widespread in the UK but is now rare. Since the 1940s over 97% has vanished. Most burial grounds pre-date the 1940s so are now some of the few places it remains – because they have not been artificially fertilised, treated with herbicides or ploughed. Providing the site hasn't been neglected, and the grass cuttings are raked up and removed regularly, this important flower-rich grassland persists, regardless of whether the grass is kept short mown or long like a meadow.

Maybe your churchyard, chapel yard or cemetery retains some of this precious grassland? If so it is worth treasuring. Here we provide information about the rich natural and cultural history of flowery grasslands. You can read about the types of flowers that you may expect to find, as well as the link that many have to Christianity. We give practical guidance on how best to look after your grassland as well as a way of assessing its condition. Finally, we will share ideas of how to celebrate it with your parishioners and visitors.

If you wish to find out more, the following resources and links are packed with more information and advice on flowery grasslands.

Organisations and Websites:

- **Caring for God's Acre** works nationally to support groups and individuals to investigate, care for, and enjoy burial grounds and graveyards. Our website has links to downloadable action packs including 'The Burial Ground Botanical Companion' and 'Caring for grasslands' as well as details of our own YouTube channel which contains short films on how to manage grasslands: www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk
- **Plantlife** is a British conservation charity working nationally and internationally to save threatened wild flowers, plants and fungi. From hard-hitting reports to guides for the amateur botanist, most of Plantlife's extensive range of published material is available to view at the click of a mouse button: www.plantlife.org.uk/uk
- **The Wildlife Trusts** is an umbrella organisation of local Wildlife Trusts. No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and standing up for wildlife and wild places. Each Wildlife Trust is an independent charity formed by people getting together to make a positive difference to wildlife, climate and future generations. To find your local Wildlife Trust and to see how they may be able to help your burial ground grassland, visit: www.wildlifetrusts.org/
- **Grassland+** is a coalition of three charities (Plantlife, Butterfly Conservation and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust) who have come together to protect and restore grasslands, heaths and meadows: www.grasslandsplus.org.uk/

Books:

- **Meadows** by George Peterken
- **Flora Britannica** by Richard Mabey
- **God's Acre: The Flowers and Animals of the Parish Churchyard** by Francesca Greenoak

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DISCOVERING MORE ABOUT WHAT MAKES MEADOWS SO SPECIAL

Flowerly grasslands, as the name suggests, are packed full of a wide range of different plant species. They are an intimate mixture of grasses, sedges, rushes and what we generally refer to as 'wildflowers' - herbaceous plants with colourful and often showy flowers.

The most familiar type of flowerly grassland is the traditional hay meadow, but they can also form part of grazed pasture, coastal grasslands, traditional orchards, field margins and road verges as well as churchyards.

The term meadow and pasture are often interchanged, and both can be rich in flowers. The key difference is that meadows are mown at some point, whereas pastures are not. Both, however, may be grazed. The type of grassland reflects the underlying geology, soils, rainfall and altitude, but its quality will depend upon its recent and historic management.

The flora is characteristically varied, having usually established over many generations, and is made up of a range of native, largely perennial plants. Typically, a wildflower meadow will start the year as a short turf. Growth starts as the weather warms in March and April and early spring flowers, such as lesser celandines and cowslips, will be found in bloom. In May, many more flowers will start to appear, reaching their colourful peak in June. By mid-summer, many flowers are going to seed and 'shrink back' whilst the taller grasses take over. Come July, grasslands are often cut, and those that aren't will start to die down naturally as autumn approaches. There is often a second flush of growth after cutting, but there is almost no growth in the winter.

In the late spring, when flowering is at its peak, you should readily see a mixture of well-known species that were once commonplace across the wider landscape, such as red clover, meadow buttercup, germander speedwell, cat's-ear, yarrow and selfheal. But if you look closely, you may well find some much less common species such as cowslips, orchids, betony and scabious. It is these flowers that often tell us the most about the grassland type and quality. The grasses will also be diverse and although they have indistinct flowers, some, such as quaking grass, may be familiar. As a general guide, a 'good' flower-rich grassland is likely to have over 15 species per m², of

which around half will be different species of grass.

Most burial grounds, like many of the flowerly meadows across England and Wales have deep, neutral soils. Here, in addition to the plants mentioned above you may find oxeye daisy, Lady's bedstraw, common knapweed, bird's-foot trefoil and an array of hawkweeds and hawkbits. Yellow rattle is an important species found in many hay meadows and sometimes in churchyards. Unlike most meadow species it is an annual and is known to feed off grasses, drawing nutrients from them which suppresses their growth and allows other wildflowers the space to flourish.

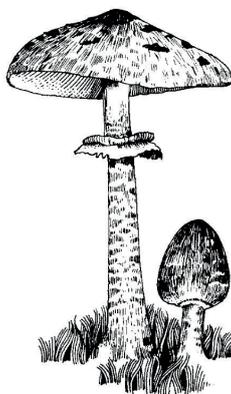


Burial grounds on calcareous or lime-rich soils are rarer but, in general, such grasslands are the most varied, with species such as common rockrose, pyramidal orchid, hoary plantain and bloody cranesbill making an appearance. They often have more wildflowers than grasses.

Coastal grasslands can also be extremely varied, including species that can tolerate the salty conditions such as thrift, sea campion, wild carrot, buck's-horn plantain and spring squill. On acid soils and in the uplands more heathy species may make their presence known - bilberry and heather as well as more delicate species such as

heath bedstraw, sheep's sorrel and harebells.

It is not just flowering plants that are found in grasslands, but also many types of fungi. The most striking group of grassland fungi are the waxcaps and they are an indicator of an old, undisturbed piece of land. Appearing in autumn they are a riot of bright colours - often reds, yellows, orange or white with one distinctive species, the parrot waxcap, often starting bottle green then fading through to yellows, pinks and greys. Areas of short grass within burial sites are particularly good for finding waxcaps as they thrive in short, regularly mown, old grassland.



Flowerly grasslands can support a huge range of other wildlife. On a summer's day the sight of butterflies dancing over the grasses and the sound of chirping grasshoppers and buzzing bees is a joy, whilst beneath the grass a whole world of tiny invertebrates live

their lives amongst the plant litter, roots and soil.

The flowers are a really important food source for many insects. They provide both the nectar and pollen essential for many butterflies, moths, bees and flies. The plants themselves are also a food for insects

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such as bugs, grasshoppers, leaf beetles and for the caterpillars of many of our butterflies and moths. The meadow brown is perhaps one of the best-known grassland butterflies and its larvae feed upon a variety of grasses, as do those of marbled whites, gatekeepers, ringlets and skippers. The orange-tip is a common sight in spring, laying its eggs on cuckoo flower, whilst the papery cocoons of the six-spot burnet moth can often be seen upon grass stems. The striking red and black adults of the burnet moths are day flying and they like to nectar on knapweeds and thistles. The grassland insects are in turn food for other animals such as spiders, hedgehogs, bats and birds. On summer days, swifts and swallows can often be seen



swooping low over the grasslands as they feed, and look out for spotted flycatchers, taking insects on the wing. As dusk falls bats, such as the brown long-eared bat, noctules and pipistrelles will emerge to feast and, as the night draws on, owls will search out small mammals amongst grass tussocks.

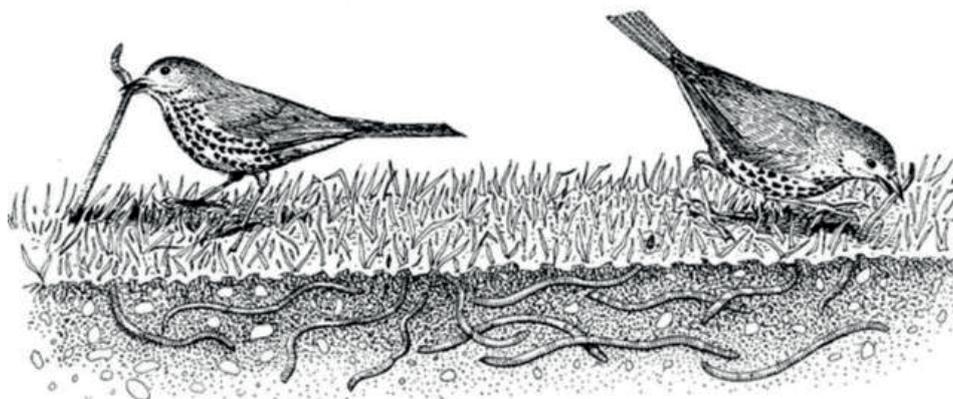
Long or tussocky grass provides shelter and nesting sites for animals. Reptiles, such as slow worms, and amphibians such as toads will shelter and forage in grasslands. Small mammals, such as voles and rabbits,



feed upon the grass and create their burrows beneath. Bumblebees also build their nests underground whilst some birds, such as skylarks, nest amongst the grasses. Many churchyards and cemeteries are often scattered with the mounded nests of yellow meadow ants. These are indicators of old undisturbed grassland and persist for many years, often developing their own distinctive flora, as the mound is hotter and drier than surrounding areas. In contrast, close-mown grass areas and patches of bare ground can also benefit some species. Solitary bees and wasps nest in short turf or bare ground and birds, like the song thrush, use short areas of grassland for feeding.

Many of the species that are associated with the grasslands of burial grounds, together with information on how to encourage them, are described in more detail in the Caring for God's Acre Action Pack.

Flowery grasslands also provide other environmental benefits including carbon storage and water retention to prevent flooding. The older and more diverse grasslands are, the more carbon they capture, much of it remaining safely fixed underground even when the grassland is cut.



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GRASSLANDS AND MEADOWS THROUGH TIME

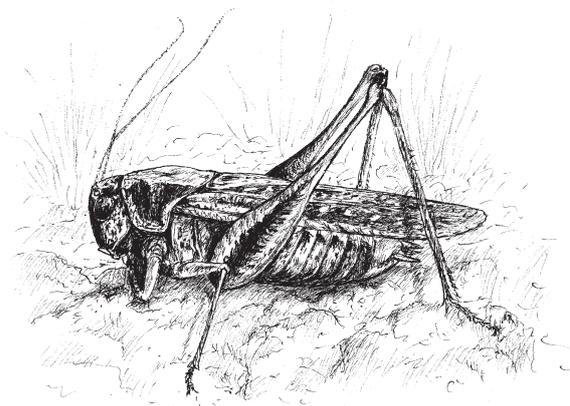
The most familiar type of flowerly grassland is the traditionally managed hay meadow. It is a man-made habitat that would have once been familiar in almost every parish across the UK.

It is hard to put an exact date on when hay-making first appeared in Britain but it probably coincides with the invention of metal blades. Indeed, an expansion of grass pollen is recorded in the iron-age and may well be a reflection of the more widespread practice of hay making; by Roman times, archaeological evidence for meadows is indisputable in the UK. Excavations have found Roman scythes in the east of the England whilst other archaeological finds, dating back to the 2nd century, include the remains of cut hay. Examination of the hay shows a list of species that are almost identical to those we see in meadows today – oxeye daisy, common knapweed, yellow rattle, vetchlings and clover. By Anglo-Saxon times meadows were commonplace across the English countryside with the term 'mead' (meadow land) often being seen on old maps and tithes.

From the Roman invasion until well into the 19th century, hay meadows were managed in a traditional way. Hay meadows were 'shut' in the spring, meaning that no livestock were allowed on to graze. From April until June the flowers and grasses were left, but once the growth slowed, shortly after mid-summer, mowing commenced. The precise dates varied depending upon the season's growth, the weather for harvesting and the geographic location – sometimes it could be left as late as September.

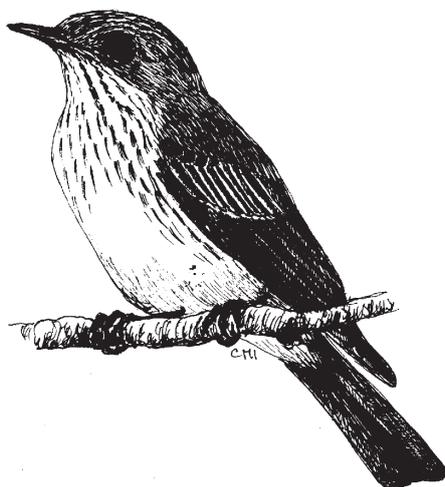
Hay was always cut on a dry day, hence the expression 'to make hay when the sun shines.' The grass was mown using scythes, often by teams of men, and it was one of the most important and social events in the farming calendar. Once cut, usually by lunch time, the hay was laid out in rows and regularly turned with a pitchfork to help it dry. It was then often built into temporary haycocks, with smooth sides to protect from overnight rain, and then re-spread for drying the next day. The time spent drying varied but once dry the hay would be transported by cattle or horse-drawn carts and stored in hay lofts or barns, or in some cases as large ricks or stacks outdoors.

Once the meadow had been mown the livestock were allowed on to graze any regrowth. This is known as aftermath grazing. The stored hay provided additional



food for livestock in the depths of winter.

The principles and timing of haymaking remain similar today, but in the mid-19th century the horse-drawn mechanical mower was introduced marking the start of mechanisation. A century later the horse was largely replaced by tractors; hay was baled mechanically, and scything had almost died out in the UK. The productivity of hay meadows was increased through drainage, fertilisers and reseedling with the result that the wildflowers and fine grasses of hay meadows declined. During the Second World War some six million acres of grassland was ploughed to grow cereals and were lost forever. Today, only 2% of the meadows that existed in the 1930's remain and other flowerly grasslands have met a similar fate. The habitat is highly fragmented with Wales having over 40% of the UK's remaining wildflower meadows and grasslands.



Incredibly important remnants of flowerly grassland are often found in churchyards and other burial sites where they have escaped the changes due to modern agriculture. Found in every imaginable situation from mountainside to coast, city centre to rural village, 'God's Acre' is often the oldest enclosed piece of grassland in any parish and its value for wildlife is unquestionable. Until recent times the grassland in churchyards would have been managed in a similar way to traditional hay meadows, with

infrequent mowing and often with some grazing. In many cases wildflowers can still be still found in the parish churchyard that are identical to those of the meadows that once surrounded it. Indeed, nowadays, churchyard flowers may no longer found anywhere else in the parish.

Some flowers found in churchyards and burial grounds are not typical of traditional meadows and are thought to have sprung from other activities associated with the church. They may have spread from

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grave decorations, posies or wreaths, or have been planted for celebrations or in memory of loved ones. Snowdrops are often planted for Candlemas, primroses for spring displays, and forget-me-nots and rosemary for remembrance. These unexpected plants are part of the rich history of burial grounds and do not detract from their importance as ancient grasslands or from their value for wildlife.

In the late 20th century, increasing numbers of burial grounds started to be managed more like gardens. They were kept scrupulously neat and close mown by the use of drive-on mowers and herbicides. Although regular mowing of grass is unlikely to kill perennial plants (providing the clippings are removed) it reduces the wildlife value of the burial ground significantly. Most plants will not be able to flower and produce nectar and pollen for butterflies, bees and other insects. This in turn affects the birds and animals that feed on them and uniformly short grass also provides little shelter or nesting sites for grassland creatures. In recent years however, the significance of the burial ground for wildlife is being more widely recognised and it is really important that where flowerly grassland does remain it is cared for lovingly and sensitively. This will allow the flowers within it and wildlife that has used it for many centuries to continue to thrive. A churchyard or cemetery managed as a meadow restores its historical sense of place.



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MANAGING MEADOWS

Deciding how to look after your flowerly grassland it is one of the most important decisions to be made and one which needs thought and planning. Conservation of this important habitat does not mean neglect, but sensitive and careful management. Surprisingly, if grass is kept short with cuttings removed, this preserves the grassland, the diversity of flowers are not lost but remain, invisible (except to a keen botanist who recognises the leaves) but unable to flower. Conversely, if grassland is undermanaged and becomes coarse and tussocky, species are lost and the special habitat is gone.

Areas of short grassland are important for public access, but a mixture of grassland heights provides sanctuary and food for the largest range of wildlife. Whilst many perennial flower species can live for many years without flowering, in order for them to thrive, they should be allowed to flower and set seed periodically. If your site is known to have flowerly grassland we would encourage you to leave a good amount to grow tall and flower.

There are no exact cutting times for flowerly grassland but following the timings for traditional hay meadows is likely to produce good results and is how your burial ground grassland was probably managed in the past. Meadows are traditionally allowed to grow long for three or four months, usually from April until the end June. After this time, when many plants have flowered and set seed, it can be cut. This is usually done around mid-July, but can be left as late as September, although do not leave it this late every year. When a hay meadow is mown, it displaces all of the species that were relying on it for food and shelter, so ideally some areas of the site should be left tall at this point, perhaps a strip of 'tussocky' grass against a wall or hedge.

If your grassland has particularly good displays of spring flowers such as cowslips and primroses, or late flowers such as scabious or great burnet, you may want to adjust the cutting times to enjoy these flowers to the full. If you have a good show of spring flowers, then leave it uncut throughout the spring but cut in June or very early July. If you have later flowering species, then consider a spring cut in April then leave grass uncut from May to September.

After cutting any length of grass it is key that the cut grass is removed. Leaving grass clippings lying will quickly reduce the diversity of the grassland, and remember, the use of chemical fertilisers or herbicide sprays will quickly destroy flowerly grassland.

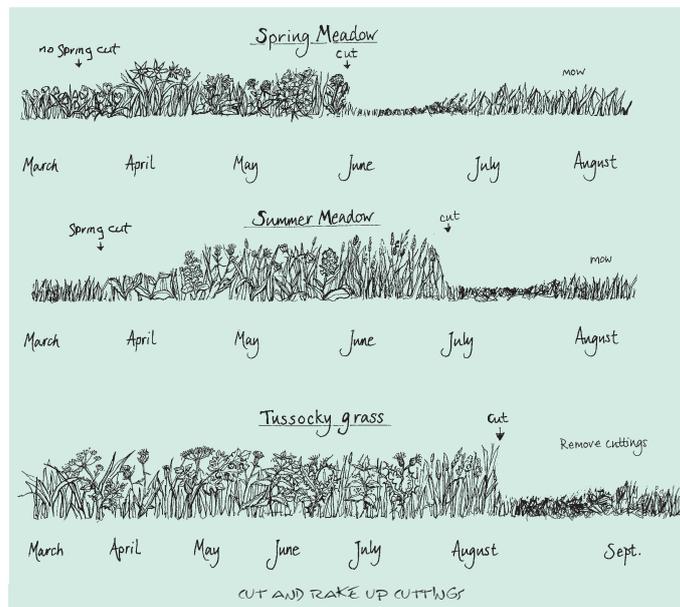
If you regularly cut late, leaving grass uncut for more than three or four months, you may find that species such as hogweed and coarse grasses such as false oat grass and cock's-foot start to dominate. If this happens simply cut earlier for some years or even rotate the area left long to a different part of the churchyard.

Remember most meadow plants are perennial so even if you have late flowering species, you will not kill them if you cut before they have finished flowering or if you revert to short grass for a while.

Remember: for all grassland management the golden rule is to remove all cuttings.

Caring for God's Acre have created action pack sheets with everything you need to know about managing grasslands in burial grounds. Have a look at Sheet A2 'Caring for Grasslands', and sheet A3 'Cutting Long Grass and Dealing with Grass Cuttings' (www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/).

They include information on planning and timings, to the tools needed and getting rid of the cut grass. A copy of these sheets are included with this factsheet or can be downloaded from the CfGA website.



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FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE

Flowerly grasslands, in particular meadows, give a familiar, nostalgic and well-loved character to our rural landscapes and are embedded in our culture. They have inspired many of our best loved writers, poets and artists. Claude Monet beautifully captured the flowerly nature of French meadows in several of his paintings, and John Constable's landscapes depict the intrinsic link of meadows and pastures to rural life.

Meadows and haymaking are frequently captured in literature and poetry and too. Perhaps one of the best-known poets who writes of meadows is John Clare. In his poem, 'To Julia', he highlights meadow flowers, the names of which are still recognisable today: common knapweed, meadowsweet, kidney vetch (lamb toes), salad or great burnet and yellow rattle.

*The knap weed falls before the scythe,
And clumps of tawney meadow sweet,
Ploughmen in fallows, whistle blythe,
Where I, and bonny Julia meet.*

*We'll gather lamb toes in the grass
Brown tanned and hot as Julia's face,
And Burnet flower, a tawney lass,
And rattles like a pencil case*

Indeed it is the flowers of the meadows, most of all, that have woven their way into our lives. They are used as tokens of love and loss, good luck and bad, and are powerful emblems of place and identity.

What child has not made a daisy-chain, told the time with a dandelion clock or held a buttercup under a friend's chin to see if they like butter? The flowers of ribwort plantain make great pop-guns in the game of soldiers and the pignut has an edible nut-like underground tuber, a tasty treat for foragers. Flower petals are thrown as confetti to celebrate marriage, and daisy petals may be picked off one at a time, to the chant of 'he loves me, he loves me not'. Garlands, traditionally made from flowers of the meadows such as cowslips, are worn in May Day festivals held in villages throughout the country to celebrate spring.

Flowers feature strongly in the key moments in our lives - birth, death and marriage and their links to the church are clear. From the late C13th carvings of recognisable flowers start to appear in stonework within churches and later in stained-glass windows, pulpits, alter

cloths, bench ends and kneelers. To this day, arranged flowers typically decorate church interiors throughout the year.

Within churchyards and burial grounds, many wildflowers are a natural component of the ancient grassland but there are also significant number of plants commonly found that are thought to have been introduced over the centuries through their links with love, loss and the Christian faith. Many flowers have 'Lady' in their name, referring to the Virgin Mary.



One of the first flowers of the year is the snowdrop, also known as Candlemas Bells or Mary's Tapers. Candlemas is a Christian holy day commemorating the presentation of Jesus at the Temple and is celebrated on the 2nd February when the snowdrops are in flower. Christians also dedicate snowdrops to the Virgin Mary and traditionally were said to scatter them in place of her image on the altar. Although Victorians linked the plant with hope there was also a lot of plant lore associating it with bad luck. If a single bloom was brought into a house, a member of the household was sure to die before twelve months had passed.

Primroses have become the flower of Easter, picked by children to give to parents and used to decorate churches. The name derives from the Latin *prima rosa* meaning 'first rose' of the year and although it is not really a rose it is also called Lent rose or Easter rose. Primrose Day, 19th April, marks the anniversary of Benjamin Disraeli's death as it was one of his favourite blooms. Queen Victoria would give him primroses every birthday and he would thank her wryly for giving him 'gold not honours'.

Lady's Bedstraw, when dried, smells sweet and was stuffed in straw mattresses and strewn on floors. It is also supposed to deter fleas. According to one medieval legend the Virgin Mary herself gave birth whilst lying on a bed of Lady's bedstraw and bracken. Lady's bedstraw has sweet, frothy, honey-smelling flowers and historically it was used to curdle milk during cheese-making.



Bird's-foot Trefoil, a plant of meadows and churchyards, has several names; Eggs and Bacon because of its yellow and streaky red colours, Mary's Shoes, as the flowers were thought to resemble slippers, and Granny's Toenails because of the claw-like seed pods. In Victorian

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times, it was one of the few flowers to denote darker thoughts, symbolising revenge.

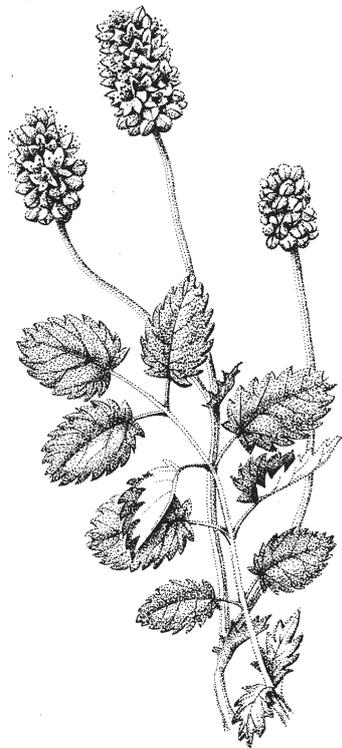
Lady's Mantle has light green leaves that are said to resemble a cape or mantle. In the past it was thought of as a magical plant used in spells and potions and it was claimed that the delicate droplets of dew that collect in the leaves would make women beautiful and that the plant could restore virginity. Today Lady's Mantle is commonly used in herbal medicine.

Germander Speedwell is likely to be found in most churchyards containing old grasslands. The name speedwell literally means 'speed thee well' and in Ireland the plant was stitched into clothing to ensure safe travel. It is also known as Angel's Eyes, God's Eyes and Eve's Tears due to the bright blue of the flowers. The Latin name given to this genus is *Veronica* after St. Veronica who offered a cloth to Jesus so he could wipe his face as he carried his cross to Calvary. The image of his Jesus' face was said to be imprinted on the cloth which is believed to exist today as a treasured relic in the Vatican.

Betony is one the many plants that has become increasingly rare in our countryside but is still sometimes found in country churchyards. It is possible that it was planted in the past in the belief that it had

powers that would ward off ghosts, goblins and other unwelcome guests. It was one of the great 'all-heals' of medieval herbalists and the Roman physician Antonius Musa claimed it was effective against sorcery.

There are numerous other links between churchyard flowers and religion. Wood sorrel is known across Europe as the Alleluia Plant because its delicate white flowers open for Easter Day. Wild daffodil is referred to as the Lent Lily, Cowslip as the Keys of Heaven, Meadow woodrush as Good Friday Grass and Solomon's seal, a surprisingly common plant in churchyards, is known as Ladder to Heaven.



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FINDING OUT ABOUT YOUR CHURCHYARD GRASSLAND AND LETTING PEOPLE KNOW

Whilst you don't need to know exactly what is growing in your burial ground to manage it well, it can be extremely enjoyable and rewarding to learn about the plants and types of grassland that are present. It will give you an appreciation and understanding of flowers not just in your burial ground but also in the wider countryside.

One way to quickly gauge how 'good' a grassland is, is to count the number of species in a typical 1x1 or 2x2 meter square. You can also look at the cover ratio of wildflowers to grasses. As a general guide, a good, flowery grassland is likely to have over 15 species per m² or a ratio of wildflowers to grasses of at least 1:4.

You don't need to be able to identify every plant – a flowery grassland may contain as many as 100 different species, so identifying everything can be a tall order!

Another way is to look for specific species, known as indicator species, which as their name suggests, give an indication of the quality and type of grassland.

Indicator species tend to be easily identifiable and you will be surprised at how many you know already.

Some species were once very widespread but are becoming increasingly uncommon such as those listed in the table below. If you have a good mixture of these flowers, it suggests that your grassland is moderately flower-rich and is worthy of care and of further investigation.

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| autumn hawkbit | germander speedwell |
| bulbous buttercup | meadow buttercup |
| common cat's-ear | red clover |
| common knapweed | ribwort plantain |
| common sorrel | selfheal |
| cuckooflower | yarrow |

You may have flowers that are even less common, and these indicate that you have a good flower-rich grassland. Don't expect to see all of these; some are only found in limestone areas, others on acid soils.



agrimony
betony
bird's-foot trefoil
carline thistle
cowslip
eyebright
harebell
heath bedstraw
heather
Lady's bedstraw

Lady's mantle
meadowsweet
meadow vetchling
orchids
pignut
oxeye daisy
sheep's sorrel
scabious
yellow rattle
yellow wort

If a site is becoming overgrown and needs more regular cutting you may have increasing quantities of these plants:

cocksfoot (grass)
false oat grass
hogweed

If you want to survey your grasslands, Caring for God's Acre have produced a **Botanical Companion** to take you through this process. It is included in this factsheet, but a copy can also be downloaded from the CfGA website. There are a number of useful guides to help with the identification of flowers and you may have a favourite. A good starting point is the fold out charts produced by the Field Studies Council:

Wildlife of Burial Grounds, OP 166

Grassland Plants 1 Identification Guide, OP68

Grassland Plants 2 Identification Guide, OP95

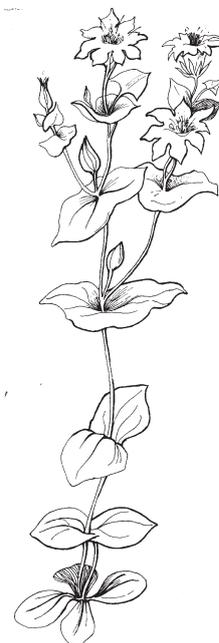
Grasses Identification Guide, OP 136

Biological Recording

You may prefer to just record those species in your burial ground that you can identify or those that interest you. Why not make some biological records? A 'biological record' is a recorded sighting of wildlife, plant or animal, however rare or common so have a go.

Recognising and recording the wildlife you see is really useful in deciding how best to manage your burial ground. It also helps a range of people who have an interest in understanding the amount and spread of different species across the UK. These could include burial ground managers, town planners, archaeologists, researchers, ecologists, other specialists and local wildlife groups.

What you see and where you see it is important and we would love you to become a recorder and add to the collective knowledge held



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about the UK's wildlife. For recording what you see in burial grounds we would like you to use our 'iRecord' form. This can be accessed via the 'Share Your Records' page on our website (www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/recording-2/share-your-records/). It is easy to do and there is a video and instructions to guide you through it. There are also identification tips and illustrations for species that you may have in your burial ground. All data gathered through 'iRecord', including the records you submit, will appear on the 'National Biodiversity Network Atlas', a national system which is free and available to all. Take a look at the Beautiful Burial Ground section of the atlas to see what other people may have found in your churchyard or cemetery (www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/recording-2/view-your-records/).

If you do not want to use the online form and would rather send us a list of species that is fine too. Please post or email them to Caring for God's Acre (wildlife@cfga.org.uk) including

Who – we need your name, and how to contact you

When – include the date you saw the species

Where – please give precise details, there are lots of St Marys! Postcode or grid reference are helpful.

What you have seen – the most important bit!



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TELLING THE STORY

Telling the story of your flower rich grassland can take many forms and can be an important way of communicating the significance of your grassland to the wider community. This can often inspire people to be more involved and can certainly help in the care and protection of these rare and biodiverse rich areas.

Here are some practical guidelines for you to consider which may help in creating a plan for telling the story of flower rich grasslands:

Who are you telling the story to?

Your church and burial ground is likely to be at the very heart of your community, visited by people for worship, celebration and funerals and remembrance. They are often used as places of peace and solitude in an ever increasingly busy world. Locals can walk there, children can play, and they are often the only local greenspace available for people to enjoy without driving or using public transport. Nature and wildlife is now recognised as playing a vital role in health and wellbeing, so the importance of this green space is better understood than perhaps it was previously.

Your church and churchyard can also be an important visitor destination, attracting tourists who are seeking the unique architecture of your church and monuments - research carried out by VisitEngland recently reported that 55% of day trips include a visit to church or cathedral and 83% of people in the UK believe churches are an important part of the UK heritage.

There is an opportunity to encourage all of these different groups of visitors to really appreciate and enjoy the rare and beautiful habitat of your flower rich grassland.



Why are you telling the story?

Let's face it, flower rich grasslands in your burial ground can be a divisive thing. To many people (and we would suggest that this is the silent majority), seeing a flowering meadow in a churchyard can be such a wonderful experience. This area of your burial ground will be alive with insects, butterflies, moths, birds and mammals – a wildlife oasis! To some however, it will look overgrown and unkempt – an abomination! This is where getting your message over can be so important and can make such a difference in how people react to your flower rich grassland.

Firstly, it is important that your churchyard has a management brief detailing (for example) which area or zone is short mown and which zone is managed as a grassland meadow. This management brief is a very good tool when deciding what to do and when to do it. Involve stakeholders including those who don't see the value of a grassland meadow so that any issues can be discussed early in the process and the huge importance to wildlife and rareness of grassland meadows can be explained. Our experience has shown that once the importance of flower rich grassland is explained and that this flower rich grassland is actually a critical part of your managed habitat, then this action alone can result in a significant reduction of potential concerns that may be raised due to your burial ground looking 'unkempt'. Once agreed, the management brief can be an important way to communicate *what* you are doing for wildlife, *how* you are doing it and *why* you are doing it.

Flower rich grasslands are an incredibly rare and important habitat and any interpretation that you consider regarding flower rich grassland might want to inspire people to view this habitat in a different way – it really is something quite special. The next custodian of your grassland habitat may be the person who read the interpretation that you produced!

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What to say?

Once you are aware of your audience and have given some consideration to why you want to tell the story of your flower rich grassland, we can now move on to what you actually want to say. In general terms, interpretation for the wider public should be short and relevant, focusing on some key themes. Some of these themes have already been touched upon in this document such as historical significance, folklore and biodiversity. These themes should be sufficient to give the reader a pretty good understanding of how special this habitat is in a local and ever-increasingly national context.

What you say depends on where you will be saying it (more on this in the next section). For example our website (www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/) has lots to say as we are the national charity for burial grounds. You will notice however that many of our pages have basic information on key themes and we direct people to different resources for in-depth information. This includes toolkits, minifilms and factsheets.

As a rule of thumb, 'less is more', resist the temptation to include everything you know!

Where to say it?

People tend to think of interpretation boards when asked to think about how to tell a story, but this is only one way to do so, and may well be an inappropriate choice. Careful thought needs to be given to this and we would advise against permanent interpretation boards for a number of reasons. That said, the siting of temporary information boards or notices (either an A4 notice on a small wooden stake, on your church notice board or on a 'sandwich board' for example) can be an incredibly effective and inexpensive way of letting people know all about your flower rich grassland. These types of notices can be updated easily as the seasons progress and will be appreciated by regular users of your burial ground as well as casual visitors.

There are many other ideas to consider;

- How about a leaflet? This can go in your church or chapel, in a special leaflet dispenser on your churchyard notice board or in the porch. Leaflets can be distributed locally and can be sent to other heritage related visitor attractions. They can also go onto websites, available to download, and can be updated and reproduced cheaply and quickly, particularly if your leaflet can be printed on a home computer.
- Posters are a good way of conveying information. Posters can again be displayed in your church and noticeboards. Like leaflets, posters can easily be updated and sent electronically to others to share.
- Social media (facebook, twitter etc.) is a really fast and free way to reach people all over the world as well as within your local community. Social media



posts can be easily updated on a regular basis and you can link into national campaigns to help get your message across. You may feel as though you don't have the skills or knowledge to develop a social media presence – if that is the case, put the word out through your congregation and perhaps someone will come forward who can help you. It is important to note that if you do create a social media presence, it is most effective when it is updated on a regular basis so that you can maintain interest, so this does need an on-going commitment.

- If you are feeling particularly media savvy, you may wish to contact your local BBC or independent radio station who might come and produce a short feature to be broadcast on the biodiversity of your churchyard including of course your flower rich grassland!
- You could join with other sites in your local area to make a 'flower rich grassland trail' which could link four or five local churches with similar habitats. Marked on a map, this could make a good route for people to walk or cycle between.

How to say it?

There are many different ways to tell the story of your flower rich grassland.

Some ideas include:

- Consider using images, drawings or photographs.
- Text should remain the main method of conveying information but keep it simple and brief.
- Keep your interpretation relatively basic but include ways in which people can find further information such as links to your social media sites, QR codes * or by including links to national organisations.
- If you or any of your congregation (including young people?) have the skills to produce and edit a short film, this can be a really nice way of conveying information – and it can also be hosted on your

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website or on social media sites.

- Perhaps the most important, tell people about them face-to-face. If you meet visitors, do you point out this incredibly rare habitat to them? Could someone lead a walk around the churchyard looking at grassland and other habitats? These are often the moments and messages that we remember the most.

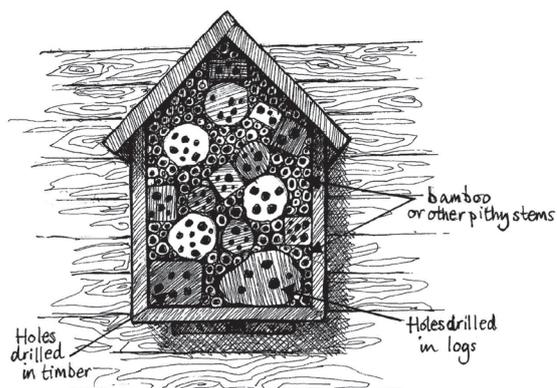
* This is a machine-readable code consisting of an array of black and white squares, typically used for storing URLs or other information for reading by the camera on a smartphone

Getting creative with your flower rich grassland

Your grasslands are a great way to involve people in your burial ground. Once people know more about this biodiverse and rich habitat, they are usually hooked. Due to their ability to attract so much wildlife, these habitats lend themselves very well to being the centre of attention at, perhaps a discovery day. Events and activities could be open to all ages and abilities and could include:

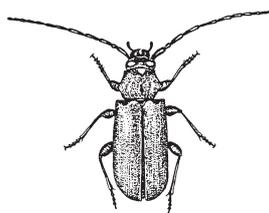
- Launch a photography competition focusing on your amazing flower rich grassland. A competition does take some time to organise as it involves judges and perhaps prizes, but it will be popular, and might result in a slideshow of all images submitted, to go onto your website or social media. This could generate some interesting shots which might include; macro shots (the tiny things); the pollinator community; your flower rich grassland in all of its glory; the wildlife within; and your grassland through the seasons.
- Contact your local school to see if they would like to come and undertake a topic on your flower rich grassland. Many areas of the curriculum could be covered, and any work undertaken by pupils could be displayed in the church.
- Hold a Storytelling session which includes a story on grasslands. Storytelling is a popular and creative activity and there is likely to be a local storyteller that you can ask to run this.
- Run a guided walk with your flower rich grassland being a feature.
- Hold a nature explorer family activity, using your grassland as the starting point. Include things like a bug hunt, basic flower and grass identification, drawing and painting or holding an evening moth and bat event, demonstrating the importance to moths and bats of this fragile and important habitat.

Some of these activities can be organised as 'stand



alone' events, but you could also consider dovetailing in to national campaigns and initiatives such as:

- Love Your Burial Ground Week www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/love-your-burial-ground-week (June)
- World Environment Day www.un.org/en/observances/environment-day, (June)
- Earth Day www.earthday.org/ (April)
- Eco Church Climate Sunday ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/climate-sunday/
- No Mow May www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/no-mow-may (May)
- National Meadows Day www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/national-meadows-day (July)



Resources

Caring for Gods Acre has some fantastic resources for family and school activities, all within the Resources section of our website (www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/). Many of these resources are relevant for flower rich grasslands and include links to both English and Welsh

national curricula.

Other resources include:

- Plantlife produce a free pdf action plan as part of their Save Our Magnificent Meadows campaign (www.plantlife.org.uk/download_file/force/2271/2218)

And finally

Flower rich grasslands in churchyards need help. Caring for Gods Acre is a member based charity and we are reliant on donations to make a difference. Please consider becoming a member – more information on becoming a member can be found on our website www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

