

THE LYCHGATE



St Andrew's churchyard, Presteigne

Welcome...

... to the spring and summer Lychgate which we hope will inspire you to find out more about churchyards and cemeteries near you.

This edition focuses on the fantastic built structures to be seen, whether it is gargoyles on the exterior of a church or the monuments. I hope you enjoy the article about restoring Georgian tombs, giving us an insight into the work of a stone conservator. If you are

based in Wales then please join in with our Biodiversity Hotspots project (more information on page 2), and if in Birmingham, look out for news of our project there once we are able to run activities, and see page 10 for more details. It wouldn't be a summer Lychgate without at least one lovely photo of grassland wildflowers within a churchyard, so we've an article on meadows too!



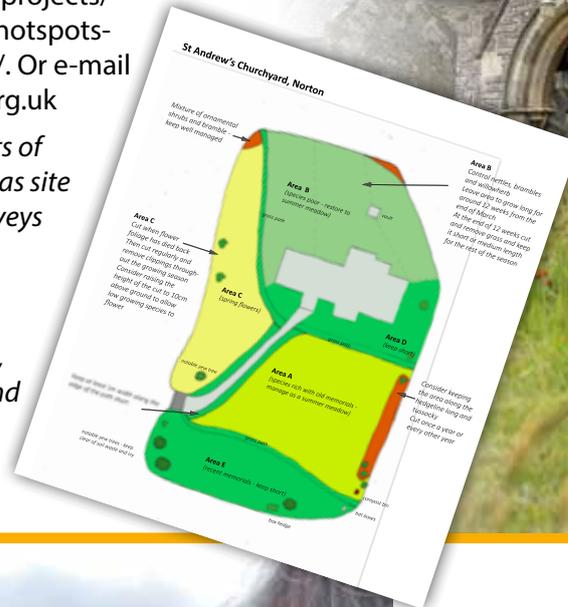
Biodiversity Hotspots across Wales

We are looking forward to supporting managers of burial grounds across Wales*. The purpose of this project is to work with groups to help preserve and enhance their flower rich grassland and engage the wider community.

Thanks to support from Natural Resources Wales we are able to offer a range of free services to burial ground managers until March 2023 including webinars, in person meet ups, support in writing management briefs, virtual visits and grassland surveys. We are developing an

online forum where we can have discussions, answer questions and generally cheer each other on! If you are interested in receiving support please visit www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/about-us/projects/biodiversity-hotspots-across-wales/. Or e-mail mick@cfga.org.uk

**Some aspects of support such as site visits and surveys are restricted to Wrexham, Flintshire, Denbighshire, Ceredigion and Powys.*



Carry on Scything

We have been missing working in beautiful burial grounds across Herefordshire and Shropshire with the conservation volunteers, but with thoughtful preparation many practical tasks can be undertaken in a safe way.

Alex admits his home school teaching skills have been stretched to the limit and he can't wait to pick up a scythe and share a brew with everyone once more!

Alex's son Ollie has a keen herpetological interest, probably inherited from his grandad Logan. Recently, in Bromfield churchyard the two of them found 17 slow worms, a toad and a 2 foot long female grass snake.



Virtual Visits

As well as offering free support and advice via telephone, e-mail and our resource materials, we also offer bespoke services to groups.

Recently on-site visits have been replaced with Virtual Visits which have been very popular. This is where groups have an initial chat with an experienced member of staff about their current management and the issues they would like help with.

Guidance is given on the type of short film footage you can capture to enable us to see your burial ground. We provide a space for groups to upload their film clips to so we can watch this together with you during a zoom Virtual Visit. Simple mobile phone or tablet footage is ideal. This service is £100 and we have just 6 places left this summer. For more information visit our website or contact andrea@cfga.org.uk



Love Your Burial Ground Week

Sat 5th to Sunday 13th June



During the last year we have all learnt to value our local green spaces and many people have been in touch to tell us how much they have enjoyed the peace and closeness to nature that their local burial ground has brought to them. Whatever the government guidance when Love Your Burial Ground week comes around, we are sure that many different types of Covid secure activities can still be held and enjoyed.

Burial grounds can be ideal places for holding activities in a socially distant way – or should we more accurately say a physically distant way as social contact can still be enjoyed from a few metres away. How about setting up a family activity that people can do in their own bubbles or small groups? You might ask people to walk one-way around the site, looking for wildlife or particular carvings on monuments? Small signs giving tree or flower names might help. You could download our Signs and Symbols Sheet or our Wildflower Spotters Guide for visitors to use.

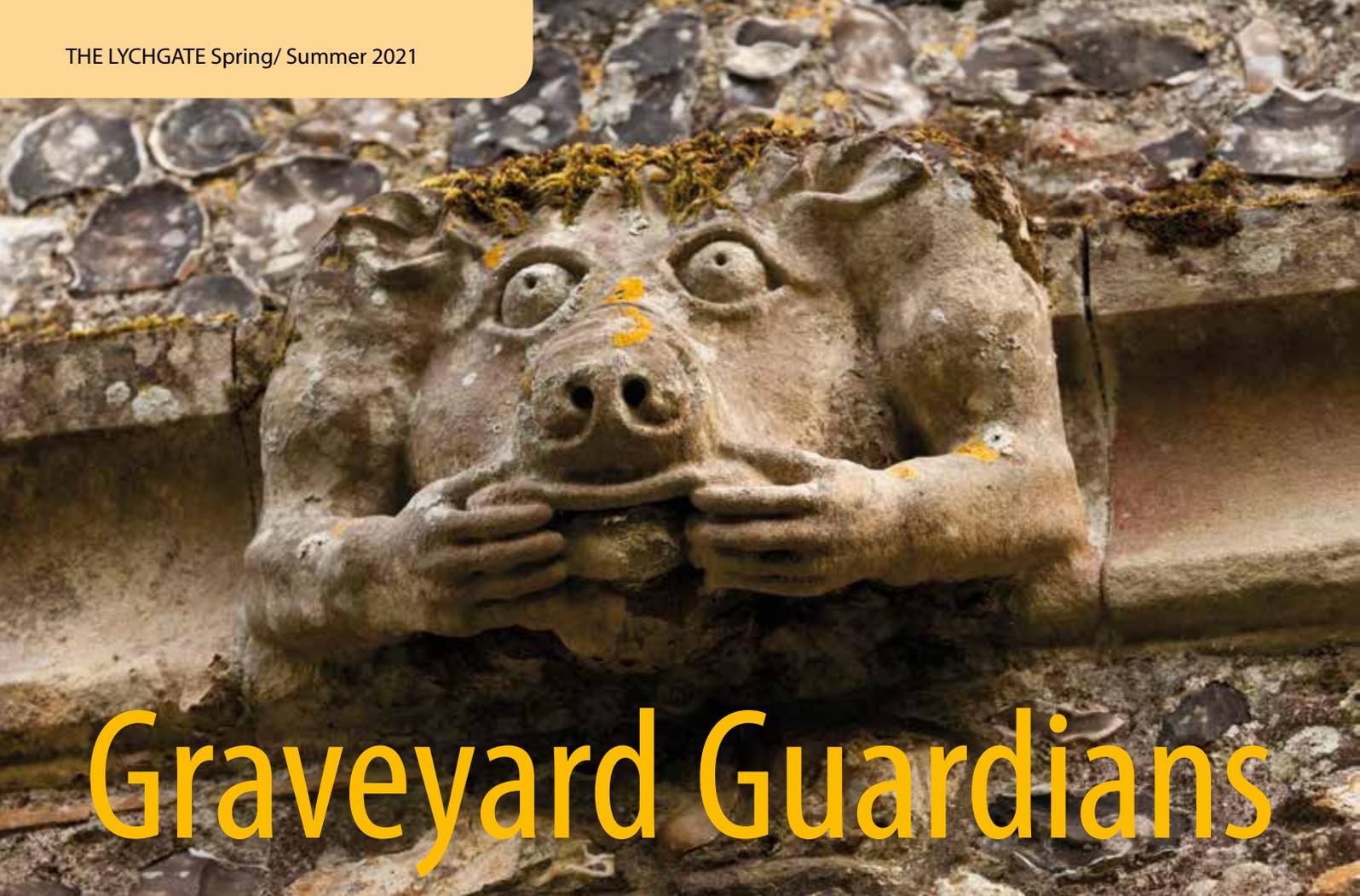
Maybe invite local residents to record the nature that they see and write it up on a blackboard in the porch? We can help by sending you copies of our Starter Guide. Have a look at the Guide at www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/starterguide and email info@cfga.org.uk if you would like a free copy in the post.

This year we have started an initiative with the Church of England, A Rocha and the Church in Wales to encourage churches to use this week as a springboard to start recording the wildlife within their churchyards. So if you fancy running a wildlife spotting activity in this week please visit our website for more information and a registration form. So far over 200 churches have signed up and we can't wait to see what wildlife is enjoying these amazing spaces.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Caring for God's Acre works nationally to support groups and individuals to investigate, care for, and enjoy burial grounds and graveyards. www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk



Graveyard Guardians

“Don’t look up!” – good advice for the fainthearted crossing a churchyard at dusk - you may encounter fearsome faces leering at you from above. This article explores the wonderful fantasy world of church gargoyles and grotesques.

These consist of faces or whole bodies of humans, devils, domestic animals and fabulous beasts carved in stone. They are often found as bosses decorating the edge of the roof, on towers and around doorways. Mere decoration or did they have a purpose? It has been suggested that they were placed to ward off evil or a nod to pagan beliefs. Another purpose might be pedagogic; they teach a lesson about life and the danger to our souls of not attending church by confronting us with the hideous denizens of hell. The examples below are drawn from my recent gargoyle hunting ground, the county of Kent.

Gargoyles have a specific practical purpose and should not be muddled with grotesques; they are designed as part of

the drainage of church roofs. Rainwater is channelled through their protruding body or head and vomited out of their mouth (or other orifice!) to protect the fabric of the church. The word gargoyle is thought to derive from the French for throat - ‘gargouille’, while ‘grotesque’ (a decorative element only) is derived from grotto-esque, a style of art found in ancient Roman grottos, although now meaning a person or animal distorted for comic effect.

Grotesques and gargoyles come in many forms, too many to discuss here. Some suggest links to older pre-Christian pagan traditions. The foliated face or ‘Green Man’ with leaves sprouting from the mouth and elsewhere is a common example. This motif is interpreted as symbolising death and rebirth, the

sprouting greenery representing life. A wonderful twist on this theme is the Green Pig at the church of St Gregory and St Martin in Wye. The Green Man is an example of how Christianity adapted symbolism from older beliefs and is one of the most ancient of pagan symbols found on churches.

The pig is one of over twenty grotesques at Wye, dating back to the thirteenth century in some cases. It has two gargoyles over the porch, but these are eroded and in poor condition, no features survive – the sad fate of many gargoyles countrywide.

Other examples of grotesques at Wye include a strange startled bird, a fanged beast, a lion, a ‘hag’ with furrowed cheeks and two monstrous teeth, and a pig-like face-puller – hands, on stumpy arms that seem to sprout from the sides of the head, pull its mouth wide open. The face-puller, like the foliated mask is a common motif. St

Gregory and St Martin has two more foliated faces, one cow-like and one more reminiscent of a traditional green-man, although badly eroded.

Perhaps the most fascinating and satanic of the twelve is a lion-like creature biting a serpent. It has been suggested that lion and snake motifs in church art refer to Psalm 91, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet." (Psalm 91:13, King James Version), taken to represent the rout of Satan. Images of Christ treading on beasts, frequently a lion and snake, appear in Early Medieval iconography where these represent the fearsome and wily aspects of the devil.

Not all gargoyles and grotesques are old. Holy Trinity in Sittingbourne, a 'Gothic Revival' church in the style of the late

thirteenth century (designed by Richard Charles Hussey), was only built in the late nineteenth century. It has a superb lion-head gargoyle with a lead spout at each corner of its tower roof, and the windows sport bosses of human faces in medieval headdress. These faces are very similar to medieval originals found in Kent, for example at the magnificent All Saints at Lydd in the Romney Marsh, known locally as the Cathedral of the Marsh, St Dunstan's at Frinsted, and St Mary's at Chilham.

Stalking grotesques and gargoyles is an addictive habit (binoculars help for those high on the buildings). Not all churches have them, but patience will pay-off if you keep your eyes raised and scour the whole structure. St Nicholas's church in the village of Leeds has just one tiny chubby

face tucked away at the back, while its namesake, St Nicholas at Rodmersham has a grimacing visage over the sacristy door as well as a couple of grotesques on its tower, although repair has clearly led to the removal of others.

Not all renovation leads to loss. I recently moved to Cirencester where a 'punk' grotesque with Mohican hairstyle, gesturing rudely, graces St John Baptist Church which is richly covered in much older examples including a menagerie of animals on its magnificent fifteenth century south porch. Cotswold churches are rich in gargoyles and grotesques as I am discovering - good hunting!

Peter Vujakovic is Emeritus Professor at Canterbury Christ Church University.



Georgians in Stone

In 2019 the P.C.C of St John the Baptist in Bishop's Castle, Shropshire was awarded a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to discover and share the secrets of Georgian history in Bishop's Castle, a notorious Rotten Borough with an unusual number of beautiful monuments from the period within the churchyard.

This project included a wide range of activities to involve people and Caring for God's Acre staff have been organising these. Despite the restrictions of Covid-19 there has been song-writing with school involvement, town guides giving tours, film making, churchyard trails, an information board as well as a seminar on Georgian times. The last event, a final celebration, which will take place on Zoom on 15th May. Please join in with this celebration which should be great fun (email info@cfga.org.uk to learn more) and if you would like to learn the songs, written by renowned folksinger John Kirkpatrick, go to the Castle Carols website and click on Georgians in Stone (<https://castlecarols.com/georgians/>).

Included within this grant was the renovation of those monuments which have been Grade II listed by Historic England and the specialist firm of Elliott

Ryder Conservation have undertaken this highly skilled work.

We asked Susanne Ryder and Kieran Elliott to tell us about their work.

'We have nearly completed the conservation of 11 listed Georgian Tomb-chests in the churchyard of St John the Baptist Church in Bishop's Castle Shropshire, under the management and guidance of Caring for God's Acre - Director, Harriet Carty. To have such a large collection of listed memorials as this in one place is unusual.

We specialise in the conservation of sculpture, church monuments, churchyard memorials and architectural works of art and have been involved in conservation for 56 years between the pair of us. This interesting project involved slowing down current rates of deterioration, partially or wholly dismantling and re-building several



After restoration

memorials which were unstable, due to failure of old materials and lack of maintenance of local materials that ultimately don't weather well. It was neither possible nor desirable to remove biological growths in the forms of aged lichens which give the objects their pleasing patina of age. Many of the surfaces were too deteriorated to undergo even the gentlest cleaning, with only mosses removed manually, as they act as a sponge, retaining excess moisture in place, on deteriorated, aged

surfaces.

The original designers and crafts people who undertook these commissions and created the memorials, which are at least 190 years old (The Georgian Period running from 1714 – 1830) would have used local materials where possible, to save the costs involved in transporting more 'exotic' or fashionable materials; with time often elapsing between the date of manufacture and building, and the passing of the person being commemorated. The size and scale of these



During restoration



Before restoration

memorials hints at the status of those celebrated when compared to more simple, cheaper headstones, although this churchyard also displays other headstones of exceptional carved quality, the like of which we have seldom seen.

The craftspeople that made and built these memorials would have used the best materials at the time, there is no doubt, with the Georgian masons and carvers probably unaware of the poor weathering characteristics of this local stone in the long-term. Some, but not all of the

iron fixings used to secure structures together had been covered, or set-in with molten-lead during building, in an attempt to mitigate against the known effects of moisture on iron. Introducing hot, liquid lead is extremely dangerous if the stonework is even remotely damp. Having watched it done on the West Front of York Minster I can understand why it is a technique rarely used now, and only under strictly controlled conditions, such as the health and safety implications.

Everything deteriorates

with age at a greater or lesser rate, and our job as conservators is to slow down those rates and preserve objects as they exist, replacing as little original material as possible. The local stone used for the majority of the memorials takes an edge well for carving and lettering, but deteriorates badly along natural sedimentary bedding-planes. The large slabs are at 90 degrees to their naturally stronger plane (known as 'face bedded') and have suffered significant deterioration as a result. Moisture causes chemical reactions and

deterioration processes including: delamination, flaking, disaggregation (sanding), efflorescence (soluble salt activity), metal staining and the corrosion and expansion of iron. We encountered all of these processes on this project!

Churchyards rise upwards, with grass, weeds, tree-leaves decaying annually, with many of the moulded plinths now all but lost visually as they are slowly subsumed. It was a chance conversation with the second generation grave-digger, who informed us in previous decades it would not have

been possible to dig the now requisite 6 foot in parts of the churchyard; the bed rock was closer to the surface. This may account for the settlement we saw in some of the tomb chests, as the interments beneath deteriorate.

Dismantling an object is always a last resort as it is so invasive, however some of the memorials were unstable, literally being forced apart by invasive ivy growth or expanding and broken iron fixings. These ones had to be carefully dismantled and subsequently re-built to ensure their long-term integrity and safety. Such objects are measured and photographed beforehand, to aid re-building. There is hardly ever anything of archaeological interest inside a tomb chest although we always hope for gold coins or maps indicating where the gold is buried! However one of the tomb chests was full of historic crisp, sweet and ice-lolly wrappers, perhaps an indication that the churchyard is a shortcut to the local school.

There is no British Standard for conserving tomb chests and much of it is down to common-sense and experience and using the best techniques and materials at our disposal. We re-built, dismantled tomb chests on new re-enforced concrete pads, instead of the original system of thin stone slabs laid on top of one another with very little mortar, which

made uneven settlement all the more likely. We used lightweight blocks and thin-bed mortar to incorporate new internal supporting cores to bear the weight of heavy, fragile lids, previously borne by weakened, delaminating stone panels. Previous dowel-holes were cut by chisels or round, star-shaped jumper chisels, that acted like drill bits. We made holes and channels deeper to give better embedment for the new fixings and make structures stronger. We secured side panels and fixed broken stone elements with marine-grade stainless-steel that doesn't corrode even near seawater, used the best modern external-grade epoxy-resins, that are not affected by excess moisture and we employed repair mediums and pointing mortars compatible with the host stone. All of this will slow-down the relentless, inevitable affects of moisture and weathering over time.

This once in a generation intervention generously supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund will ensure the long-term integrity of this regionally important collection of Georgian memorials.

Photographs and further technical information on the repairs undertaken are available on the blog www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/news-blog/



A collection of some of the iron fixings that survived

A-Z of Burial Ground Conservation

F is for Flowers in your burial ground

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 other 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.

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, or are

starting to die down naturally as autumn approaches with nutrients returning to the soil. N.B. to encourage wildflowers you need to remove these nutrients, so cutting and raking is vital. 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 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. Why not have a go at counting the species in your burial ground grassland? Our Botanical Companion is there to help you do this, particularly if you are not a botanist and don't know the names of the plants you find. The Botanical Companion can also help you identify what type of soil you have, through the plants growing in it

Celebrating Birmingham's Burial Grounds

Whilst much of our work focuses on the biodiversity of burial grounds it is important to remember that these special places are also the chronicles of our communities. The memorials tell us of lives long lived and those cut tragically short, they tell stories of immigration, war and disasters, of fashion and wealth, and it is this rich social history that we are excited to start exploring in four cemeteries and one churchyard in Birmingham.

Funded by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund the Celebrating Birmingham's Burial Grounds Project has enabled us to digitally map the cemeteries of Handsworth, Warstone Lane, Key Hill and Brandwood End and the churchyard of St Barnabus, Erdington.

The next step is to start to photograph and record the individual details of each memorial onto the map to create an accurate, searchable resource of value to family researchers and social historians. Soon we will be working with local volunteers, Friends groups and history

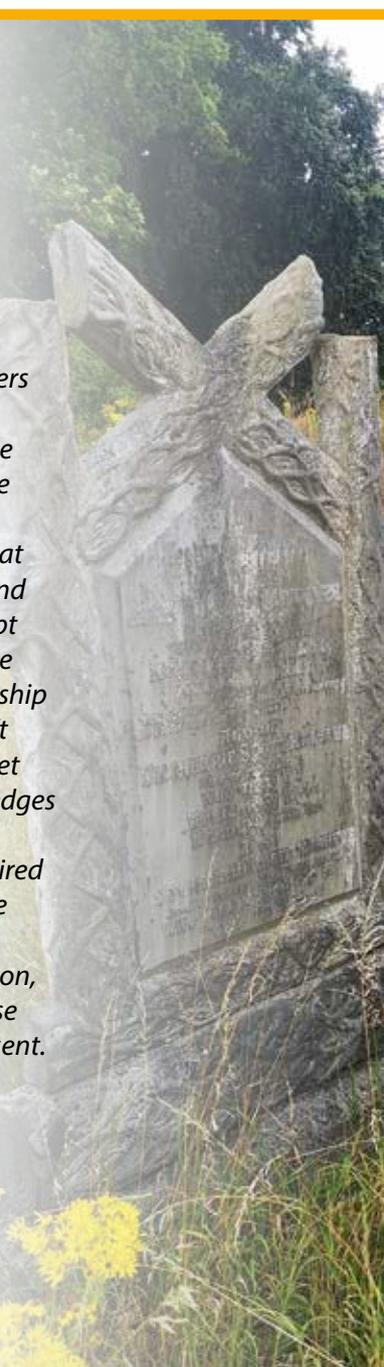
societies to build this picture of communities past.

This is the perfect, gentle activity to do in our current health climate, once we are allowed out and about again, as it can be easily done with social distancing. We will soon be setting dates for the first sessions where we will guide volunteers through the process with everything they need. If you are a Birmingham resident and would like to get involved, please get in touch with George (george@cfga.org.uk).

Why I like Recording Memorials ...

I am not a historian, but I am interested in people and their stories. During a recording session, volunteers pair up and one takes on the role of a 'writer' and the other a 'reader' and it is the conversations that spring from that collaboration that I love. The discussion around deciphering a difficult script or a weathered carving, the appreciation of craftsmanship or longevity when we don't expect it, a moment of quiet when a recorder acknowledges a tragedy or a short life. Recorders often finish inspired to find out more about one or two of the people they have 'met' during the session, weaving the stories of those from the past into our present. Burial grounds are full of stories.

George



and can be bought in the Caring for God's Acre online shop.

Most burial grounds, like many of the flowery meadows across England and Wales have deep, neutral soils. Here 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 really interesting, 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 look for species found in heathland – bilberry and heather as well as more delicate species such as heath bedstraw, sheep's sorrel and harebells.

We would love to hear about the meadow flowers found in your churchyard, chapel yard or cemetery and about your species counts using the Botanical Companion. With over 20,000 burial grounds these small, burial ground meadows could make a real difference to the national situation and information on every site gives us more knowledge. Please send any sightings or counts to wildlife@cfga.org.uk. Why not have a go at counting or identifying plants during Love Your Burial Ground Week?



Thinking of setting up a Friends of Group?

Many churches and cemeteries have constituted Friends of Groups who organise and co-ordinate activities and initiatives.

Having a Friends of Group can often engage more people in volunteering as the group's responsibilities can be clearly separated from those who have ultimate responsibility for the management. It is often much easier for a Friends of Group to access funding compared to a council or Parochial Church Council.

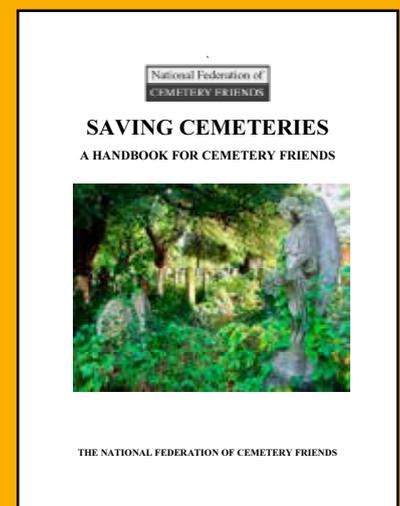
If you are interested in setting up a Friends of Group for a cemetery, churchyard or natural burial ground you can visit the National Federation of Cemetery Friends website where they have information on their Saving Cemeteries handbook.

The handbook covers many things including creating a Friends of Group, organising a volunteer group, legal issues, working with the owners and campaigning.

The National Churches Trust also has some free advice on setting up a Friends of Group on their website.

<https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/involving-people/setting-friends-group>

We will be running a webinar on this topic during the winter. If you are interested, please email anna@cfga.org.uk to be added to the list.



Our podcast is now live

We are enjoying recording this series where we explore burial grounds with people who care for them, enjoy them and study them.

If you are not familiar with podcasts all you need is a device (computer, phone or tablet) and access to the internet. You can listen to podcasts in an app or via a web browser like Chrome, Safari or Microsoft Edge.

Pop to <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/podcasts> to listen.

If you would prefer to listen on the go then it is usually easier to download the episodes onto your phone before you head out.

To do this:

If you have an iPhone you can download the Apple podcasts app or if you have an Android phone you can download the Google podcasts app then search for the podcast and download. Alternatively you can use the Spotify app to search for the podcast.

Let us know what you think and if you have any special requests for topics or people to interview, we would love to hear about them!



Virtual AGM – Save the Date

For the second year we will be holding our AGM virtually so that everyone, both near and far, can join in from the comfort of their own living rooms/kitchens/other!

The date is set for Tuesday 9th November 7pm. The official business will be followed by a virtual cemetery tour with Qualified City of Westminster Guide and founder of the Cemetery Club, Sheldon K Goodman. Sheldon

is a fabulous heritage communicator whose passion focuses on the people of long ago, our changing landscape and what went on before us. Details of how to book will be emailed to members later in the year.



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

Employ our core staff, Harriet, Prue, Andrea and Anna

- Run our helpline – answering your calls and queries via phone or e-mail
- Develop new projects and initiatives to support groups managing burial grounds across the country
- 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
- Support our wonderful Volunteer Team

Please get in touch:

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