

THE LYCHGATE



Welcome

to the Autumn and Winter edition of the Lychgate. We hope you will enjoy it and please, once you've finished reading try and pass this on to someone else. Perhaps you could leave your Lychgate copy in your local church or chapel, how about the doctor or dentist waiting room or the library or community centre? Alternatively, you may have a friend or relative who would be interested in learning more about the charity and may go on to join Caring for God's Acre.

As a charity we regularly consider our impact on the planet and our carbon footprint and have debated whether to continue printing and posting out the Lychgate or whether to make this a solely digital magazine. We feel that the benefits of a printed magazine justify the use of resources, not least because the copies tend to have long lives and we hear from people who have first learnt of the work of Caring for God's Acre via a previous edition perhaps found in a friend's house, a church porch or elsewhere.

The last few months have been a time of reflection for Caring for

God's Acre, looking back over the past few years to assess our influence and how this has grown. As we draw to the close of our largest project - The Beautiful Burial Ground, we have been moved by how many people have become involved since 2018, approximately 20,000 individuals either off their own bat or through over 1,000 recording events and activities which we have been running across all of England and Wales.

Thank you to all who have taken part, perhaps you have been spotting wildlife during Love Your Burial Ground Week,

recording memorial inscriptions or learning about burial ground archaeology. Although the current funding stream comes to an end, the Beautiful Burial Ground initiative carries on, so please keep exploring, learning and recording in churchyards, chapel yards and cemeteries and let us know what you find.

A date for your diary, our online AGM is at 7pm on the 15th November, see p2 for more information.

CfGA volunteer team, St. Mary's Bromfield



We are absolutely thrilled that our Beautiful Burial Ground Project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund has been awarded the Best Practice Award for Knowledge Sharing (2022) by the CIEEM (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management). This award 'recognizes the high standard of professionalism and ecological environmental management practice' and has been given for the project's contribution to sharing the natural environment with people.

'When someone says 'come on a nature walk', you don't expect to be taken to a cemetery. Our two hours in Longden Cemetery in Shrewsbury

proved to be an exciting way to spend a few hours. Within a few yards, we had found wild flowers, a spectacular fungus, a parasitic wasp, which gave

everyone the shivers, an ancient type of apple tree and enough creepy crawlies to fill a jam jar. Thanks to George from Caring for God's Acre who ensured that the event was disability friendly, with tracks that could accommodate electric scooters. We had a fabulous time and are looking forward to the next walk...' Workshop attendee from Shropshire Disability Network.

Photograph - David Smart

AGM

The Caring for God's Acre AGM will be held online at 7pm on 15th November 2022. The business of the AGM will take around 20 minutes.

The talk which follows the AGM will be on the Ossuaries of Europe, a virtual tour through some of the continent's most famous bone storages, created principally due to a shortage of burial space. This will be given by Cat Irving, Human Remains Conservator for Surgeons' Hall, Edinburgh whose credentials include conservation work on the skeleton of nineteenth century



serial killer William Burke. Both the AGM and the talk are free to Caring for God's Acre members, £5 for non-

members, booking essential <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/webinars/> on our website.

Out & About with Opening the Ark



It has been a busy 9 months for Opening the Ark. Since starting the project in November 2021 we have already engaged with over 500 people and counting. Our project is about inviting the local community into their burial grounds to enthuse and engage them with the biodiversity to be found there. We have done this through our 'Love Your Burial Ground' community events, running school sessions, activity days, walks and talks.

It has been great to see children as well as adults coming into the churchyard enjoying nature and learning about why churchyards are so important for wildlife. At these events we have had all sorts of talks and activities going on so there was something for all ages.

We had a number of experts such as Rob Rowe come and talk about wildflowers and folklore, Bea Kerry running bug hunts and insect identification, Sam Devine-Turner talking about Dormice, their ecology and showing us nibbled hazelnuts, and Tom Hayek who set up a moth trap the night before running a session and then recorded an amazing 118 species the following day!

We also ran environmental art activities where we created wild clay tiles, bird boxes out of plant pots and made seed bombs. These activities have also proved to be

very popular in schools, where further sessions are planned this autumn. The bird boxes use a simple terracotta pot fastened to a piece of wood with nails and string and once completed can be attached to a tree to provide a ready-made home for small birds who use the hole in the base as their front door.

Throughout the summer we ran a number of activity days which have included 'Mini-Beast Mayhem' where we joined Tim Kaye in a local churchyard and ran an exploring activity session, recording everything we could find. This included plants, birds, insects, fungi, and even a Slow Worm to everyone's excitement. We also ran a session with Messy Church where we did a range of practical hands on nature related activities and came across a Lesser Emperor Dragonfly.

Expert Phil Playford from the Shropshire Bat Group led a couple



of bat walk sessions in locations where there had been a good record of Bats being present. These walks were really interesting and it was fascinating to learn about these elusive mammals. Phil showed us how to use bat detectors and how to identify different bat species. We will be planning more specialist walks in the next few months so keep an eye on our Opening the Ark calendar on our website <https://bit.ly/openingtheark> and on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/OpeningTheArk>



Pilgrim Plants

The Garden of St Mary and St Chad, Lichfield Cathedral

Marion Standing, Lichfield Cathedral Garden volunteer

The Cathedral Close at Lichfield is rich in history stretching back to the year 700, when a new church was dedicated on the present site to house the bones of St Chad, first Bishop of Lichfield. The grounds surrounding the Cathedral have recently been the focus of a detailed survey and examination of the possibilities for a more thoughtful use of the land, both for visitors and eco-systems.

A volunteer team of gardeners was formed to work on different areas of the Close estate, under the leadership of the Estate Manager, and with inspiration and guidance from the conservation charity A Rocha.

As I am particularly interested in the idea of a church garden becoming an additional aspect of learning and teaching about faith as well as an eco-resource, I volunteered to help develop the three adjoining narrow flower beds which encircle the main approach to the West Front of the Cathedral, the route used by most visitors and congregations.

The vision behind our work is to establish a collection of plants which reflect and celebrate the co-patrons of the Cathedral – the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Chad. The plants provide an opportunity for visitors to pause and explore the stories which the plants tell through both fact and legend and which remind them that this was once an important pilgrimage site after the death of Chad which drew visitors from far and wide in large numbers. The story of this holy man gave inspiration and hope to the

people of medieval England and they walked long distances to celebrate his memory. Plants grown today for St Chad reflect the desire for healing in body, mind and spirit of those who came on pilgrimage: Betony to heal, Chamomile to calm, Lemon Balm to cheer and Rosemary to cleanse.

Devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also very strong at that time and the concept of a 'Mary Garden' was a useful way of explaining beliefs about her significance and saintliness and celebrating her place in the Christian story. Marigolds were 'Mary's gold'; the shaped leaves of 'Lady's Mantle', covered in drops after rain, were said to represent her cloak; and the roses and lilies which we grow were her symbols in medieval art.

Hopefully, the garden will give visitors the opportunity to become immersed in the history of the two saints before they enter the building itself and will remind them that they are already on a pilgrimage on holy and precious ground. Signage on the beds tells of the strong



connections between people and plants, through the stories they can tell and the healing properties they contain. They are all ancient native species whose use can be traced through contemporary accounts and illustrations to medieval times*.

Details of the plants are contained in a free leaflet which you can download from <https://bit.ly/pilgrimplants>. The benefit of this collection of nectar-rich plants is not lost on the pollinators who thrive on the flowers in summer or birds who enjoy the seeds which we leave in winter so we feel that this important aspect of the garden is in balance with the pilgrim experience. The Bishop of Lichfield, the Rt Rev Michael Ipgrave, put it thus recently:

'Humility in its root meaning is about keeping close to the ground, and that is literally true on a walking pilgrimage. As your feet make contact with grass, stones, gravel, mud, and even tarmac, you become aware of your connection with the natural world, and your eyes, ears and sense of smell are absorbed in the natural world around you. That itself gives you a humbling sense of your own smallness in the midst of creation; but in an age of ecological crisis it also arouses a sense of penitential humility for the damage that we have caused and continue to cause to our fragile world. Pilgrimage is an exercise in ecological humility.'

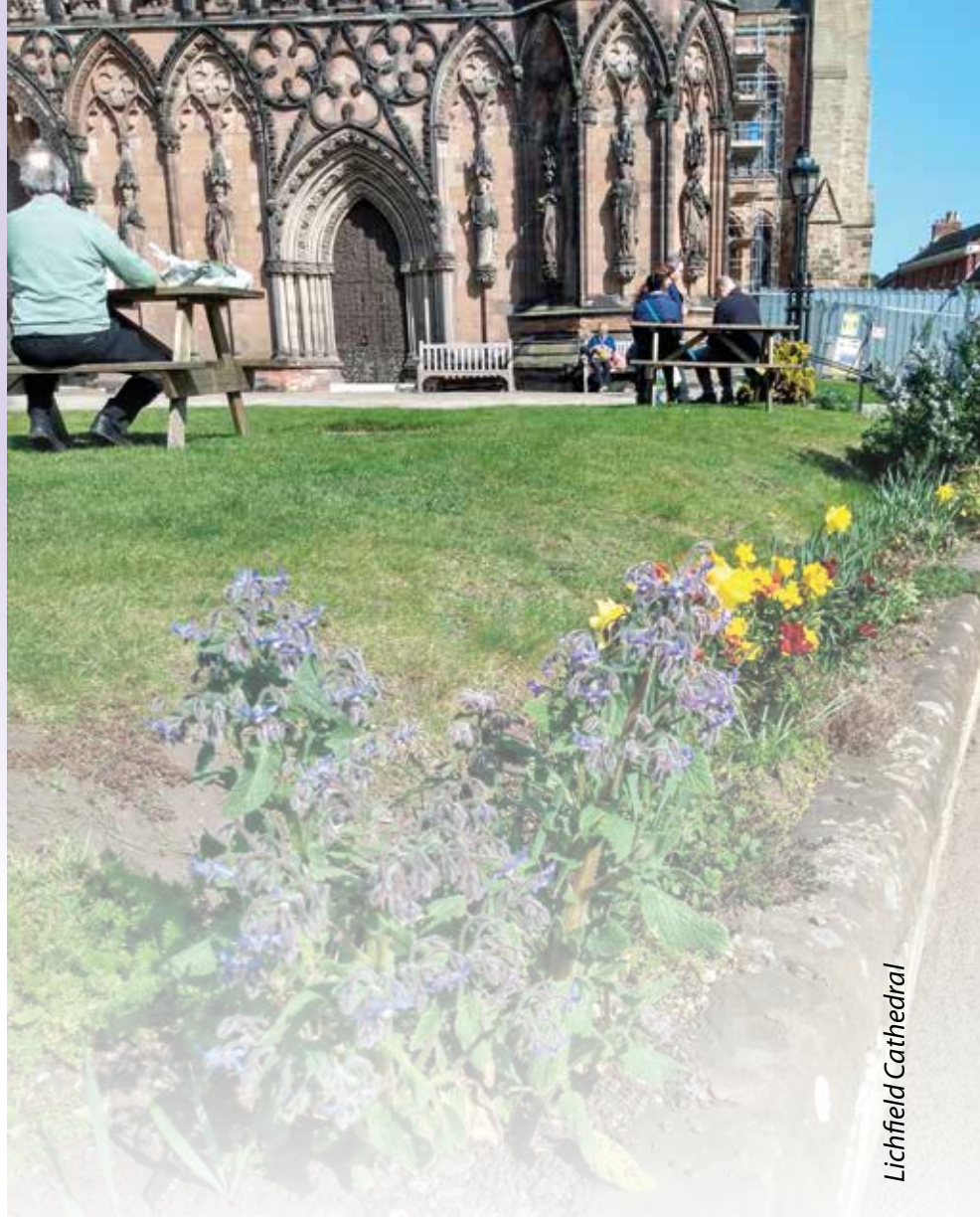
The garden is going to sleep for the winter soon but we hope to welcome you next Spring when it comes to life to tell its stories all over again.

**Reference:*

The Medieval Garden – Sylvia Landsberg

Medieval Flowers – Innes and Perry

The Medieval Flower Book – Celia Fisher



Webinars

Our Autumn webinar series is now running, starting with a talk on Wednesday 26th October by one of our Patrons, Brigit Strawbridge, about solitary bees and how we can better manage our spaces for them.

Wednesday 2nd November, 2pm

Who Needs Friends with Colin Fenn

Wednesday 9th November, 2pm

Mammals in Burial Grounds with Sam Devine-Turner

Tuesday 15th November, 7pm

Online AGM and talk The Ossuaries of Europe with Cat Irving

Wednesday 16th November, 2pm

'Like a nightmare that haunts a murderer's brain' – Depicting funeral workers' feigned sorrow in 18c England with Dr Dan O'Brien

Wednesday 23rd November, 2pm

Caring for Fungi in Burial Grounds with Bruce Langridge

Tuesday 6th December, 2pm

The Restoration of the Jewellery Quarter Cemeteries

Wednesday 14th December, 2pm

Saints, Springs and Sanctuary – Stories of Sacred Ground with Amy Douglas

Visit <https://bit.ly/cfga-webinars> to see the full programme. Webinars will be uploaded to the Member's Area for catch-up viewing.

The webinars are free to members, £4 for non-members. There is always plenty of time for questions at the end and if you have any suggestions of topics you would like to hear about, please let us know.



The Beautiful Burial Ground Project

After four and a half years The Beautiful Burial Ground (BBG) project will be ending at the close of 2022. Many of the staff of Caring for God's Acre have been involved in delivering this project with George and Liam working solely on BBG whilst Prue, Anna, Andrea and Harriet have all contributed greatly too.

We are very proud of all that has been achieved, particularly of how we kept the project going through the Covid pandemic, switching some aspects to digital and encouraging people to explore and record on their own or within family groups. Our members and other volunteers have really embraced this project with thousands of you getting involved. Here are a few of the milestones that have been reached.

Our new website was one of the first achievements, launched early on in the project this has allowed us to communicate far more easily, making lots of interesting information accessible. Anna continues to improve the website so if you have not visited it recently then please take a look – it's been refreshed and it's now easier to navigate.

The Beautiful Burial Grounds portal within the National Biodiversity Network Atlas is a first of its kind. This system allows anybody to check what wildlife has been recorded in a particular burial ground. It's far from complete but we now have a really good baseline on which to work. Currently we have over 20,000 sites

mapped and up on the portal with biological records for over a third of these. There have been an astonishing 10,220 different species recorded within burial grounds. Many more records are currently within the system, being verified as accurate before they go up and there are more sites to add too, particularly in Wales.

We set out to put burial grounds on the map and to raise awareness of how great they are for biodiversity and we have definitely done that!

We have also linked this information across to the Church Heritage Records of England and Wales. This part of the project is still a work in progress but once complete, will bring biodiversity into the heart of the church planning system for the first time.

By far the most important part of the project has involved people! BBG always relied on people to make it a success and we have been overwhelmed by the response. Over 1,060 events and activities have taken place during BBG, across all of England and Wales. These have ranged from large BioBlitzes to a few people



60 events for those with physical disabilities, mental health issues and for families with young children. Whilst many are initially unsure that an activity in a burial ground can be for them, the enthusiasm during these events and feedback afterwards shows how much this is valued!

Have a look at our minifilms via YouTube or our website to see a few examples of all of these activities <https://bit.ly/cfgafilms>

Although the BBG project is now coming to a close the concept behind it remains a core part of our ethos.

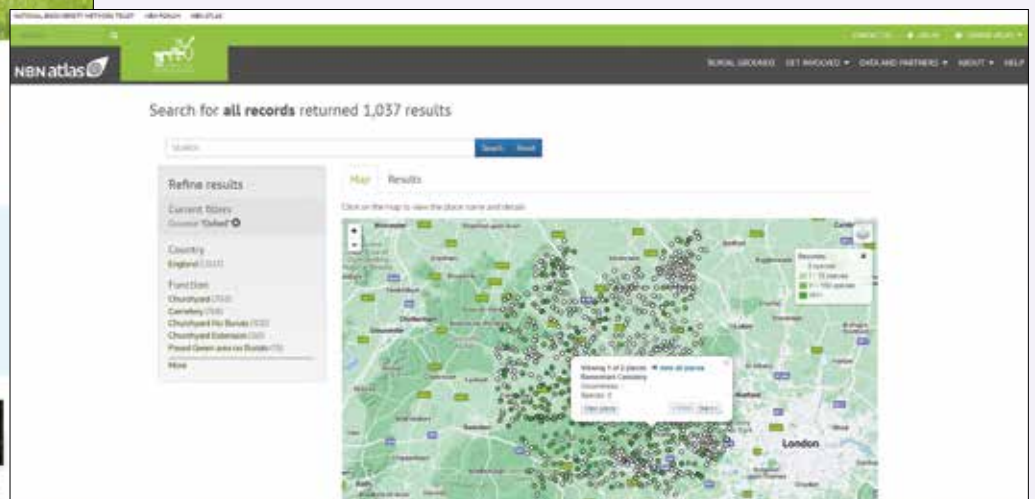
We will continue to work with our

partners, the NBN, the Churches of England and Wales, the Woodland Trust and many more. We will continue to run Love Your Burial Ground Week with Churches Count on Nature a vital part of that and are exploring new ways to maintain the enthusiasm people now have for discovering more about burial grounds. This might be through wildlife recording on iNaturalist or digitising monument inscriptions in urban cemeteries. Please take a look at the resources on our website to help you carry on learning and recording.

As with so much of our work, we owe huge thanks to our main funder the National Lottery Heritage Fund and to everyone who buy lottery tickets.

coming together to listen to bird song. People have learned about identifying and recording a wide range of species and habitats, the archaeology of churchyards, and how to record inscriptions and monument condition. When it was impossible to organise events during 2020, people chose to take their daily exercise through local churchyards and cemeteries, making a note of what they saw. We know that approximately 20,000 of you got involved, generating almost 90,000 new biological records.

We've always known that burial grounds have features that make them particularly important places for many different people within our society. They are accessible, many have ramps with rails not steps, disabled parking and increasing numbers now have a loo! They are in the heart of communities, within walking distance for many and are free to visit. George has organised nearly



Scything in the Sunshine

Andrea Gilpin, Caring for God's Acre

In the summer of 2004 I stood in an overgrown churchyard, old English scythe in hand looking with slight dismay at the task at hand. By my side was Martin Kibblewhite an English gentleman in his 80s sporting a grey beard, a red and white spotty handkerchief on his head and a look of sheer enthusiasm on his face.

An array of Martin's scythe collection lay on the ground. I chose one and he showed me how to set the handles and keep the edge sharp. Then we began, serenaded by bird song and the swish of the blade. For the first hour or so I wielded my scythe and watched as the grasses smiled at my efforts by bending over and bobbing back up again. Martin was going great guns and I could see the red handkerchief disappearing into the undergrowth as he sung jaunty tunes.

Over lunch Martin explained why the Old English scythes* can be tricky to use. In days gone by the saying used to be 'No more lend your scythe than your false teeth'. This is because often the snath's length, curve and weight was chosen to fit a particular person. And even more importantly – the whole set up would then be taken to the local blacksmith who would alter the bend and twist of the blade to ensure it sat flat on the ground for that particular owner. Often there were blacksmiths in the area who were known as experts in adjusting scythe blades so they were just right for the current owner.

So the chances that a scythe from Martin's collection was going to be

one that would 'fit' me was pretty slim. I persevered and improved over the next two years and, although I enjoyed it, I was always pleased to put the scythe down at the end of a long day.

Then came a turning point. Martin mentioned the Austrian scythe**. I looked into it, contacted the Scythe Association and ordered one from the knowledgeable Simon Fairlie. It arrived – thin, lightweight and perfectly designed to not need a blacksmith to set the blade! Using it was a whole different experience to using the English scythe – firstly it felt like a well-designed extension of my arms, secondly I felt no strain on any one part of my body, thirdly it mowed the grass efficiently. In contrast to the English scythe, I was reluctant to put it down at the end of a day's mowing. In addition I could easily change the blade on it depending on the task at hand be it fine grass in open meadow areas, or tough brambles near to headstones. And, unlike my false teeth, I could easily pass my scythe to someone else to use who, with a quick adjustment of the handles, could make it perfectly fit them!

Fast forward to now and Caring for God's Acre has been efficiently using scythes to manage burial

grounds for over 15 years. We have trained 100s of people who enjoy this peaceful and efficient way of managing areas of long grass which large mechanised machinery can't access. The scythe is a fine alternative to a strimmer, having the advantage of cutting the grass in a way that leaves it in a neat 'windrow' rather than spraying grass cuttings all over the stonework. This windrow is easy to either turn to make hay or rake up and move. Wildlife seems safer as it hops/slithers/runs away more easily when scythes approach compared to the strimmer, maybe as a result of the directional sound scythes make.

Being easy to use with no noise, vibration or fumes, scything is now the favourite activity of most of our volunteers working here in the Marches area. Alex is busy running courses and we will soon be selling scythe sets in our online shop. Do contact if you want to know more, but a little warning – scything can become addictive!

** Also known as the Anglo-American scythe,*

*** Also known as the continental scythe as this style is made in more places than just Austria.*

“It was just a totally enjoyable event”

This year’s Love your Burial Ground Week and Churches Count on Nature activities in June were a great success with over 4,000 people taking part across England and Wales in 335 burial grounds.

8,403 records were submitted either via the iNaturalist app, by post, iRecord or e-mail. The top flowers recorded were common daisy, herb Robert and oxeye daisy. The top three bird records were blackbird, wood pigeon and robin and the Specked wood butterfly and the Buff-tailed bumblebee were the top two most frequently recorded invertebrates.

Thank you to everyone who got involved - these records are now being processed by specialist verifiers all across the country and although they may take a while to appear on the National Biodiversity Atlas be assured they will eventually show up!

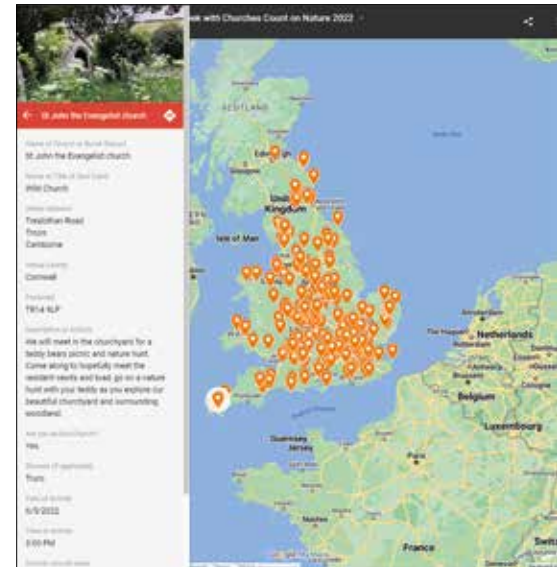
Different wildlife will appear throughout the seasons so do keep sending in your records if you have the time.

“The whole event was an inspiration to many locals and for those passing by our church on holiday”

“Materials were beautifully designed, thank you”

“Thank you for the wonderful booklets & nature information it was really useful”

“I’ve learnt so much this morning”



The wonderful world of lichens

We have a new short film on lichens available on our website. Lichenologist April Windle explains why burial grounds are the perfect place for these interesting organisms – a combination of fungus and algae or cyanobacteria - to flourish. Some lichens grow very slowly and so the undisturbed habitat of burial grounds allows them to develop on walls, trees and gravestones.

Visit <https://bit.ly/cfga-lichens> to learn more from April and also visit the Resources section of our website to download our new Guide to Lichens.



I A-Z of Burial Ground Conservation is for Images

From medieval gargoyles and grotesques to puritan gravestones our ancestors have never shied from adorning our churchyards with images of the droll, the grim or the ghoulish. Many gravestones and memorials include images, such as skulls, bones or coffins, reminders of life's brevity. These symbols are known as 'memento mori' - the Latin for "Remember you must die." These images are very much of their time, popular from the sixteenth century, with usage peaking in the mid-seventeenth century, later replaced with less grizzly alternatives, for example, weeping willows, or shrouded urns.

The churchyards of Kent are a particularly rich hunting ground for memento mori imagery (as are churchyards of Puritan New England!). The church of St Gregory and St Martin in Wye, nestled beneath the North Downs, has many remarkable examples. One seventeenth century headstone commemorating Thomas and John Hudson is crowned with three skulls, the two side skulls with a long bone beneath, and the central 'winged' skull with a gravedigger's spade below and an hourglass above! The hourglass is a common device used to portray impending mortality - the 'sands of time'. Two further headstones at Wye have hourglasses, both winged to emphasise the flight of time, while another has two coffins adorning it. The most ornate headstone, with a fascinating story, has a central coat of arms and two skulls with trumpets (a reminder of the 'Day of Judgement') and reads:

"Here lieth the body of Cosman Ertzberger of this town. He was a native of ye City of Basil [Basel] in ye canton of Bern and came to England with ye Right Hon Heneage Earl of Winchelsea Ambassador to Constantinople in ye year 1678. He lived in this town 65 years and died April ye 4th 1744 aged 89y."

Fascinating Kentish examples can also be found at Holy Trinity, Milton Regis. Quality as well as symbolism of carvings can vary greatly, some at

this site are extremely naïve – no much more than deeply scratched outlines of skulls and bones. Other common symbols are also found here, for example winged heads (cherubs), signifying the spirit of life, a more positive image than most memento mori. Milton, however, is one of several churches in a ring around the town of Sittingbourne (a historic stopping-place on the route between London and Canterbury) which have a very unusual local variant I have not encountered elsewhere. This usually involves a shrouded corpse rising from a chest-tomb with a devil like figure or perhaps 'Old Father Time' to the right and a trumpeting angel to the left. Some versions, for example at St Peter and St Paul at Borden, include a collapsing tower on the left side signifying 'The End of Days' - "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Jesus on the destruction of the temple, Mark 13:1-37). Other similarly complex but less sinister



Doddington Churchyard

headstones at Borden show a robed woman by a funeral urn under a weeping willow, and Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt complete with the baby Jesus, donkey, and palm trees! These are precursors of a shift in fashion during the eighteenth century to cherubs and other less forbidding themes (and much later, to new fashions such as Celtic crosses, but that is another story).

While Kent has an abundance of memento mori symbols, my move to the Cotswolds (and trips to Devon, Dorset, and Cornwall) have revealed

many fewer examples. Cirencester and its surrounds are full of cherubs but few skulls (you need to search hard to find them). The question is, to what extent is this due to regional differences or to the erosion of older headstones in the south-west? Many headstones in the Cotswolds are made from local limestone and are badly eroded. Stone, inevitably imported into the chalklands of Kent, seems to survive far better. Some memento mori images are still to be found in the southwest, for example in Cirencester's main churchyard there is a shrouded skull on a chest tomb and a row of three headstones each bearing a snake eating its tail, the ouroboros, a symbol with complex meanings, perhaps representing the circle of life and death. Other instances include a skull and crossed bones above a Palladian fanlight window (tower built 1784) at St Lawrence, Bourton on the Water, and some headstones with skulls at Tetbury.

This short article merely scratches the surface of this fascinating



St. Gregory and St. Martin, Wye

topic and from a very personal perspective. More work is needed to understand geographic variations and I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has examples that might help to build the bigger picture. When out headstone hunting, if anyone accuses you of being a 'tombstone tourist' you can flummox them with the riposte that you are a 'taphophile' - someone with a passion for churchyard memorials

(from the Greek *Táphos*, pertaining to funeral rites, burials, and the grave)!

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All images by Peter Vujakovic.

Cirencester Churchyard



St. Peter and St. Paul, Borden

These Silent Mansions:

A life in graveyards by Jean Sprackland
published by Jonathan Cape, 2020

“Why are so many of us drawn to these peculiar places, with all their contradictions and intensities of feeling?”

The paradox of nature doggedly flourishing in the place of the dead is captured well in this book by Jean Sprackland, who writes of the many graveyards she has visited over a lifetime. Jean is an award-winning author and poet, and the quality of her writing shows in this cliché-free book, which combines folklore, nature and history in a series of themes following the graveyard at various seasons and times of the day. These themes are further subdivided into short chapters. From the Magnificent Seven, the largest and best of London’s cemeteries, to tiny little churchyards across the country, one is left with the impression that Jean can’t pass by without popping in, something that will be familiar to many of us. She narrates the stories inherent in graveyards – those of the dead - whilst weaving her own life story through them. Her writing takes in natural phenomena too, everything from the story of the yew tree, to the lifecycle of the Holly Blue butterfly which lays its eggs in the ivy so frequently found in burial grounds.

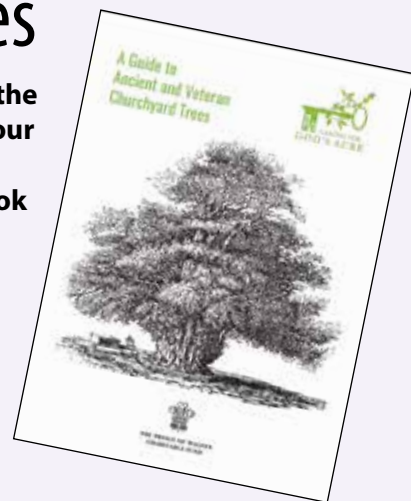
I’d recommend Jean’s book to any wandering taphophile – it’s a gentle, oddly soothing book which I found perfect for night-time reading. Available from online bookshop The Hive in hardback, paperback and e-book <https://bit.ly/silentmansions>.

Anna Wilde



New Guides

If you haven’t visited the Resources section of our website recently, you may want to take a look at four new guides we have produced with support from the Prince of Wales’s Charitable Fund. The Guides are free to download and are available in both Welsh and English. They give in-depth information on four subjects, all of them commonly found in burial grounds:



A Guide to Meadows & Wildflowers
Glaswelltir blodeuog mewn safleoedd claddu

A Guide to Lichens
Cennau Safleoedd Claddu

A Guide to Ancient & Veteran Churchyard Trees
Coed Hynafol a Feteran mewn Mynwentydd

A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles
Amffibiaid ac Ymlusgiaid mewn



Editors:
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Andrea Gilpin

Design: Blast Design
www.blast-design.co.uk

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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Charity No: 1155536

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(Dept of Levelling up)