We appreciate the hard work of volunteers across the diocese in caring for our churchyards. Since 1993, the Churchyard Award Scheme has encouraged parishes to take care of the sacred grounds which surround our church buildings.

Our churchyards offer comfort and solace to those remembering loved ones, and can be a place where people encounter God in beauty, peace, and silence. The Scheme is free to join. A panel of volunteer judges visit through the summer, prior an award ceremony in the autumn. There is a separate certificate for places where diversity of native flora and fauna is actively promoted. Through the Scheme, advice is shared and achievements celebrated. This year over 40 churches participated, urban and rural, large and small, all receiving diocesan recognition for their care of God’s Acre.

Application forms and further details are available at www.lichfield.anglican.org/churchyard_awards
In 2020 Caring for God’s Acre will be 20 years old. Throughout this time, we have been raising awareness about how brilliant burial grounds are and supporting those fantastic people who manage them, usually on a voluntary basis.

It’s thanks for you, our members that we are still here, still doing this vital work and growing in our capacity and influence with every passing year. It’s not always been easy, (the current economic situation is particularly challenging), but it’s always been fascinating, with the enthusiasm and commitment of the people we meet; working away in their own ‘patch,’ giving us inspiration. Please help us to celebrate our 20th birthday. Join in with The Year of the Burial Ground; tell people about Caring for God’s Acre and keep supporting and encouraging us!

Year of the Burial Ground 2020

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

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

There will be many ways of becoming involved:

• Attend one of our conferences
  We have organised two ‘Beautiful Burial Ground’ conferences in March. These days will bring together experts for a packed itinerary – inspiring attendees to investigate and record in burial grounds and show how records can be used to help with management decisions and interpretation.

  More details to be released later this year but in the meantime, here are the dates for your diary:
  Thursday March 12th
  National Museum, Cardiff
  Thursday March 26th
  The Circle, Sheffield

• Enjoy our detailed monthly blog posts from experts in the field
  From memorials to migrating birds, visit our website or sign up to our e-newsletter to learn fascinating facts about all things burial ground related.

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

• Run an event as part of Love your Burial Ground Week
  Sure to be the biggest yet – the second week of June.

• Enter our Photographic competition
  More details to be released in December.

• Use the year to raise the profile of your own burial ground
  Contact us for press release templates and ideas for articles to go into your local newsletters.

• Join us on social media
  Using the hashtag #yearoftheburialground so we can make contact, retweet and see what you are up to.

If you want to be involved please e-mail Prue and she will e-mail you our Year of the Burial Ground Information Pack later this year – info@cfga.org.uk, 01588 673041
On 15th June, in St Editha’s churchyard, we undertook a bold project as part of ‘Love Your Burial Ground’ week in conjunction with the Beautiful Burial Ground project run by Caring for God’s Acre.

Jacqui Hodgkinson and myself pitched camp behind the church at 10a.m. on Saturday morning and set up our stall – a day and night’s worth of activities for all ages to celebrate our churchyard and to connect with the community. Luckily, it was market day in Church Eaton, so after shopping and breakfast at the market in the Institute, visitors made their way over to see what we were doing and to have a chat and a look around.

We had the most amazing day chatting to visitors, taking walks around with people knowledgeable in flora, fauna and even the 150 species of U.K. dandelion! We spotted and logged 57 varieties of creature and following a visit by knowledgeable friends, a list was later made of 42 different wildflowers in our churchyard, all proof that our burial ground is home to a vast variety of species of flora and fauna and an essential part of our local environment.

During the day, using binoculars and cameras, lard, cheese, bird seed, sticks, porridge oats and a variety of other stocks, we managed to photograph and log our visitors, make feeding stations for the feathered visitors, spider web traps, memory cards for the day, ladybird hotels and much more. We welcomed during the day a local amateur photographer who took hundreds of shots at different times of the day and night and we look forward to perhaps an exhibition of photos at a later date.

Another part of our amazing day involved an outdoor service at 3p.m. outside with more than 12 of us singing songs and hymns about nature as well as reading poems followed by homemade scones, tea and coffee- what a fabulous act of celebration and community.

Following our night-time vigil, the 8a.m. service on Sunday morning was really well attended by regulars and other supporters which began outside in the churchyard and continued in church, all rounded off by warm bacon rolls and tea and coffee after the service. Following this, we scouted around for the last time and gathered our things and at 10 a.m. on Sunday 16th June, we completed our 24 hour vigil and what a superb time it was- time out to observe, listen (to the dawn chorus), meet, chat and share. An unforgettable day when we learned so much more about our churchyard to take us forward into the future planning – mission accomplished!

Please see our displays in the church.

Thank God for our beautiful world.

Julie

Love your Burial Ground Week – 24 hours in the Churchyard

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

Here is a glimpse of some of the highlights:

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

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

April saw records pouring in as our conservation volunteers noted species whilst out and about, including plants, birds, amphibians and reptiles. Down by the seaside Val Appleyard submitted the first of many records for Woodvale Cemetery, Brighton, continuing to submit records almost weekly throughout 2019. Margaret Markland and Jane Ing kindly contributed to the Shropshire Burial Grounds botany efforts and a training day at Hopesay rewarded participants with Slowworms and both Smooth and Palmate Newts.

As we came into May our local volunteers continued to make records as did Tammy Stretton from Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust who is recording in Welshpool Cemetery, now seen as a potential Local Wildlife Site. Back in Norfolk, Martin Greenland was spotting birds, butterflies and bees to name but a few species groups, and we saw records coming in from Herefordshire, Northamptonshire and Worcestershire in particular. At the end of May we ran a memorable BioBlitz at the wonderful York Cemetery, where we were joined by mammal, invertebrate, lichen and moss experts. I managed to make a brief visit to Holy Trinity Goodramgate, a tiny churchyard providing some respite from the hustle and bustle of central York.

Our second BioBlitz of the year was held in June at St Michael’s Lichfield, organised with the indefatigable Ray Allen. We were supported by a whole host of recorders, resulting in records for 126 different species, and bringing the total for the churchyard up to an amazing 1,258. The Dartmoor based Moor Meadows group got stuck into churchyards and together we have encouraged churchwardens to manage areas of their churchyards as wildflower meadows.

In August we received a record of a Grass snake from church warden Jim Logan of Bromfield, this species is known to use compost heaps for laying eggs (look out for empty egg cases). We were lucky enough to have John Walters recording invertebrates for us in South
Devon, Buckfastleigh and South Brent; check out Twitter for his excellent invertebrate illustrations. Carole Tyrrell has been making plant records throughout spring and summer at the Grade 1 listed Brompton Cemetery in London, and she hasn’t stopped there, visiting other lovely cemeteries such as Greatness Cemetery.

As the summer months progressed, more and more records came in from all over England and Wales. During this time our Community Coordinator George ran 64 training sessions which also yielded many records and we now have burial ground information from 33 counties and 592 burial grounds. We’ve had records from churchyards, chapel yards, cemeteries and green burial sites. Individuals have joined in as have church groups, families, interest groups, local authorities, professionals and local environmental records centres. We’ve worked with people with complex health needs who find burial grounds refreshingly accessible, blind or partially sighted people who have learned bird song, children who have made their first biological record.

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

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

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

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

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

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

- The thrushes – Blackbird, Song and Mistle Thrushes and winter visitors, Redwing and Fieldfare, Robin, Goldcrest, Wren, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and Starling, Blue, Great and Coal Tit.
- Finches – Greenfinch, Siskin, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Brambling, Redpoll, Hawfinch, Bullfinch and Linnet.
- Pigeons and doves – Woodpigeon, Stock Dove and Collared Dove.
- Crows – Carrion Crow, Rook, Jay and Jackdaw.
- Various raptors – including Barn, Tawny and Little Owl, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.
- Swift, Swallow and House Martin.
- Warblers – Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler.
- Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers.

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

Written by John Arnfield, Chair of Shropshire Ornithological Society.
See the blog section of our website to read John's article on How to improve burial grounds for birds.
An Epitaph is a short text honouring a deceased person. Strictly speaking, it refers to text that is inscribed on a tombstone or plaque, but it may also be used in a figurative sense.

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

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

The African's Grave
The best known of the headstones is a Grade II listed headstone with the inscription:

Here lieth the body of ID
a Native of Africa
who died in this Town
Sept 9th 1801
God hath made of one Blood, all nations of Men.

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

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

To the memory of Matthew Marston. He departed this life May 29th 1802, the oldest Burgess of the Borough. His steady and uncorrupt conduct presents an example to his brother Burgess for perpetual imitation, and a useful lesson to the Parliamentary Representatives of the Borough, that Opulence and Power cannot alone secure independent suffrage.

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

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

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

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

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

In November, we are running a workshop on churchyard accessibility. Meeting in St Giles’, Shrewsbury, members of the Shropshire Disability Network will be helping diocesan officers and colleagues think through how our churchyards can be accessible for all. We plan to publish evidence-based guidance as to best practice.

Contact David Primrose
tc@lichfield.anglican.org

**Eco Church**

Over 50 churches from 21 of our deaneries, as well as our Cathedral, have already registered for Eco Church, with at least two achieving their bronze award. This is part of our environmental policy and action plan, recommended in March by diocesan synod to all our deaneries.

Eco Church is a free online survey with supporting resources to help churches express our care for God’s world in our worship and teaching; in how we look after our buildings and land; in how we engage with our local community and in global campaigns, and in the personal lifestyles of our congregations.

It’s easy to register, gain credits for all that you are already doing, and identify any additional actions that will be straightforward to achieve. Further information is available at www.lichfield.anglican.org/ecochurch. Together we can achieve Eco Diocese Bronze by Easter.

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

**Membership**

The partnership between Caring for God’s Acre and the Diocese of Lichfield is now in its fourth year. As well as all the advice and information available on our website, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk, Andrea and I are only a phone call away and happy to answer any questions, big or small!

Do let us know if you have a monthly parish magazine, and we’d be pleased to arrange for you to receive a short article with seasonal nature notes. The articles provide information about the wildlife in your churchyard, and encourage parishioners to get involved.

Remember that individuals and groups in the diocese receive 20% members discount on all CfGA materials. Simply use the discount code Lich19.

Harriet Carty
Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Advisor
harriet@cfga.org.uk 01588 673041

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

- Employ our core staff, Harriet, Andrea and Prue
- Run our helpline – answering your calls and queries via phone or e-mail
- Maintain our resources and information including the website
- Produce this newsletter and maintain the charity
- Let people know about burial ground conservation through general publicity and social media
- Develop new projects and initiatives to support groups managing burial grounds across the country
- Support our wonderful Volunteer Team

Please get in touch:
01588 673041 info@cfga.org.uk

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- Ecclesiastical Movement for Good Award
- Golden Bottle Trust
- GML Ltd
- Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund