Join us for an afternoon with Professor Stefan Buczacki

This year our AGM will be followed by an illustrated talk by famous horticulturalist, broadcaster and writer, Professor Stefan Buczacki. Stefan has recently written a book ‘Earth to Earth, A Natural History of Churchyards’. It is an engaging and interesting read for everyone who admires or cares for churchyards. There will be copies for sale and the afternoon will be a fascinating exploration into the history and natural history of burial grounds. Tea and homemade cake will follow.

The talk is free to members and £8 for non-members.

Please book early to avoid disappointment
info@cfga.org.uk, 01588 673041
www.stefanbuczacki.co.uk

2.30 pm Wednesday 28th November at the Bishop’s Palace, Hereford.
Welcome to the Autumn and Winter edition of the Lychgate, I hope you enjoy reading it and are able to attend our AGM

This has been a busy six months with a great deal of positive change. Our staff numbers have swollen from four to seven and we have expanded into a second room in order to fit everyone in!

The Beautiful Burial Ground project is off to a great start and our new website will help us to reach more people and enthuse them about the interest, importance and beauty of burial grounds. I’m delighted that our membership continues to grow. Please encourage your friends, church or cemetery or even diocese to become members. We currently have one diocesan member which is the Lichfield Diocese. Through this membership we are able to work more closely with churches in the diocese, supporting them in the management of churchyards, speaking at events and also preparing management briefs. We will be looking at developing projects together in the future; seeking funding for joint initiatives covering local history, encouraging visitors and enhancing sites for wildlife.

As always, we love to hear from our members; please get in touch and tell us what you are doing, whether it’s a problem you would like help with or an exciting discovery!

A Summer of Awards

We are delighted that this summer former Manager Sue Cooper and the Churchyard Task Team volunteers have received Royal Awards in recognition of their achievements.

Sue has been awarded an MBE.

‘I am very pleased and honoured to have been appointed a Member of the British Empire (MBE) in the Birthday 2018 Honours List for my work in support of conservation and the environment of Shropshire and Herefordshire – the two counties that I have come to love most. I must thank my colleagues at Caring for God’s Acre who supported me, and worked in such a dedicated fashion throughout the past twenty years to help make the charity what it is today – a nationally recognised and well-respected organisation.’

The volunteers have received the Queen’s Award for Voluntary service, which is considered the equivalent of the MBE for volunteer groups.

Eleven years ago Caring for God’s Acre set up the Churchyard Task Team to undertake practical conservation work across South Shropshire and Herefordshire. Since then the team has gone from strength to strength and has undertaken an amazing 30,000 hours of conservation work in local burial grounds.

Conservation of burial grounds is about active management, not neglect. The work of the volunteers has transformed many sites, leaving them better managed, with increased value to wildlife whilst looking more attractive to visitors.

Martin Garland has been a volunteer since the early days.

‘In that time I’ve met and worked with a remarkable bunch of like-minded people, who want to get involved in countrywide work, like scything and hedge-laying. These are just some of the skills I’ve learned. It’s always rewarding to see, over time, how a seemingly sterile burial ground can become an oasis of wildflowers and wildlife. It has been a most enjoyable time.’

Congratulations everyone!
Through this project we will put burial grounds across England and Wales on the map by revealing their hidden heritage and importance to biodiversity. We will be working with church communities, interest groups and individuals to learn about, research and survey the natural, built and social heritage of their local burial grounds hoping to inspire an understanding of how important these special places are.

To increase the amount of knowledge held about the biodiversity of specific burial grounds, we aim to gather 75,000 biological records (recorded sightings of all types of wildlife) across the four years of the project. To do this we are encouraging existing wildlife recorders to visit and make records in burial grounds and are organising training sessions for people with an interest who could potentially become recorders in the future.

Sessions are being run by The Beautiful Burial Ground team directly and partners across the country. Norfolk Wildlife Trust got off to a flying start by running sessions to train up keen volunteers to record birds, bees and butterflies. Essex Wildlife Trust ran sessions on bats and swifts and veteran trees. The Beautiful Burial Ground team hosted botanical identification sessions in churchyards in Shropshire and on the Welsh Borders.

These sessions generate a species list for a site and help volunteers with their identification skills. Species information is now being channelled (by Liam) into the National Biodiversity Network Atlas where he is working with the Church Heritage Record and Church Heritage Cymru to develop a system enabling anyone to locate online wildlife records for any burial ground in England and Wales.

As well as being valuable wildlife habitats our burial grounds encapsulate the stories of our communities. They tell us about changing fashions and traditions, of immigration and of lives both long lived and tragically short. Through this project we will encourage people to explore and record these stories and the built heritage of our burial grounds by running sessions in county archives and training days in monument recording. We will then connect the location of the built and social heritage records with that of the wildlife records for a site. This will enable burial ground managers, and anyone else with an interest, to have access to information on all the significant components of an individual burial ground.

A key aspect of the project is engagement with sections of the community who may benefit from exploring the potential of burial grounds as places to learn about and connect with wildlife and the stories of the communities they are in. Many of our burial grounds are in the midst of our communities yet are under-appreciated as the accessible, calm and beautiful places they often are. Specifically, we are looking to work with people with physical disabilities and mobility issues; people with mental health issues and with families.

This summer we have enjoyed working with Visions Links, a Hereford based charity supporting those with visual impairments, who joined us in a rural south Shropshire churchyard to learn to identify bird song. Shrewsbury Cemetery was the location for a session looking at wildlife in the burial ground with a group from the Shropshire Disability Network. Around the country, family days have been run by our partners in North Wales, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, helping visitors of all ages to discover the often hidden wonders of burial grounds.

We are now looking forward to the autumn, to fungus forays, archive training and monument recording sessions and are starting to plan for next spring’s botanical recording season.

Keep touch with the project by visiting The Beautiful Burial Ground pages on the Caring for God’s Acre website and signing up to the quarterly Beautiful Burial Ground project e-newsletter. You will also find details of the upcoming sessions (all of which are free) and information on how to submit burial ground records.

For further information, please contact the project team:

Sue – Project Manager
sueb@cfga.org.uk

Liam – Data Manager
liam@fga.org.uk

George – Community Coordinator
george@cfga.org.uk

Off to a Great Start
The Beautiful Burial Ground Project is a Caring for God’s Acre initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Sue, Liam and I (Georgina) joined the Caring for God’s Acre team to deliver the project and got fully underway in late May.
Setting up your own team
The advantage of involving people in caring for burial grounds goes beyond sharing the physical workload. It can help explain what you are doing and build local support. Volunteers often become ambassadors for sites which in turn generates goodwill. As well as practical support people bring different skills and experience such as plant identification, updating the website or the ability to involve other groups. Involving others also makes the work much more enjoyable!

Here we share some top tips on how to involve volunteers in your task days.

**Planning the day**

This is where it is really helpful to have undertaken the ‘Five Steps’ (described in the previous Lychgate and on our website). It is then a simple case of looking at the Annual Work Plan to see what needs doing in what month.

• Make a list of what jobs need doing and the approximate number of people you will need for each job. Undertake a simple risk assessment.

• Work out what the best length of session would be – often a half day – morning or an afternoon is long enough.

• Keep to a regular day – it is easier for people to remember – e.g. every first Saturday morning of the month.

• Allocate someone to welcome new volunteers when they arrive. Introduce them to others, give them a tour of the site and explain what you are doing that day and why. This step often gets overlooked but is important to ensure volunteers feel comfortable and appreciated.

• Give volunteers a choice of tasks so they can choose something that matches their ability and interests.

• If you want to involve parents, consider running simple activities for the children. In one site we worked with, advertising two hours of children’s craft activities as part of the task day meant six more adults turned up.

• Take photos of before and after to put up in the porch or display during open days. This can help motivate volunteers and encourage others to get involved.

• Supply nice refreshments – home-made cake is better than biscuits!

• Once your group is established, why not recognise special events like birthdays or the anniversary of the group. In our experience word of mouth is definitely the best way to gain more volunteers. Also posters, community websites and parish magazines work well. Make your day sound interesting – give it a name such as ‘Cake and Rake’ or ‘Scything Saturday’. The more you plan, the less stressful it will be for yourself, and the more enjoyable for others.

For more information on how to set up your own team contact Andrea who can provide advice along with resources such as templates of annual work plans and risk assessments.

andrea@cfga.org.uk
Ray Allen tells us how St. Michael’s in Lichfield has become a Churchyard for People and Wildlife

St. Michael’s Churchyard is located on a Greenhill in the southern part of the City of Lichfield. Reputed to date back to pre-Christian times, and with a total area of 9 acres, it is thought to be one of the five largest churchyards in England. It is in two parts: the old, closed churchyard of 7 acres; and the “New” 2-acre area. The old churchyard is now closed for burials. Both churchyards are public open spaces, well used by many people in the community.

A working group of six members was set up in 2014, because of concerns that people felt about the poor state of the churchyard, which, because of poor management for many years, had become very overgrown. There were few wild flowers, lots of brambles, holly and ash saplings; a poor and untidy compost area; and many of the paths had disappeared. The churchyard generally looked uncared for.

The PCC commissioned a local land surveying firm to produce a topographical survey which gave us a clear view of the churchyard and the tasks that needed to be done. I was then asked to take on the responsibility of acquiring a Management Plan for the churchyard.

I compiled a survey to find out the views of the congregation and local residents about the churchyard. Another member of the congregation interviewed people as they were walking through the churchyard. The survey results were interesting. Most people wanted the peace and tranquillity maintained, but they did not like the impenetrable areas caused by the overgrown vegetation.

With this information obtained it was decided to contact Caring for God’s Acre for help in producing a Management Plan for the churchyard. Harriet Carty came to see the churchyard and then presented her findings to the churchyard group. A few weeks later a detailed 21-page 3 Year Management Plan arrived; and an extremely helpful Burial Ground Action Pack arrived. Because of its size, Harriet suggested zoning the churchyard to make management less onerous. Colour-coded maps helped with this. The management of a meadow area and planting of smaller clusters of wild flowers, together with the creation of clear woodland with a series of paths were excellent and very welcome suggestions.

She also said that composting needs to be better organised and overgrown areas cleared to allow more light so wild flowers can grow. Another valued comment was that grass cuttings should be removed from mown areas to reduce soil fertility and enable more wild flowers to grow.

We have now set to work implementing the Plan. A Working Party has met regularly since October, 2017 and, along with the Community Payback Team and help from a skilled tree maintenance man, we have worked hard to dig out brambles, holly seedlings, rampant growth of ivy and weeding of graves. The results are clear for all to see. We now have a mass of bluebells, wild garlic and many other spring wild flowers. The churchyard has been opened up for nature and nature has seized the opportunity it now has. The positive comments from passers-by and church members have been most encouraging. The churchyard is now a much more welcoming place.

Added to this was the recent news that we had been awarded a National Lottery Awards for All grant of £10,000 and a locally funded Biodiversity Grant of £1,500. These grants will enable us to do even more to manage our churchyard so it is truly a churchyard for people and wildlife.

Ray Allen
is for Compost Heaps

In many burial grounds the most popular place for the compost heap is unfortunately under a beautiful veteran yew. However freshly cut grass is harmful to mature, slow growing trees because the leachate is too acidic/nutrient rich and the heat from the decomposing process can damage the roots.

Any compaction of the ground beneath trees is also detrimental. So, although visually, compost heaps may look best tucked away in the corner, ensure they are sited away from the roots of mature trees.

Heaps can simply be loose piles but it is more practical to build a compost bin. This contains the cuttings, keeps the area looking managed and reduces scattering by dogs or foxes. Pallets, which allow air circulation, make good compost bins and age well over time. These also give many important access points for animals such as hedgehogs or slow worms.

Building two compost bays allows one bay to be actively filled over the growing season whilst the other bay is left to compost. The ideal months to empty compost bins are October and April when there should be neither nesting animals, such as grass snakes, or hibernating ones, such as hedgehogs or newts. The timing of hibernation is affected by temperature and so the April and October rule is not set in stone!

Compost bins in burial grounds have a particular problem of being inundated with plastic flowers and cellophane/ribbon. Signs saying ‘please take plastic home’ are rarely effective. The best solution we have found is to provide a small bin next to the compost area to make it easy for those visiting loved ones graves to separate non-compostable material.
FAQ

Question:
We have some activities that we want to undertake in our burial ground, but we don’t have any funds, do you know of any?

Answer:
It all depends on what you want to do…
If you simply want to fell trees or resurface a path, unfortunately we don’t know of any funders. Most funders are interested in giving grants for things that benefit the community in a wider sense. So, for example, enhancing the site together with training and interpretation would be of more interest to them.
A good place to start would be the Lottery. They have an online ‘Funding Finder’ where you simply answer four questions and it gives you a list of compatible programmes.
We have been involved in many burial ground projects benefiting from two Lottery programmes; ‘Sharing Heritage’ which offers grants of between £3,000 and £10,000 and ‘Our Heritage’ which goes from £10,000 to £100,000. Funded work needs to ‘make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities in the UK’.
For more information, please visit www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/funding-finder and feel free to call Andrea at the office for advice on developing a project and applying for funds.
01588 673041 andrea@cfga.org.uk.

Caring for God’s Acre

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All individuals and groups in the Diocese receive 20% members discount on all CfGA materials, along with free entry to our AGM. Simply use the discount code Lich19.

News from Lichfield Diocese

We have renewed our agreement with Caring for God’s Acre, with Harriet Carty as our Diocesan Churchyard Environmental Officer. Please do contact her directly for any advice about your churchyard.

Come and join us at our annual Churchyard Awards event, Saturday morning 24th November, at Doxey, Stafford, to celebrate the great efforts made by numerous volunteers in churchyards across the diocese, adapting to this year’s very difficult weather conditions. Contact us now for further details and free entry to next year’s Churchyard Awards Scheme.

We are exploring the possibility of a natural burial ground / woodland cemetery for the diocese, and would welcome your thoughts on this.

And next year sees a fresh focus on the environment, with churchyards playing a vital role.

David Primrose, tc@lichfield.anglican.org

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
• Support our Shropshire based Churchyard Task Team

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

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