Love your Burial Ground Week

Saturday 8th June – Sunday 16th of June

Many churchyards and burial grounds have been valued and loved for hundreds of years. People who are now responsible for their upkeep are part of a long line of generations who have taken up the management baton. But it isn’t easy. The things that make these sites special – lichen encrusted headstones, ancient monuments and species rich grassland, are also things that can give rise to complicated and sometimes contentious management decisions.

In short, being a custodian of a community’s burial ground can be both physically and emotionally demanding (and probably always has been). This is why our charity began – to support people in the task of keeping burial grounds beautiful, accessible and connected to their communities.

The last point is important – ‘connected to their communities’ and is why we started a dedicated week – national Love your Burial Ground Week (formally Cherishing Churchyards Week) nine years ago. It takes place in the second week of June. During this week groups run an event (or sometimes five!) to highlight to the wider community the wealth of heritage their unique site contains.

Events in previous years have included teddy bear picnics, family bug hunts, dawn chorus (followed by breakfast!), illustrated talks, wildflower identification, tower tours, family history, memorial recording, volunteer work party sessions and more.

So why not join us this year and celebrate your burial ground?

Contact Prue info@cfga.org.uk to let us know about your event.

Sign up to our e-newsletter

If you would like to receive our quarterly e-newsletters, please send us your e-mail address or sign up directly on our website. Each issue contains short articles with links to current news in burial ground conservation.

The Church of England around Staffordshire, northern Shropshire and the Black Country
Welcome to the Spring and Summer edition of the Lychgate, I hope you enjoy reading it and feel inspired to look at your local churchyard or cemetery with new eyes.

There is an article on Churchyard Crosses which draws on a longer piece on this fascinating subject by Judith Leigh, one of our trustees and an expert on built heritage within churchyards. Judith’s article is on our website under News & Blog, so if this whets your appetite please take a look at the full article, and then perhaps go out and about, looking at these ancient structures.

As always, we love to hear from our members, hopefully many of you will be joining in with Love Your Burial Ground week in June. This is always a pleasure for us as we learn about so many interesting activities taking place all over the country.

We are delighted to have been awarded £9,550 from the Aviva Community Fund to make short films to inspire people to investigate, record and look after their local burial ground.

Thank you to everyone who voted for our project. The funds will be used to purchase training and equipment for volunteers to create a series of short films on topics such as species identification, monument recording, investigating social history and collecting records. We will be purchasing high quality camera and sound equipment as well as editing software and a number of tablets. Films made will be shared with groups, and promoted via our website and social media.

We are now on the lookout for locally based volunteers who have an interest in film making and would like to train to use camera and sound equipment and/or edit any films made. No experience will be necessary, simply enthusiasm! We will be supported by a local company, experienced in training complete beginners. The films will be one of the legacies of the Beautiful Burial Ground project, helping communities across England and Wales to learn more about their amazing burial spaces.

If you would like to find out more, or would like to register your interest as a volunteer, please contact Sue: sueb@cfga.org.uk. Training will take place where we are based in Craven Arms, Shropshire.

Photo by Sunyu Kim from Pexels
Often to be found on the south side of the church, churchyard crosses seem to have served a variety of functions such as defining a sacred space for burials and being part of church rituals including outdoor services and processions. They were used occasionally as a focal point for preaching.

Whilst there are a few crosses believed to date from before the Norman conquest, most were erected after this time but before the Reformation of the church by Henry VIII in the C16th. Churchyards did not contain monuments to individual graves until later on, so the stone crosses would have been highly visible, important structures. During the Reformation, a great many crosses were destroyed or damaged as part of the widespread removal of iconography which swept through the country. The actual cross was often removed, maybe leaving the shaft or just the base in situ. The shafts were sometimes reused by putting a sundial on top of them, and in later centuries new crosses were carved to replace those lost. Some crosses may have a mixture of stone masonry from across the centuries. Crosses were also put up in important places in the wider landscapes such as crossroads, on boundaries or in the centre of towns. If you develop a taste for seeking them out this can lead you to many interesting places.

We would love to hear about medieval crosses in churchyards that you visit. This information can be added to the Church Heritage Record and Church Heritage Cymru and will enrich their records.

Written by Judith Leigh – CfGA Trustee, and member of Diocesan Advisory Committees. Please pop to the News and Blog section of our website for the full article.

Professor Stefan Buczacki becomes Patron

We are delighted that Professor Stefan Buczacki has become a patron of Caring for God’s Acre.

Stefan is a horticulturalist, broadcaster and writer who is perhaps best known for his twelve years as panellist and chairman on Radio 4’s Gardeners’ Question Time. However, this is just part of a portfolio of well over 2,000 radio and television programmes.

Stefan is also an experienced and prolific author, contributing to major newspapers and magazines. He has written around 60 books, including several standard works of reference such as the Guide to the Pests Diseases and Disorders of Garden Plants, Fauna Britannica, Garden Natural History (Collins New Naturalist series) and most recently, Collins Fungi Guide.

We knew Stefan was passionate about burial grounds after reading his fascinating new book Earth to Earth: A Natural History of Churchyards and we greatly enjoyed his inspiring talk at our AGM. After this we couldn’t resist the opportunity to ask if he would consider becoming a Patron of the charity.

‘I was delighted and honoured to be asked to join Caring for God’s Acre as a patron and I look forward to sharing my enthusiasm for the history, natural history and conservation of such important habitats.’
Burial grounds are crucial lifelines for many species of plants, animals, and fungi. Every year, important habitat is threatened by external forces such as housing development, intensive agricultural practices, and questionable land management decisions. Species once considered commonplace might now be a rarity, and cause for excitement.

You may or may not be aware, that there exists a UK-wide group of wildlife enthusiasts who spend many hours travelling around their local area identifying the species they find. The lists they make are essential to monitor how wildlife is faring. They make lists of birds, wild flowers, mushrooms, pollinators such as bees and butterflies, and much more. These enthusiasts vary in expertise and background. Some belong to groups and societies, some are professionals, others prefer to record alone. Within recording groups, confidence and experience levels vary tremendously. In fact, these groups depend on different levels of experience so that they can continue over time through teaching and passing on knowledge.

The map of records for burial grounds is patchy. Despite their age, churchyards and burial grounds are not particularly well recorded. For example, out of 314 churchyards that we have identified in Shropshire, botanical records are available for only 96 of those, with 218 having no such records. Botanical surveying is one of the most popular forms of biological recording alongside birding, but we know even less about other species such as fungi or butterflies in burial grounds. Botanical and bird recorders are the main contributors to the UK records pool. As 69% of Shropshire churchyards do not have botanical records, it is almost certain that a much larger percentage will have no records of other species at all.

What is a biological record?

Making a biological record is simple, and you do not need to be an expert to do it. There are four important components to a biological record:

**Who** – The recorder’s full name.

**What** – The common or scientific name of the species you found. You can make a record at whatever level of certainty you are comfortable with. A record of ‘Swift’ is equally as valid as using the scientific name *Apus apus*.

**Where** – You should record the location name, and if possible, a grid reference, which you can get using the recording form on the Caring for God’s Acre website.

**When** – It is important to include a day, month, and year.

**How to make records**

Our project aims to encourage all types of recording, from *ad hoc* records of common species such as daisy and wood pigeon, to structured surveying protocols involving repeat surveys.

Here are some of the species you might observe when visiting a burial ground. The magnificent old yew tree with its peeling bark casts shade over a prickly holly bush. Nearby ivy sprawls over a tall stone monument. A robin is hopping amongst daisies and dandelions where the grass has been cut short, and molehills are dotted amongst the gravestones. In an overgrown corner, bramble tangles within a patch of nettles. Leafy oak and beech trees cast dappled shade over the bluebells nestling underneath. A pigeon sits amongst the branches, and in the long grass you can recognise oxeye daisies, and red clover. As you turn to leave, a ladybird lands on your arm.

If this sounds familiar to you, and reminds you of your own burial ground – it’s time to share some records. We know there are many thousands of sites like this, but we don’t have the records to prove it. Here is a list of the records you could make from the quick visit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Yew</td>
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<td>20th June 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Ivy</td>
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<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Holly</td>
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<td>Robin</td>
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<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Daisy</td>
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<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Dandelion</td>
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<td>Common Mole</td>
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<td>Nettle</td>
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<td>Bramble</td>
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<td>Oak</td>
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<td>Beech</td>
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<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Oxeye Daisy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Red Clover</td>
<td>Norbury: All Saints, SO36399285</td>
<td>20th June 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taylor, Liam</td>
<td>Ladybird</td>
<td>Norbury: All Saints, SO36399285</td>
<td>20th June 2018</td>
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</tbody>
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We are happy to receive these records in a variety of ways, including post and email. The easiest and quickest way for you to submit your records however, is via our website. From the home page, hover your mouse over the light blue box 'The Beautiful Burial Ground Project' and click ‘Share your Records’. On this page you will see our recording form, and beneath is a video with a walkthrough on how to complete all the boxes if you are unsure of anything.

What happens to your records

Once you have submitted your records to iRecord they will await a verification check to confirm the accuracy of the records. Following confirmation that the records are valid, they will be forwarded to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas, and anyone, anywhere in the world can see the records you have made. We hope that the records can influence management decisions, encourage more visitors, and promote further recording. Seeing what other people have recorded can encourage another enthusiast to take a look for themselves or to visit new sites where nothing is currently known.

We are working with the NBN to provide a ‘portal’ where you can view records for any burial ground in England and Wales. This portal will be on the NBN Atlas website; anyone that views the NBN Atlas online has access to over 220 million biological records across the UK. This data comes from many different sources, and you can contribute to this pool of records. Have a look at the NBN Atlas website and see what species have been recorded in your area, if there aren’t any – you can be the first one. Our Beautiful Burial Ground Portal will be up and running before the end of 2019.

If you are new to recording wildlife, please have a look on our website and see if we are running a training course near to where you live. In addition, one of the best gifts you can give yourself is to book on to one of the many training sessions run by the Field Studies Council (FSC). With centres across the country there should be opportunities accessible to you. The FSC offers courses of all different lengths, including day, weekend, and week-long. You can learn identification skills for many different species groups such as plants, mosses, moths, butterflies, flies, fungi, mammals, invertebrates and many more.

Your Turn

Now it is over to you. This spring and summer you can make sure there are records for your burial ground. By starting to make records, you can help to raise awareness of how special these sites are, and help protect them for many years to come. The first step is to visit your local churchyard and make a note of all the different plants you can recognise, making sure you also make a note of the date. Following this, you have three options: Post the records to us, email the records to us, or use the recording form on our website. Biological Recording is straightforward, useful and fun!
Churchyards are a true haven for veteran trees, particularly the oldest trees in Britain, the Ancient Yews. Individual yew trees may predate Christianity in Britain and some are over 2,000 years old so predating the birth of Christ. Their presence in churchyards may indicate that the site has been a place of spiritual importance in earlier, pagan times. These trees may be the oldest feature or item of heritage in an area, definitely the oldest living thing. They can be viewed as living monuments.

There are about 800 ancient and veteran yews in the churchyards of England and Wales, three quarters of the British population. Internationally, Britain is a stronghold of veteran yew trees and so these churchyard yews are actually globally important. They really are very special.

Yews can be found in many churchyards across Lichfield Diocese. During the ‘Love your Churchyard’ conference held at Blymhill in February 2017, attendees heard about the specialness of churchyards for wildlife including yews and how you can help to manage this wonderful historic place, currently in your care. This conference inspired many groups such as St Michael’s in Tettenhall to request a visit and a churchyard management plan from Harriet Carty, our diocesan churchyards environmental adviser and director of Caring for God’s Acre. With others, Phil Deeming helps look after St Michael’s churchyard, and their group received a visit in 2017. On visiting Tettenhall, Harriet was delighted to find three fantastic ancient yew trees in need of a little care; a really special feature of this interesting churchyard and worthy of a visit.

As Phil described ‘Harriet advised us on many aspects of the churchyard including the potential of areas to become havens for wildflowers as well as how we could better care for our three yew trees. The high priority task was to remove the dense ivy. The recommended way of doing this is to cut a section out of the lower part of the ivy stem and wait for it to die back before gently removing it.’

St Michael’s is a closed churchyard and is therefore maintained by Wolverhampton City Council who provide both practical and advisory help. As well as managing the trees, the PCC are hoping that the council will help them in restoring wildflowers to an area that had become overgrown with scrub. If your churchyard isn’t closed the local authority is still a good starting point for seeking help with trees, tree officers are usually very helpful and can often visit and advise you. Also, the diocese has its own DAC consultant for trees – Andy Smith so do contact andy@TreeHealthConsulting.co.uk if you have a query about yours. Remember to consult the DAC before undertaking any work on your trees.

To find out information on your veteran or ancient yews take a look at www.ancient-yew.org which has an amazing map and descriptions of these fabulous trees from across the UK.
At this time of year the yellow trumpets of daffodils brighten up even the dullest spring day. Most of what we see are planted or escaped garden varieties but a real treat is to find wild daffodils (*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*).

Once abundant and hand-picked for markets, this beautiful wildflower is now much rarer, having mysteriously declined during the 19th century. This once-widespread species has now acquired a disjointed distribution – for instance it is found mainly in south Devon, pockets of the Black Mountains in Wales, stretches of the Gloucestershire-Herefordshire border country, the Sussex Weald, Farndale in North Yorkshire and the Lake District. Elsewhere, even in seemingly suitable habitat, it only occurs in small patches, many miles apart.

The wild daffodil’s status as a popular flower was particularly celebrated in the area around Newent, Dymock and Ledbury on the Gloucestershire-Herefordshire border which acquired the nickname of ‘The Golden Triangle.’ In the 1930s the Great Western Railway ran ‘Daffodil Specials’, from London for weekend tourists to walk amongst the ‘golden tides’ and to buy fresh bunches at garden gates. Many farmers and orchard-owners used to grow them as a cash-crop, harvested on a ‘Pick Your Own’ basis. At the end of April, the meadows went back to their function of growing hay or fruit.

A 1930’s guide to a village in the Golden Triangle wrote: ‘They are picked by the local women and children and were sold to an agent, who sends them to South Wales, where they find a ready sale for Mothering Sunday and also for Palm Sunday, for many places the old (Welsh) custom of ‘flowering the graves’ on that day still persists. The daffodils are also sent to northern industrial towns’.

As well as a national symbol of Wales, the wild daffodil is also the County Flower of Gloucestershire. In the Language of Flowers it represents hope, folly and unrequited love. It is also known as the ‘Lent lily’ or ‘Easter lily’ since it often blooms and fades within the lenten period.

**How to spot a wild daffodil**

The wild daffodil is smaller than horticultural varieties, with paler petals and a deeper yellow trumpet-like tube. The leaves are grey/green, flattened and around 15mm wide. It is relatively short (30-35cm) and forms clumps which carpet the ground. A top tip by expert Mick Crawley is that unless there are several hundreds of them looking particularly small and washed out, they probably aren’t wild!

If you would like to identify what daffodils you have in your burial ground, a great resource is Mick Crawley’s Daffodil website - www.daffkey.co.uk. It takes you through the different identification characteristics with clear photos to help. However, with so many varieties it is not for the faint hearted!

If you have any daffodils in your burial ground, Liam would love to hear from you so we can add them to the database: liam@cfga.org.uk. We don’t need to know the species, just that they are daffodils.

*Information from Flora Britannica by Richard Mabey*
Stewardship

“All things come from you, and of your own do we give you” (I Chronicles 29:14) are familiar words which remind us of the stewardship of all God’s creation which has been entrusted to us.

The Bible begins with the story of creation and our part in its care. As church communities, we are inheritors of a wealth of resources passed on to us from previous generations. Along with the gospel itself, this inheritance includes our traditions, the goodwill of the community, the church building with all its assets, and, in most cases, a churchyard. It’s good to think of our churchyard as “God’s Acre,” a special parcel of land set aside in God’s service for the living and the dead. Caring for God’s Acre is part of our stewardship, and like many forms of stewardship can be both serious and joyful.

Good stewardship merits good advice which is why, as a diocese, we are in partnership with the national charity, Caring for God’s Acre. There is much information freely available on their website. Their director, Harriet Carty, is our diocesan churchyard environmental adviser, and can be contacted on 01588 673041 or at harriet@cfga.org.uk. There are many ways in which our churchyards can celebrate the abundance of creation. With careful planning, informed by good advice, naturally occurring plants can be allowed to flower whilst the churchyard still looks tidy and well cared for. There are suggestions as to how to encourage local parishioners to become involved in the care of our churchyards. Several of these ideas will be profiled during Love your Burial Ground Week, Sunday 8th to Sunday 16th June.

Over forty churchyards have been entered for this year’s Churchyard Award Scheme. This is a great opportunity to recognise good practice in the many and varied churchyards around the diocese, each with its own challenges and joys. Churchyards are places where people reflect on the big questions of life and death, and churchyards can often lead people to church.

Thank you for your faithful stewardship and all that you do in caring for God’s acre.

Revd Dr David Primrose, Diocesan Director of Transforming Communities