



Burial grounds are crucial lifelines for many species of plants, animals, and fungi but there aren't many records of the wildlife that they contain. Records are important as they help establish the distribution and size of populations, and regular recording helps us detect changes over time. They help to identify the location of rare and locally important species and can be used to help protect species and habitats from harm.

As part of our Beautiful Burial Ground project we are encouraging people to make records of the wildlife they see in burial grounds.

Recording wildlife

To submit your records simply let us know: **What you saw or heard, where you saw it, when you saw it and finally who you are.** Then either e-mail this to: **wildlife@cfga.org.uk**, or have a go at submitting them online using a system called iRecord. Visit our website to find the link to iRecord and help in using it, or contact the office for help and guidance. Once your records have been verified you will be able to see them at burial grounds:nbnatlas.org You can also search this database to see what other people have found in your local site and to look at the records submitted for other sites.



Appealing to many who are interested in local history and the natural world, burial grounds encapsulate the history of communities whilst offering refuge for our native wildlife.

For many people burial grounds are the only locally accessible green space.

Join the movement to keep burial grounds beautiful, accessible and connected to their communities.

Caring for God's Acre works nationally to support groups and individuals to invest, care for, and enjoy churchyards and burial grounds. There are over 20,000 burial grounds in England and Wales, ranging from small rural medieval churchyards to large Victorian city cemeteries, spanning different cultures, religions and centuries. We estimate that these sites are cared for by over 150,000 volunteers.



This old, relatively undisturbed or 'unimproved' grassland is now rare in the UK. Since the 1940s over 97% of flower-rich grassland, that was once widespread in the countryside, has vanished. The ancient grassland found in old burial grounds is a relic of that once common habitat and these sites have become the Noah's Ark for many species.

A churchyard or burial ground may be the most ancient enclosed piece of land in a parish, town or city. The grassland will have been relatively undisturbed, growing and re-seeding naturally for hundreds if not thousands of years. It will also have been both mown for hay and grazed by animals during its time as a burial ground. A benefit of this management over a very long time is a rich diversity of grasses, flowers, fungi, birds and animals.

Something special....

If possible, have areas of grass with varying heights: Close mown grass helps ground-feeding birds like thrushes as well as grassland fungi! such as waxcaps, which make a colourful display in autumn. Medium mown grass is perfect for areas where a tidy appearance and accessibility is needed, but grass doesn't need to be too short. Raise cutting blades to a minimum of 10cms. This enables low-flowering plants like clovers to bloom, which benefits bees and other invertebrates.

Tall grass is left to grow for 12-16 weeks over the spring and summer and will contain a variety of summer meadow plants. Choose areas away from visited memorials for this height of grass. Then sit back and enjoy the display!

Whenever you cut grass of any height it is really important to pick up all the clippings to decrease the nutrients and encourage wildflower-ers.

See CfGA website for mini-films and advice on grassland management.

How we can support you

We have been supporting communities in managing their burial grounds for 20 years and understand what a tough balancing act looking after these unique places can be. There are various ways we can help:

- e-mail support
- chat on the phone
- virtual visits
- education pack for schools
- online beautiful burial ground forum
- site base maps
- memorial recording forms
- wildlife recording advice
- advice sheets
- mini-films
- management briefs
- surveys
- talks and workshops....



How you can help us

We need your help so please become a member of Caring for God's Acre and help keep burial grounds beautiful, accessible and connected to their communities.

Your member support is vital. It helps us to work with individuals and organisations to preserve and protect the wonderful wildlife and the heritage found within burial grounds – forever, for everyone.

By making a small monthly or annual donation you or your group will be joining other like-minded people who care about the conservation of our important and historic burial sites.

You will be directly supporting our conservation work across the UK.

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As a member you will receive:

- An informative and inspiring newsletter twice a year
- A set of beautiful A5 postcards
- A stunning Guide to Wildlife in Burial Grounds Field Studies Council Chart
- Priority booking and 20% discount on events
- Beautiful Burial Ground DVD
- 20% discount on CfGA materials and publications

Contact: info@cfga.org.uk to find out more.

President: HRH The Prince of Wales, KG, KT, GCB, OM
 HLF LOGOPrince of Wales LOGO
 Heritage Fund LOGO



A key to unlock the treasures of churchyards and burial grounds



Old trees

The most significant collection of old trees in Europe is to be found in the churchyards of England and Wales, where approximately 800 yews with an age above 500 years have been recorded.

As well as yews, other species of veteran tree are often found in churchyards. We can help care for veteran trees by gently removing young saplings, as well as rubble, piles of grass cuttings, grave spoil or anything else that is beneath the canopy. Always remove ivy from yew trees. There is no need to remove ivy from other species unless advised to by an arborist.

As well as annual inspections by volunteers, it is prudent to have regular tree surveys by a qualified arborist or tree contractor. Seek advice from the Arboricultural Association or Local Authority when selecting a tree expert. Contact Caring for God's Acre for advice on undertaking your own Volunteer Tree Survey.



Hedges and shrubs

Thick busy hedges and shrubs, with grasses and flowers at their base, are good for birds, insects and small mammals. Trim the hedge every two or three years, preferably in January or February. This gives birds and other animals time to feed on the fruit and berries. Many hedge plants will only flower on 'old wood' i.e. the previous summer's growth; these need at least two years between cuts to flower. Aim to trim half the hedge one year and half the next, or one side one year and the other side the next. Consider traditional hedge-laying as a management method.



Scrub

Scrub describes those areas of low woody growth made up of saplings, woody suckers, low bushes and brambles, which occur in under-managed areas. Scrub can obscure stone features and impinge on grassland. It does, however, provide food and cover for birds, butterflies and small mammals, particularly hedgehogs. So don't clear it all away, instead manage scrub by cutting back new bramble and sapling growth each year to prevent its spread.

Artificial lighting

Scientific evidence suggests that artificial light at night has negative effects on many creatures including amphibians, birds, mammals and insects. Consider the effects when deciding if your building needs to be lit up at night.

Give wildlife a home

Consider putting swift boxes behind the louvres in the church tower. Erect a range of different sized bird boxes, including open fronted ones for Spotted Flycatcher and Robin. Put bat boxes up in trees, (seek advice on location first).

Hedgehogs, amphibians such as frogs and newts and reptiles such as slow worm all love deadwood piles and compost heaps, using them to hunt for snails, beetles, worms and other invertebrates. Create a pile of deadwood in a shady place using logs and twigs of a variety of sizes. Compost grass cuttings.

Lichen sanctuaries

Lichens have been used by humans for centuries – in ancient Rome lichens were used to make purple dye for togas and in the Outer Hebrides lichens are still used to dye wool. Churchyards, chapel yards and cemeteries are of supreme importance for lichen conservation. Of the 2000 UK lichen species, over 700 have been found in burial grounds. Almost half of these are rare and seldom if ever occur in other places. To help preserve them ensure they are not shaded – keep ivy, brambles and long coarse grass at bay. If you need to move any stonework or wood with lichens on, make sure it is repositioned in the same way so the lichens can continue to thrive.



Flower-rich long grass

The ancient grassland found in many old burial grounds is a relic of the once common habitat – flower rich or 'unimproved' grassland. Burial grounds containing this grassland are now the Noah's Ark for many species which were once widespread. Identify areas of grass that can be left to grow and flower for around 12-16 weeks over the spring and summer, then cut and rake off the grass clippings.

Bats

Churches and sensitively managed burial grounds provide important roosting sites for bats and some have provided a safe haven from habitat loss for many generations. Bats need nursery roosts for the young, winter roosts to hibernate and temporary roosts to digest their food and to sleep during the day. As well as buildings, bats use trees, finding shelter in nooks and crannies, particularly in veteran trees. Bat boxes in trees can provide extra roost sites. All bats are protected by law so seek advice before carrying out building or tree work where they could be roosting. The Bat Conservation Trust has great resources to help.

Swifts

Swifts need our help – over the past 15 years numbers of this amazing and beautiful bird have dropped by about 40%. Swifts are only in the UK for around 3 months – between April and August. They are aerodynamic superstars, reaching speeds of 70mph and feeding, drinking and sleeping on the wing. They are in urgent need of nest places. First, ensure any building work does not exclude them, particularly if they nest under the eaves. Second, consider creating artificial cavities to help boost the numbers of nest sites. Towers and spires are particularly suitable! Swift Conservation can help you with this.

Recording memorials

Recording memorials can be a very enjoyable, rewarding experience. Even very worn and difficult gravestones often retain more than anticipated at first glance and will repay the effort taken to decipher them. We have teamed up with Professor Harold Mytum to produce the Discovering and Recording Gravestones guide, pop to our website if you're interested in finding out more.

Welcoming to all

Making your site accessible to everyone involves thinking about what impacts on both physical and non-physical needs of all visitors. Information on how to make your site welcoming to people with all abilities, along with an access checklist is available on our website.

Put your burial ground on the map - let us know what wildlife you have seen

Join our Beautiful Burial Ground project and tell us what wildlife you have seen or heard in your local burial ground. - To submit your records simply let us know: What you saw or heard, where you saw it, when you saw it and finally who you are! Then either e-mail this to wildlife@cfga.org.uk or have a go at submitting your records online using a system called iRecord, (check our website for the link and instructions on how to do this). Encourage visitors to make a note of anything that they spot too.