



CHURCHYARDS & CEMETERIES

1. INTRODUCTION

Churchyards and cemeteries are places where people are laid to rest or people come to remember those who are close to them. Churchyards can be very ancient and were often areas of an old hay meadow and are likely never to have been ploughed, fertilised or sprayed. They can therefore represent relics of former countryside or 'unimproved' pasture, supporting a variety of plants that are now rare in the surrounding countryside such as devil's-bit scabious and betony. City centre churchyards can often provide refuges for wildlife and bring solace into an otherwise busy, noisy environment.



Oldberrow © J O'Dell

Associated habitats can include veteran trees (especially yews), hedges, ponds, ditches, ivy-clad walls and unusual tree specimens. The variety of stone used in boundary walls, gravestones and the church itself provides habitat for a range of mosses, ferns, lichens and drought tolerant plants. They are particularly important for lichen species because of the rarity of stone outcrops elsewhere in the local landscape.

In this action plan the churchyards incorporates the church, other buildings, graves and walls as well as grass and trees. These habitats are the responsibility of the churchwardens with all management works to them requiring Diocesan permission. Churchyard management is normally carried out either by volunteers from the church congregation or by a gardener employed and paid for by the Parochial Church Council. Cemeteries and crematoria are usually much larger and are normally the responsibility of the local authority but can include similar structures to those found in churchyards.

2. OUR OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

	Target
A. To raise awareness of the importance, rarity and fragility of the biodiversity within churchyards and cemeteries and overcome a perception of untidiness and disrespect.	2004-2015
B. To encourage maintenance of / improvement of condition of 50 churchyards and cemeteries by advising on management.	by 2008
C. To investigate churchyards as a source of local provenance seed for spreading into the wider countryside, especially in connection with the re-creation of species-rich hay meadows through agri-environment schemes.	by 2006

- D. To ensure that any remaining species-rich churchyards and cemeteries are considered for designation as SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) or SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) by referring to 1984/5 churchyard survey and Habitat Biodiversity Audit and any resurvey work. by 2008
- E. To encourage their use as an educational resource. 2004-2015

ASSOCIATED HABITAT PLANS

- Lowland Neutral Grassland
- Roadside Verges
- Lowland Calcareous Grassland
- The Built Environment

ASSOCIATED SPECIES PLANS

- Rare Bumblebees
- Song Thrush
- Barn Owl
- Bats

3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

There are no national BAP objectives and targets for Churchyards and Cemeteries. However, the distinctive threats and management issues associated with this land use make it worthy of a separate action plan.

4. CURRENT STATUS

In 1984 it was estimated that there were 759 'churches' in Warwickshire Vice County 38, of which 283 had enough churchyard to warrant a survey. A survey was carried out during 1984/85 and the results are available in the Warwickshire Biological Record Centre in the County Museum.

4.1 Legal and Policy Status

Nationally a few churchyards have been legally designated as SSSIs and some churchyards have become nature reserves. These usually have well-written management plans. It is more common for a churchyard to be designated a SINC or equivalent, for example in 1995 10% of Suffolk churchyards were SINC. (This was achieved through the presence of a full-time Churchyards Officer, employed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Other counties/vice-counties could potentially reflect this level of recognition and protection, given sufficient resources.)

Churches and churchyards can also provide habitats for a number of statutorily protected species such as bats, badgers and reptiles. Relevant legislation includes various schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 as well as the Habitats Directive; for example, bats are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and Schedule 2 of the Conservation(Natural Habitats,etc.) Regulation 1994(Regulation 38).

4.2 Current Factors Affecting The Habitat

- **Size.** Most churchyards are relatively small which may affect population sizes of certain groups or species. Cemeteries tend to be larger.
- **Attitude** towards 'untidiness'. There can be ignorance of the value of tall herb and longer grass for a wide diversity of insect and bird life, with grass areas often being mowed too closely or subject to the use of chemical fertilisers. The misinterpretation of what is meant by the Rules of the 'Best Kept Churchyard' Competition can encourage a short lawn, bedding plant type approach with nothing 'untidy' around.
- **Lack of resources/volunteers/equipment** to carry out the final cut and rake off grass. This can be a very labour intensive exercise but is important since leaving cuttings can lead to gradual nutrient enrichment of the soil. In the long-term it will favour the growth of more vigorous grasses rather than fine grasses and flowering herbs.
- **Gravestones** make cutting very time consuming and the grass can become tussocky in the immediate vicinity.
- **Introduction of inappropriate plants**, such as memorial trees that shade out valuable grassland or plants that compete or (e.g. cultivated *primulas*) hybridise with native species
- **Insufficient management guidelines.** There is sometimes little control over the planting of inappropriate species, the use of pesticides (especially herbicides) and removal of rubbish from tended graves and headstones
- **Cleaning lichens off gravestones.** Some gardening firms advertise this as a service.
- **Lack of awareness/education** of how the churchyard or cemetery can both serve its primary purpose and also be managed in a way that is sensitive to its inherent biodiversity value.

5. CURRENT LOCAL ACTION

- The 'Living Churchyard' Project aims to encourage the management of churchyards in a wildlife friendly way that promotes community involvement and brings people closer to creation. The project was initiated in 1987 at the Arthur Rank Centre and now aims to broaden its aims to the Midland area. The project can provide help and guidance in the production of churchyard management plans and location of species experts to undertake wildlife surveys.
- The 'Best Kept Churchyard' Competition encourages some wildlife conservation. However, it must be remembered that much of the area is still tended by relatives and guardians and sensitive handling will be required to introduce 'untidiness'. Their needs must be accepted and incorporated into any churchyard's / cemetery's management.
- The 'God's Acre' project aims to carry out surveys of churchyard wildlife and to produce a management plan, with an advisor working together with

interested parties. However, limited resources are a major constraint. The project set up an award scheme called the God's Acre Award for churchyard conservation. This project has worked well in Lincolnshire and some lessons could be learnt from this and applied to our region.

- A number of churchyards around the sub-region, manage part or all of their grounds for wildlife, many working to existing management plans, developed with the support of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust or the 'Living Churchyard' Project. Examples include Offchurch and Oldberrow - see below, also Barston, Temple Balsall, Studley, Lea Marston, Alderminster and Wootton Wawen.
- Local authorities are responsible for the maintenance of many cemeteries, these are managed under contract. London Road Cemetery (Coventry) has an impressive selection of trees, good bird population and areas of wildlife. Oakley Wood, managed by Warwick District Council, has an extensive area of open space and associated woodlands.
- At Offchurch the churchyard has been divided so that conservation can take place in an old area and the grass is neatly mown where interments take place.
- Oldberrow churchyard is a perfect example of old unimproved neutral grassland and is managed accordingly. Two requests for local provenance seed have recently been received and one of the projects is now in progress: hay from the churchyard has been spread on a paddock belonging to a local farm in DEFRA's agri-environment scheme.

6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS (some dates amended – Core Steering Group – Feb 2008)

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By	Meets objective
Policy & Legislation				
PL1. Ensure that all relevant habitat policy is included in Local Planning Documents (see ODPM Planning Policy Statement PPS9)	LBAPSG	NE WM WWT	2004- 2015	C
PL2. Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designation as an SSSI.	NE	WWT WM	2006	D
PL3. Ensure that any site meeting the relevant criteria is considered for designation as a SINC.	WSP	WWT NE WM LAs	2006	D

PL4. Incorporate the biodiversity importance of cemetery and crematoria into relevant LA strategies.	LBAPSG	NE LAs WWT	2006	D
PL5. Dioceses should draw up a policy for protecting churchyards as SINC.	LBAPSG	NE WWT DACs	2005	B, D
Site / Species Safeguard & Management				
SM1. Actively promote that all SINC churchyards/cemeteries have management plans.	WSP	NE LAs	2006	B
Advisory				
A1. Promote existing / develop good practice guidelines undertaking churchyard, cemetery and crematoria management.	CDEG	LAs DACs	2005	A, B
A2. Appoint an 'ecologist' to the Local Diocesan Advisory Committees.	LBAPSG	DACs	2006	A
A3. Support and revitalise the 'Caring for God's Acre) initiative to promote good practice.	CDEG		2005	A, E
Research & Monitoring				
RM1. Repeat the 1984 churchyard survey to determine the extent of losses and gains in wildlife value.	WBRC	WWT	2008	C, D
RM2 Enter existing and future information on churchyards, cemeteries and crematoria habitat onto a database.	HBA		2005- 2015	D
RM3. Involve specialist groups in survey and monitoring work to cover invertebrates, bats, herpetofauna etc.	WBRC	WWT WART WBG BC	2008	A
RM4. Survey other churchyards, cemeteries and crematoria.	HBA	WWT LAs DACs	2008	C, D
Communication, Education & Publicity				
CP1. Produce a good practice leaflet with information about good quality churchyard, cemeteries and crematoria sites that can be visited in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.	WWT	DACs	2008	E
CP2. Work with local schools to encourage them to use their local churchyard and cemetery resource for environmental education purposes.	LBAPSG	DACs WWT	2004- 2015	A, E

CP3. Establish an annual “Wildlife in Churchyards Day” with a programme of events as good examples of well managed churchyards, in spring / early summer to demonstrate the value of churchyard conservation to local communities, schools etc.	CDEG	WWT LAs DACs	2006	A, B, E
CP4. Where appropriate, encourage churchyard and cemetery managers to erect wildlife interpretation boards and promote management plans.	LBAPSG	WWT DACs	2005- 2015	A, E
CP5. Get more volunteers involved by turning the final cut of the year into a community event.	LBAPSG	DACs CW	2004- 2015 annual	A, B

Abbreviations: CDEG – Coventry Diocesan Environmental Group, CW – Church warden, DACs - Diocesan Advisory Committee, NE – Natural England, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit, LAs – Local Authorities, LBAPSG – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group, SINC – Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, WART – Warwickshire Amphibian & Reptile Team, WBG – Warwickshire Bat Group, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WM – Warwickshire Museum, WSP – Wildlife Sites Project, WWT – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

7. REFERENCES (see LBAP Bibliography web page)

8. FURTHER INFORMATION (see separate Links web page for links to web sites)

Bat Conservation Trust
Flora Locale – Knowledge Zone

Caring for God’s Acre, CFGA, 6 West St., Leominster, Herefordshire HR6 8ES.
Tel. 01568 611154. Email: info@cfga.fsnet.co.uk

Plantlife International, 14 Rolleston St., Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 1DX: Send A5
SAE for leaflet: *Churchyard Lecanactis: old walls can harbour secrets (lichens)*.

Parker, M. (1989) *The Living Churchyard*. Natural World.

Buglife (2004) Information on the habitat-management requirements of key
invertebrates CD-Rom £34.99 from Beverley Doyle by email at:
beverley.doyle@buglife.org.uk

Norfolk Wildlife Trust Churchyard Scheme. For information sheets on
managing grasslands in churchyards contact Andrina Walmsly :
Tel. 01603 625540

‘Divine Inspiration’ in Coventry is a unique project funded by English Heritage and
the Heritage Lottery Fund. It enables churches in the Diocese to look at how they
can improve their welcome and publishes a monthly newsletter ‘*The Gatekeeper*’.
www.divine-inspiration.org.uk

9. CONTACT

Jane O’Dell, Warwickshire Museum. Tel. 01926 418060/ 412481