



# WELCOME TO OUR CHURCHYARD



Colossians 1:16 says, 'by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible'. Churches can be one of the best places we have left to study not just the visible natural world – but also the invisible. The land outside our buildings is often teeming with life.

## **PLACES FOR WILDLIFE TO LIVE AND WILDFLOWERS TO GROW**

Churchyards make an important contribution to the biodiversity of the country and are important places for wild flowers and wildlife. As the countryside in Britain becomes more industrialised and urbanised, there are fewer places for wildlife to live and wildflowers to grow. But there are areas in every village, town and even city that are holding out against the onslaught. These are churchyards, and in some parts of the country they are the only protected eco-systems in their area where remnants of the local flora and fauna can survive.

By protecting the churchyard as a sacred eco-system, we are ensuring that birds, reptiles, insects and bats can thrive. This is an example of restoring something that has always existed – the local churchyard – as an embodiment of the church's core teachings about respecting nature.

## **SAFEGUARDING VALUABLE HABITAT**

The grassland found in churchyards is unlikely to have been fertilised or reseeded and is therefore often rich in wildflowers which are now so scarce elsewhere. Careful management of all or part of the churchyard to favour these wildflowers, offers a unique opportunity to safeguard this valuable habitat in a place where it can be enjoyed by parishioners and visitors alike. For example. From February to May, the churchyard is full of snowdrops, crocus and bluebells, which create stunning carpets of colour. If cutting takes place before these plants have had time to die back naturally, they will not thrive the following year.



## SPACES FOR NATURE

Our churchyards are vital spaces for nature and they've been here a really long time. Most churchyards and cemeteries date from well before the widespread losses to our natural heritage occurred, and so are arks for species and habitats going back through the centuries. Some burial sites may have been founded on older pre-Christian sacred sites whilst many younger burial grounds such as the Victorian cemeteries have been in existence for over 100 years. The management of burial grounds hasn't really changed over time. Apart from grave digging, burial grounds are undisturbed, timeless sanctuaries where plant and animal populations have increased. Longevity of management is rare elsewhere, and in habitat terms is important

## NATURAL HERITAGE

Burial grounds have a wide range of plants and animals and there are three features that are really outstanding:

### **Yew trees**

Yews are associated with life, death and immortality and have been planted in burial grounds and holy sites for centuries. As a result, three quarters of the UK's ancient or veteran yews are now found in the churchyards of England and Wales. These are the oldest living things in the UK - many are over 500 with some over 2,000 years old and there is no known limit to how long they can live

### **Lichens**

If you are interested in lichens, then look in your local churchyard. Boundary walls, monuments, trees and grassland may all host lichens which may have been growing for hundreds of years. Have a look at them through a magnifying glass; you'll enter a fascinating miniature world.

### **Species-rich grassland**

This habitat has decreased by about 97% nationally in the last 60 years but is present in many churchyards and a haven for many native and threatened wildlife species such as hedgehogs, bats, foxes, lizards and many moths and butterflies.

## A MATTER OF FINANCE

Maintaining a churchyard which is environmentally rich and a place of peace and sanctuary for all is a huge financial commitment for a church and we are often reliant upon donations and the help of volunteers. If you would like to be involved with maintaining or protecting our churchyard, do get in touch.

