

# The Living Churchyard

Diocese of St Albans

# History of the scheme

- 1980 Developed in partnership, operated from Arthur Rank Centre
- 1998 Funding ran out
- Caring for God's Acre: grant-funded charity in Hereford diocese
- 2006 CfGA national conference and applied for lottery funding to roll out new national scheme
- 2006 Diocesan Environment Conference

# Objective

To help churches manage their churchyard in a wildlife-friendly way, while being sensitive to the needs of all users.

# Why?

- Create valuable habitats
- 2010 is International Year of Biodiversity
- God's presence in creation
- Live in harmony – an example to the wider community
- Education – especially children
- Aesthetically pleasing

# United Nations' International Year of Biodiversity

The CofE is one of 300 UK partners who have joined the global campaign involving almost 1000 organisations celebrating “the variety of life on Earth ....essential for sustaining the natural living systems or ecosystems that provide us with food, fuel, health, wealth, and other vital services.”

# Importance of churchyards

- Grassland is usually the most important feature in old churchyards
- Protected species, primarily bats
- Lichens – often over 50 species, some only found in churchyards
- Veteran trees
- Nest site for birds: barn owl, swift, swallow
- Habitat for invertebrates

# Importance of Grassland

- Remnant of old pasture containing species which were once common – since 1940 decline of > 95% of area
- Refuge – 50% of Norfolk's population of some species is in churchyards
- Species lost from countryside due to intensification of farming – use of herbicides and fertilisers, monocultures
- Lost from road verges due to run-off from fields, vehicle emissions, inappropriate cutting, salting
- Native flowers important for many insects

# Grassland Management

- Frequent mowing prevents flowering
- Too short will destroy important species
- Leaving clippings reduces the number of species and increases the rank grass
- Better to cut regularly and not too short than not cutting or leaving long clippings
- Don't use chemicals



# The Benefits

- Allows you and the insects to enjoy the flowers....food for bats & birds
- Allows plants to seed and spread
- Long grass required for many butterflies to breed, also grasshoppers
- Long grass is habitat for voles....owls
- Increases biodiversity

# Trees

- Aesthetics
- Nest site and food for birds
- Roost for bats
- Attract insects - food for birds & bats
- Site for lichens and mosses
- Understorey provides another habitat
- Veteran trees important historically

# Hedges

- Another habitat
- Food and shelter
- Don't cut during the bird nesting season  
i.e. March to end of August
- Maintain as an A shape i.e. wider at the  
base
- Better still – lay the hedge

# Stonework

- Habitat for lichens, mosses and ferns
- Lichens should not be removed
- Mosses may require removal from buildings if the church fabric is at risk – not always the case
- Some native species of plant almost restricted to walls e.g. navelwort

# Compost Heaps

- Grass cuttings and other plant material that rots easily
- Home for fungi, fed on by invertebrates which are eaten by toads & slow worms
- Over-wintering site for grass snakes
- Site away from base of trees and water because of nutrient run-off

# Management Principles

- 1<sup>st</sup> Principle

DO NO HARM

- Don't use chemicals
- Don't leave long cuttings lying
- Don't cut too short

# Remember!

A Faculty or Archdeacon's Letter is required before

- Felling or major pruning of trees
- Planting of trees
- Removal/introduction of hedges and walls
- Creation of paths
- ....and lots more! Check with the DAC

# Management Principles

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Principle

## IMPROVE YOUR MANAGEMENT

- Leave areas of grass uncut for 2 months, then cut and rake off
- Rake more/all the cuttings off the regularly mown areas
- Leave a strip at a boundary, cut and rake off in October



# How to Improve Grassland Management

- Survey and map what is present
- Consider your resources – tools & people
- Look for areas with a few special plants, or many more common plants, which are not in sensitive locations
- Start small
- Inform people what is happening
- Be prepared to amend your plans

# Types of Management

- Spring flowers: cut once in Feb/March then leave uncut until mid June
- Summer flowers: cut until mid May then leave uncut until end of July
- Butterfly & insect: cut once in mid July
- Amphibian and slow worm: cut once in October. Best around edge of churchyard.
- ALWAYS RAKE OFF THE CUTTINGS

# Improve your churchyard

## Install bird, bat and insect boxes

- No faculty required if fixed to a tree
- Faculty may be required if fixed to a building
- Suitable for any churchyard whatever its location and current wildlife value
- Bird boxes with a CCTV camera now available for about £100 – watch what is going on inside!

# Improve your churchyard

Have a compost heap

- Grass cuttings and other plant material that rots easily
- Site away from base of trees and water because of nutrient run-off

Create a log pile

- Don't pile the logs against the base of trees

# Improve your churchyard

Ivy is one of the latest flowering plants and provides nectar for insects and berries for birds

- allow it to climb where it is not damaging the fabric or trees
- prevent it from spreading over further gravestones as it will destroy the lichens

# Enjoy your churchyard!

- Moth evening
- Bat walk
- Dawn chorus & breakfast
- Lichen tour
- Outdoor service celebrating creation
- Lots of resources available for children's events
- Open Day for the community
- Create a nature trail

# Find out more

- DAC leaflet
- Environment section of diocesan website  
[www.stalbans.anglican.org/Mission/Environment](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/Mission/Environment)
- Visit other churchyards
- Hereford diocese's website  
[www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk)
- 'Wildlife in church and churchyard' Nigel Cooper
- Contact Judith Evans  
environment@stalbans.anglican.org