

# Churchyards

## God's Acre—churchyard conservation in Lincolnshire

Churchyards and cemeteries can provide a variety of habitats, supporting a wide range of species. Many older churchyards contain grassland which is the remnant of ancient meadows, supporting species lost or in decline in the surrounding countryside. The church and associated buildings itself may contain roosting or breeding sites for bats, swifts and barn owls, whilst the stone of the church, headstones and memorials often support a rich diversity of lichen, liverwort, moss and fern flora. Mature trees are often found within the site or form part of the boundary, many of which are specimen yew trees.

Due to their nature and location within rural settlements, churchyards can provide a refuge for habitats and species lost from the surrounding farmed landscape; whilst in urban settings, they can provide a sanctuary for wildlife in areas

lacking other types of greenspace. They can provide the local population, schools and youth groups with an easily accessible open space to visit, explore and use for quiet reflection – a key role for churchyards and cemeteries. Churchyards and cemeteries have also been the focus of increasing interest in genealogy and attract many visitors and tourists researching family history.

A number of these churchyards now include areas managed for wildlife and quiet contemplation, and are often well used by local groups and visitors where access is welcoming and information is readily available. The provision of a seat and a notice board with information about churchyard management is of huge benefit for the church community group in spreading the message to locals and visitors alike that churchyards are available for everyone to enjoy.

## Churchyard management

Management should take account of, and be sympathetic to, the primary purpose of the site and its main users, whilst ideally taking account of the wide range of habitats and species that these sites support. If you are interested in encouraging wildlife in your local churchyard, here are a few simple steps to follow:

- Contact the church members – the Parochial Church Council or similar – to discuss the idea.
- Once agreement has been reached you will need to survey the churchyard to find out what exists already – trees, hedgerows, grassland etc. (see overleaf).
- To find out the best management for churchyard habitats, check out the Caring for God's Acre factsheets (see overleaf).
- Check what existing management takes place – often this will be done by volunteers or via a contractor. Consult
- with church members and draw up a new management plan/programme that will benefit the wildlife within the churchyard.
- Check if any permissions are required before undertaking any work and putting the plan into action. Remember, it is always best to start slowly, using available resources.
- Always display the plan for people to see what is happening, include a notice in the local community newsletter or church news bulletin, and/or put notices in the churchyard where something may have changed – tree felling or a change in grass cutting.
- Monitor the management to see if it is working – often this can take a year or more if a change in grass cutting is to encourage wildflowers.
- Review management and make changes if necessary.

## Next steps

Once you have a Management Plan that is achievable by the church community group, why stop there! Some of the tasks may have included volunteer working parties to clear scrub, often revealing hidden headstones, monuments or other interesting features.

Often, as the management has changed so will the look and feel of the churchyard. More people may be visiting the churchyard – some to research history, some to discover the different habitats, some for quiet reflection and most to have a look at what has been happening! Remember to also have a notice up – whether in the church porch, notice board or as a stand alone board in the churchyard – to explain to people why things may have changed and future plans. This will help inform people of what is happening and hopefully encourage them to get involved in some way.

Look at ways of encouraging people to visit, become involved or take an interest. This may be through installing a new bench or seating area, erecting a notice board, doing talks and walks round the churchyard, by creating a display in the church or producing a small leaflet.

There is a set of God's Acre Activity Sheets available, created to help families, schools and youth groups discover the secrets of churchyards. These are available to download and print off from the website [www.lincswolds.org.uk/discovering/gods-acre-project](http://www.lincswolds.org.uk/discovering/gods-acre-project) – all you need is a sunny day, some good company, a few hours, possibly a picnic and a few essential items (listed in the activity sheets).

## Mapping and surveys

This can sound quite scary but it is a simple process – start first with a map of the churchyard, either a hand drawn one or from the internet, which should include:

- The churchyard boundaries, paths and outline of the church.
- Orientation – a north arrow will do – and surrounding land uses – roads, houses, gardens, arable fields, etc.
- Ideally an estimation of the area – can be simply done by pacing the boundary and between key features.
- Next mark on the different uses of the churchyard – new burials, memorial garden, older headstones, flower borders, benches, compost heap etc.

Next comes the survey – this can be started by simply looking at different features in the churchyard, marking on the map and listing them alongside:

- Boundaries – are they walls, hedgerows etc., and what species are in the hedgerow.
- Trees and shrubs – location with a note of species.
- Areas containing grassland – note whether they are cut short regularly, left to grow longer and cut less often or perhaps only cut once a year.
- Any flowers of interest should also be noted – snowdrop clusters, bluebells, primroses, ox-eye daisies etc. – outside of defined borders. This can be done from memory or by asking others in the community.
- Gravestones, stonework and monuments of particular interest – perhaps an unusual type of stone, engraving, family group etc. or a war memorial.

- Make a note of any animals, birds, insects, butterflies you may see whilst you are in the churchyard.
- Any other feature – clumps of ivy, overgrown areas, nettle patches. This type of area is vital for wildlife if managed correctly but can look untidy and take over if left unmanaged.

Remember, depending on the season, you will see different things and may not realise other things are there! Always make a note of things you see and when you saw them, adding to the list and plan to make sure everything is noted. Ask other people to help, especially those in a local gardening group, Wildlife Trust group, school, youth group or local history society to help discover the treasures in your local churchyard – plants, animals, geology, stone carving, epitaphs and ancient monuments.

Further advice and information is available from the Caring for God's Acre Project based in Hereford Diocese, which inspired the Lincolnshire God's Acre Project.

A series of factsheets are available as downloads from their website on key features of churchyards and how to manage them, along with how to survey and map churchyards and example explanatory notices.

[www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

### Find out more—publications...

Here is a list of some publications which we feel may be able to help you identify species and features and some which are of wider general interest linked with churchyards.

Field Studies Council charts. *These simple 8 and 12 page laminated fold-out charts are extremely popular - subjects include grasses, churchyard lichens and bats.* Priced between £2.50 - £4.00, visit [www.field-studies-council.org/publications](http://www.field-studies-council.org/publications) to see the full range.

The Wild Flower Key by Francis Rose. ISBN 0723251754.

*A very good plant identification book which includes vegetative keys for plants not in flower.*

Reader's Digest Nature Lover's Library – Birds, Trees and Shrubs, Butterflies and Insects, Animals, Water Life and Wild Flowers. *A nice series of 6 which will give you extra information such as folklore related to species.*

Wildlife in Church and Churchyard: Plants, Animals and their Management by Nigel Cooper.

*How to work with nature to enhance your parish church environs.*

The Churchyards Handbook by Thomas Cocke. ISBN 0715175831 (4<sup>th</sup> edition).

*A guide to good maintenance, including information on law, wildlife and archaeology.*

Wildlife in the Churchyard – The Plants and Animals of God's Acre. Francesca Greenoak with illustrations by Claire Roberts. ISBN 0316904996 (1992 edition).

*Whilst not a field guide, this is an inspiration and well illustrated - worth looking out for in second hand bookshops.*

### Find out more—contacts...

See overleaf for churchyard-related contacts.

For general nature conservation enquiries you can contact:

#### Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

[www.lincstrust.org.uk](http://www.lincstrust.org.uk)  
[info@lincstrust.co.uk](mailto:info@lincstrust.co.uk)  
01507 526667

#### Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership

[www.glnp.org.uk](http://www.glnp.org.uk)  
[info@glnp.org.uk](mailto:info@glnp.org.uk)  
01507 528398



## Further information and contacts for God's Acre in Lincolnshire

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### Permissions and Health & Safety

Works such as installing benches, tree felling, tree planting etc. require permission from the Archdeacon and/or a Faculty which is a legal planning document from the Diocese.

The DAC Secretary is very pleased to hear of any questions or plans at an early date to give advice. If in doubt seek advice.

Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC)  
Tel: 01522 504047

### Archaeology & History

Remember to check with your local library as a starting point for information on your churchyard.

Lincs to the Past [www.lincstothepast.com](http://www.lincstothepast.com)  
A website of records covering items held in Lincolnshire's Historic Environment Record, Archives, Libraries, Museums and Tennyson Research Centre.

Lincolnshire Archives  
Tel: 01522 782040

Lincolnshire County Council  
Historic Environment Records  
Tel: 01522 782070  
[www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/historic-environment/historic-environment-record](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/historic-environment/historic-environment-record)

North East Lincolnshire Council  
Historic Environment Record  
Tel: 01472 3234213  
[www.nelincs.gov.uk/planning-and-development/heritage-and-conservation](http://www.nelincs.gov.uk/planning-and-development/heritage-and-conservation)

North Lincolnshire Council  
Historic Environment Record  
Tel: 01724 867822  
[www.northlincs.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/historic-environment-record](http://www.northlincs.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/historic-environment-record)

Heritage Gateway  
Information of both local and national heritage  
[www.heritagegateway.org.uk](http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk)

Heritage Lincolnshire  
Holders of a wide range of resources to support research including parish files, maps, books and reports  
Tel: 01529 461499  
[www.heritagelincs.org](http://www.heritagelincs.org)

### Trees

For advice on tree management, please contact your local authority Tree Officer in the first instance or:

Lincolnshire County Council  
Tel: 01522 782070  
[www.lincolnshire.gov.uk](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk)

### Bats

Bats have been associated with churches for hundreds of years and are protected by law.

Free bat surveys and advice for churches are available from the Lincolnshire Bat Group:  
c/o Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust  
Tel: 01507 526667  
e-mail: [info@lincsbatgroup.co.uk](mailto:info@lincsbatgroup.co.uk)  
[www.lincsbatgroup.co.uk](http://www.lincsbatgroup.co.uk)

### Lichens

Often overlooked, lichens are a vital indicator of the health of the wider environment.

The Field Studies Council Guides are invaluable in identification (see previous page).

### Geology & Stonework

Lincolnshire Geodiversity Group  
c/o Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership  
Tel: 01507 528398  
[glnp.org.uk/our-services/geodiversity-strategy](http://glnp.org.uk/our-services/geodiversity-strategy)

### For any other enquires, including grants, interpretation etc., please contact:

Diocese of Lincoln  
[www.lincoln.anglican.org](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org)

Open Churches Officer – supporting and encouraging church community groups  
Tel: 01522 504025

Historic Churches Support Officer – giving advice, ideas and information with church buildings  
Tel: 01522 504028

Churches Together in All Lincolnshire  
Tel: 01522 504071  
[www.ctal.org.uk](http://www.ctal.org.uk)



## Achieving more for nature

Your hard work contributes to a larger plan for biodiversity in Greater Lincolnshire so please tell us about your achievements. Our churchyard and cemetery action plan has a target to achieve positive conservation management for 100 churchyards and cemeteries in our area by 2020. For more information please follow the link below.

[glnp.org.uk/our-services/nature-strategy/urban](http://glnp.org.uk/our-services/nature-strategy/urban)

If you would like to tell us about what you are doing for your churchyard or cemetery please contact the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership at:

[info@glnp.org.uk](mailto:info@glnp.org.uk) or 01507 528398



## Share your records - Get involved with recording

Burial grounds are poorly understood in terms of their biodiversity relative to the wider countryside. They are not seen as places that can be visited without permission and their interest is often not recognised as a result – despite a few exceptional sites being known. The Beautiful Burial Ground project will make it easier for recorders to submit records for burial grounds, display summaries of burial ground data, use the data to highlight sites worthy of recognition as Local Wildlife Sites, and display data on the National Biodiversity Network Atlas and Church Heritage Record.

[www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/recording-2/share-your-records](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/get-involved/recording-2/share-your-records)

