

## Case study: All Saints Ecclesall

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### **Name of project or group**

All Saints Ecclesall Churchyard Project. Case study by Olivia Redfearn, July 2022

### **What actions for nature did your group want to take and why?**

As All Saints Ecclesall is a functioning graveyard, it is important that there is a balance between the maintenance of an active site while also encouraging wildlife and diversity. In 2007 a vegetation survey was done in order to “inform management decisions that aim to enhance wildlife in the Churchyard”.

As a result of the survey’s findings, each area is managed in a way that is suitable to the environment. The woodland area is managed with minimal human intervention around nesting seasons as we recognise the value of the habitats that the woodland provides to both birds and mammals. Other areas with newer graves are managed with a combination of spring meadow and summer meadow cutting regimes to encourage the growth of a variety of seasonal flowering plants and to prevent deterioration to scrub.

Cut grass is left in situ for a week or two to allow any seeds to drop out, but then is raked up (avoiding “scalping”) and removed, which has the effect of removing nutrients from the soil, again encouraging greater species diversity. One grassland area was identified as having the potential to provide a suitable habitat for plants of botanical interest. This area is left uncut all year which also serves to provide over-wintering areas for invertebrates.

There are also about a dozen bird boxes installed around the site including swift boxes on the church building.



Photo credit: All Saints Ecclesall

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### What resource or support did you use?

- Vegetation survey to inform management decisions - Richard Hall, 2007
- Management of Grasslands in Churchyards- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- The Lowland Grassland Management Handbook - Natural England website
- Caring for God's Acre resources website and online conference.
- A diverse set of interests and knowledge within the church congregation.



Photo credit: All Saints Ecclesall

### How did you empower or involve others?

All Saints Ecclesall is blessed with a fantastic team of diligent volunteers who frequently meet to maintain the churchyard.

We also welcome the contributions of church members with a variety of expertise who are able to help inform management decisions. The mapping and photography of the churchyard has provided lots of roles for people to be involved at different levels. This has included the contribution of Duke of Edinburgh volunteers.

Caring for God's Acre resources are available to church members who can use them as a framework for identifying and recording species. Several members of the team attended the Caring for God's Acre conference which helped illustrate the importance of churchyards as a space for biodiversity.

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### How did it make you feel?

Working with nature is a rewarding experience for those involved, particularly when the result of management strategies can be seen.

### What changes have there been as a result of your actions?

Many more flowers and insects have been present in the areas which are no longer mown continuously - most notably, the wild orchids in the area left uncut all year round. The uncut flowering grassland is visually appealing to visitors - it offers a scenic place of reflection. The bird boxes are well occupied (70% approx) as the relatively undisturbed woodland provides a popular habitat and opportunity for food.

### Have you had any memorable nature encounters while doing this?

A memorable nature encounter for one team member was finding five squirrels sheltering in the owl box when it was cleaned out in February. Also, the badgers excavated a massive new hole, and the team had to move all the soil they shovelled over a gravestone.



Photo credit: M Quincy



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### How have your actions been shared or inspired others?

We have contributed an event to the Heritage open days which has included a nature tour of the churchyard to visitors. Caring for God's Acre resources are available to church members to record species.

There are also leaflets available giving information about the churchyard and signs labelling tree species in the graveyard.

### What's next?

We are currently in the process of digitising our graveyard records which has included the mapping of trees and plant species. This will create a visually organised and accessible way to look at and record distribution of species to help inform management decisions. We are hoping to use this site to record the location of bird boxes. This will progress further as Caring for God's Acre works with Atlantic Geomatics to improve the tools to do this.

We are also looking into the possibility of using the bell tower to play Swift calls to encourage the nesting of Swifts in the recently installed Swift boxes.