

The churchyard during 2018

Conservation Measures

In 2018 the churchyard grass was left uncut for the majority of the summer to ascertain what natural plants were growing and where. As a result, areas of wild flowers were left to grow, seed and increase. Also, several species of butterfly not previously seen were noted, (the Small copper – sorrel and dock egg layers, the Meadow brown and the Speckled wood –both various grass egg layers). Juvenile crickets were found in two separate locations and a thriving nest of the small bumble bee *Bombus pratorum* was observed in long grass in the area outside the hall kitchen window.

In 2019 only two specific areas of grass will be left uncut, but they will be cut if and when they become too untidy. These are: a single strip parallel to the north-side holly hedge where considerable work has been done by the Gardening Club to clear brambles and saplings thus ensuring the strip will be tidier and, a rectangular area to the east of the hall which will include the site of last year's bees' nest.

The grass 'nature walkway' will be maintained between the Lych Gate and the Park Road gates, parallel to Park Road and, where possible, further local wild flowers will be introduced into this area. A considerable quantity of seven-spot ladybirds waking from hibernation in the church tower were swept up at the end of March and released outside. Four stag beetles were seen during the summer and a stag beetle grub disinterred during gardening activity was safely reburied in the rotting beech stump near the war memorial.

Wild flower seeds were planted by the Cubs in the wild flower meadow area in the late spring but, owing to the summer drought, these failed to germinate. Also, as a result of the severe conditions caused by the drought a pair of nesting blackbirds in the north-west churchyard and their nestlings were lost despite uncovering two discarded rectangular stone urns from a shrubbery and installing them as bird baths in the blackbirds' foraging area. These two water resources are, however, being maintained and evidence of small bird use, including a wren, has been seen. Three of the wooden nest boxes donated by parishioners and used by blue tits were predated by the greater spotted woodpeckers which inhabit the churchyard. However, a pair of Nuthatches nested successfully in an old woodpecker nest hole in the sweet chestnut tree in the car park. Future nest boxes will need to have metal ring guards fixed at the nest box entrance holes. Unwanted saplings have been regularly cut back and, where possible, removed. Various clumps of the invasive broad- leaved sedge have also been dug out.

During the summer drought new trees and vulnerable plants were kept watered by volunteers from the congregation. The designated wild flower meadow area was rotovated in the autumn and twice hand weeded by the Gardening Club and sown in early November. Any bulbs disinterred by the rotovator were replanted in situ in early January.

Trees and Tree Care

The regular monitoring of mature tree health continues. A new inspection by the Council's tree officer has been requested and is being pursued. The Canadian Maple which marked the Canadian War Graves died in the early spring of 2018. The cause is unknown. The church is in liaison with the Canadian War Graves Commission regarding replacing the tree and a new site has been agreed but this is largely dependent upon more light being created in the area to help preserve the immaculately maintained grass on the war graves. A request to the tree officer has been made to pollard an unruly sweet bay to the south-west of the war graves which is cutting the light. This is being followed up together with a request to trim back the Norway Maple which has begun to infringe upon the Ginkgo biloba.

Churchyard Maintenance

Two critical areas of eroded pathway were repaired by the Council with tarmac in early November in time for Remembrance Sunday. The tilted base of the Honourable Henry Bligh monument (Vicar at St James 1881 – 1893) located outside the boiler room, was reset level. This needed to be done in order to remove and replace the broken paving slabs there. The work was done by Bryan Basdell and John Daly of the Properties Committee rather than the Council as the paving was considered part of the church courtyard and not the churchyard.

Burials

There were nine ashes interments within the given period: seven in the Garden of Remembrance and two into existing family graves in the churchyard.

In Memoriam

A grass area on the south side of the Reverend Brunt memorial flower bed has been identified and set aside for the planting of memorial rose bushes with memorial plaques. The first such rose bush was planted there on 28 June and the memorial plaque installed during All Souls on 28 October. Following an enquiry in August regarding the installation of a memorial bench in the churchyard six suitable sites for memorial benches were mapped and presented to the PCC and approved. All of any such benches will be uniform in style and timber-type and will be two-seater size only to discourage sleep-overs. A maintenance fee will be payable and a reasonable 'life-time' for each bench will be set dependent upon manufacturer's guarantee period and an allowance for reasonable durability.

Plants and Gardening

The newly planted shrubbery to the south of the West Door has been regularly weeded, tended and watered by those in the original planting team. The new garden construction on the north-west corner of Park and St James's roads is moving towards the first stage of completion. A low-cost development budget was approved by the PCC. The area has been rotovated and subsequently hand weeded and dug over on several further occasions by the Gardening Club. Border flower beds have been landscaped in and these have been planted with various plants donated to date by the congregation. A request for more plants will be made as we approach the autumn. The church office ordered a 50 plants shrub pack, provided gratis by the Mayor of London's greening initiative and these were planted in November to form a mixed hedge against the St James's Road iron railings and the Park Road wall. The grave of Reverend Richard Coad-Pryor (vicar at St James 1914 – 1923), located within this new garden area, has been cleared of scrub and weeded. The new lawn will be laid after Easter once all danger of frosts has ceased. The donated garden bench will be installed and the original stepping stones relaid as a path to the seat from the West Door and on round into the grass walk way on the church's north side. The gift of a small electric lawn mower has been offered and an initial team of mowing volunteers created. Less turf than was budgeted for will be required (owing to the landscaped flower beds) and so it is hoped the original budget will cover the purchase of some suitable chippings with which to dress the Coad-Pryor grave. The Church Gardening Club and/or various members of the planting team carried out work in the churchyard on some fourteen separate occasions during the given period. On 12 June a tall standard Hibiscus (pink flowered) was given by the local council and planted at the gateway to the West Door. The plant was watered and maintained throughout the summer by the Council and the gift was arranged by the Council's Tree Officer (who also arranged for the gift of the beech bench sited at the approach to the South Door).

Ongoing and Various

Regular care and maintenance of the Garden of Remembrance, the War Memorial and Remembrance Sunday wreaths continues. Litter is removed on a weekly basis. Following a request some twelve months ago to the Council for 'dogs on leads' signs these have recently been installed. It is hoped this will help reduce the amount of dog mess which has occurred when dogs were allowed to run out of sight of their owners and will keep dogs off the graves. The 'pooper scooper' signs continue to remain mostly effective.

Looking Ahead

To move forward with achieving 'Designated Local Wildlife Area' status for the churchyard more particular information on wild plants, toadstools and lichens, insects and birds as well as any small mammals, amphibians and reptiles, needs to be logged. A simple scheme to achieve this will be created during the coming year and members of the congregation interested in wildlife conservation will be asked if they would like to help observe and gather information.