

Questions, Answers and Comments from Explorers of Church Buildings: Churchyard Transformation Webinar on 16 March 2021

Lent Reflections

Emily explained that the Diocese were running a series of lent reflections each day, exploring the topic of God's Creation. These can be found at:-

<https://www.chester.anglican.org/Lent>

Diocesan Guidance on the Environment

Emily provided the following link which gives Diocesan Guidance on the Environment:-

[Diocese of Chester | Environment \(anglican.org\)](https://www.chester.anglican.org/Environment).

This includes details about ARocha Eco awards.

Churchyard Activities and Services

Q) David stated: Thanks Andrew. Do you use the churchyard for activities/services? e.g. forest church?

A) Andrew said they haven't used the churchyard for church services as yet, but we have used it to engage families and children for church activities such as an Easter Gospel Trail, a couple of Art Projects such as for Remembrance in November, and recently an outreach on Christmas Eve sharing the Nativity Story, books, sweets and warm drinks.

Churchyard Extensions

Q) Anne-Marie stated: We are looking at a churchyard extension which would be a woodland churchyard, promoting biodiversity and fully renewable materials. We have found a financial partner but need to find organisations which would help us to maintain and develop it. Any ideas? Anne-Marie also mentioned they were thinking of their green space and she wondered if anyone had done a similar thing. In particular they were extending for burials using the field behind the churchyard which they have been given and they need to partner with the local agricultural college about this. Anne-Marie also asked about how do they lay it out and choose which trees.

A) Andrew suggested approaching the Local Council who often have pots of money for green space developments or neighbourhood social projects. This may also be a project to run in conjunction with local schools, studying biodiversity, creating bug houses, planting different plant/tree species and physically using the space.

Andrea said that the first thing to ask is what is your goal? She suggested environment charities who could give a list of plant species to look at.

Emily also suggested that Anne-Marie contact the DAC at caroline.hilton@chester.anglican.org; katy.purvis@chester.anglican.org

Andrew said that Caring for God's Acre also have good "How to Guides".

Sandi stated: She could put Anne-Marie in touch with someone who could help.

Eco Church

Q) Jenny stated: There was a reference to creating eco-churches - which sounds like some sort of certification. How can one find out about this initiative?

A) Andrew said that ARocha run a gold, silver and bronze award programme for Eco Churches, and churches may be surprised that they already do enough to qualify for a Bronze Award. The assessment, which is done on-line, looks at the church grounds and land, but also focusses on the church building, energy consumption and conservation, worship and teaching, community and global engagement on environmental issues, and lifestyle of church members both at church and at home.

See: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk>

Debbie stated: our Diocesan Environment Forum has some fab people who are great and knowledgeable contacts on Eco Church!

Steve stated: At Prestbury, we have achieved Bronze and are shortly hoping to reach Silver. excellent way of focussing your effort to be more sustainable.

Funding Sources

Andrea stated that they have some information sheets on their website on engaging volunteers and applying for grants. This can be found at:-

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/action-pack-section-d-involving-people/>

Andrea stated that a good funding pot here for between £3000 and £10,000

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/national-lottery-grants-heritage-2021/3-10k>

Emily stated for grants, see the environment chapter in this CofE grants list:
<https://www.parishresources.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Charitable-Grants-for-Churches-Jul-2020.pdf>

Gardening and Maintenance

Q) Steve asked: Here in Prestbury, we have an area of our large churchyard in which we would like to create a sensory garden of tranquillity along the lines of monastic traditions. Did you have any specific guiding principles on your selection of plants, herbs etc which might reflect this tradition or any sources of advice which we might explore?

A) Andrew said - In our churchyard we have focussed on sustainability, choosing bulbs and perennial plants rather than constantly purchasing bedding plants. Our recent grant application included a sum to purchase some of these more expensive plants. The bulbs coming up in spring have been a great source of spiritual encouragement for the church members as we come out of lockdown, and we got a good response sharing photographs of the spring flowers and prayers on our social media.

Monastic gardens would have been both attractive contemplative spaces as well as practical and productive spaces. A water feature would aid contemplation and be a source of freshness, life and reflection. Places to sit, either benches or patch of grass would be helpful. Scented plants would engage the senses, and herbs for smell, flowering colour and their practical use would work well. Herbs were of course grown for medicinal use in monastic gardens. Other ornamental vegetable plants would give colour and variety and reflect the use of these spaces as kitchen gardens – sweet peas, kale, chards, nasturtiums for example.

Q) Jenny stated: Thank you for sharing - your description of the rainbow installation was beautifully written. Who does the design of these installations - is it a collaborative activity or some inspired individuals?

A) Andrew said - the whole gardening project had developed organically (appropriately enough!) over 20 – 30 years, however the Spiritual Garden we looked at has been the last few years. The biblical elements of this started as the brainchild of one volunteer, Eddie, to which others have added ideas as the collection of installations has grown. Some have worked well, others have been adapted with time – but all have been a collaborative effort. The biblical planting installations have provided inspiration for a prayer leaflet and guide and as a focal point for visiting school groups as we open up the stories with them.

Comment) Emma stated: We approached City of Trees who have been brilliant at providing trees and doing the hard work for us - they also maintain for 15 years!! Emma said that City of Tees were trying to create a forest and that they were based in Manchester. She said they plant and maintain trees for 15 years. Link to city of trees: <https://www.cityoftrees.org.uk/>
Steve stated: Woodland Trust are giving trees away too.

Q) Julie asked: We have a grant and are about to start on restoring our garden to a woodland area in one part and have planted trees for the environment in December. Apart from that we have a huge area of grass that generates a ton of grass cuttings, do you manage to compost all your grass? We are having compost bins made from pallets, and asking for donations of cardboard. how do you manage your compost variety?

A) Andrew said - Grass cuttings are also an issue for us but more so are the tonnes of leaves we rake up over the autumn. We have a large compost area which the gardeners rot down a mixture of grass and leaves which are left covered in the winter in plastic sheeting. Rotted down compost is reused around the garden. Much of the grass is recycled via the green bin schemes with the local council and we have several bins. Fortunately, Trafford Council abolished the pay-scheme for green bins recently. Volunteers take bags of leaves etc. to the local recycling facility on occasion and we also spread leaves and grass cuttings beneath the trees in the vicarage garden.

Emma stated: Our local council Tameside have supplied us with litter pickers and bin bags and collect our litter bags for us.

Q) Janine stated: Could I ask, has this inspired local people to recreate this in their own gardens and does the church invest in any outreach to encourage people to garden their own gardens?

A) Andrew stated this was an excellent idea and one he would look at. Volunteers who have joined the gardening team have certainly increased their knowledge and shared expertise, and have been more encouraged to look after their own gardens at home. There is also an exchange of plants as people bring in spare plants from home or take them from the garden to nurture them on and return them.

Q) Gill asked: What facilities are required for garden development? Tree planting? Benches and the like.

A) Emily stated that Gill would need to speak to the DAC about this. She provided the email addresses of the DAC as follows:- caroline.hilton@chester.anglican.org; katy.purvis@chester.anglican.org

Q) Mark asked: In one image I noticed what looked like a gravel area in the background, is this for vehicles or just for pedestrians, what is beneath it and how easy is it to maintain?

A) Andrew stated that this gravel area had been in place since the previous vicar and is grey gravel on a hard mud base. It's a car park and pedestrian access. It's quite tricky to maintain as seasonal weeds take root, but these are usually picked by the team, or if they get out of hand by use of a herbicide. Every couple of years we have to man-handle the gravel from areas it congregates and settles, back to the high traffic areas.

Q) One lady asked about an old car show room that they have, which they want to fit out into a garden.

A) Emily said that St Mary's, Upton, did tub planters in a small urban area. Andrea mentioned an organisation called the Quiet Garden hub. <https://quietgarden.org>. Fiona said that she was from St Mary's, Upton, and that the planter area was flagged. They planned to plant the tubs with scented flowers. Andrew said that his local community centre used raised beds which were tended by residents with reduced mobility or wheelchair bound, in a community social project. Emily mentioned the Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Risk Assessments, Rotas and Volunteers

Q) Alison stated: Very inspiring, thank you. I am just wondering about how you manage a large team of volunteers - risk assessments, rotas etc.

A) Andrew stated that they have around 50 volunteers over the course of the last 20+ years, but at any one time there are about 10 active volunteers. Those who have volunteered in the past but now are unable to work on the grounds due to limited mobility will still join us for tea and toast and fellowship at half time!

Risk assessments for the activity and equipment are included as part of the risk assessments for church, and new volunteers are provided with training on the larger equipment. We have devised additional risk assessments for Covid-safe operation. We don't have a rota for volunteers as people come when they can when the activity is run on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, unless the weather is inclement.

Andrea stated: some information on Health and Safety for churchyard activities here: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/D2-Health-and-Safety-v2.pdf>

General Comments

Christopher stated: Wonderful creation, Andrew. Thank you for the presentation. I was powerfully struck by what you had achieved at St Mary's when I was on my Reader placement a couple of years back. I was able to report back to my home church. So much to learn from what you and the team have done - and are doing.

Emma stated: This is so inspiring - thank you Andrew

Richard stated: Absolutely inspiring. Thank you for sharing.

Peter stated: But a brilliant webinar - you do this really well!

Steve stated: Very helpful all round - thank you

Janine stated: Thanks, really helpful

Mark stated: Thank you for an excellent inspirational presentation.

Christopher stated: Thanks, everybody. All round inspiring.

Nikki stated: Thanks everyone. Really helpful. Grace and peace

Lucy stated: Thank you all for a really inspiring and helpful morning.

Sandi stated: Thank you. very helpful

Alison stated: Thank you everyone. Wonderful event.