

LOVING OUR CHURCHYARD

St Luke's Churchyard and Church Rooms Garden lie in the heart of the village of Sway in the New Forest. They comprise an old churchyard, a new churchyard and a Garden of Remembrance, which is the only area where burial (of ashes) still takes place. Sway also has a Cemetery in the defined village.

These green spaces are loved by many villagers and those with connections to Sway.

Tending them has been the work of a few parishioners over the years – for a long time, a group of gentlemen managed the land in a traditional way. In the 80's, one gentleman and Sunday School sowed some wild flower seeds. Very good records about the flora in the Churchyard were kept at that time. Largely, the grassy areas were kept very short and tidy, until the last 2 years.

When lockdown occurred, a group of younger ladies tended the Churchyard. When they were able to, they worked very hard to tame the parts which had grown quite unruly during the long months when no-one could care for the area. A Fuchsia bed was laid down in memory of the gentleman who had gardened here every Tuesday morning for some decades – the same one who sowed the wild flower seeds with the children.



And a wooden engraved plaque arrived in the Garden, made by a parishioner: The Joy of the Lord is my Strength Nehemiah 8:10

Habitats for hedgehogs, water for all creatures & new bird boxes found their way into the Churchyard. Eco Church, which had been established in October 2020 online via zoom, added Bat boxes and an owl box, plus bug hotels after an evening's workshop with the Brownies. New signs now punctuate the landscape to tell people about the way we care for our grounds and why.



In July 2021, it was time to make a policy for the care of our land. This was not as straightforward as one might have thought, for those who like a traditional look and those who prefer a wilder garden, did not agree. Caring For God's Creation had always happened in Sway's Churchyard, and now intensifying the conditions in which wildlife thrives became so important in the face of a changing climate.

In May 2022 we got together a group to identify all the wild plants, shrubs and trees which were growing at that time in our Churchyard, south and north sides and in the garden. The results of this ID exercise were amazing. We would recommend any gardening group to undertake this.

We took pictures and wrote explanations, then (with permission) we filled our Church noticeboard with the complete array.

From records between the mid-1980s and 2000, we have found the botanical names of 64 species of wildflower which were growing here.

We discovered 39 of the original species. 25 are missing at the moment - 17 new, previously unrecorded, species were also found.




A meeting was held for all those keen to garden in the Churchyard, Eco Church and anyone else who was interested. Using Caring for God's Acre's "Churchyard and Burial Ground Action Pack" and videos from their website, the meeting was instructive and a way forward emerged.

Now a management plan has been put together for our land which incorporates areas of short grass, medium grass, tussocky grass and long grass depending on the time of year. It is a large document with images and good solid reference and back-up information about why and how St Luke's wants to care for its burial ground and garden in this way.

The document was available for anyone in the Parish to look at and consult for several months this year, then it went to PCC for approval. Happily, the plan was approved and we move forward with a new team on Tuesday mornings, caring as ever.

Document Detail

<p>St Luke's Church, Sway</p> <p>Caring for the churchyard 2023</p>	 <p>Primrose</p>
<p>1. Aims</p> <p>Based on advice from 'Caring for God's Acre' (a charity which supports those caring for burial grounds) we aim to care for St Luke's churchyard "in a way that makes it pleasant and attractive for visitors, in keeping with the function of burials, a fit setting for the church and a haven for wild life".</p>	

