

The Wilder Churchyard Project at St John's

Rationale



Protecting our natural environment and God's creation is integral to the response to our Christian calling. All the land with which God has blessed us provides opportunities to encourage, support and connect wildlife. (Taken from the Diocese of Bath and Wells website)

History

A survey of the churchyard grounds carried out by Sarah Warren and Adam Gale in September 2021, revealed a wide range of plant life that has hitherto been unobserved during the growing and flowering season because of regular grass mowing. These plants – which include many species of grasses and wildflowers – support a range of insects and other invertebrates, which if they were left to grow, would flower and seed naturally during the season.



The Project



To encourage, enhance and protect these native species of plants, and to allow our churchyard here in Milborne Port to become a more biodiverse haven for pollinators, it was decided early in 2022 to experiment with adopting a lighter mowing regime in certain areas of the

churchyard, and to see what happened as a result. An enthusiastic band of gardeners (The Grasshoppers) meet on alternate Thursdays to manage and maintain the churchyard.

Plan for this year (2022)

For this first year it was decided to try reduced mowing for some trial plots, and see the effect. The areas selected for this trial are on the west side of the churchyard (A and B on the plan). The plan was to mow these areas in early spring, and then to leave the grass and flowers to grow, (with a mown border adjacent to the paths). Normal mowing would resume again in June/July. All other areas would be mown in the usual way, with grass clippings removed, to provide a comparison with the trial plots. All areas would then mown after the flowering season, and then maintained in preparation for the winter months.



Since this is our initial trial period we also wanted to include some flexibility so that we could adjust the above management plan as time progressed based on successes and failures.

The Future



Nothing is set in stone, but based on what has been seen this year, it is hoped that this can be continued. The plan is to cut the grass around the churchyard sometime in September, leaving a proportion uncut so that butterfly caterpillars and other insects can complete their life cycles and appear in greater numbers next year.

Feedback

Your feedback is welcome – please add your comments in the notebook provided. If you would like to come along and be part of the Thursday Grasshopper group, please contact Susan Wales on 01963 250660 or Trevor John on 01963 250382.

Results so far



These have been more than we could have wished for, with a host of flowers appearing amongst the variety of species of grasses. Bees, beetles and hoverflies have been observed, as well as the Small Skipper, Common Blue and Meadow Brown butterflies. Ragwort, whilst unwelcome in pony paddocks, is good for pollinators and is the food plant for the Cinnabar moth.

Based on the the progress made a couple of adjustments were made to the management plan:

1. Mowing has resumed for part of the trial plots on the west side but it was decided to leave some areas un-mown for a bit longer for two main reasons:
 - o To allow the caterpillars of Small Skipper butterflies and other butterflies and insects to complete their life cycles and appear in greater numbers next summer.
 - o Although the best flowing period for these areas is over, it still gives people an opportunity to see some of the results before mowing is resumed fully.
2. It was decided at the beginning of July to suspend mowing in the North and East areas for a period to give various plant species a chance to flower, with spectacular results. Flowers here include: Bird's-foot Trefoil and Rough Hawkbit. Mowing will be resumed once these have seeded.

The strategy has significantly reduced the manual labour required to maintain those areas with reduced mowing, with a consequential reduction in fuel usage and reduced CO₂ emissions.

Area A

Plants	
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy
<i>Carex caryophylla</i>	Spring Sedge
<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>	Oxeye Daisy
<i>Convolvulus arvensis</i>	Field Bindweed
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot grass
<i>Festuca sp</i>	Fescue grass
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's Bedstraw
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	Ground Ivy
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough Hawkbit
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird's-foot Trefoil / Eggs & Bacon
<i>Luzula campestris</i>	Field Wood-rush
<i>Picris echinoides</i>	Bristly Oxtongue
<i>Pilosella aurantiaca / Hieracium aurentiacum</i>	Orange Hawkweed / Fox and Cubs ?
<i>Pilosella officinarum / Hieracium pilosella</i>	Mouse-ear Hawkweed
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary Plantain
<i>Poa species</i>	Meadow-grass
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Selfheal
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Ragwort

Birds & Insects
12 swifts
Common Blue butterfly
White butterfly
Speckled wood
Cryptocephalus Leaf beetle
Eristalis tenax hoverfly
Parasitic wasp

Mosses
<i>Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus</i>
<i>Pseudoscleropodium purum ?</i>

<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser Trefoil
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover
<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Germander Speedwell
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False Oat-grass

Area B

Plants	
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Briza media</i>	Quaking grass
<i>Carex flacca</i>	Glaucous Sedge
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth Hawksbeard
<i>Cymbalaria muralis</i>	Ivy-leaved Toadflax / Kenilworth Creeper
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's foot
<i>Galium mollugo</i>	Hedge Bedstraw
<i>Hieracium pilosella</i>	Mouse-ear Hawkweed
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Common Cat's-ear
<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medick
<i>Plantago lanecolata</i>	Ribwort Plantain
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary Plantain
<i>Potentilla erecta</i>	Tormentil
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Selfheal
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover

On the path on the south side of the church

Plants	
<i>Chaenorhinum minus</i>	Small Toadflax
<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Common Dog Violet,/Wood Violet

On the north side outside choir vestry door

Plants

Anagallis arvensis

Scarlet pimpernel