

The wonder of wildflowers on our doorstep

Barry Goodwin & Bernard Maguire share their thoughts after a wildflower and grass survey of St John's churchyard.

There is quite rightly a real concern about the loss of biodiversity across the world today but sometimes we can be surprised by just how much there is on our own doorstep.

Back in June, St John's hosted a workshop organised by 'Caring for God's Acre' (CfGA), an organisation which works nationally to support groups and individuals to investigate, care for, and enjoy churchyards and burial grounds - <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>. There are over 20,000 burial grounds in England and Wales, ranging from small rural medieval churchyards to large Victorian city cemeteries, spanning different cultures, religions and centuries.

As Bernard has noted in his Blog on the St John's website 'Burial grounds, including St John's, can be remnants of the landscape that once surrounded them, unspoilt by agriculture and development, home to plants, animals and insects now rare in our wider countryside. Our churchyard encapsulates the history of a community, it tells us about fashion, status and immigration of lives long-lived and those tragically short. It is a place full of stories.'

<https://www.stjohnsshirley.org.uk/2022/06/30/bernards-blog-no-24/>

Led by experts from 'Caring for God's Acre', 'Surrey Wildlife' and a local wildflower specialist those of us who gathered spent an enthralling morning of wildflower and grass identification. With the help of a hand lens, we learnt to identify the differences of groups of flowers that we thought were the same. The experts enthused over the ranges of grasses, and we were subsequently overjoyed to find that in just two hours we had observed fifty-five different flowers, ferns and grasses plus five different insects on the day. Remembering them all might take a bit more time! We have now heard that St John's will soon appear on the CfGA website as one of the national "Burial Grounds to Inspire".

There is always a tension in maintaining burial grounds. It is between allowing safe access for families to maintain family graves, so important as we remember loved ones, and at the same time allowing wildlife to flourish. With careful maintenance, water butts to reduce our tap water use and bug hotels, the team at St John's can be proud at what it has achieved.

If you would be interested in a monthly Sunday afternoon 'mini eco walk' when the St John's tearoom is open then please let us know – we can learn from each other and as the Autumn approaches, and the flowers fade, it will be the turn of the fungi. Also, if you would like to see a copy of St John's guide to its historic monuments and trees, or a list of the plants we identified then please contact us via Bernard at verger@stjohnsshirley.org.uk



ID Workshop in churchyard



Wilkes Poppies
Fly Agaric
Wildflower bank spring 2022