

SHILLINGSTONE CHURCHYARD MAINTENANCE NEWSLETTER No. 4

This is the fourth of our occasional newsletters, giving you the latest information on the churchyard at Holy Rood. We hope you find this helpful & interesting.

Thank you for carrying on maintaining the churchyard through the pandemic.

The Bishop & Volunteers!

Bishop Karen paused her Pilgrimage from Wareham to Shaftesbury to commend the management of our churchyard – balanced and beautiful. Well done all!

And we have said ‘Goodbye’ to 2 volunteers – Keith Hawkins, who has done 24 years (!) and Chris Netherway. Our grateful thanks to them for their years of service. And to Alan Drake who has taken over Keith’s patch – he hopes as a temporary measure.... *Thank you to you all!*



Those Mowing machines....

Once again, the AL-Ko mower stopped running and has needed Mike’s attention – the engine cylinder was full of oil. Please, if the machinery isn’t working, don’t put it back in the shed for someone else to find! Tell Mike as soon as you can. He also asks you only to tip the machines backward (not forwards). This should keep the engine cylinder free of oil.

Owl pellets & their contents

An owl has been resting on a standing cross in the older part of the churchyard – the regurgitated pellets of undigested food were found on the ground, and I dissected them to see what the owl had been eating. The photos show the pellets as found, and the contents – mammals, birds and beetles were on the menu.....



BioBlitz week – The Results!

We sent a list of over 100 plants and animals for the national ‘Churches count on Nature’ campaign. The list included 23 tree species - has anyone spotted the large Wytch elm, which I think has



fallen to disease this year?. The list also had 95 plant species on it proving that not all that's green is grass! It was fascinating watching (and listening to) my expert friend, Jim, identifying the mosses and lichens. First, he sprayed them with water – and then took a magnifying glass to them. They are really pretty up close! There are 5 common ones on the tombstones in your plots – a white knobbly one, an orange one, a white one with black spots, one with black and yellow spots and one that's black – called 'Verrucaria'- yes, it looks like a verruca! Lichens and mosses are very sensitive to aspect (on stones and trees), shade, the roughness of the substrate and the chemistry of the stone or tree bark. So what is common on one plot or tomb may be absent from another. They are well worth a close look if you have a few spare minutes. The picture shows Jim in action on a hot day this summer!



The numbers of insects, birds and mammals spotted were low, so this will be the focus for recording next year.

Spare those dandelions!

Shakespeare called them 'golden lads and girls' and these mini-sunflowers are cafés for bees, butterflies and hoverflies – but the seeds feed birds like goldfinches too. There are 250 species of them....my university botany tutor was an expert in them; he apparently collected 120 of them on his honeymoon!! So why does the sight of them make people reach for the flame thrower, weedkiller, spade or mower?!!

Things to watch out for:

- Over the beech hedge, the SCC wildflower meadow has had its nutrient strip cut and will be reseeded with yellow rattle and wildflower seed which need 'vernalisation' over winter. The annuals in the pots and mini-copse have seeded and will be cleared away.
- A self-guided trail leaflet with snippets of historic and wildlife interest in the churchyard is now available in the church.
- Your invitation to a 'Thank you' tea in the Spring.

Wanted

- 2022 is the year we plant native primroses in the churchyard. Any spare seedlings?
- A volunteer to take on mowing Chris Netherway's strip of grass / graves.
- Volunteer(s) to keep the paths swept and edged.