



# Churchyards for London

Brian Cuthbertson | Reconciling a Wounded Planet  
Coventry | 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> September 2015

# Churchyards and wildlife

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- “The Churchyard is to be kept in such an orderly and decent manner as becomes consecrated ground” (Canon Law F13/2)
- ‘The Churchyards Handbook’ (Thomas Cocke Ed, Church Hs Pub)
- “The churchyard belongs to the whole community represented by the parish, and not simply to the small group of parishioners who worship regularly in the Church.” (Churchyards Handbook)  
*(The above statement is legally incorrect!)*
- ‘Wildlife in Church and Churchyard ...’ (Nigel Cooper, CCC)  
... ‘Plants, animals and their management’
- “Christian belief is that the non-human world has value because it is valued by its creator, God. Plants and animals deserve our care too. Managing the churchyard is thus not only a ministry to the human users but also to the species and creatures living there.”  
([www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-and-wildlife/](http://www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-and-wildlife/))



‘Sparrow monuments’, Poole Keynes, Gloucester  
*Listed Buildings Online*

**“Even the sparrow has found a home,  
And the swallow a nest for herself,  
Where she may lay her young—  
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
My King and my God.”**

*Psalm 84:3*

# Trees in churchyards

- New faculty rules/ CBC guidance
  - Trees have enjoyed unique status
- Amenity, responsibility, risk
  - Buildings, subsidence
  - Power lines – Electricity Act 1989
  - Leaves and nuisance
- Tree diseases and pests
  - Ash dieback, acute oak decline
- Inspections and QIs
- Tree works
  - Planting, pruning, lopping, topping
  - Removal; replacement and offsetting
- Professional support
  - Arboriculturalists and arborists
- Permissions
  - DACs, archdeacons/ faculties?
  - Planning, conservation areas, TPOs



St Mary Paddington Green

# Churchyard management

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- Maintenance and cultivation regimes
- Late grass cutting (for breeding butterflies)
- Tree care and maintenance
- Natural ‘weed control’ (a big ask!)
- What is a ‘weed’? (See Richard Mabey)
- Eradicate severely invasive species
- Minimise chemical herbicides, especially spraying
- Q: Which is the most invasive species?\*



*Buddleia davidii*

**“*Buddleia (davidii)* is an opportunist that's always ready to capitalise on any slight advantage.”**

*Peter Gibbs*

*BBC Weather Forecaster*

[www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine)

\* A: *Homo sapiens*

# Conservation and sustainability

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- Tensions: wild or controlled, nature *versus* buildings?
- The building fabric
- Walls, lychgates etc
- Gravestones and monuments
- Trees v ivy?
- Total conservation
- Energy and resources, wildlife, historic buildings
- Can we preserve everything?
- What might have to give?



Savoy Chapel

**“Green is the colour of the Holy Spirit,  
of life, procreation and resurrection.”**

*Carl Jung*

*Quoted from Joseph Campbell , ‘Creative Mythology’*

# Churchyards for London

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- Dioceses of London, Chelmsford, Southwark, Rochester
- Scope: Greater London only
  - Some 560 sites out of nearly 1200 in City of London and 32 other boroughs
  - Church curtilage, gardens and graveyards, including detached churchyards
  - Non-negligible size, evidence some green space and/or trees
  - Some redundant churches, but municipal cemeteries out of scope
- Phase A: *Churchyards Ecology Survey, 2013-2016/17?*
  - Desk-based research
  - Sampling
  - Professional surveys and report
  - The first such comprehensive study
- Phase B: 2015-
  - Churchyards for Communities*
  - Churchyards and Heritage*
  - Churchyards for Biodiversity*
- Phase C: 2021 –
  - Habitat enhancement, capital works



St John Erith, St Nicholas Chislehurst, St Mary Lambeth, St Luke Chelsea, All Saints Harrow Weald

**“God’s Acre”**  
*Saxon phrase*

# Purposes and benefits

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- To assess content and state of fauna and flora
- Then apply learning for a range of community, heritage and biodiversity benefits
- To churchgoers and other visitors to churchyards, including the general public
- Access to and enjoyment of churchyards and wildlife
- Better care of wildlife in churchyards
- Appreciation and learning from wildlife in churchyards
- To recover a sense of belonging with nature



*Campanula rotundifolia*

**“I lingered among them under that benign sky, watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, ... and wondered how anyone could have imagined unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.”**

*Emily Brontë*  
*‘Wuthering Heights’*

# Threats and opportunities

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- Ash and oak tree pests
- Hibernation, breeding and food sources eg for hedgehogs
- Partly due to climate change
- Forward shift in spring, northern species drift
- Other endangered species eg bees
- Invasive species: Sycamore, *Buddleia davidii*, Japanese knotweed
- Refugia and stepping stones
- Keystone species (Plane, Lime, Ash), BAP priority species eg Redstart
  - Extensive biodiversity does still exist!
  - Bats: thriving in London churchyards!



**“Most of the non-native species in London do not pose a threat to biodiversity and add to the individuality and richness of London's wildlife and heritage. However, some invasive non-native species are a cause for concern, and already threatening the value of London's natural environment.”**

*London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum*



# Professionals and volunteers

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- Andy Lester, A Rocha UK
- AECOM Infrastructure and Environment UK Ltd
- Selection and tendering
- Ishpi Blatchley, British Lichen Society
- Alison Fairbrass, University College London
- Brian Cuthbertson, Project Administrator



St Mary Magdalene Holloway

**“Churchyards may be maintained by parochial church councils or by local authorities. Some are laid out as public parks with flower gardens ... Insect and bird life depends for its sustenance on flora in churchyards and is also ubiquitous.”**

*Project summary*

# Research and sampling

- Desk-based study
  - Spreadsheets and maps
  - Diocesan, library and web records, aerial photography
  - Extract from Greater London records office (GiGL)
  - Analysis of sites and environments
- Sampling
  - Selection of non-contiguous inner and outer London boroughs
  - Site selection, representative of urban, suburban, pre-urban and rural landscapes, site sizes, soil types, habitat potential



**“There is a high degree of connectivity to Canons Park and its notable habitats ... The desk study has revealed a number of current and historic records of notable fauna species within the study area; including birds, bats, mammal and amphibians ... The site appears to contain semi-natural habitats including grassland and trees as well as numerous gravestones ... It is foreseeable that the site could support notable and common plants, birds, invertebrates, mammals (including bats and notable small mammals such as hedgehog) and possibly reptiles. The gravestones may support assemblages of lichens and mosses.”**

*St Lawrence Whitchurch, Little Stanmore, Desk Study*



# Surveys and reports

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- Ecologists' visits: one or two to each site
- 15 sites in 2013, 10 more sites in 2014, 6 in 2015
- All London, Southwark and Chelmsford so far, 2015 mainly Rochester
- Desk study reports and site sheets
- Site notes and species lists (mainly plants)
- Habitat maps
- Sound recordings by Alison Fairbrass
- Bat species IDs by Alison, bird IDs by Andy Lester of A Rocha
- Lichen lists by Ishpi Blatchley and other British Lichen Society volunteers
- Full project report to come

**“The Biodiversity Strategy sets out the direction for biodiversity policy for the next decade, on land (including freshwaters) and at sea. The Government’s mission, stated in this document, is to ‘halt overall biodiversity loss, support healthy, well-functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks, with more and better places for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.’ ”**

*Natural England/DEFRA ‘Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services’*

# Results and lessons

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“Interim results are being compiled (including analysing sound recordings). Data compiled at the first stage suggested that churchyards in Greater London occupy a total of 270 Ha, or 1/6<sup>th</sup> of 1% of the land area of Greater London (157,215 Ha). The ecological potential of these sites appears disproportionate to their size, after considering their distributed locations and contribution to connectivity between other green spaces in London. The range of species observed within a 0.5 km radius of just 50 sites bears witness to this – more than 200 significant species on GiGL’s database; and no fewer than 114 designated sites within a short distance of these 50 churchyard sites ... The master higher plant species list from the first 15 sites visited comprised no fewer than 272 of God’s woody and leafy creatures. The lichen lists are a marvel ... There are also numerous birds, and evidence of bat activity on almost every site – up to 6 different species on a site!”



*Buddleia globosa* at St Pancras Gardens

**“Habitats within our churchyards have the potential to support protected species such as the slow worm and the lizard *Zootoca vivipara*; or amphibians including the smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*, as well as the common frog and toad.”**

*Parish newsletter, Christmas 2013*

# Budgets and funding

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- Phase A

Project budget £93,000

£34,000 raised or promised

Contributions from all four dioceses

In proportion to their size and numbers of churches

London also contributes staff time

Grants from Natural England and two trusts

Data from GiGL

Volunteering

No charge to parishes

New external fundraising effort, 2015-2016



- Phase B

Approximate budget £100,000

- Phase C

Indicative £250,000?

# Communication, guidance and training

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- ‘Beauty in Tranquillity’ – London-wide workshop with CfGA  
St John’s Wood Church and Churchyard, 16 July 2015
- Diocesan websites  
[www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-and-wildlife/](http://www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-and-wildlife/)  
[www.london.anglican.org/kb/trees-in-churchyards/](http://www.london.anglican.org/kb/trees-in-churchyards/)  
[www.london.anglican.org/kb/biodiversity-action-plans/](http://www.london.anglican.org/kb/biodiversity-action-plans/)  
[www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-for-London/](http://www.london.anglican.org/kb/churchyards-for-London/)
- The above pages need re-visiting and overhauling
- Parish newsletters
- Uniform London-wide policies?  
Dioceses of London, Southwark, Chelmsford, Rochester
- Churchyards for London Phase B  
Long-term engagement and education programme



[www.arctrust.org](http://www.arctrust.org)

**“We would like to see country-level biodiversity strategies implemented more effectively and further UK-level coordination where appropriate.”**

*Amphibian and Reptile Conservation*



**Thank you for listening**

Brian Cuthbertson | Diocesan of London  
Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015