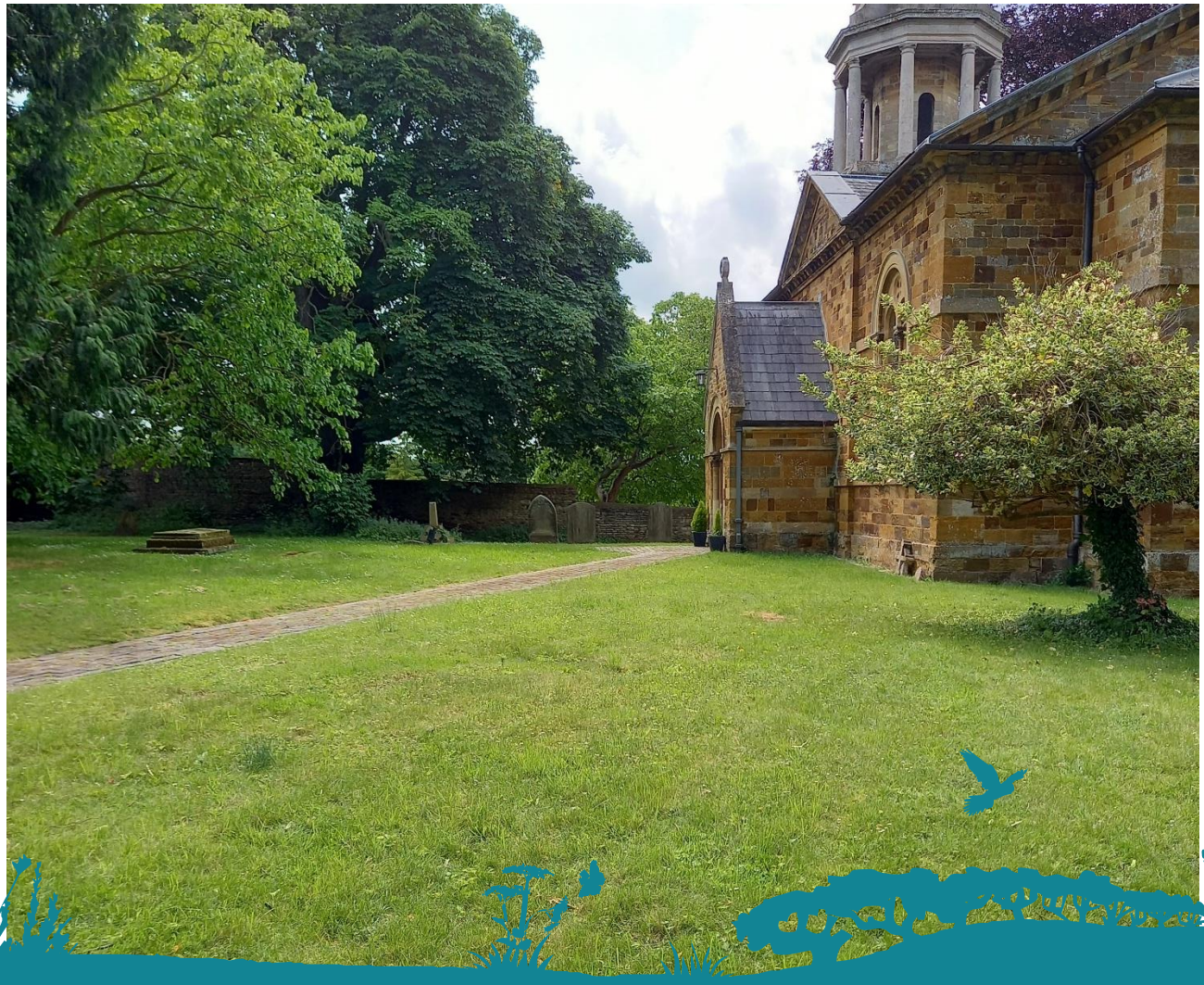
Wildlife Trust for
Beds, Cambs
& Northants



St Mary's, Great Houghton Churchyard Site Visit Report

Date:03/06/2025

Grid Ref: SP791589 Size: 0.2ha

Many thanks, Kris and Sarah, for meeting us and showing us around your churchyard – what a beautiful oasis.

Different habitats you already have in place

– walls, short and long grass, scrub layer, tree canopy.

You told us about your hope to try and set up a community project in order to get more people engaging with the churchyard. One thought was to set up some sort of nature trail around the churchyard – we think this is a great idea. Perhaps think about certain features you might like to highlight (the chest tombs out the back, for example) and then plan your mowing regime/paths around that and what's manageable for the team.

Railed Graves - The railed graves at the rear of the church would make another nice project to get stuck into. Saplings, bramble and weeds could be removed to then reveal what lies beneath.

Woodland Corner - When we walked further around the church, we reached the shady area which had a lovely woodland feel. The chest tombs deserve to be seen, so clearing the ivy and bramble from these and removing the smaller saplings of ash and sycamore will help open up the area. The pendulous sedge has a tendency to take over so this can be taken back a bit too. We think this would be a lovely area for people to explore when they visit the churchyard. This corner already has some plants associated with shady spots or woodlands but you may like to introduce some more in time. We have included a list of plants for shade that also benefit wildlife that might be helpful.

Trees - What a treat for you to discover the grave of a former rector in the undergrowth. There are a few trees which would benefit from having a few of their lower branches removed in order to lift the canopy. Your stunning horse chestnut was such an example. As most have TPOs you'd obviously need to approach the Council before going ahead with any works.

After you left us, we came across your marvelous mulberry tree. Ivy is starting to get a grip on the trunk so we'd recommend removing this before it takes hold too much.

Spring flowers – There was plenty of evidence of spring flowers such as daffodils, snowdrops, bluebells, ground ivy, common dog violets and primroses and it's important to have that early forage for insects when nectar sources are scarce early in the season.

Summer-flowering wildflower areas – I've marked on the plan where we found a nice patch of yarrow. This flowers in summer so if you wanted to have a lovely patch flowering through summer then perhaps cordon this area off so that WNDC don't mow it. After it's flowered, it can be incorporated back into the general mowing regime.

You may not have any control of the mowing but if you do in the future and would like to create a wildflower meadow, the mowing regime we'd suggest is to start with an early cut with the cuttings removed (late March-early April) to take off any dense growth that has occurred over the winter months. This will then allow your early spring flowers to come through (primroses, daffodils etc). In late spring these will start to die down to be replaced by yarrow, lady's bedstraw etc which will flower in early-mid-summer. Certainly, over the last few years a lot of flowers are still in flower in August and into September, so we'd recommend a late cut then but with the unpredictable weather it could be from any time from late-July onwards. Then carry on cutting with the rest of the churchyard until you stop for the season, but ensure you always remove the cuttings from those areas to prevent the nutrients going back into the soil.

Creating different lengths of grass within the churchyard will also increase the biodiversity as different species use long grass, short grass and even bare ground.

Long grass provides crucial habitat for many invertebrates to complete their life-cycles. It's also good habitat for species that enjoy damper condition such as toads, frogs and newts. Lots of species of butterflies (ringlet, meadow brown, gatekeeper, marbled white, speckled wood, large skipper, Essex skipper, small skipper) and other insects need longer grass in order to lay their eggs and then feed on the grass stems themselves.

Ivy – Dense ivy will provide nesting habitat for various birds, as well as shelter for insects and is an excellent nectar source in the late summer when not much else is in flower. You will find a wide range of pollinators will visit including hoverflies, other flies, bees, wasps and many butterflies. It will also provide

a good hibernation site for overwintering butterflies such as comma, small tortoiseshell, red admiral, brimstone and peacocks.

Lichens and mosses – should be left in place on stones and wooden features. A lichen survey in 1987 carried out by the British Lichen Society (the results of which I don't have) identified 41 species in the churchyard which is a decent number.

Relocating plants – You might consider moving some plants to a more favourable area that you're happy to leave to grow longer, thus giving them the opportunity to complete their lifecycle. Growing conditions should be fairly similar across the site so they should transplant quite well, just give them a good water in after planting.

Areas of more formal planting – there are a couple of areas of newer more 'garden-like' planting. These areas can also be fantastic for wildlife, especially pollinating insects. If anything else is to be added try to include open, more accessible flowers. I have included a list of plants which will hopefully be useful.

Suggestions for increasing the biodiversity in the churchyard

Below are a range of other ideas which you may like to consider in time and are included to give a range of options. We would always advise starting small with manageable actions based on the size of your workforce. You certainly don't need everything.

Kerbed graves - For any kerbed graves you have which are untended, our suggestion would be to remove the vegetation that's currently in there (mainly grasses and what would be traditionally called 'weeds') and to replace these with Mediterranean herbs. Things like marjoram and thyme are low growing and need very little maintenance once they're established. They flourish on poor soil and in summer will provide a carpet of blooms for pollinators, as well as a glorious scent when you brush your hand over them. Some churchyards have in place an 'adopt a grave scheme' which locals can take on and then plant up and maintain.

Nettles in sun – We recommend retaining a nettle area as they'll provide food for the caterpillars of peacock, small tortoiseshell and comma butterflies. At the end of summer (and checking to make sure the caterpillars have moved on and there are no chrysalises on the leaves) the patch can be cut back down to the ground ready for the next year. Any other nettles you have that are in more shady locations should be controlled.

Bird boxes - Here are our thoughts about bird nest boxes for putting up in the churchyard.

We'd suggest a mix of open-fronted (could attract robins, blackbirds, thrushes, pied wagtails and spotted flycatchers) and small holed nest boxes (would attract the various tit species, house and tree sparrows). The best place to site the open fronted ones would be where the cover is denser and offers better protection from predators. Tit boxes could go in the various trees dotted around the churchyard. I'm enclosing some box plans that also include siting instructions. You may find there are people in the village who'd be willing to build these – it's also an easy project for children to enjoy.

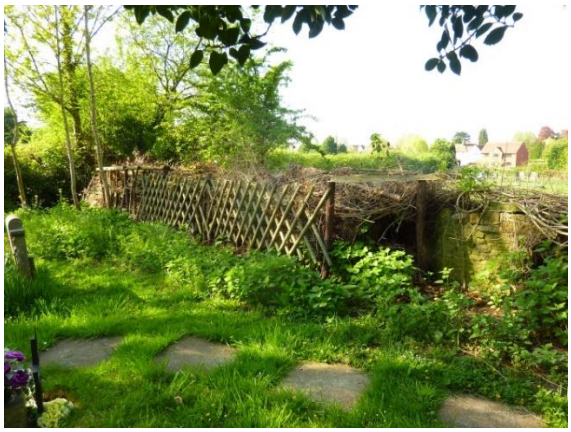
A huge array of information about bird nest boxes can be found on the BTO website
http://www.bto.org/about-birds/nnbw

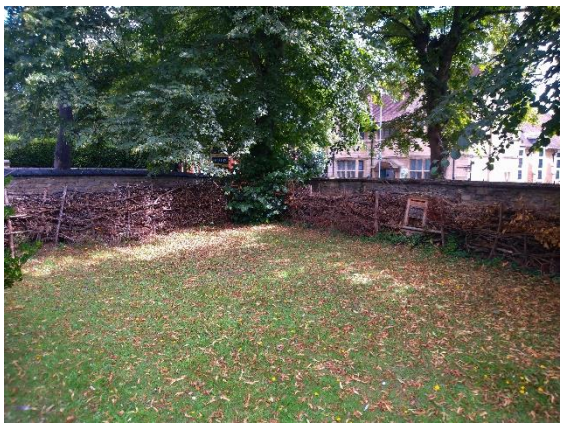
I'll send you information about bat boxes and where to site them too.

Log piles - These are another great habitat and a way of utilising a waste product. It would be good in an out of the way place, can be left to rot down over time and will create an invaluable habitat for invertebrates such as woodlice, centipedes and millipedes. These in turn become food for ground beetles, amphibians, birds and small mammals.

Log piles in the sun - These will attract a different set of species to log piles in the shade and can be useful for a number of species – in particular beetles, solitary bees and parasitic wasps.

Dead hedge – We spoke about perhaps creating one in front of your current (somewhat buried) compost heap. They are a great way of creating another habitat but also putting to good use branches and smaller bits of wood that would otherwise get left in piles. Other churchyards encourage visitors to add to the hedge which they really seem to enjoy!





Insect/bug hotels – these are easily created from natural materials and will create a haven for a wide range of invertebrates.

Introducing a water feature into the church grounds - It can be something as simple as an old washing up bowl sunk into the ground or something more elaborate. What's important is to provide sloping sides (stones to act as a ramp) so that if anything falls in it can then crawl out. Birds will come down to drink and bathe and insects will come to drink.

I'm attaching information about bird boxes, insect hotels, habitat piles, plant lists etc with this report so you can get some ideas about what might work in your own churchyard as well as some example management plans to help get you started.

Public relations – it is vitally important to let people know what you're doing and why – this is especially true when it comes to helping explain why some areas of the churchyard are being left longer than others. From our discussions I know this is already high up your list. A simple laminated sheet tied to a bamboo cane by a feature you want to highlight is sometimes enough to inform people. If you have a local paper, newsletter or Facebook group use this to drum up interest for any work you might think about doing in the churchyard. If interest is forthcoming, you could then think of having a "clear up the churchyard day/make a bug hotel from natural materials day/make a bird box" etc – easy things for the local community to get involved in. This will help them to take more ownership of the churchyard and, by encouraging more biodiversity within the churchyard, it will encourage people to spend more time there looking at what is actually around.

A sightings board or sightings book would be useful so that visitors to the church and churchyard can write down what they've seen – this can also form the start of you keeping a species list of what's been seen in the churchyard and help with any monitoring programme going forward. You can also use the noticeboard to post photos of things that have been seen in the churchyard as well as telling visitors what you're up to.

You might also like to have a look at:

- RHS Wildlife Gardening https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/wildlife-garden
- Caring for God's Acre (CfGA) – has an amazing amount of information on their website – I heartily recommend taking the time to have a good look through it all https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/
- Wildlife Gardening Forum – www.wlgf.org - a vast amount of science-based information. Whilst it focuses on gardens there are plenty of ideas which can be transferred to churchyards too – a website I use an awful lot.
- Illustrator, Marian Hill, has put together an amazing website of free posters which can be printed off and used in your churchyards. Sheets include dandelions, bramble, nettles, ivy and what pollinators are attracted to them – a fantastic website - www.buzzandscuttle.com/free-printable-resources.html

I realise there's a lot of information here and please do take these as what they're intended to be – suggestions. You may find not all of them will work with the manpower/personalities that you have, but we hope it will give you a flavour of what might be possible over time.

We very much look forward to visiting again and seeing how you're progressing in the future and once again, thank you for a super visit – a real pleasure.

If you need anything from us, then please don't hesitate to get back in touch – it's what we're here for.

Kind regards,

Lisa and Katharine

Here is the list of species we noted on the day – over 80 flowering plants which is very good.

Species Lists

Fauna

Common name	Scientific name
Birds	
Blue tit	*Parus caeruleus*
Chiffchaff	*Phylloscopus collybita*
Goldfinch	*Carduelis carduelis*
Jackdaw	*Corvus monedula*
Bees & wasps	
Tree bumblebee	*Bombus hypnorum*
Other groups	
Hoverfly	*Merodon equestris*
Woundwort Shieldbug	*Eysarcoris venustissimus*
Holly leaf miner	*Phytomyza ilicis*
Harlequin ladybird (larva)	*Harmonia axyridis*
Harlequin ladybird (adult)	*Harmonia axyridis*

Harlequin ladybird (pupa)	*Harmonia axyridis*

Flora

Common name	Scientific name
Aquilegia	*Aquileia sp.*
Ash	*Fraxinus excelsior*
Barren brome	*Anisantha sterilis*
Bittersweet	*Solanum dulcamara*
Black medick	*Medicago lupulina*
Bluebell hybrid	*Hyacinthoides x massartiana*
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosus agg.*
Bristly oxtongue	*Picris echioides*
Broad-leaved dock	*Rumex obtusifolius*
Bulbous buttercup	*Ranunculus bulbosus*
Butterfly-bush	*Buddleja davidii*
Cat's-ear	*Hypochaeris radicata*
Cherry sp.	*Prunus sp.*
Cleavers	*Galium aparine*
Cock's-foot	*Dactylis glomerata*
Common dog violet	*Viola riviniana*
Common mallow	*Malva sylvestris*
Common mouse-ear	*Cerastium fontanum*
Common nettle	*Urtica dioica*
Common ragwort	*Senecio jacobaea*
Common sorrel	*Rumex acetosa*
Copper beech	*Fagus sylvatica f.purpurea*
Cotoneaster	*Cotoneaster sp.*
Cow parsley	*Anthriscus sylvestris*
Creeping buttercup	*Ranunculus repens*
Creeping thistle	*Cirsium arvense*
Cut-leaved crane's-bill	*Geranium dissectum*
Daffodil	*Narcissus pseudonarcissus*
Daisy	*Bellis perennis*
Dandelion	*Taraxacum officinale agg.*
Dogwood	*Cornus sanguinea*
Dove's-foot crane's-bill	*Geranium molle*
Elder	*Sambucus nigra*

Enchanter's nightshade	*Circaea lutetiana*
Field bindweed	*Convolvulus arvensis*
Field wood-rush	*Luzula campestris*
Fox-and-cubs	*Pilosella aurantiaca*
Garlic mustard	*Alliaria petiolata*
Germander speedwell	*Veronica chamaedrys*
Great willowherb	*Epilobium hirsutum*
Greater plantain	*Plantago major*
Green alkanet	*Pentaglottis sempervirens*
Ground-ivy	*Glechoma hederacea*
Groundsel	*Senecio vulgaris*
Hedge woundwort	*Stachys sylvatica*
Herb-robert	*Geranium robertianum*
Holly	*Ilex aquifolium*
Horse chestnut	*Aesculus hippocastanum*
Ivy	*Hedera helix*
Ivy-leaved toadflax	*Cymbalaria muralis*
Lime	*Tilia x europaea*
Lords-and-ladies	*Arum maculatum*
Meadow buttercup	*Ranunculus acris*
Nipplewort	*Lapsana communis*
Pellitory-of-the-wall	*Parietaria judaica*
Pendulous sedge	*Carex pendula*
Perennial rye-grass	*Lolium perenne*
Primrose	*Primula vulgaris*
Red clover	*Trifolium pratense*
Ribwort plantain	*Plantago lanceolata*
Rose of sharon	*Hypericum calycinum*
Rosebay willowherb	*Chamerion angustifolium*
Rough hawkbit	*Leontodon hispidus*
Selfheal	*Prunella vulgaris*
Smooth sow-thistle	*Sonchus oleraceus*
Snowdrop	*Galanthus nivalis*
Spear thistle	*Cirsium vulgare*
Stinking iris	*Iris foetidissima*
Sycamore	*Acer pseudoplatanus*
Violet sp.	*Viola*
Wall speedwell	*Veronica arvensis*
White bryony	*Bryonia dioica*
White dead-nettle	*Lamium album*
White mulberry	*Morus alba*

Wood avens	*Geum urbanum*
Wood dock	*Rumex sanguineus*
Yarrow	*Achillea millefolium*
Yew	*Taxus baccata*