

What is in the Education Pack?

There are five topics in this pack each containing several activities and ideas to support the exploration of burial grounds. The topics are:

Precious Places

What's the Story?

Marvelous Monuments

Wildlife Safari

Art and Architecture

Each topic covers a range of subjects.

There is a pack of photographs illustrating different aspects of burial grounds and worksheets or templates for some of the activities. When needed for an activity these are listed under Resources, eg **Bug Hotel Guide**. Useful websites, books and poems are listed at the back.

National Curriculum

The activity suggestions include cross-curricular information relevant to learning in KS1 and KS2 in England and Wales. They also include ideas and activities to support learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). In addition there are ideas for projects to be undertaken in the classroom following a visit including 'Exciting Writing' ideas on how a burial ground visit can inspire various forms of writing.

Most of the suggested activities presented can be carried out in a number of ways to suit the needs of the group of children you are working with. We encourage you to adapt them and pick and choose ideas to ensure that your trip to the burial ground is specific to your topic and the needs of your year group.

Scouting and Guiding Group Leaders



This pack provides activities, challenges and ideas for work towards various badges and challenges. Each topic is signposted with information about which badges or challenges the activities support.



Badges and Challenges include:

Rainbows – Look and Learn

Beavers – Explore, Faith, Global Challenge, Creative Challenge

Brownies – Skills, Finding Your Way, Out and About, Culture, Seasons, Wildlife Explorer, Environment, Friend to Animals, Science Investigator, Artist

Cubs – Local Knowledge, Community Challenge, Global Conservation Challenge, Local Knowledge, Naturalist, Artist

Guides – Finding Your Way, Community Action, Discovering Faith, Guide Challenge, Culture, Animal Active, Science

Scouts – Heritage, My Faith, World Faiths, Environmental Partnership, Community Challenge, Naturalist, Global Conservation, Artist, Arts Enthusiast, Photographer, Craft

John Muir Awards

The activity suggestions included in this pack support outdoor learning such as the John Muir Award. To accomplish the John Muir Award, participants undertake a range of activities with four challenges at their heart.

They are:

Discover a wild place

Explore its wildness

Conserve – take some personal responsibilities

Share your experiences.

Each topic in this pack and all activities can contribute to meeting the John Muir Award Challenges of Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share. Have a look at the website to find out more; www.jmt.org/jmaward-home.asp



Preparation before a visit

Who to contact and what to ask

When planning a visit to your local burial ground, discuss your plans with the clergy, churchwarden, local authority or other site manager. They may be able to give you information about the particular site, which will enhance your visit. Contact details can often be found on a notice board at the site or in the church or chapel entrance.

Ensure that you have the necessary permission, insurance and assistance to undertake your visit safely

Discuss with the site manager exactly what you are planning to do during your visit and ensure that they are happy with your plans. Ask them if you can collect things such as leaf litter, flower petals, and mini-beasts and whether it would be acceptable to take things away or to take photos. If you plan to do monument rubbing, discuss this in advance with the site manager asking which monuments would be appropriate and safe. They can also inform you if a burial is taking place (check this a few days in advance of the visit). N.B. many older burial sites are 'closed' so no new burials take place in them.

Risk Assessment

As with any outdoor visit, check the weather forecast and make sure that everyone is dressed sensibly. Group leaders should make a preparatory visit to the site in order to think about any likely hazards that you may encounter and to carry out a risk assessment. The site manager may be able to tell you about site-specific risks (these sites are open to the public and so they should be aware of hazards such as unstable monuments).

Possible hazards particular to burial grounds include; Yew trees which contain toxins and so the berries should not be eaten, unsafe memorials, uneven ground, trip and slip hazards, low or sharp railings.

For group visits or open events make sure you think about facilities such as parking, loos and handwashing. If there are no handwashing facilities you may want to supply hand sanitisers and paper towels.

The Do's and Don'ts

Before your visit discuss with your group why the site is important to people. As these sites are places for burial, be aware that people may be visiting graves and may appreciate peace and quiet. Be sensitive around recent graves and ones that are regularly visited and be aware that the children in your group may have friends or relatives buried in the site. It may be better to keep your investigations to the older sections where you are less likely to find recent or regularly visited graves. Children need to be prevented from climbing or leaning on monuments so as to keep safe and also to behave appropriately.

Generally however, people enjoy hearing and seeing children in their local site and churchyards are places of activity as well as mourning; weddings, celebrations, fetes, Sunday schools. Do not worry, and let the children relax and enjoy themselves as much as they would do if visiting another historic place.

In our experience managers of burial grounds welcome visiting groups and are keen for children to learn about and enjoy these fascinating places. They may wish to help with a visit and can advise you on points of particular interest and religious customs when visiting, and can tell you how the site is managed.



Additional Information

Church and Chapel Yards

A church or chapel yard is the land surrounding or next to a church or chapel. For many years these sites have been commonly used as consecrated burial grounds or graveyards to bury the dead of the parish. This has been common practice since the 8th century. They are generally managed by local volunteers.

Consecrated Ground is land which has been declared sacred and for religious purposes

Cemeteries

Cemeteries are burial grounds not linked to a particular church, chapel or religious belief. Urban migration and churchyard overcrowding led to public health fears and as a consequence cemeteries developed widely in Britain from the 1820s onwards. Unlike churchyards, cemeteries were located at the edge of a village or town rather than at the centre. Cemeteries also tend to be much larger than churchyards. They were originally envisaged as public open spaces or 'gardens of remembrance' being professionally designed to be attractive places to visit. They are generally managed by local authorities and occasionally by trusts or 'friends' groups.

War Memorials

A war memorial is generally erected by local communities or groups to commemorate those people involved in or affected by war or conflict. Many are important for their architectural and artistic heritage and are listed. New memorials continue to be erected.

The War Memorials Trust works for the protection and conservation of war memorials in the UK and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) established in 1915 organises war memorial care, conservation and maintenance.

Lychgates

The word lychgate originates from the Old English word Lic meaning corpse. In the past the corpse was carried to the lychgate and placed on a coffin stone or a bier where the priest conducted the first part of the funeral service. Lychgates are found at entrances to churchyards and sometimes at the exit too. They became popular in the 19th century and were constructed of medieval type joinery often to commemorate a local person, a special event or as a war memorial.

Churchyard History

Churchyards were once the heart of community activity and the venue for local markets, fairs, meetings and plays. On old church buildings you will often find deep grooves scratched into the stonework. These were caused by the local men and boys sharpening their arrow points during compulsory archery practice at butts set up in the churchyard. Games such as quoits, ninepins and wrestling took place in churchyards, and the church or chapel walls were used to play a game called fives. 'Church ales' or beer festivals were often organised by church wardens to raise funds and were a feast of eating, drinking and merriment.

Wildlife Importance of Burial Grounds

Many burial grounds are brimming with wildlife, partly as a result of their age and timeless nature. Islands of tranquility within both urban and rural land, they have often escaped the loss of wildlife and habitat that has occurred elsewhere. The grassland within burial grounds can be full of flowers and insects such as bees, butterflies and grasshoppers. Burial grounds frequently contain large and ancient trees in which are found many bird, mammal and invertebrate species. Monuments and stone walls can host creatures such as lizard, frogs, newts, solitary bees and particular plants like mosses and ferns. There are often areas of long grass, scrub or shrubs which may contain slow worms, hedgehogs and birds. Burial grounds are therefore immensely valuable wildlife habitats with a wide range of plants and animals present.

Burial Grounds Are Particularly Notable for Yew Trees, Lichens and Grassland Species:

Yew trees

The most significant collection of old Yew trees in Europe can be found in the churchyards of England and Wales. Approximately 800 Yews of over 500 years old have been recorded, and all burial ground Yews are distinctive features of our landscape. Yew tree numbers have been threatened for many hundreds of years. In Europe, Yews were felled on a huge scale for English long bows throughout the 13th to the late 16th centuries. Henry IV ordered his royal bowyer 'to cut down Yew or any other wood for the public service'. However he did exempt Yews within the estates of the religious orders. As a result Yew trees growing within churchyards were saved from the longbow mania. In Medieval times Yews were removed because of their toxic effect on animals and in more modern times the majority of Yew trees in North America and Asia have been destroyed for the anti-cancer compounds which are found in the bark.

Many different religions throughout history and across the world have seen and in some cases still see the Yew as sacred – for example, the Druids, Buddhists, Celts and early Christians. The longevity of the Yew has made it symbolic of everlasting life, reincarnation and resurrection for different religions and they have had a place in many burial customs. In the early Christian era, a piece of Yew was buried with the deceased to help the soul to achieve everlasting life and Yew boughs were traditionally used in the 'Palm Sunday' church services at Easter.

Lichens

Lichens are two or more organisms living together as one; fungi and algae. The fungi form the visible part of the lichen and within, protected by threads of the fungus, are cells of algae, which can photosynthesise, giving food to the whole lichen. Provided there is enough light and moisture, lichens are able to grow on surfaces unsuitable for other plants. Some grow very slowly, sometimes less than half a millimetre per year; others grow more quickly. Many lichens are long-lived. An individual lichen may be almost as old as the gravestone it is growing on. Of the 2000 UK lichen species, over 700 have been found in burial grounds and almost half of these are rare and seldom, if ever, occur in other places.

Different rocks and building materials can have distinctive lichen communities, also the various types of stonework: gravestones, walls and buildings will vary from rough to smooth, shaded to exposed, damp to dry, horizontal to vertical. All of these provide different niches for lichens and may have different species growing on them. Lichens are also found on trees, wooden structures like fences and gates, grassy areas, pathways and even rubber dustbin lids.

Human beings have used lichens for centuries. In ancient Rome lichens were used to make purple dye for togas. In the Outer Hebrides lichens are still used to dye wool from orange through to brown in the making of Harris Tweed.

Grassland

Most churchyards were originally ancient meadow or pasture. As a consequence many now contain species-rich grassland, which is enclosed, largely unspoiled and protected from the chemicals often used in modern agriculture. Whether the turf is long or short it can be filled with different grasses, mosses, flowers and, in autumn, grassland fungi. Folklore and old names of plants shed light on their association with churchyards and the church calendar. Snowdrops are also called February Fair Maids, Mary's Tapers and Candlemass Bells (Candlemass is the 2nd February), for example. There

may be a great many animals living within, or making use of this species-rich grassland; from soil invertebrates and butterflies through to grass snakes, seed and insect eating birds, voles and shrews.

Caring for God's Acre

Caring for God's Acre is a charity dedicated to the conservation of burial grounds of any or no religion or denomination. We aim to encourage the protection of wildlife and preservation of heritage within these sites and to involve people in their care and management and in learning about and enjoying these beautiful and fascinating places. You can find out more at www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk.

Caring for God's Acre Flagship Species

We have chosen 6 flagship species that are typical of burial grounds, easy to spot and interesting to learn about. Hopefully these act as a hook to aid learning about the range of habitats and interesting features of burial grounds. They are; Yew trees (see previous section), Slow Worms, Hedgehogs, Swifts, Bumblebees and Waxcap Fungi.

Slow Worm

The Slow Worm is a harmless species of reptile found throughout the UK. They are found in rural and urban places and burial grounds can provide really good habitat for them. The slow worm is often mistaken for a snake but is actually a lizard without legs. It has eyelids, a flat forked tongue and can drop its tail to escape from a predator. All of these are features of lizards not snakes. Slow Worms grow from 4cm at hatching to about 30cm long and can live a long time; a male Slow Worm that lived for 54 years in Copenhagen Zoo holds the record! Like all reptiles Slow Worms use the heat of the sun to warm themselves. However they rarely bask out in the open, but usually stay under cover, often in long grass, woodpiles and compost heaps where they hunt for slow moving prey such as slugs and worms. They hibernate over winter amongst tussocky grass, log piles, compost heaps or stones, emerging in spring and breeding in May. Slow Worms are described as 'giving birth' to young rather than laying eggs. The female actually holds the eggs in a membrane within her body until the young are born in August or September; known as 'ovoviviparity'.

Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are found across most of Britain including towns and cities, particularly those with a network of burial grounds, parks and gardens. Hedgehog spines are actually modified hairs whilst the Hedgehog's face, chest, belly and legs are not spiny but have coarse grey-brown fur. When a Hedgehog curls up it presents a

complete ball of prickles as a defence mechanism. Hedgehogs feed primarily on beetles, caterpillars, earthworms, earwigs, slugs and snails. They are nocturnal and tend to forage for food over a wide area, travelling 1 to 2 miles in a night. They have a good sense of smell but poor eyesight, and are inquisitive. They tend to be solitary animals apart from the breeding season when males seek out females. Young hoglets are born from May through to September with 2 to 6 hoglets in a litter. They stay in the nest for the first four weeks or so, after which time they begin to be weaned and are led on night-time foraging trips by their mother. Shortly after this the youngsters will leave the nest of their own accord and the family separates.

Hedgehogs hibernate from late autumn onwards (depending on the weather) in a nest made from old dry leaves, grass and other vegetation. This may be at the base of a hedge, in a compost heap, amongst tree roots or under piles of logs.

Whilst in hibernation the Hedgehog's body slows down and it becomes immobile. It then wakes and emerges in the spring, timing again depending on the weather and on how long its fat reserves last.

Swift

Swifts look like swallows and martins, but are actually related more closely to hummingbirds. They are an extremely aerodynamic group of birds, spending almost all of their lives flying. The shape of a swift is so suited to flying that they are unable to land on flat ground and have tiny feet and legs. Swifts pair for life and return to the same nest sites year after year. They tend to nest in colonies and have a screaming call that attracts other swifts to a nesting site. They nest within a hole in a cliff, wall or roof with the nest entirely out of sight. In burial grounds, look and listen for swifts from April to August and try to see if they are nesting in the buildings. They are only in the UK for about 3 months whilst nesting; the rest of the year is spent on the wing, hunting for insects in a migration that crosses Europe to equatorial and eastern Africa. Blocking of nest entrances can spell disaster for a whole colony and swifts are in urgent need of nest places.

Bumblebee

Bumblebees are larger and hairier than other bees, making them well suited for our climate. They are social insects and live in nests of up to 400 individuals, ruled by a queen. Unlike honeybees they do not swarm, do not become aggressive (although they can sting if under threat) and a nest only lasts for one year. Bumblebees are essential for pollinating our plants. They are also active in colder weather – the first bee you see in spring

and the last in autumn is likely to be a Bumblebee. There are 24 species of Bumblebee native to Britain, 8 of which are widespread. They can be identified fairly easily with a book or a chart. Take a look on the Bumblebee Conservation Trust website or the Field Studies Council fold-out chart on bees.

Waxcap Fungi

Waxcaps tend to be brightly coloured fungi and are found in old, undisturbed grassland that has not been ploughed, reseeded, fertilized or treated with chemicals. They are easy to see as colours range from red, orange, yellow and pink through to grey, brown and black. With names like Ballerina, Blushing, Spangle and Parrot Waxcap they are fun to look for and appear in autumn like jewels scattered in the grass.

John Muir Award

John Muir (1838-1914) was a Scottish-born American naturalist, author, and early supporter of the protection of America's wilderness. He is sometimes called the father of America's national parks, and he made an enormous contribution to the conservation movement. Today, his articles and books continue to encourage and inspire people to visit wild places.



The John Muir Trust is a British conservation charity dedicated to protecting wild places. They own and care for some of the UK's finest wild landscapes including Ben Nevis in Scotland. Founded in 1983, the Trust takes its inspiration from John Muir. Like Muir, the Trust believes in protecting wild land for its own sake and believe that wild places are essential for both people and wildlife. They run an award system (the John Muir Award) encouraging people of all ages to connect with, enjoy and care for wild places. Burial grounds are ideal places to carry out the John Muir Award program. You can find more information about the John Muir Trust at www.jmt.org.