

# East Chiltington church and burial ground



You may have read in April's parish magazine that three public consultations (for the Plumpton Parish Neighbourhood Plan) have demonstrated overwhelming concern for our wildlife and countryside. Responses to the latest questionnaire showed that 98% felt wildlife and the countryside contributed significantly to their quality of life in the parish.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that wildlife does not thrive at all well on a regularly mown or strimmed patch of countryside. Wildlife needs to be given space and time in which to thrive, creating not only beauty but blossom, pollen, nectar and leaves on which insects, birds and other creatures can feed and breed.

Seventy-five per cent of the UK is farmed, grazed, spread with fertilizer, and sprayed with fungicide or insecticide for the efficient production of cheap food. Wild flora and fauna cling on around the undisturbed edges, the verges, ditches, copses or areas managed specifically for their protection. Areas we tend to think of as neglected like stinging nettle patches and scrubby unmanaged brambles are oases for hedgehogs, slow worms and lizards.

Burial grounds and churchyards have existed for hundreds of years with no herbicides, which is one of the reasons they are so good for wildlife. East Chiltington churchyard is just such a spot. The old tombstones lie in a beautiful old meadow of flowers ringed within an old flint wall. The 12th century nave and 13th century tower stand protected from the wind by a magnificent sentinel yew tree. The Celtic people considered yews sacred and symbolic of everlasting life and this yew certainly pre-dates the Christian church. It is not difficult to imagine how this little knoll on a ridge commanding views of the surrounding vale and Downs felt sacred to our ancestors thousands of years ago and will for ages still to come.

The plan for the future management of the Churchyard is to make a plan! The last survey of flora conducted in May 2010, excluding grasses, mosses, ferns, lichens and trees, yielded 39 species, including violets, oxeye daisies, bird's foot trefoil and yarrow, to name but a few. In order to encourage the flowering of the old Churchyard and verge beneath the flint wall, there will be

no regular mowing or strimming during the growing season. A detailed map of the site will be drawn to mark out key features such as paths, spring bulbs, roses, compost heaps, areas of short mown grass, long flower-rich grass etc. At the end of the summer the grass sward will be cleared and composted.

The management of the Churchyard started this year with a spring tidy up in March. There was much to catch up on. A team of volunteers helped prune the roses, sweep leaves and remove ivy from the walls. There was much more to do but it was getting too late to start moving and tidying compost heaps and clearing the thatch of grass around the old stones as the daffodils, celandines and anemones were already flowering.

Through the autumn and winter months there will be other organised working parties and opportunities for anyone to come and help. Any input to the annual work plan and yearly work plan is welcome. If you are any good at drawing detailed maps, please let us know.

The burial ground, war memorial site and paths will continue to be mown during the season. The objective is for the community to help nurture this tranquil place and give wildlife a hand at the right time of the year.

*Please contact James Otway if you would like to be involved. Tel: 07702 208475*