



VISIT RECORD ENJOY

Starter Guide to
Burial Ground
Heritage & Wildlife



Why Burial Grounds?

There are over 20,000 burial grounds in England and Wales, ranging from small rural medieval churchyards to large Victorian city cemeteries, spanning different cultures, religions and centuries.

Burial grounds can be remnants of the landscape that once surrounded them, home to plants, animals and insects now rare in our wider countryside. In urban areas they can be havens for wildlife, peaceful spaces for people and provide essential green spaces in built-up areas.

Burial grounds also encapsulate the history of communities, they tell us about fashion, status and immigration, of lives long-lived and those tragically short. They are places full of stories.

Caring for God's Acre works nationally to support groups and individuals to investigate, care for, and enjoy these unique sites.



Why this pack?

This guide will lead you through your first visits to burial grounds and teach you to recognise some of the wildlife and built features in them. Once you can recognise some species and features, we will show you how to record them.

A 'biological record' is a recorded sighting of wildlife. Experts need these records to understand how wildlife is spread across the UK. Each county has a centre for recording biodiversity and this allows us to understand how widespread species are, as well as see where populations are increasing or declining. You can be a part of this too, it is important to record common species as well as rare ones to give a full picture. Keep reading for more information.

The built heritage of burial grounds is important for archaeologists and historians. By studying the built features, we can learn about attitudes to death, changes in belief, family structures and social status. The styles and materials of monuments and graves track the development of the arts and local styles.

We hope this guide will spark your interest for burial grounds and wildlife in general. Each section of this pack gives suggestions on where to go if you want to find out more.

Why Record what you see?

Recording the wildlife you see is really useful to help a range of people who have an interest in understanding the amount and spread of different species across the UK. These could include burial ground managers, town planners, archaeologists, researchers, ecologists, other recorders, specialists and local wildlife groups. What you see and where you see it is important and we would love you to become a recorder and add to the collective knowledge held about the UK's wildlife.

For recording what you see in burial grounds we would like you to use our iRecord form, this can be accessed via the **Share Your Records** page on our web site www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk It is easy to do and there is a video and instructions to guide you through it.

All data gathered through iRecord, including the records you submit, will be available via the National Biodiversity Network Atlas, free and available to all.



Recording Built Heritage

Enrich the List – This is a Historic England initiative where members of the public can share information about listed buildings or places. This includes photographs (new and old), historic events and social history. To find out more visit historicengland.org.uk and search for Enrich the List.

Historic Environment Record (HER) – Sometimes known as Sites and Monuments Records, The Historic Environment Record holds information on our historic built environment. To find the HER for your area visit www.heritagegateway.org.uk and click on the Historic Environment Record option.



Before your visit ...

Municipal cemeteries, churchyards and chapel yards are generally open to the public and you do not need to inform site managers before you visit. You may find there are sections of a cemetery dedicated to particular religions where there are practices associated with visiting graves and general visiting is not appropriate. These areas are often marked on a map and may be closed.

If you are planning a visit with a larger group, contact the church warden or cemetery manager first. You can usually find their contact details in a church or chapel entrance or via their website.



Be prepared, wear clothing suitable for the time of year and footwear suitable for walking across a variety of soft surfaces. Take a notebook, pencil and camera with you if you can, a magnifying glass could also be useful. There are a variety of apps for tablets and phones for wildlife identification that might be useful, especially if you would like to learn to recognise bird song.

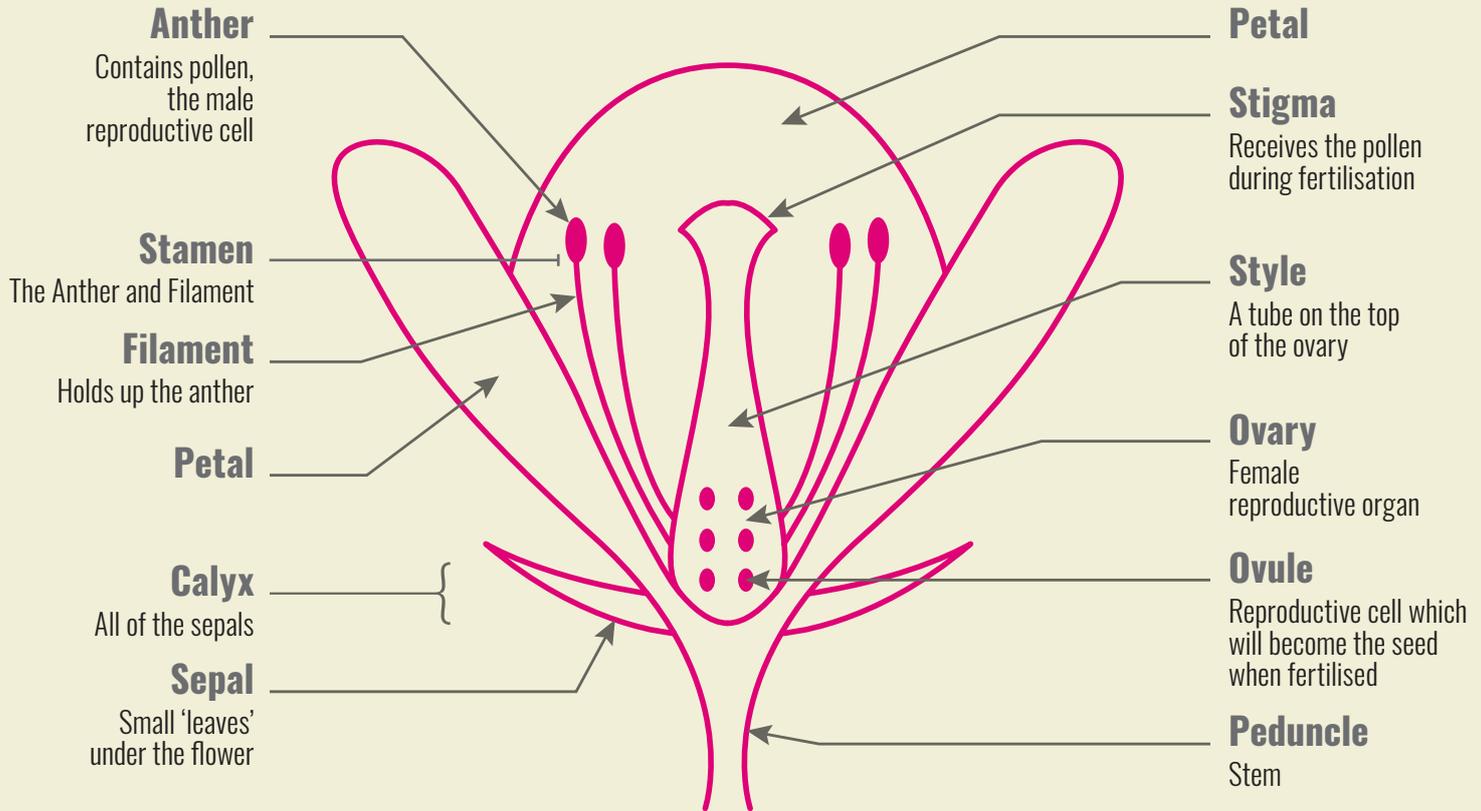
Be safe, if you are going out alone let someone know where you are going and when you plan to be back. Go in daylight, burial grounds can be full of trip hazards due to kerbed and laid down gravestones as well as uneven surfaces from wildlife activity.

Be comfortable, many burial grounds are accessible with seats making them perfect places to observe and enjoy wildlife if you have mobility limitations. Sitting quietly will give you opportunities to watch, listen and identify wildlife. A search on-line for information about the burial ground might give information on accessibility or a telephone number you can call for further information.

Be sensitive, burial grounds are special places. Please be respectful around new and regularly visited graves. Most sites welcome visitors and whilst the wildlife and history of burial grounds is fascinating, understand that this is not their primary purpose.

Parts of a flower

You might like to learn the names of the parts of a flower, they are sometimes used to identify species.





Snowdrop

Galanthus

Flowers late December - March

Snowdrops have narrow blue-green leaves that grow on the base of the plant, only one pure white, drooping flower on each stem and green tips on the inner petals.



Primrose

Primula vulgaris

Flowers January - April

Wild primroses are small and reach about 12 cm in height, they have pale-yellow flowers with five petals that are fused into a small tube at the bottom. Flowers grow from the base of the plant on long stalks. Crinkled green leaves grow in rosettes and have hairs underneath. They like the shade and damp conditions. You might also find garden varieties which are brightly coloured.



Lesser Celandine

Ranunculus ficaria

Flowers February - April

One of the first flowers of the year, this is a low growing plant with one shiny yellow flower on each stem and heart shaped leaves on long stalks. The flowers close before rain and at night.



Daffodil

Narcissus

Flowers March - April

The bright yellow daffodils that are often found in burial grounds are most likely to be garden varieties. However, there could be wild daffodils especially close to woodland edges and in damp areas. Wild daffodils are smaller (up to 30cm tall) and paler than their garden cousins, they have pale yellow petals surrounding a darker yellow trumpet. They will look faded and small and there will be lots of them.

SPRING FLOWERS

Find out more about wild flowers and plants search for The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland or Plantlife online.



Bluebell

Hyacinthoides
Flowers March - May

Bluebells have distinctive bell-shaped flowers on one side of the stem and long narrow leaves.

Many of the bluebells found in our gardens and urban areas are a hybrid. This is a cross between our native bluebell and Spanish bluebell. The hybrid has broader leaves and flowers all around the stem. The petals of each bell open wider and flare at the ends whilst they curl in the native variety. Both the native and hybrid examples can be recorded as a bluebell without needing to go into further detail.



Cowslip

Primula veris

Flowers April - May

Cowslips have dark green and wrinkled leaves with toothed edges. The leaves grow all around the base of the plant starting wide and narrow towards the tip. Yellow bell-shaped flowers have five petals with small indents in the top edge of the petals. The flowers are enclosed by a long green tube-shaped calyx and are found in clusters on each plant, which tilt to one side.

There are several different types of buttercups however the three described here are the most common.



Creeping Buttercup

Ranunculus repens

Flowers May - August

This species is seen growing amongst short grass. It grows close to the ground and produces long runners which spread out to colonise the area. The leaves at the base of the plant are hairy with long stalks and are each cut into three, toothed, sections. The flowers are a deep glossy yellow with five petals and five sepals. The sepals are hairy and clasp the petals from below.



Meadow Buttercup

Ranunculus acris

Flowers April - October

These buttercups can grow 20-90 cm tall. The sepals are yellowish green and clasp the petals from below, though they soon fall away once the flowers open leaving a green spiky seed head. The leaves at the base of the plant have long stalks and are deeply divided into 3-7 toothed and deeply cut lobes. The leaves on the stem have short stalks and the uppermost leaves have no stalks or teeth. The sap is a skin irritant and can cause blisters.



Bulbous Buttercup

Ranunculus bulbosus

Flowers March - May

This has a similar appearance to creeping buttercup; however, the plant has a much larger bulb like swelling at the base. The main identification feature of this species is the sepals; they do not clasp around the petals, instead they turn back towards the stem.



Bugle

Ajuga reptans

Flowers April - July

This is a low-growing and creeping plant. Bugle has oval leaves spread out in a rosette at its base, and smaller leaves growing up its flower spike. The flowers grow on a spike which grows vertically upwards growing to 20cm tall.



Selfheal

Prunella vulgaris

Flowers June - October

Selfheal is a low-growing plant with paired, oval leaves and bluish or violet flowers on a seed head that remains after flowering. It looks like bugle at first, but selfheal has a flat top to the flower head whereas bugle is conical.

Germander Speedwell

Veronica chamaedrys

Flowers April - June

Germander speedwell is a low-growing plant (up to 20cm) and one of several different speedwells. It has upright spikes of bright blue flowers with four petals and a white middle. Look for two rows of long white hairs on opposite sides of its stems, think of the fringed trousers that American Indians wore in cowboy movies. These hairs differentiate germander from the other speedwells.



Common Bird's-Foot-Trefoil

Lotus corniculatus

Flowers May to September

Common bird's-foot-trefoil is a member of the pea family. Its yellow flowers look like little slippers and appear in small clusters. The topmost petals have red lines on them. They are followed by seed pods that look distinctly like bird's feet or claws, hence the name. A low-growing plant, its leaves are covered in tiny soft hairs. The red and yellow flowers give it the alternative name of 'eggs and bacon'.



Oxeye Daisy

Leucanthemum vulgare

Flowers mid-April - June

Looking like a large daisy, it has white flowers with a round yellow centre. The oxeye daisy grows on long stems up to 70cm tall with one flower at the end of each stem. The leaves are toothed and vary in size, they spiral around the stem beginning large at the bottom and reducing in size on the way up.



Daisy

Bellis perennis

Flowers all year

The common daisy has spoon-shaped leaves that form a rosette at the base of the plant, close to the ground and among short grass. It has a single stem carrying the flower head - this is not just one flower, but a composite of a number of tiny flowers which make up the yellow disc in the middle and the surrounding white ray florets look just like petals.

Grass species can be hard to identify. Ideally a burial ground will have several different types of grasses at a range of heights rather than a single species that dominates, like a playing field. Why not see how many different types of grass head you can find? Here are some examples.



Yorkshire Fog



Meadow Foxtail



Crested Dogstail



Cocksfoot

Boundary Walls

Burial grounds were enclosed as sacred spaces and to stop animals disturbing the ground. Early Christian (pre-Norman) enclosures can be identified by their roughly circular shape and may even be on pre-Christian sites. Old maps and parish records can illustrate the history of these boundaries. Usually built in the local style, from local building materials, they can be distinctive in their construction.

Old walls can create wonderful habitats for lichens, mosses and ferns. Their cool, dark recesses and cavities create microhabitats for plants similar to those found on natural rock faces, plus a few garden escapees, and give homes to insects and basking areas for lizards.

The wildlife on walls is most diverse in areas of low pollution and where the wall has been undisturbed for many years.





Ivy
Hedera helix

Flowers September to November

Ivy is an evergreen, woody climber. It has two different forms, juvenile and mature. Leaves of the juvenile ivy have 3-5 lobes. As the plant matures the leaves become oval, dark green and glossy. Once mature, ivy produces yellowish green flowers in clusters called umbels in early autumn. The flowers are followed by round black fruits.



Hart's-Tongue Fern
Asplenium scolopendrium

This fern is easy to recognise, the frond is a single, glossy, green blade, with orange spores underneath.



Ivy-Leaved Toadflax
Cymbalaria muralis

Flowers year round

With small green ivy shaped leaves this plant grows up to 8cm in length. Its tiny flowers are mauve with white and yellow bulges. It has reddish stems and is a creeping plant.

The easiest way to identify trees is when they are in leaf. Try to match the shapes of the leaves here with the ones you can find.



Ash trees have sets of leaves in 3–6 opposite pairs with an addition leaf at the end of each set. The smooth bark is green-grey lightening with age developing shallow tears over time. Really old ash trees have bark similar to oak. In winter ash has distinctive black buds.



Beech has shiny leaves with hairs at the edges and a smooth bark. In winter it has red-brown leaf buds with a crisscross pattern.



Hawthorn is generally a thorny, bushy tree with small leaves that unfurl bright green in early spring. The bark is smooth and grey on young trees with narrow cracks running down the stem developing as the tree ages.



Oak has long leaves with a distinctive lobed shape. Its bark is ridged and rough. The trees bear acorns in the autumn and in winter the twigs look like knuckles.



Hazel is often a bushy tree which will grow back with multiple stems if it has been pruned or cut down. The leaves are round with toothed edges, hairy underneath, and pointed at the tip. The bark is almost shiny with marks around the stems.



Holly keeps its tough and shiny leaves all year round. They are spiky on young trees but smooth on old trees. The bark is smooth and thin with lots of brown warts. Holly has red, poisonous berries.



Sycamore has leaves with five lobes (palmate), the stalks on young leaves are red. The bark is silver-grey and develops cracks and large peeling scales as it ages.

Yew trees have long been associated with churchyards as well as pre-Christian activities. You are most likely to encounter two types of yew in burial grounds, common yew and the sub-species Irish yew. The yew is the most long-lived tree in northern Europe, it has straight, small, flat needles with a pointed tip, these grow in two rows on either side of each twig. Yew does not bear its seeds in a cone, instead, each seed is enclosed in a red, fleshy, berry-like structure called an aril which is open at the tip. The foliage, bark and seed coat of yew contains a cocktail of highly toxic chemicals. Only the red aril is not poisonous.

Common Yew

Taxus baccata

Common Yew has a rounded shape with long, curved boughs bending down to the ground where they then root. It can have a huge canopy covering a large area.

Irish Yew

Taxus baccata 'fastigiata'

This is a more compact, smaller and upright tree than the common yew.



Common Yew



Blackbird
Turdus merula

The male blackbird has black feathers, a bright yellow beak and a yellow ring around its eye. They are about 25cm in length and can be seen hopping or running along the ground. They cock their heads to one side to listen for worms. The female is slightly smaller than the male and is brown, she doesn't have the distinctive yellow features of the male.



Robin
Erithacus rubecula

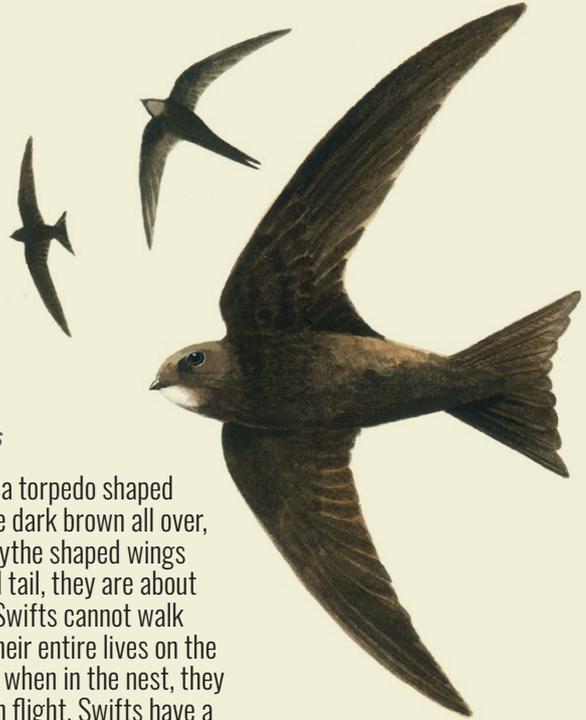
With its bright red breast, the robin is familiar throughout the year. Males and females look identical at about 14cm long, and young birds have no red breast and are spotted with golden brown. Robins sing nearly all year round and despite their friendly appearance, they are aggressively territorial and are quick to drive away intruders.



Pied Wagtail

Motacilla alba

The pied wagtail is a small (18cm), long-tailed and rather sprightly black and white bird. When not standing and frantically wagging its tail up and down it can be seen dashing about over lawns or car parks in search of food.



Swift

Apus apus

Swifts have a torpedo shaped body and are dark brown all over, with long scythe shaped wings and a forked tail, they are about 16cm long. Swifts cannot walk and spend their entire lives on the wing except when in the nest, they even sleep in flight. Swifts have a distinctive shrill scream and might be found nesting under the eaves of churches. Summer visitors to the UK, they arrive May to June and leave in August.



Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Swallows are summer visitors to the UK and arrive between April and June. Swallows are 15-20cm long and can be recognised by their long, forked tails and long narrow wings. They have a red throat and forehead, a cream underbody and a dark blue-black back. Swallows like to nest within buildings such as barns or cloisters.



House Martin

Delichon urbica

These are small birds, about 12cm long with shiny blue-black upper feathers and slender streamlined wings. They have a white band across their backs and short forked tails. Be careful not to mix them up with swallows. House martins have shorter tails and a white chin. They are rarely seen on the ground except when they are collecting mud to build their nests which they fix to walls under ledges and in roof apexes, on the outside of buildings.



Yellow Meadow Ants

Lasius flavus

Old burial grounds have become a refuge for the harmless yellow meadow ant because it lives in permanent pasture which has become a rare habitat. This ant creates large mounds, often against gravestones, facing the sun. As the number of workers increases so does the size of the mound. It becomes an irregular labyrinth of cells and passages all made of soil and lying equally above and below ground. Mounds can be over 100 years old and form a mini-habitat of their own. The ants need the warmth of the sun and so they trim back the grass growing on the surface.





Brimstone Butterfly

Gonepteryx rhamni

Often the first butterfly of the spring the male brimstone is sulphur yellow with a single orange spot on each wing. The females are pale green, also with an orange spot on each wing. Their wings are leaf shaped with pale undersides.



Peacock Butterfly

Aglais io

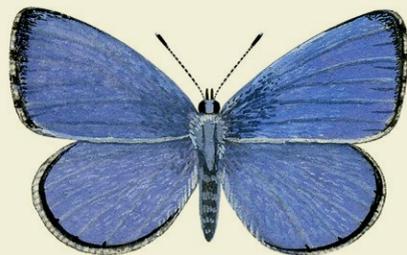
Peacocks have dark red wings with four distinctive 'eyes' (like those on a peacock's plumage) and dark edges. Their bodies are dark red and hairy.



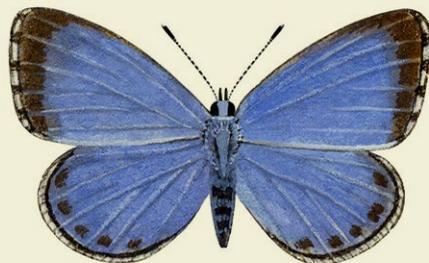
Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

Easily recognised by their dark colours and distinctive red bands, white spots and small blue spots along the wing edges.



male



female

Holly Blue

Celastrina argiolus

Although there are several butterflies that look like the holly blue, this is the first of them to emerge in late March/early April. This butterfly is often found in burial grounds because it needs both holly and ivy plants. It has black spots on light blue underwings and can look silvery in flight. It is often seen high up in holly trees rather than close to the ground.



Cinnabar Moth

Tyria jacobaeae

The cinnabar moth is a common species in southern and central parts of the British Isles. Look for the eye-catching moth between late April and August or the black and yellow striped caterpillars between May and August. This moth can be seen flying during the day unlike most moths.



Spotted Ladybird

Coccinella septempunctata

Ladybirds are round beetles with red wing cases protecting delicate wings beneath. The 7-spots have three spots on each wing case with a seventh central spot where the wing cases meet in the middle. They have short antennae on the head and pale marking on the front of the body. Each of the six legs end in a claw.



Harlequin Ladybird

Harmonia axyridis

There are over 100 pattern varieties of Harlequin ladybirds. They can be black with 4 red spots or red-orange with eight spots on each wing case and a black shape where the wing cases meet. These are a non-native species of ladybird which are becoming prevalent in the UK.

There are many different types of fungi found in burial grounds, mostly appearing in the autumn. Short mown grass can be good for waxcaps whilst earthstars often appear under yew trees and conifers. Look around the edges of the burial ground on wood piles and around the base of trees. Always be careful when touching fungi and wash your hands before touching your face or eating.

Fungi are part of a diverse community of “decomposers” that break down dead plants and animals. Fungi transform organic matter into forms that can be used by other decomposers, and into food for plants.



Fly Agaric

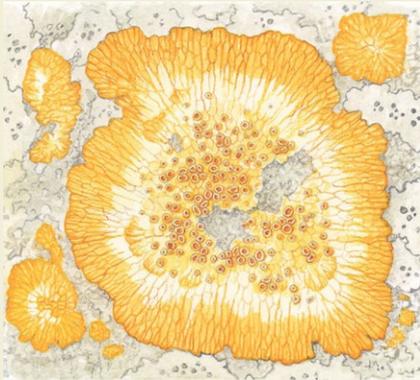
Amanita muscaria

One of the most recognisable fungi in the UK. The scarlet top has white wart-like spots which drop off with age and the cap can fade to orange. The stalk and gills (underneath the cap) are white. You will find them growing in association with birch and pine trees.

Lichens often form mosaics of colour, especially on stonework. Lichens are two or more organisms living together as one, a fungus, an algae and/or cyanobacteria. Lichens are particularly rich and varied in unpolluted sites.

Churchyards and burial grounds are of supreme importance for lichen conservation, particularly where there are no natural outcrops of rock. Lichens are also found on trees, wooden structures like fences and gates, grassy areas, pathways and even rubber dustbin lids! Of the 2000 UK lichen species, over 700 have been found in burial grounds. Almost half of these are rare and seldom if ever occur in other places.

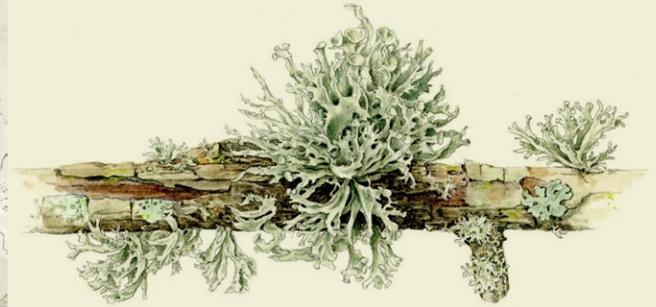
There are three main types of Lichen:



Crustose (crusty) lichens are flat lichens firmly attached to stone and cannot be easily removed with a fingernail.



Foliose (leafy) lichens have leafy edges and can be lifted away from a stone with a fingernail.



Fruticose (shrubby) lichens are bushy and usually only attach at one point.

Some animals are hard to spot in burial grounds but they do leave signs that they have been there...



Rabbit Poo

Rabbits produce small hard round, light-coloured pellets. If you are sure the poo is from a rabbit you can make a record of a rabbit on the site.



Molehill

Moles live underground and are not usually seen. However, the presence of molehills is a sure sign of moles and a record of moles can be made based on seeing a molehill. Moles paralyze worms and insects with poison in their saliva then they store the insects in an underground room to eat later.



Owl Pellets

Pellets are the regurgitated remains of an animal that a bird cannot digest, they are often mistaken for poo. In birds of prey and owls it is often hard to tell which bird pellets have come from which species. Search for pellet identification online to help you determine which species the pellets you find have come from.



Foxes are a common sighting in many towns and cities. Their footprints are a little bit like a dog's, they have the same number of pads, but their feet are generally much narrower and tend to be in line with each other.



Unless you live in Cumbria, rural Scotland or the Isle of Wight any **squirrel** footprints you get are likely to belong to the **grey squirrel** rather than **red**. Both species have much larger back feet than front feet.



Hedgehog footprints are hard to spot but quite distinctive in their long, narrow shape. They have three toes that point forward and two that go out to the sides.



Cat



Dog



There's always a chance your site is visited by **badgers**. Their paw prints are large, robust and have five digits.

Nibbled Nuts

Hazel nuts are popular with many small mammals and the way a nut is opened can tell you who's eaten it. This is particularly handy for telling if dormice are present, as they are secretive animals and you're very unlikely to see one.

It takes strong jaws and teeth to split a hazel nut. So, if you find a discarded nut shell split in two, or shattered, the nut has probably been eaten by a squirrel.



Squirrel

Bank voles also have big, strong teeth, so can bite rather than nibble through to the kernel. Quite often they will leave an irregular, roundish hole in the shell. They tend not to leave lots of teeth marks on the shell near the hole.



Bank Vole



Apodemus Mouse



Dormouse

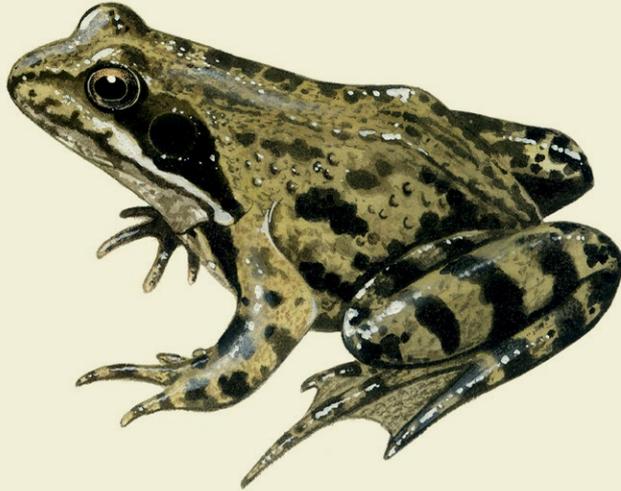
Distinguishing between nuts eaten by *apodemus* mice (woodmice and yellow-necked mice) and dormice.

Both sorts of mice nibble neat round holes in the shell, so you need to look closely. A magnifying glass helps. A hole nibbled by an *apodemus* mouse will have teeth marks going down the edge of the hole (vertically). They leave more scratches on the outside of the shell than bank voles. Nuts nibbled by a dormouse will have smooth inner surface of the hole, as they gnaw like a tin opener turning the nut as they go rather than down.

Another clue to help you tell the difference between *apodemus* and dormouse nibbled nuts is where you find them. If you find a cache of nibbled nuts, it's likely to be *apodemus*. Dormice generally tend to eat and then drop nuts where they find them, so their nuts are often more spread out.

If you find a nut with a really tiny hole (maybe 1-2mm across), this has probably been eaten by an insect.

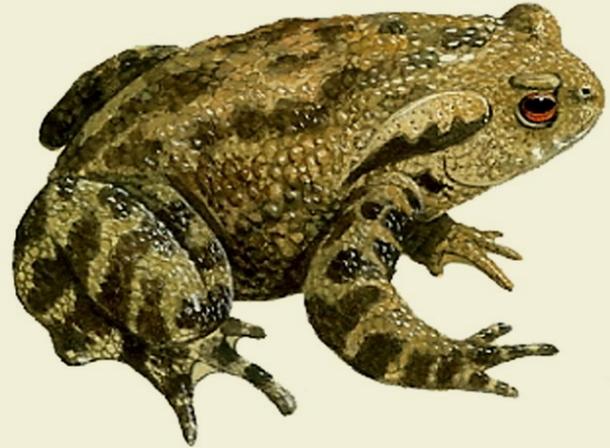
Amphibians are animals such as frogs, toads and newts. They have a water-based larval stage, but the adults spend much of the time away from water. Mid-January to May is when our native amphibians are making their way to wetlands to lay their eggs. You can often find the adults migrating to (as well as in and around) the edges of canals and ponds looking for mates.



Common Frogs

Rana temporaria

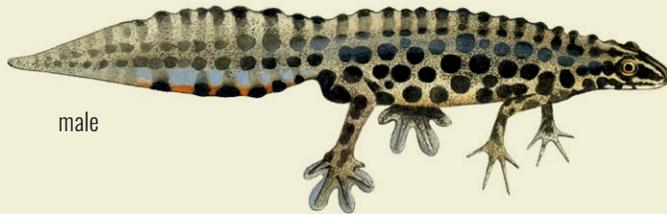
Common frogs largely have olive green skin with brown blotches, but colours can vary. They have muscular back legs and a line running through the eye. Frog spawn looks like a mass of thick jelly with dark specs throughout.



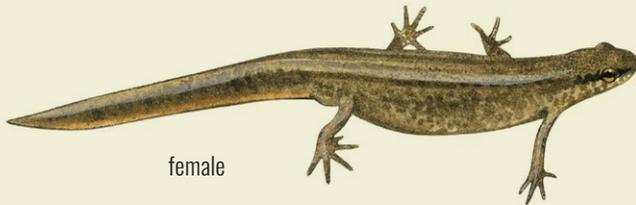
Toads

Bufo bufo

Common toads vary from dark brown, grey and olive green to sandy-coloured. They have broad, squat bodies and warty skin. They always walk rather than hop. Toad spawn is laid in strings, quite different from frogspawn.



male

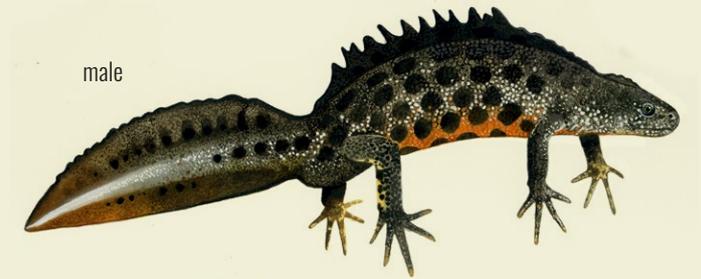


female

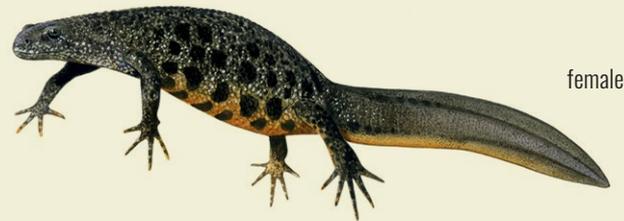
Smooth newt

Lissotriton vulgaris

The Smooth Newt is the UK's most widespread newt species. They can grow to 10cm and are generally brown in colour. Males develop a continuous wavy crest along their back in the breeding season. The belly of both sexes is yellow/orange with small black spots. The spots on the throat provide a good way of telling this species apart from the less common palmate newts (which lack spots on their throat).



male



female

Great crested newts

Triturus cristatus

Great Crested Newts are protected by law and should not be handled or disturbed. In comparison to other newts the great crested is significantly larger, growing up to 17cm in length. Great crested newts are dark brown or black in colour with a distinct 'warty' skin. The underside is bright orange with irregular black blotches. In the spring, males develop an impressive jagged crest along their back and a white 'flash' along the tail.

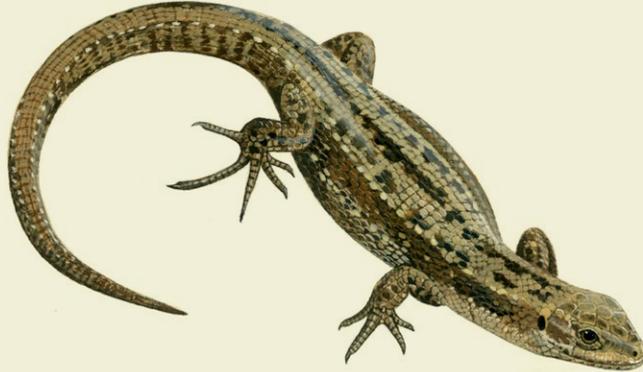
There are six types of British reptile which are lizards, snakes or slow worms. They are easiest to spot on sunny mornings in the spring and autumn when they need to bask in the sunshine to raise their body temperatures.



Grass Snake

Natrix natrix

This non-venomous reptile is the largest snake in the UK. Females are bigger (up to 130 cm) than the males (around 100 cm). The snake's back is green or brown with dark bars and a yellow or cream and black neck collar. The underside is white or cream with black markings. The female lays eggs in warm, rotting vegetation like compost heaps. You may find old egg shells which are white and leathery.



Common or Viviparous Lizard

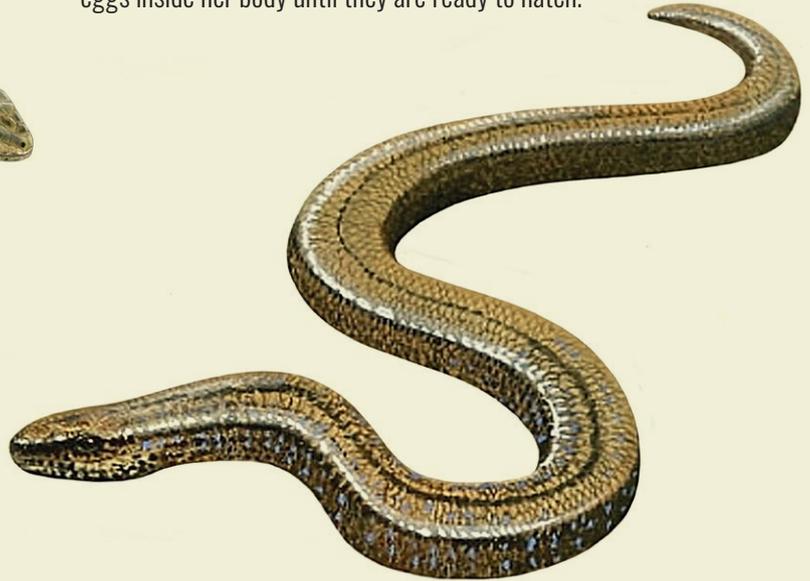
Zootoca vivipara

This lizard is grey to dark brown, often with a dark stripe that runs along the back. Females have yellow, grey or green undersides with few or no spots. Males have orange or yellow undersides with a profusion of black spots. There are also completely black forms. Common lizards give birth to live young.

Slow Worm

Anguis fragilis

Although it may look like a small snake, the slow worm is a legless lizard. Their colour varies from brown to grey or bronze. Slow worms are often found underneath pieces of wood or metal. They rarely come into the open. The female keeps the eggs inside her body until they are ready to hatch.



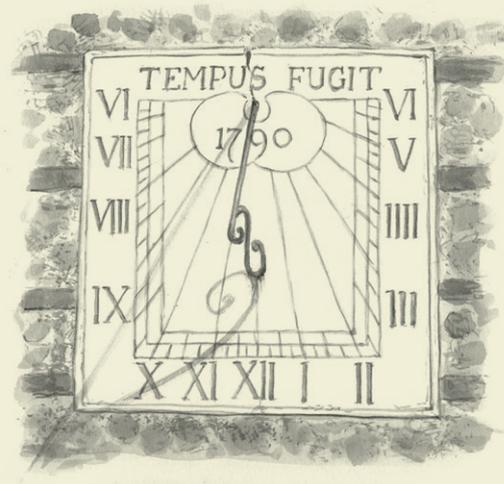


Lychgates

Lychgates are a roofed porch-like structure over a gate to a churchyard, often built of wood and were a key part of burial practices. They were meeting places and shelters for the people bringing a corpse for burial, and for the priest to receive the body. 'Lych' comes from the Old English 'lich', meaning corpse. As these were largely wooden structures many have been restored and replaced or disappeared over time.

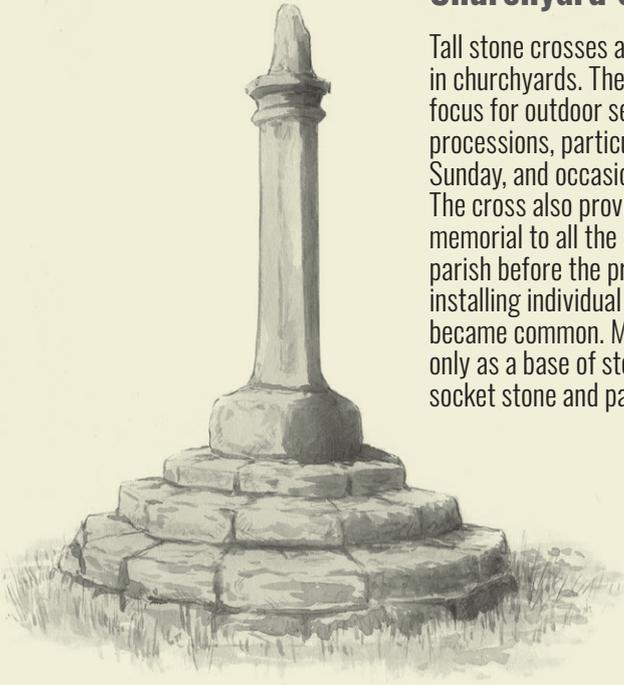
Sundials

Most medieval churches would have had a sundial. These might be attached to the church, usually above the porch or on the south face of the tower. Its main purpose was to ensure that the bell was rung at the correct time to mark daytime canonical hours (certain times of the day for prayers). In many places, the sundial was the only reliable public timepiece until the early 19th century when sundials were replaced by church clocks.



Churchyard Crosses

Tall stone crosses are often found in churchyards. They provided a focus for outdoor services and processions, particularly on Palm Sunday, and occasional preaching. The cross also provided a communal memorial to all the dead of the parish before the practice of installing individual monuments became common. Many survive only as a base of steps and maybe a socket stone and part of the shaft.



Find out more

Many old gravestones are now difficult to read due to weathering, but individuals and family history societies may have recorded their inscriptions and published them, either online, on microfiche or in book form. Your county archive service will be able to help you find these.



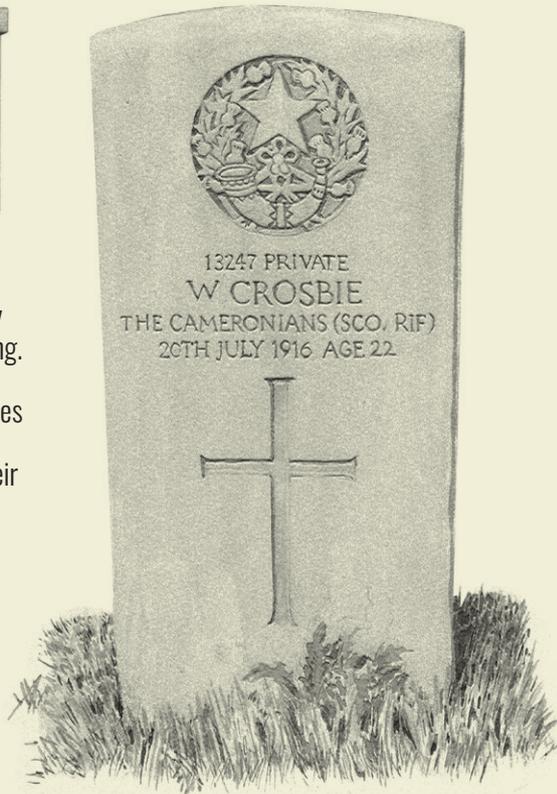
Inscriptions

Monument inscriptions are the text on the gravestone or tombstone. There may be multiple burials in one grave so the inscription will provide information about several family members. Monumental inscriptions are important to genealogists and family historians, providing information on a person's life and death, including dates, and sometimes addresses and occupations. Many, particularly 18th and 19th century headstones, have beautiful lettering.



Symbols

Carvings on memorials can be very elaborate; they may also be puzzling and often hold a lot of meaning. The family of the deceased would have chosen symbols to reflect their religious devotion, their lives and the fashion of the time. Some symbols are still used today, while other headstone symbols and their meanings have become more obscure in modern times. Lists of the meanings of symbols can be found by searching online.



War Graves

The existence of a war grave in a burial ground does not necessarily mean the person was interred there. Many stand as memorials to the fallen whilst their remains were buried in the country where the conflict took place. War graves are not limited to death in combat either but include military personnel who die while in active service, e.g. during the Crimean War, more military personnel died of disease than as a result of enemy action. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has an online database of British and Commonwealth war graves and inscriptions.





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