

SGEG - Shamley Green's Special Places

5. Christ Church Graveyard

Next time you come along the busy main road from Cranleigh to Shamley Green, why not pause a while to have a look around the graveyard attached to our distinctive hill top church. Well above the road and surrounded by a protective thick holly hedge, it's a haven of tranquillity and a great wildlife habitat!

Beyond the neatly kept entrance the graveyard is a lovely wildlife-friendly place with plants like cat's ear and ox-eye daisies which are really good for pollinators. Managing a graveyard is a tricky business, but with advice from charities like Eco Church and Caring for God's Acre, Christ Church is doing a great job of balancing the needs and wants of parishioners with the needs of the local flora and fauna.

There is a large patch of ground to the North of the church which is managed to encourage wildflowers including bluebells in the grass and harebells nestling by headstones. Swift nesting boxes have been installed under the eaves of the church hoping to help our endangered swift population. And last November the children of the Messy Church and Little Stars groups got together to plant swathes of early flowering bulbs under the yews at the Northern entrance to the church yard. Watch this space this spring! The roadside bank by this entrance is also home to a gorgeous springtime display of primroses and daffodils.

The three big yews nearby were planted when the church was originally built in 1863. Yews have traditionally been planted in ground considered sacred since pre-Christian times and this continued with the spread of Christianity, yews being planted when churches were originally consecrated or major additions made to them. King Edward 1 actually decreed in 1307 that they must be planted in churchyards to protect the church from wind damage! In 2000 a little yew, the 'Millennium' yew, was planted in the 'new' part of the graveyard to the East (consecrated in 1900 and still in use today). Although this tree doesn't look very impressive at the moment it could well still be there in another 100 years' time, or even more!



Bluebells, moss, and lichen-covered gravestones

Like all graveyards, the whole history of the parish is encapsulated here: headstone memorials to many generations of local families, and to some local celebrities such as Tony Hart and Harry Secombe, and the sad headstones of young men tragically killed in both World Wars. Headstones in churchyards are also valuable habitats for many species of mosses and lichens, which means they can be difficult to read! Did you know the almost universal use of headstones is relatively recent, only being widely adopted since the 18th century? - for a fascinating history see www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/m-is-for-memorials/