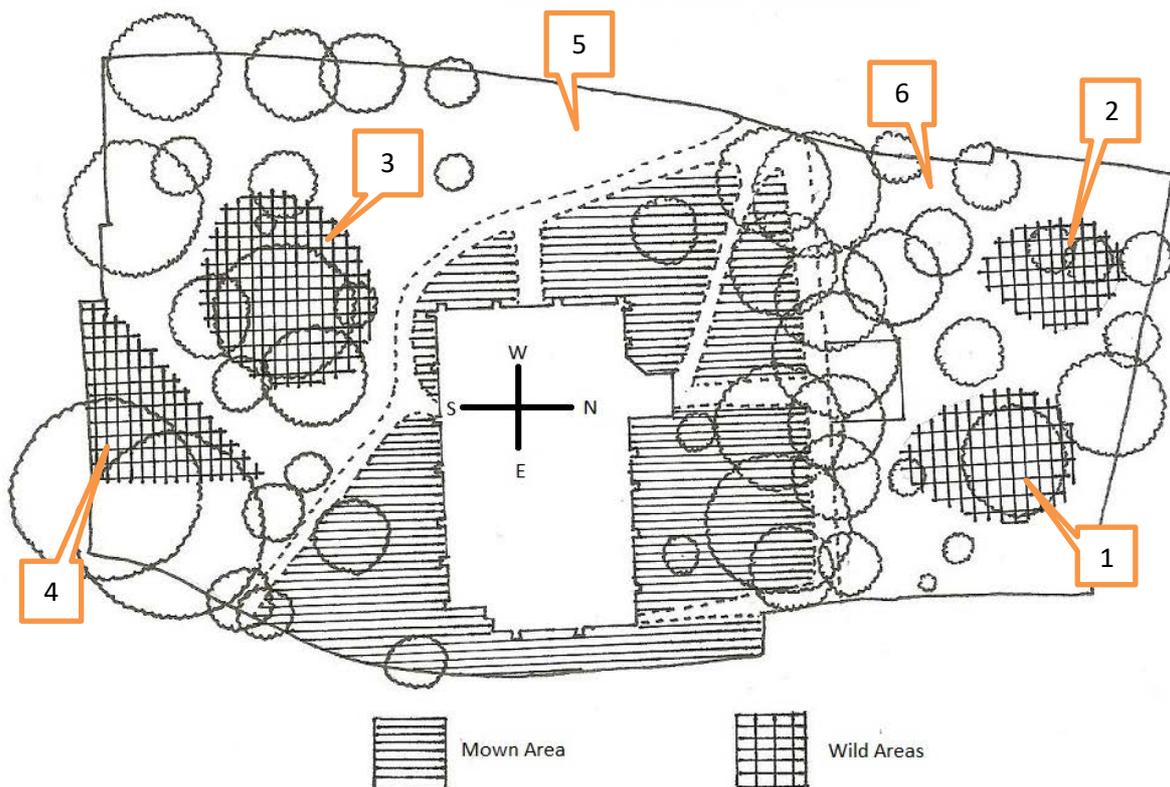


ST CLEMENT'S CHURCHYARD REDISCOVERED (Part Four)

In my earlier articles I provided some early insights into the plans for the designated 'kempt' and 'wild' areas of the Churchyard. I am pleased to say that thanks to the work of the volunteers, and one in particular, great progress has been made in improving the designated mown areas in the immediate vicinity of St Clement's itself. It may not quite be 'bowling green quality' just yet but the improvement is noticeable and, judging from the comments passed on to me, is bringing great joy to locals, parishioners and visitors alike.

Regular readers may remember that the designated wild areas are seen as a slightly longer project. The advice from Roger Wragg of DDC was to leave these areas to have a season's growth so that we could identify which plants were growing there, decide which should be retained, where new plants should be added as well as what other actions were necessary to create an appropriate growing environment. As high summer has probably reached its peak so last month, I took the opportunity to revisit the 'wild areas' and with the help of Peter Dean from the Sandwich Bay Bird Observatory Trust (SBBOT) review what was growing and make plans for the future. I must admit it was fascinating to spend time with an expert, for you learn so much in a very short space of time. In reality what I saw merely as 'greenery' he was able to put a name to virtually everything we came across. The plan below shows the current designated wild areas and for ease I have numbered them 1, 2, 3 and 4 so that I can outline what we found growing in them.



Wild Area 1: The dominating ground cover was elder and ivy but we found stinking iris, violets and wild strawberries. Ideally, we need to remove the ivy and the elder as soon as possible as they will smother the existing wild flowers and limit the success of any new planting.

Wild Area 2: Once again this is an area dominated by elder and ivy but we were able to identify cow parsley, nettles, pendulous sedge, stinking iris and violets. There are also three large privet bushes that are in need of trimming, with the area likely to benefit from the removal of one of them.

Wild Area 3: For no apparent reason this area has escaped the smothering effects of ivy and elder and we found blue bells, cow parsley, dock, geum, stinking iris, violets and wild arum.

Wild Area 4: This area contains a variety of wild grasses, bluebells, nettles and primroses. Given the timing of the visit our expert could not be sure whether the blue bells were English or Spanish but the size of the dried 'bells' suggested that they were likely to be the Spanish variety.

More widely across the Churchyard we found evidence of moon daisies, potentillas and trailing tormentil. The general advice I received though is also very important for the future of our wild areas and that is that as well as clearing the ivy and ground elder, we must seek to create more light for our plants as well as improving the vistas across the Churchyard. Currently the suckers and low hanging branches are limiting the sunlight that can reach these new beds so this must be part of the next winter works that we will agree with DDC.

Peter also identified a further area that would benefit from full-sun throughout most of the day and the suggestion is that the east-facing aspect just in front of the Church Hall would be an ideal location for a colourful wild flower summer bed. For ease of identification I have labelled this as **Area 5** on the plan. I would be interested to hear comments from readers regarding this suggestion.

On our walk around the Churchyard we looked closely at Area 6 on the plan. This part of the Churchyard looks totally overgrown from a distance but benefits from closer inspection. The plants and shrubs there are essentially ornamental and at some point in the distant past this will have been a very attractive shrubbery. Currently there is a mahonia, a cotoneaster, a bay tree and a climbing rose and a wild hop all competing for space and light. There do not appear to be any graves or tombs in this area but it could, with a little care and attention, be rescued and returned to its former glory. Peter has offered to provide further advice in the future and, following the autumn cut of SBBOT wild areas provide us with some seeds for the Churchyard.

So, from one expert to another. I was also contacted by, Geoff Cornelius, a former St Clement's Churchwarden who took time to show me the various trees that had been donated by parishioners and planted in the Churchyard in the past. It was Geoff who planted the Millennium Yew that I wrote about last month and he showed me the trees planted as part of the Mary Attwood legacy as well as trees planted in memory of a range of parishioners who are no longer with us. Mary Attwood has been a very generous benefactor to St Clement's and as part of her legacy comprise Geoff planted two cherry trees, two apple trees, a maple and a yew.

I am aware of other trees that have been planted to commemorate the lives of parishioners and have decided to create a record of these commemorative trees. Unfortunately, plaques attached to the trees or stakes in the ground often become detached and lost so to avoid this information being lost altogether I would be grateful to receive any information on the type of tree that has been planted, when it was planted and the person it commemorates. This is important and valuable information and an essential part of the history of the people of Sandwich in general as well as of St Clement's Churchyard in particular.

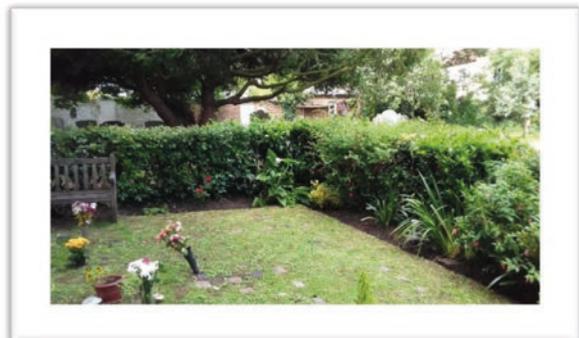
In terms of commemorating those parishioners another important development has taken place and may have already been spotted by regular users of the path between Sandown Road and Church Street St Clement's. Thanks to the commitment, dedication and tenacity of Reverend Canon Mark Roberts the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has finally formally recognised that there are two members of the armed forces laid to rest in St Clement's Churchyard. This recognition has been acknowledged by the two plaques placed on the walls at the two entrances to the Churchyard. We intend to find out more about each individual and will share their stories at some future date.



A section of wall between the Churchyard and Barnes End Court

As well as planning for the future and capturing information from the past, the work of clearing the Churchyard continues. The DDC team has continued to trim and cut down previously untouched areas of the Churchyard and that helps to open up aspects and views that have previously been cluttered or inaccessible. The volunteers have continued to clear away ivy from the trees and walls surrounding the Churchyard much to the delight of one resident from Barnes End Court who can once again enjoy looking across the Churchyard from her sitting room and kitchen windows. It is disappointing though to cut away the undergrowth at the base of the walls to find so many broken tombstones. I would like to think that in the fullness of time we can reassemble and erect these witnesses to our collective and shared past.

Another area that we have been giving attention to is the Garden of Remembrance. As you can see from the photographs below the team has begun cutting the shrubs surrounding the garden and edging around the borders. One volunteer has taken on the Garden of Remembrance as her focus and she has done some wonderful work weeding the borders, clearing away the dead flowers and plants and washing and storing the various pots and containers in the cupboard within the Garden.



As each month goes by, we are all discovering and sharing more and more about St Clement's Churchyard. I continue to be delighted by the correspondence I receive from those who have read these articles and who have information to share, ideas for further work or those who wish to give their time as volunteers. So, if anything in this article has triggered a memory, if you have any suggestions for areas to develop or any plants or seeds you wish to donate to help stock the wild areas please do not hesitate to make contact with me.

Barry Brooks

Churchwarden