

# St Mary's Church, Berrow – Churchyard Trail

**Please take care when walking around the churchyard. The surface is very uneven and there are low walls and possibly memorials hidden in the grass. Look out for overhanging branches.**



**The Churchyard** is enclosed by a stone wall. Outside the wall the land belongs to the golf club and is also, since 1952, designated as part of the Berrow Dunes SSSI as is a large part golf course. The churchyard is now closed – there can be no more burials except for burials of ashes. The local council is now responsible

**History** – parts of the church building date back 900 years. There is a booklet detailing more about the building in the church. The churchyard has been used for burials for much of that time in particular for those washed up on Berrow beach from the many shipwrecks along our coast. The church tower was once painted white to act as a beacon for the many ships that used to travel up to Burnham.



Our trail starts by the **stone mounting block** which was used until at least the early 1900s by the vicar among others arriving at church. Where the church room is there used to be a row of cottages and a stable block where the horses would have been looked after during the services.



Go through the gates (installed in 2024).

Turn right and follow pathway parallel to the wall. The large tree on right is an oak. Many different trees were planted on the perimeter in 1960s and 1970s and are now well established.

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Continue on and you will see on your right a **wildlife hotel** built by one of our youth groups. (With grateful thanks to Westcroft Fram Shop for providing the pallets to get us started)

Bug hotels are made from a variety of materials to make hidey holes for insects and help to create warm, dry spaces that will attract different creepy crawlies. Good for lots of different types of minibeast such as *ladybirds*, *bees*, *woodlice* and *spiders* who may use it as a safe space to shelter, lay their eggs, raise their young, and seek refuge from predators. We might even get frogs or hedgehogs

coming to stay.

We have put a **small pond area** on the top of the insect hotel to provide drinking water for birds and other wildlife.

There are no other accessible sources of water nearby as the rhynes are too deep for small mammals and birds.



In the corner of the wall there is a **stone stile** (which used to be part of a footpath across open land). This is a good place to look for Spring bulbs.

Turn to your left and you will see a white headstone which is our **Commonwealth War grave** and is maintained by the War Graves Commission.



There are some **Invasive species** which we need to remove – like sea buckthorn which was originally planted on the sand dunes to keep them in place. It is spread very easily by birds and the wind carrying the berries and, although very good at holding sand dunes can take over and prevent other native flora and fauna from growing,



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You will notice a very **large Holly bush** in the centre of this part of the churchyard. Our wildlife enjoys Holly: the berries are an important food source for many birds like *Redwings* and *Fieldfares*; indeed, *Mistle thrushes* guard their own berry-laden bushes with such voracity that they'll chase off any potential thieves.



Look out in the trees for **Bird nesting boxes** we have put up. There are 2 types – great/blue tit boxes and open fronted boxes for robins. There is evidence that these boxes have been used by birds. In the Spring see if you can see the adults taking food in for their young.



On the right half way along you will see a **large hole** under the wall. This has been made **by badgers** who regularly come during the night and forage for earth worms. At the moment, there is no evidence that their set is in the churchyard.

Look around and you may see where they have been digging up the surface of the grass in search of earth worms.



Carry on towards the far corner and you will see a **white marble grave** of a Russian lady Anna Andreevna. Her husband Captain Harold Grenfell's name is also on the stone together with the inscription in Russian - CMN CMOKONHO (Sleep Well).

She was Anna Andreyenka Levoshkina born in 1895 the daughter of a Russian farmer and died in Somerset in 1924. He was born in 1870 and was a British Naval Attache in St Petersburg in 1912 and died in Somerset in 1948 and is not thought to be buried with her





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There is **bramble** growing over a lot of the wall in this part of the churchyard – this is a good source of nectar for *Brimstone and Speckled Wood butterflies*, fruit for *Song Thrushes and yellowhammers* and a hiding place for mammals such as *hedgehogs*.



Walk to your left and notice **the Ivy** growing over wall – sometimes considered a nuisance but ivy is a great source of nectar, the pollen and berries of ivy are an essential food source for insects and birds during autumn and winter when little else is about. It also provides shelter for insects, birds, bats and other small mammals.



A little further on is the **grave of Lord Cave** – A former Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain (1922-28) who lived at St Annes, Gore Rd, Burnham. The grave stone bears the words “A man who neither sought or shunned greatness but found it in the path of duty”

This area is particularly good to spot bluebells in May.  
*In Spring – listen for birdsong and look out for a wonderful show of bluebells*

Continue across the sand path (which will lead you to the path to the beach across the golf course) to the older part of the churchyard. Here also is good for **bluebells**.





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There is an area without any memorials and here we leave the area unmown during the spring and summer to allow **native wild flowers** to grow & flower.



A **report by the Somerset Botany Group** found 94 species of native flowers and plants. Some of these are rare and interesting e.g. pyramidal and bee orchids bluebells, cowslip and doves foot cranesbill.

Their report also says '**The grassy areas in the churchyard are unusual, with a very high ratio of wildflowers to grass**



There is a **memorial for Ben Travers** a local playwright who was a member of St Mary's Church. He wrote 'farce' plays and lived in Berrow after 1<sup>st</sup> WW. He died Dec 1980. Inscription reads 'This is where the real fun begins'.

Continue down the path and on your right you may see a **Rugosa rose** after which some of the local roads are named. We do need to control this very pretty flower because it is inclined to spread quickly.



On your left by the chancel door you may see daffodils in the shape of a cross planted by our young people at their light party in October ready to flower at Easter.

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On the other side of the chancel door there is an area of pyramidal orchids and primroses.



As you return down the path towards your starting point there is an unmarked **plague grave**.

In 1960s/70s a water pipe was taken into the church for the first time. In laying the pipe alongside the north side of the church path a flat tombstone was revealed on which was read "Plague victim".

The whole stone was not uncovered so no date was discovered. The south east corner of the stone was broken away so we looked inside and could see nothing. The stone is about halfway between the main gate and the Chancel door. The grave seems to have been sited North/South rather than conventional East/West.

## Our Aims Are:-

- For the churchyard to be cared for in a way which makes it pleasant and attractive for visitors, a place in keeping with the burial and remembrance of loved ones, a fit setting for the C13 church and a haven for wildlife.
- Surrounded by a SSSI and set between the sand dunes/links golf course and a small area of scrubland with a road bordered by housing we aim to promote an area of wildlife retreat encouraging native plants to flourish.
- A place for current and future generations to visit and explore both the history and the natural history.

We hope you enjoyed our Churchyard Trail. For further information see our Wilder Churches Page. [berrowandbrean.co.uk/wilder-churches-project/](http://berrowandbrean.co.uk/wilder-churches-project/)