

Friends of St Giles' Hill Graveyard



NEWSLETTER



Christmas 2025

*we celebrate 10
years of hard work!*

It has been 10 years since Anna and David Stewart took on the resurrection of the St Giles' Hill graveyard and tremendous things have been achieved. In recognition of this the Hampshire Chronicle published an article about the work done with a photo of Anna, Dave and some of the people who regularly help on a workdays. These are usually on the first Saturday of the month from 10.00 – 13.00.

Anyone is welcome to join us.



Anna on the left and Dave 2nd from right together with members of the committee and helpers.

Diversity of Flora

When the Friends of St Giles' Hill Graveyard first started their work a survey recorded 59 species of plants, the recent incomplete survey has recorded over 250 with an expected total of over 300 species.

2025 has seen the development of an area dedicated to wildflowers and they have flourished, as has the grass which was planted where hogweed has been destroyed. Dealing with hogweed has been an ongoing battle over many years but it looks like we might be winning in some areas!



Hybrid Mullein



The wildflower area in July

There have been some interesting species of plants arriving in the graveyard over the year, for example, the hybrid Mullein which aroused some interest in botanical circles and was investigated by Martin Rand, botanist and Vice County recorder for South Hampshire.



Martin Rand at work

Diversity of Fauna

The diversity of flora in the graveyard has encouraged some rare and interesting visitors.

Moth Night

We have been holding annual moth nights on St Giles Hill in or close to the graveyard since 2014. Moth species fly at different times during the year, so it is important to do surveys during different months to get an idea of our overall species diversity. This year we got the moth traps out for the 23 August. It was a difficult year because of the drought, but we still recorded 47 species of moth and 10 species of other insects. The star of the show was the Jersey Tiger. Found in our gardens and in the moth traps, the warm and dry summer was an unusually good year for the Jersey Tiger which is spreading north with rising temperatures.



Moth night 2025

We also had visitations from the rare Striped Lychnis moth which lays its eggs mainly on Dark Mullein. We saw the results in July when we observed the striking caterpillars on the Mulleins. Watch out when you are digging, the larva overwinter below ground as a pupa.



Striped Lychnis



Jersey Tiger Moth

One very special visitor!



The amazing journey of Cicada Barbara

By Anna Stewart

We don't have Cicadas in the UK although there is a reintroduction program for Cicada Montana in the New Forest.

In August this year we and our neighbours heard a very loud buzzing coming from several locations in and around St Giles Hill Graveyard. What was this sound? One person thought the nearby substation was having a problem, I thought someone was using machinery, others thought there was work done on the gas mains. The noise seemed to be coming from trees and bushes so we recorded the sound on iNaturalist hoping that someone might help with identity. The recording was posted on the Facebook entomology group and the two UK entomological societies contacted. Facebook entomologist Paul Winters came up with the answer, Cicada Barbara, and he produced the characteristic sonogram of the recording.

We were keen to get our Graveyard cicadas recognised as an official record, but how? The sonogram was put on the recording app iRecord as the New Forest Cicada Montana and it was picked up by UK's official Cicada Recorder Professor Alan Stewart of Sussex University who was delighted with all our cicada recordings.

Yes, it was Cicada Barbara which is a rarity, but he wanted to send the sonogram to the European cicada expert in Switzerland for verification which eventually came.

We don't have the first record of this insect in the UK, but we have the record for most numerous and are probably the only Graveyard with a cicada on the species list.

Cicada barbara only lives in Southern Spain and Portugal, it loves hot weather and doesn't like a freeze. So how did it get to our Graveyard? We can't be certain, but the horticultural trade in large Olive trees might be the answer. The cicada nymph lives in the soil around the tree and hatched out in August. There are a few of these Olive trees on St Giles Hill.

Will our cicadas come back next year? Probably not as it doesn't like the cold and lifecycle is usually seven years. A pity as no one ever saw this very ugly insect with its very loud sound. If it does we will be ready and entomologists from all over will be flocking from all over for a 'twitch'.

Feliz Navidad to all cicadas, we hope to see you next year!

*“I was so impressed with
all you have achieved”*

Special occasions 2025



All Saints Day

The Reverend Christine Smith joined volunteers and family members of people buried in the graveyard on All Saints Day. She held a brief blessing service and following this she told the Friends that she was “so impressed with all you have achieved to make the cemetery so beautiful and to honour all who lie there.”

Remembrance and QR codes

There are many graves of those who fell in the two world wars in the graveyard and every Remembrance Day their sacrifice is honoured by residents and committee members. In recent years QR codes placed near the relevant graves give visitors more detailed information about each of these servicemen. These have proved popular with younger members of our community. Local residents also visit to pay their respects, for example, Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Chris Warren who served with the Royal Hampshire Regiment, as did 3 of those buried there, together with his wife, Nicky, who served as an Engineering Officer in the RAF.



Committee members and residents on 11th of November



Lt Colonel (retired) Chris Warren

IT and the Graveyard

Friends of St Giles' Hill Graveyard has a developing presence on social media as Anna and other committee members are involved in many botanical projects across the city and beyond. This feeds into the work that the Friends do as it adds to our knowledge and to our interaction with other groups. For example, Anna has been helping to advise the Cathedral on developing its own wild flower area and she is very involved in important work to record botanical species across other areas of the city known as the 'Plant hunt'.

We are always looking for more people to get involved in what we do. It is a fascinating and worthwhile way to spend one Saturday morning a month helping to improve the local environment, support increasing diversity of natural species and preserve an important historical site.

Do get in touch!

Stgileshill.org.uk



We wish you all a very Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year!