

Biodiversity Survey of Graveyards 2024: Liz & Alastair Lavery

During late spring and early summer this year we had a lot of fun surveying the biodiversity in 47 churchyards and cemeteries for Perth and Kinross Council Green Graveyard Initiative. We visited graveyards from Blair Atholl in the north to Portmoak in the south, in the Carse of Gowrie, Strathmore and Stathearn, travelling nearly 1000 miles over 16 days. For each graveyard I listed all the species I could recognise and their habitats, defined very simply for the purpose of this survey as different places where groups of plant species were growing in the churchyard, for example walls and gravestones, mown grass. I then rated them on their Biodiversity, 1 – 10, from low to high and Neatness, 1 – 10, from very untidy to “not a weed in sight”. As to be expected the most biodiverse had very low management input and the widest range of habitats.

Highlights were meeting someone at St. Maddoes churchyard who used to live in our house, Effie Grays memorial in Kinnoull churchyard in Perth (watch the film if you don't know the story), many fascinating very old gravestones including Pictish stones, and being invited for coffee by the production assistant for a prequel to Outlander who were setting up to film at the beautiful Dundurn Churchyard at St. Fillans. Botanically we discovered a recognisable churchyard flora; *Ranunculus bulbosus* (Bulbous Buttercup) was surprisingly common, *Luzula campestris* (Field Wood-rush) and *Veronica chamaedrys* (Germander Speedwell) were almost constant in every graveyard, *Taxus baccata* (Yew) the most favoured tree with *Ilex aquifolium* (Holly), and *Hedera helix* agg. (Ivy) was growing everywhere. The rarest species we found was *Anthriscus caucalis* (Bur Chervil). Here are a few photographs of the churchyards we explored.



Wild St Beans, no management for several years, church ruins completely smothered by *Hedera helix* agg. (Ivy). 24 April 2024



Neat, well cared for Fonab, Pitlochry, Rowans with a rich Lichen flora, bark eaten by rabbits. Woodland helped improve diversity. 8 May 2024



Alyth, a very large cemetery with many *Taxus baccata* (Yew), *Bellis perennis* (Daisy) surviving mowing. 17 May 2024



Kilspindie, perhaps the most biodiverse churchyard with over 60 plant species, grass uncut this year and weedy paths. 13 June 2024



Fortingall, a well kept churchyard, home to the Fortingall Yew, thought to be the oldest tree in Britain, perhaps 6000 years old. 19 June 2024



Our favourite, Dundurn near St. Fillans, look out for this beautiful wee, ruined church in the prequel to Outlander. 19 June 2024