

## Clophill Heritage Trust's Project Update

### Wall restoration and Poetry & Peace Path

The gravestones were moved from the grave sites within the ancient churchyard in the 1960s due to vandalism at the time. A record of the grave sites is held by the church. The gravestones were reset around the perimeter of the churchyard to prevent further damage to them and to protect the gravesites.

Over the last 60 years the gravestones have continued to be a target for anti-social behaviour and have been damaged as well as lost in the undergrowth. Due to the age of the gravestones, many had become fissured and fractured and were in danger of falling. The majority of the stones no longer had a visible inscription. The churchyard wall adjacent to the overgrown gravestones was seriously dilapidated due to the additional soil behind the gravestones and the undergrowth.

Clophill Heritage Trust sought professional advice regarding the best way forward for the site and were advised that laying the stones, which no longer had any visible details, flat on a prepared bed to level them and protect their face, was the best way forward. Churches regularly reuse old gravestones where the inscription is no longer visible, and we have followed best practise by recording which stones have been placed in each location.

The stones have been assessed in detail by conservation architects who explained that the best thing was to reset those which still had inscriptions in a new row, and for those no longer bearing an inscription to lay the stones flat to prevent further damage. Setting the now blank stones into the wall was not possible due to the properties of the gravestone stone in comparison to the Greensand stone, which is much softer, and would therefore accelerate its erosion. The conservation architect's provided details of how this should be done, which has been followed.

Following extensive consultations with the Church Commissioners, Central Bedfordshire Council, English Heritage (Historic England), the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the local school, Church and Parish Council we have progressed the wall rebuild with local Greensand stone using an experienced local stone mason, supported by funding from the Green Infrastructure Fund and the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership via the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Poetry and Peace Path was seen to be the most appropriate and positive way of keeping and denoting respect for the flat stones without inscriptions. The path involves young people from the area in creating poems about Greensand Country and as an annual Peace Poetry competition for the local school to ensure that the act of Remembrance continues year on year. This also brings literature and heritage skills into the site and gives our local children a link to their local history and heritage.

CHT has been dedicated to ensuring that damage and disrespect of the graves stopped when the charity was formed in 2010. The Trust's 65 volunteers have worked since this time to ensure that the site is a positive and respected place which the local community can come and enjoy on a quiet day or at one of our community events throughout the year, in particular our WW1 Commemoration Event on the 11<sup>th</sup> November from 12 noon - 4pm after our local church service. There will be poetry read around our WW1 art installation and the café and tower tours will be open. We plan to open the rebuilt wall, poetry and peace path and the geology interpretation section of the wall led by Bedfordshire Geology Group at this event and all are welcome.

A remembrance garden will be planted alongside the path with poppies and native wildflowers and the wall will incorporate seating areas. It will be a truly peaceful place for anyone who wishes to come and sit and remember their loved ones.

CHT always welcomes new volunteers if you would like to be involved in this or any other project then please get in touch.

For further information and official photographs please contact [info@ClophillEcoLodges.co.uk](mailto:info@ClophillEcoLodges.co.uk)