

Nature Study in Cemetery

This cemetery is maintained by Test Valley Borough Council as a lawn cemetery, so mostly the grass is kept neatly trimmed. There was an experiment of letting some of the grass grow long, but it had the effect of looking untidy without apparently increasing the biodiversity of the land, so has ended.

The cemetery has a very fine collection of coniferous trees, including a mature monkey-puzzle tree (*araucaria araucana*) and several Cedars of Lebanon (*cedrus libani*) amongst others. There are also many types of fruiting fungus (toadstools) which are particularly conspicuous in the autumn months of the year. The gravestones host a remarkably large number of lichens.

Although no systematic survey of wildflowers has taken place, there do not seem to many species present, the same being true of surrounding land. Amongst those present is lady's bedstraw (*galium verum*) and harebells (*campanula rotundifolia*). Ladies bedstraw used to be used in bedding because it smells of hay when dried.

Test Valley Council planted a wild flower mix outside the upper gates in the spring of 2012. This was successful and provided a luxuriant display of flowers. This year, 2013, there is a reduced number of species, but the blue geraniums have yielded a splendid show.

There were no obvious signs that bats have roosted in the bat boxes. If the bats continue not to use them, it may be desirable to re-site the boxes. They must be some of the only empty council-houses in Test Valley. On one occasion, the ground near one of the trees was littered with a number of feathers from the breast of a pigeon, the remains of a meal by a sparrow hawk. We have not checked on mammalian life but in 2012 a young hedgehog was seen in the vicinity. We were told that there was a fox's earth nearby, but have not located it.

Slow worms continue to live in the cemetery as they have done for more than a century.

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