

COWGATE CEMETERY Deborah Gasking

Leave Your Roots

In nature, when a plant dies, there is nobody to come along and yank it out of the ground, roots, and all. Instead, the roots are slowly decomposed by soil microbes, deep underground.

Plants devote a significant amount of their energy to cultivating and feeding beneficial soil microbes; and in return, soil microbes feed and protect the plants and roots.

Worms, bacteria, fungi, and other organisms all nibble away, converting dead roots back into nutrients available for other living plants. And so the cycle repeats. In the process, soil organic matter and carbon, plus overall soil structure are all improved. If plants are ripped out of the ground, the soil will be robbed of a good meal and a degrading of long-term soil fertility. Also, a lot of good microbes that live around the root systems of your old plants that could help future growth, will be lost.

As they develop, peas and beans produce nodules on their roots which is a perfect habitat for nitrogen-producing bacteria. Thus, the plants provide a nursery for the bacteria, and in return, the nitrogen they produce helps to feed the plant. These nitrates have effectively been taken from the air so, when left, they will decay and add nitrogen to the soil, leaving it ready for your next crop.

Furthermore, a bare soil surface might lead to crusting, soil erosion and drying. So, apart from fixing nitrogen and good microbes in the earth, plant residue (roots and short stalks) can be an

effective mulch to retain moisture, protect the soil from raindrop impact and increase water infiltration.

And so, onto Cowgate Cemetery . . .

Obviously, we do not pull up any of the growth – not even the beastly, bright yellow ragwort – as we like to think we are preserving these acres as a nature reserve. But in this way, we have been obeying the rules of nature – even in our ignorance.

Log piles

Britain was once almost entirely covered in woodland, and so wood is a natural habitat for many of our wildlife species. However, half of that habitat has disappeared since the 1930s, and population numbers of vital insects are declining.

Increasing the biodiversity of your garden does not have to be hard or compromise the way your garden looks. One small change you could make to bring major benefits for the creatures that call it home is to leave a small pile of



Glorious Cowgate

old wood in a dappled or shady spot (this also makes use of any bulky cuttings). Log piles can look quite architectural and rustic, though many people prefer to tuck them out of sight.

Decaying wood in your log pile would provide an ever-rarer habitat to a range of specialist wildlife that is growing increasingly uncommon. One simple pile of logs can quickly become a flourishing wildlife community. Then simply leave nature to do the rest! You should not dismantle the pile but could

gently lift logs to see your new thriving insect world.

Guided by White Cliffs Countryside experts, we at Cowgate have been creating log piles in numerous areas within the cemetery for a few years now, so we are pleased to report that our little corner of Dover is supporting a network of habitats for our smaller creatures.

Bliss.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS **Sheila Cope**

Dr Glyn Hale, the Society's Archivist and long-time member of the Executive Committee, died on 14th September 2021, aged eighty-nine. In his younger days he was active at events and projects. He spent his childhood in Dover during the war, one of a small band whose primary education was intermittent and who had considerable freedom, he implied, to roam around the town. He was an old boy of the Grammar School. Glyn's doctorate was probably awarded in the USA or Canada because he spent some years there and his son still lives in Canada. Librarianship was his speciality. He may also have been an officer in the Canadian army.

Many of Glyn's views were unconventional, but he had the skill to manage recalcitrant French students in a language Summer School setting. His home was in Temple Ewell, where he was the Village Correspondent for the local press, regularly attending events in the village hall and George V playing field and reporting on model boat contests at the lake in Kearsney Abbey. He was also a

celebrant for Humanist funerals.

Dover Society members now number 465, about ten more than this time 2 years ago, so it is encouraging that the pandemic has not depleted us. We held a stall at the Urban Fete in Pencester Gardens in September where we recruited five members. Such events, together with the distribution of Newsletters, help to raise our profile and sometimes bear fruit at a later date. Welcome to new members who include Miss A Parkin, Ms J Seiler, Mr T Tugnut & Mr R Senecal, Mr J Glass, Mrs J Grey, Mr S & Mrs H Bell, Ms S Cooper, Mr J Benjafield & Mr B Elsey.

After 30 years as Membership Secretary, I hope to hand on the task to a younger person with IT skills who will be able to attract more new members, perhaps by means of the internet.

There is a job description, and I am looking forward to hearing from someone who would enjoy the challenge. It is an excellent opportunity to meet people and to have a role at the heart of the Society.