

Standon Nr. Ware Walk 11:

Standon Churchyard through the Seasons

The churchyard of St. Mary's Standon has a very fine selection of our native wild flowers, as well as quite a few introductions! A consequence of the rich and varied plant life is that it also supports a large number of birds, mammals, insects and other animals. This walk will lead you around the churchyard and provide a flavour of the views to be enjoyed in every season.

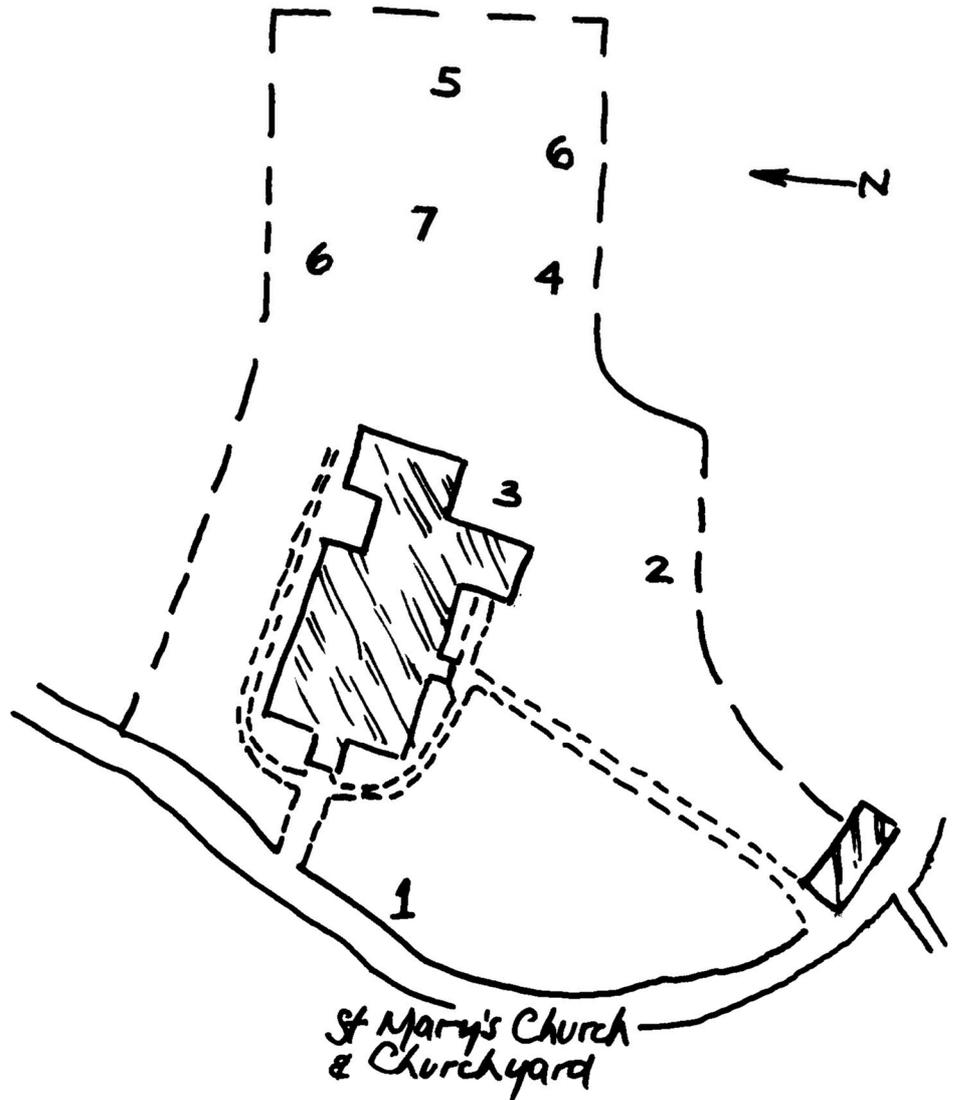
1 The year is opened in January with snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis* and its relatives). Planted, and now naturalised, beneath the lime trees at the front of the churchyard, they are a delight to see. As the snowdrops begin to

fade during February, the narcissi begin to break the soil. These will soon open and make a fine display, both beneath the lime trees and, further up the churchyard, on the banks above Standon House. Wild flowers are also in flower throughout this early part of the year; dandelions, with their bright yellow flowers, and red and white dead nettles.

2 Higher up the churchyard, and behind the old school house (Knights Court) primroses will have been in flower, particularly if the weather is mild. As March advances, Spring begins in earnest. The lesser celandine thrusts up its ivy-like leaves and opens bright yellow flowers to the sun. If the sun goes behind a cloud, or as evening comes, the flowers close. Violets can be found throughout the churchyard and their purple (or white) flowers are beautifully scented if you get your nose down close! With the advancement of April the leaves begin to break bud on the trees. Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) is normally first (sometimes as early as March), followed quite quickly by hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). The other trees follow in ragged order with oak often last. The cherries will flower and the trees along the Knights Court boundary are often beautiful in early April. In late April and early May the grass under the lime trees at the front of the churchyard becomes speckled with the soft pink of cuckoo flowers (*Cardamine pratensis*).

3 If you walk up the side path, past the bell tower, and around to the deep gully, you can see some of the treasures of the churchyard. The damp and shade of this man-made canyon has created ideal conditions for ferns. Male fern, Hart's Tongue and Polypody (*Dryopteris felix-mas*, *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and *Polypodium vulgare*) thrive here. This really does show how micro-climates can provide, in a small area, ideal conditions for plants that are otherwise quite uncommon in the dry eastern counties of southern England.

4 As Summer progresses into June, the Dog roses (*Rosa canina*) flower in the hedgerows higher up the churchyard. Brief though it is, this really characterises June in the countryside. If you are lucky you may even find a wild strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) before the birds or mice beat you to its delicious, if rather small, fruit.



5 As June moves on into July, the long hot days of Summer bring all the profusion of meadow, and woodland margin flowers into full bloom. The sheer number of varieties which adorn our churchyard preclude mentioning all of them all, but, the airy flowers of the grasses and the startling white and yellow of the Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) certainly let you know that high Summer has arrived – especially if you are a hay-fever sufferer!

6 August brings the first hints of summer's wane as the flowers fade and dry out to leave seed heads often as beautiful as the flowers themselves. The willowherbs (*Epilobium*) are at their best, thistles (*Cirsium*) and hawkbit (*Leontodon autumnalis*) take us into September and beyond with their flowers and fluffy airborne seeds. Other flowers, like those of the dandelion, which have been with us all year, once again assume prominence as their hasty competitors leave their flowering for another year. Autumn has arrived.

7 October's first frost catches out any tender plant which was still flowering through the warmer days of Autumn. It also decorates the seed heads and spiders webs for anyone early enough to see it. As the leaves begin to fall and days shorten through November and into December, winter in the churchyard still has much to reveal; the tracks of birds, mice and shrews can be found if we have snow, and this just emphasises the richness and variety of this little remnant of our countryside's former glories. Over 140 species of plant have been identified in this tiny area (a list has been compiled and is available if anyone would like a copy). Several animals; mice, voles, shrews, slow worms (*Anguis fragilis*, actually a legless lizard), and invertebrates too numerous to name, find a permanent home here. Others, like toads, hedgehogs and foxes, roam widely but return frequently. Owls, and other birds, nest here, both pipestrelle and brown long-eared bats roost in and hunt over the churchyard. All this variety has been sustained because the churchyard has remained unspoilt over so many years. It should be valued, by all, for the pleasure it can bring and the oasis of conservation it represents. In particular we should thank the dedicated group of volunteers who work so hard, all year round, to keep it for all of us.

Paths in Standon Parish are clearly waymarked. If you come across any problem with missing waymarks, please contact the Parish Paths Partnership: john@walkinginengland.co.uk.

This leaflet has been produced by Standon Parish Council working as part of the Parish Paths Partnership, a programme funded by Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside Management Service (CMS). CMS helps communities across Hertfordshire to care for and enjoy the environment. www.hertslink.org/cms

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