



## WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



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*Projects Officer*

# MANAGING A CHURCHYARD for NATURE CONSERVATION and REMEMBRANCE

## COWGATE CEMETERY (formerly St Mary's New Burial Ground)

Cowgate Cemetery nestles at the base of the slopes of the Western Heights at the top of Cowgate Hill. Parallel to it runs an alley-way and in front of that lies a row of flint cottages known as the Sarah Gorley Alms Houses.

This small part of old Dover seems to be little known, as when I talk to people about the management of the cemetery they often have not heard of it. This seems a great shame because the information contained on the gravestones at this site is fascinating and holds a wealth of social history.

The White Cliffs Countryside Project is attempting to manage the Cemetery for nature conservation and as a place for quiet remembrance but we do need some more volunteers to help us to care for it and to act as wardens.

Local volunteers of all ages have been helping to care for this neglected Cemetery. Our own conservation volunteers have regularly cleared footpaths and cut down bushes that are damaging the headstones. We have had valuable practical help from the students of Walmer Social Centre, who did traditional hay raking of the grassland in order to encourage the growth of more wild flowers.

Pupils and staff from Dover College have spent many working hours at Cowgate Cemetery, continuing to clear and maintain footpaths, cut back scrub, clear litter, and re-paint part of the wrought iron gates.

**16** We have also had valuable help from the Girls' Venture Corps and from Deal Queen's Scouts. Both groups spent their spare time clearing and maintaining footpaths and clearing litter; the Scouts finished the painting of the gates.

All this hard work should not go to waste. The Cemetery needs a few more regular helpers to care for its appearance and for the wildlife that has found a home there. It is a sheltered, wild site and is home for many birds, colourful butterflies, reptiles and mammals. There are numerous berry-bearing bushes that provide food and shelter for the animals.

The WCCP are managing the habitats in the Cemetery to maintain a diversity of structures and types of vegetation. For example, grassland, scrub and woodland. This enables a greater variety of wildlife to live in a smaller area of land.

Cowgate Cemetery is named after a gate in the medieval town wall that allowed the townspeople to graze their cows on the slopes of the Western Heights.

The Cemetery – a rectangle of about two and a half acres – was consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1835 as an extension to the St Mary's Parish Churchyard, which at that period occupied ground now covered by York Street.

The layout of the Cemetery is attributed to Stephen Geary (1797-1854), an architect who designed London's famous Highgate Cemetery.

A feature is the terrace of family vaults along the upper edge. The gravestones, mainly sandstone or limestone – some with intricate carvings – are set out within plots intersected by what were formerly wide pathways.

There are many interesting gravestones. At the centre of the Cemetery is a large obelisk to Sergeant Monger of the Cinque Ports Volunteer Artillery, who was killed by the bursting of a gun at Archcliffe Fort.

Many of the people buried at Cowgate Cemetery had died aboard ship or abroad and were brought back here to the first bit of British soil!

In our cross-curricular activity weeks with local schools we have encouraged the use of the Cemetery for educational activities such as information collecting, basic maths, history, creative writing and art.

Cowgate Cemetery is a fascinating part of old Dover, important for its social history, its wildlife and as an educational resource for local schools. If you can spare just a little time, please help us to take care of it for future generations.

Contact Mrs Melanie Wrigley, WCCP, 6 Cambridge Terrace, Dover, Kent CT16 1Jt. Tel: Dover 241806.

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## WALKS 1992

You are invited to join a guided walk with a difference, on Sunday, 5 January, 1992 – Winter Sketching in Dover – a slow stroll stopping to sketch the winter landscape in Cowgate Cemetery, the wildlife and the fortifications of the Western Heights. Meet 1.30 pm outside the main entrance of the 'White Cliffs Experience', Market Square, Dover.

Sunday, 16 February, 1992 – Dover Landscape Photography Walk – with advice from Gateway Camera Club. Meet outside main entrance of 'White Cliffs Experience' at 1.30 pm. We will walk onto the Western Heights.