

Projects

Cowgate Cemetery - Gravestones

Lesley Gordon

As reported previously, the chance to record gravestones at Cowgate has expanded with work on an increasing number of plots by the Society's intrepid clearance parties. Last spring, Ian Merton, collector in chief of headstone information, became increasingly concerned at the number of stones lying dotted about, face down on the ground, their information seemingly lost. A plan began to form to see if any could be raised temporarily to yield their information before it was irrevocably lost to the damp earth and plethora of slugs and beetles underneath.

A tentative request to Dover District Council for assistance in raising the heavy stones brought an immediate offer of help from Roger Walton, the Council's Head of Property Services. So it was that, at 9am on the 23rd July, a small party from the Society stood at the cemetery gates to greet the arrival of a lorry from English Landscapes, contractors to the Council for land and ground maintenance.

Two of their men, Paul Cobbins and Darryl

Pendle, set to work with crowbars and blocks of wood, levering up the fallen stones while the rest of us peered and brushed and recorded any information thus exposed. We were pleased to find that the strength and skill of the two men in raising heavy stones, which had been lying flat and overgrown for years, was matched by their own interest in the task in hand. The presence of large numbers of slow worms and beetles, some surprisingly large, underneath the slabs, indicated what a haven for wild life the cemetery is.

Over twenty stones were raised in barely an hour. Some were too worn away to be of use and some, it later transpired, had already been captured before their fall, by Mrs. de Bourbel, who first recorded sections of the cemetery in the 1980s. The remainder yielded up their hitherto secret information, which has now been added to the Society's growing database. Thanks are gratefully recorded to the Council and English Landscapes for their help in this ongoing project.

Cowgate Cemetery - Clearance

Jeremy Cope

Our aim, as practised by The Society's project team and the White Cliffs Countryside Project (WCCP) volunteers, is to restore the cemetery to a hay meadow but one populated with trees and large shrubs. In this way Cowgate may be both a cemetery and wildlife area. It will require mowing in the autumn and again in early spring.

Five of the eight plots that make up the cemetery can be said to be at the hay meadow stage (well almost). During the summer, whilst we were clearing undergrowth and rubbish from the remaining plots and from the cemetery borders and the vaults, nature had its way with the hay meadow plants and the grass and vegeta-

tion grew vigorously, hiding the tombstones and providing a romantic aspect. In August we started mowing the grass with petrol strimmers and grass hooks. Paul Hadaway used the WCCP mower which was a very great help and we should have the whole of the hay meadow area cleared by the time this article goes to press. We will then turn our attention to the remaining three plots to clear the undergrowth that has grown during the year. We shall also reduce the amount of shade from the trees by pruning the lower branches and this, combined with the clearance of the undergrowth, will encourage the grass to dominate and change the plot's vegetation to that of a hay meadow.

The Society has received an anonymous donation of £250 for the Project Fund for which we are very grateful. The commit-

tee has agreed to the purchase of a more powerful strimmer than currently available to us which will make a very useful addition to our resources.

WCCP are to install a cemetery information board which will include the history and details of flora and fauna. This is very welcome and the committee agreed to contribute £100 towards the cost. We have been asked to comment on the content and are currently circulating the proposed text to those involved for comment.

Finally if any member is interested in joining our clearance working parties they would be most welcome. You will only be expected to carry out work that is within your skill and I think that you will find us a happy bunch. (Contact Jeremy Cope on 01304 211348).

The October Meeting

The Dour

A report of a talk by Paul Bolas with an update on the restoration of the river

by Jeremy Cope

The August issue reported on the survey of the Dour from Buckland to the sea. At the October meeting Paul addressed the Society with the subject of 'The River Dour Survey'. His talk covered the science, problems and potential of the river and how that potential might be realised.

The Dour, a typical chalk stream, gets its water from rain falling on the surrounding hills which is then filtered through the chalk and rises in springs to feed the river as clear, pure and oxygen-rich water at a constant temperature of 11 degrees. This

combination readily supports plants, insects crustacea and fish. The natural chalk reservoir provides a reasonably steady river flow.

How do we arrive at the present state of the river given its natural beauty and cleanliness? In the past rivers were seen as a cheap way of providing sewers, with culverting a method of hiding the subsequent spoliation. We are fortunate in that the Dour does not suffer from sewage outfalls although it receives toxic silt from paved areas. The litter-strewn river is evi-