

## **Grazing in cemeteries and grazing Yew**

### **Extracts from Nibblers online discussion group**

Dear all,

I have been approached by our head of cemeteries who is interested in trialling grazing in one of our cemeteries. It is more or less closed to new burials (existing plots only) and these days is seen more as a pleasant place to walk than as a working cemetery. The primary purpose is for vegetation management rather than any particular conservation interest, though I am sure that the existing flora, although not fantastic, will benefit. If there are reports of any similar projects I would be very interested to hear how they got on.

A quick précis of the site:

6.5 hectares

Opened 1877

Urban location

'Friends of....' group very supportive of the idea

No new plots being opened

Almost impossible to carry out any form of mechanical grass cutting due to fallen headstones, kerbs etc etc

Although the flora is reasonably varied, there is nothing too exciting.

Looking forward to your replies,

Henry Campbell-Ricketts

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30 years ago I wardened an area of public open space which contained a small cemetery similar to that described. It was grazed by a single, tethered billy goat which was moved around frequently; the regime was fine, the billy was very friendly and those walking through the cemetery enjoyed seeing him. However, some parishoners raised objections to the presence of a cloven hoofed animal in a cemetery and the goat was removed.

In addition to checking what sort of feet your stock will have, you might wish to ensure that friends/relatives of those buried know that putting expensive flowers on the graves will be a waste of time and money (but I expect you have considered this already).

Peter Chapman

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Peter,

Thank you very much for this reply. What did you do for water? Or more to the point what did the goat do....

Henry

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Hi

Just a thought - cemeteries usually have a yew trees which are not good for stock. Do you know if there are any in this one?

Jane Wilson

GAP LGS co-ordinator

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Quite a few I think - they would either have to be fenced off or the animal(s) tethered I suppose. I have never kept livestock within grazing distances of yew before, is it safe to assume that they are stupid enough to eat it?

Henry

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Received wisdom on this is that stock generally only consume significant (i.e. dangerous) levels of the various toxic plant species when they are short of other grazing. I have certainly seen animals graze ragwort, yew, bracken and hemlock water dropwort without any obvious ill effects, but in every case the toxic plant was only a small proportion of intake. On that basis, so long as there is plenty of grass there shouldn't be an issue. Theoretically!

That said, I cannot think of a more public place to test the theory, and the consequences (beyond the obvious unpleasant ones for the stock) should it prove to be wrong would make me think very carefully before I tried!!

Steve Clarke  
English Nature

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We have grazed cattle Sept. - dec extensively on a SSSI with many large yew trees, they came from a farm where they had a small amount of yew so may have been genetically intelligent to it. We saw the cattle eating the yew on several occasions but no harm done all went on to survive and calve well with healthy good weight calves. All despite the protests of a local retired vet who swore they would all die, quiet a pressure to be put upon all involved in the grazing but the happy ending shows that one persons bad experience with a poisonous plant is not also ways to mean that will be the outcome in every or the majority of cases.

lynnie

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I found that you want to make a mental note of graziers who have had a problem with poisoning from a particular plant, as they tend to be useful for grazing sites where other poisonous plants are present. The bad experience makes them very careful in their livestock management, but they are normally overcautious in exposing stock to any plants they have had a bad problem with in the past.

David Hodd

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Back to the original question - several years ago I was approached by Brighton Borough (now City) Council who were keen to manage their cemeteries for wildlife. I cannot remember the name of the person who contacted me, but a little research should reveal the results of their work.

Tim Beech

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Oh and while I remember, Lapley Church in Staffordshire graze their cemetery (with yew trees).

Tim Beech

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Hi

I rang a friend last week for his experiences, having grazed a cemetery a few years ago with sheep. The only problem was getting the sheep out because they knew their way around far better than the dog & handler!

Cheers  
Jane Wilson

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BEWARE YEW! Common in cemeteries, highly poisonous to sheep.

Cathy Wainwright Grazing Manager The Wildlife Trust BCNP

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