



Approx. time
1½ hours+

Friends of York Cemetery

NATURE TRAIL



Registered Charity
No. 701091

One of a series of trails to enhance your enjoyment of the Cemetery

Best enjoyed: All year

INTRODUCTION

York Cemetery covers 24 acres of land just south of the city walls. Opened in 1837, it was conceived as a pleasant and peaceful garden in which to walk, contemplate and remember the dead. The Cemetery Company ceased operating in 1966, maintenance declined and the site grew wild and derelict.

By 1979 the combination of rare, cultivated and new wild growth led to the site being described as one of the finest urban nature reserves in existence. The site was conveyed to York Cemetery Trust in 1987 and the Trust decided to manage the site for nature as well as maintain it as a working cemetery.

Some of the site may look wild, but this is all part of the evolving Land Management Plan developed by the Trust. Considerable effort is made to ensure that the conservation work remains in keeping with the Cemetery's continuing role as a Garden of Remembrance.

The Trust employs a very small team of grounds workers but much of the work on site is carried out by volunteers with valuable assistance from the York Cares programme. The Cemetery attracts considerable support from the local community, upon whom it depends and for whom it is held in trust.

THE TRAIL

At the Cemetery Entrance turn right to pass the Gatehouse and brick buildings

1. The Pond

!! PLEASE KEEP THE GATE FASTENED & TAKE SPECIAL CARE WITH CHILDREN !!

The butyl lined pond which was first created in 1993 and rebuilt in 2013 is the centrepiece of our Wildlife Water Project. Access to open water allows many different species to gain a foothold in the Cemetery.

The pond contains several micro-habitats; deep and shallow water with small gravel, mud and silt beds. The pond is planted with a good balance of plants that offer a variety of colour and foliage at different times of the year. Bog plants, marginals, lilies and deep water plants as well as oxygenators and floaters are provided to maintain a successful ecosystem.

If you stand quietly and watch, you might see frogs and newts, as well as a rich variety of invertebrates such as dragonflies, pond skaters and water boatmen.

**!! PLEASE FASTEN THE GATE WHEN YOU LEAVE !!
THANK YOU**

Leave the Pond, turn right and make your way to the Beech Hedge

2. Victorian and Modern Sections of the Cemetery

Here you are standing at the boundary between the original 1837 Victorian cemetery to the north and the Modern Section to the south which was brought into use in the 1890s.

The Victorian section was laid out by Architect and Designer James Pigott Pritchett with lawns, flower beds, shrubs and imported trees. The mature trees you now see represent about half of the original stock planted over 150 years ago. The rest have succumbed to disease, storm and old age. Here the Trust has continued this theme of a garden of remembrance by planting exotic tree species and creating ornamental features such as the Butterfly Walk and the Bolton Percy Garden.

In contrast, the Modern Section was set out as a rectangular 'lawn park' with few trees and a number of hedges which were later removed. This section has, more recently, been extensively planted with native species to create an English open woodland with features such as a herb garden, wild orchard and an avenue of oaks.

Turn left immediately after the hedge and follow the grass track to the Rockery

Nature Trail (2015)

3. Rockery

This was originally built using millstone grit boulders in 1928 by Backhouse Nursery of York and formed an interesting feature of the 'lawn park'. Having become overgrown with weeds and self-seeded trees it was cleared, capped with millstone grit chippings and replanted in 1996 mainly with dwarf conifers and heathers. It was formally reopened on 13 February 1997 to mark the tenth anniversary of the formation of York Cemetery Trust.

Its sheltered, south facing aspect makes it particularly attractive to bees and butterflies.

Pass the Rockery and turn right at the tarmac path. Stop at the path leading down to the Cross of Remembrance

4. Wild Orchard

This area, looking down to the Cross of Remembrance has been planted with wild fruiting shrubs and trees such as guelder rose, wild cherry and the service tree. In Spring the blossom attracts pollinating bees and other insects which, in turn, support a growing bat population. In Autumn the fruits provide food for birds and insects.

Retrace your steps and take the first grass path on your right. At the 'Angel' monument to Sidney Bowker turn right onto any of the three parallel paths

5. Oak Copse

This grove of oaks was planted in the late 1980s and provides a wonderful canopy above the angel monuments and along this woodland glade.

English woodland naturally develops into oak forest over thousands of years as oaks invade and out compete other species. Oaks attract parasites, including the characteristic gall wasp. A single mature oak can support a thousand other species in a complex, interdependent miniature ecosystem.

Continue along this path and turn left near the southern boundary

6. Trees

The Trust has planted many trees across the site. In harmony with the original design, exotic specimens in the Victorian Section complement, and will eventually replace, the trees we see now.

In the Modern Section native trees transform the site into open woodland. 'Stands' of various species provide a diversity of habitat and give the woodland a distinct structure or geography. Inter-planting of different

species in each stand ensures that should disease take out one species, there will still be tree cover in that area.

Continue along this path. Turn left on to concrete path at the end of the wooded area

7. Herb Garden

Nestling within its beech hedge is an oasis of plants more familiar as garden herbs. The herb beds were created in 1994 by adding kerbs to graves which didn't previously have them, creating gravel paths and surrounding the whole area with a beech hedge.

A different species of herb is planted within each kerb, which reduces competition between the plants and eases maintenance. The stones naming each herb were carved by trainee mason, Steve Baston.

This herb garden sun trap increases the diversity of the site attracting butterflies, bees and birds feeding on the plants. Stay awhile to enjoy the fragrances of this enclosed space.

Turn right out of the Herb Garden and right again onto the grass path. Make your way to the south east corner of the Cemetery overlooking the allotments

8. Green Corridor

In the distance lie Walmgate Stray (Common land that once belonged to the Freemen of York), The University of York and fields surrounding Heslington village.

York Cemetery plays an essential role in York's ecology forming the blunt end of this green wedge of land driving into the City and is a major migration route for wildlife. In ecological terms, green corridors connecting wildlife sites can improve the chances of survival for species in them.

Walk along the Cemetery's eastern brick walled boundary to reach Lime Avenue. Before turning left down Lime Avenue, turn right to make a small detour to visit Soldiers' Lawn and Oak Copse

9. Soldiers' Lawn

This area, part of an extension to the original Victorian cemetery, was used mainly for public burials. Unlike the rest of the Victorian Section it was not laid out as a garden and has few mature trees. The oaks were planted in 1987/8. The lawn here connects with the Picnic Lawn as open ground.

Retrace your steps and continue straight down Lime Avenue

10. Lone Pine Lawn

Stop at the first crossroads. On your right is an open area which was originally used for public burials. With few headstones and no trees, it is therefore suitable for management as a lawn. The open space between the tree cover is perfect for bats to hunt on the wing at dusk.

Continue down Lime Avenue. Pass the Pergola on your left. Just before Michael Thomas William's, with the 'Angel' monuments on your left, take the concrete/grass path on your right.

11. Lime Avenue

Genus *Tilia*, commonly called lime tree, line either side of the central avenue of the Cemetery. Its sturdy trunk stands like a pillar and the branches divide and subdivide into numerous ramifications on which the twigs are fine and thick. In Summer, these are profusely clothed with large leaves resulting in a dense head of abundant foliage providing cool shade on a hot Summer day.

The leaves are subject to attack by many insects especially aphids which are attracted by the rich supply of sap, and are often 'farmed' by ants for the production of the sap which the ants collect for their own use. The result can often be a dripping of the familiar sap onto anything below. This 'farming' process does not appear

to cause any serious damage to the trees.

Continue down Lime Avenue toward the green bin and, opposite the angel monuments on your left, take the concrete/grass track on your right

!! PLEASE TAKE CARE ON THE STEPS !!

12. Bolton Percy Garden

Beyond the steps to your left is an area gardened in a style inspired by the more modern part of Bolton Percy churchyard near York. The design uses mainly English perennial species and extensive mulching to minimise maintenance.

Walk straight on and turn right beyond the raised Remembrance Lawn to your right.

Turn right at the junction with John Kenneth Victor Embleton's headstone on your left.

Cross the concrete path and follow the grass path as it curves left.

Pass the steps to your right and at the junction take the concrete path curving around the Fernery

13. Fernery

The bank was chosen as a suitable site to house a collection of British ferns. Its north to north-east shaded aspect provides ideal growing conditions for many of our regional ferns. The University of York Fern Society cleared the turf from the bank and began planting in 1997.

Turn left and head for the high wall and houses forming the Cemetery's north boundary. Turn left and go down Butterfly Walk until you reach the higher section of the boundary wall and the dominant Copper Beech which spans the footpath

14. Copper Beech

This mature tree is a dominant feature of the Cemetery beneath which only early Spring plants can thrive. From April the leaves of the tree blot out the sunshine and the underlying area becomes dry and dark. The convolutions in the middle of the tree branches are probably caused by disease or genetic disorder.

Continue down Butterfly Walk

15. Butterfly Walk

This south facing walk with its high brick wall backdrop provides 150 metres of habitat suitable for butterflies. The plants include many familiar garden species. The dominant plant species is the Buddleia, or Butterfly Bush, in its different varieties.

The 'show plants' here are supported by the stands of long grass, nettles and buckthorn throughout the Cemetery which provides the necessary additional food, shelter and hibernation sites to sustain a varied population of insects. Over 20 different species of butterfly have been recorded in the Cemetery together with over 45 species of moths.

Turn left at the end of Butterfly Walk and immediately before the white building, turn left onto the grass footpath leading to the Scented Walk

16. Scented Walk

The Scented Walk complements the Butterfly Walk as a garden chosen for its scent. Designed with assistance from the York Blind and Partially Sighted Society, it is provided particularly for visitors with visual impairments. The 200 metre long walk, with its many plant species, is structured to blend and contrast the different scents as you progress along it. Highly scented plants also attract flying insects which, again, will in turn attract bats and birds.

Continue on this path. Turn right onto Chapel Avenue. Turn right at the Chapel and return to the Entrance, where this trail ends.

YORK CEMETERY'S ECOLOGY – DID YOU KNOW...

Why are areas of long grass in the Cemetery beneficial to its ecology?

Short grasses can be seen as an ecological desert with few plant species and very little wildlife. Stands of tall grass provide an irreplaceable habitat for mammals, such as hedgehogs and insects, particularly butterflies, which need particular plants for food and shelter for their chrysalis or for hibernation.

Woodpiles

Along this trail you will see a number of woodpiles which have been created with cuttings and fallen wood. They provide a home for thousands of insects and a place for hedgehogs to sleep and hibernate. The Cemetery is ideal for hedgehogs, thanks to the abundant insect life, the land management methods used and the absence of the hedgehog's modern arch enemy – the car!

Pesticides

The widespread use of chemical controls is a major factor in the decline of British wildlife such as butterflies, bats and birds of prey, as well as our most unusual wild flowers. Aside from direct toxic effects and the build up of some chemicals in the food chain, the blanket removal of what some people see as weeds also destroys the habitat and food supply of the species we like to encourage. York Cemetery Trust has a policy of relying overwhelmingly on strimming, mowing and other mechanical methods of control.

Glades and Meadows

In order to encourage the butterflies, birds and mammals that bring life and beauty to the Cemetery, it is necessary to create the woodland glades and ancient meadowland that are their natural habitat.

In a natural forest, when an individual tree dies, it falls, leaving a gap. This patch is rapidly colonised by grasses and wild flowers previously suppressed by the lack of light, and the glade takes on a character distinct from the surrounding woodland.

In order to recreate this effect, certain areas of the Cemetery are kept without tree cover and these glades are each mown at different times of the year to encourage a slightly different range of species in each one, which leads to the inclusion of a greater total number of species around the Cemetery as a whole and provides each glade with its unique character. Larger areas take on the character of traditional meadows with their own distinct varieties and wildlife.

Watering Places

Eight old cast iron baths with cement/sand/manure surfaces provide drinking and bathing places for wildlife around the Cemetery. They are set at ground level either in unused grave spaces or where there is insufficient space for a burial.

Bees

The Cemetery environment, with its rich variety of flora, is very attractive to bees and provides the food, water and shelter they require to survive.

Due to loss of habitat and the use of pesticides, bees are under threat. Friends of the Earth states that bees are vital because they 'pollinate flowers, plants and crops that support other species (including humans) ... They pollinate 75% of our main food crops worldwide, including some of our favourite produce like apples, strawberries and tomatoes'. They also make honey and beeswax.

Honey bees, however, only represent a small fraction of the roughly 20,000 known species of bee, with the genus *Apis* being the only true honey bee. In the Cemetery, you may spot the Western honey bee, *Apis mellifera*, foraging for food.

The forager bees collect water, propolis, pollen and nectar. Bees forage during daylight hours when the temperature is above 10C, when the wind does not exceed 40mph and when the flower blossoms are open and producing nectar and pollen. There are always short spells of sunny weather during the winter period when bees are able to leave their hives for cleansing flights and to forage for short distances from the hive.

Flowers contain nectar and pollen for bees. Nectar provides sugars that are the primary source of energy for a bee's wing muscles and heat for honey bee colonies for winter. Pollen provides the protein and trace minerals that are mostly fed to the brood (bee larvae).

We really hope you enjoyed this trail and that it inspired you to find out more about York Cemetery. A trail of this kind can give only a flavour of what the Cemetery has to offer, so why not:

- **Try one of our guided walks**
- **Become a Friend of York Cemetery**
- **Become a Volunteer**

(Pick up a leaflet or see the website for more details)

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Friends of York Cemetery

The Cemetery Gatehouse

Cemetery Road

York YO10 5AJ



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**FOR YOUR SAFETY
PLEASE KEEP TO THE PATHS**

