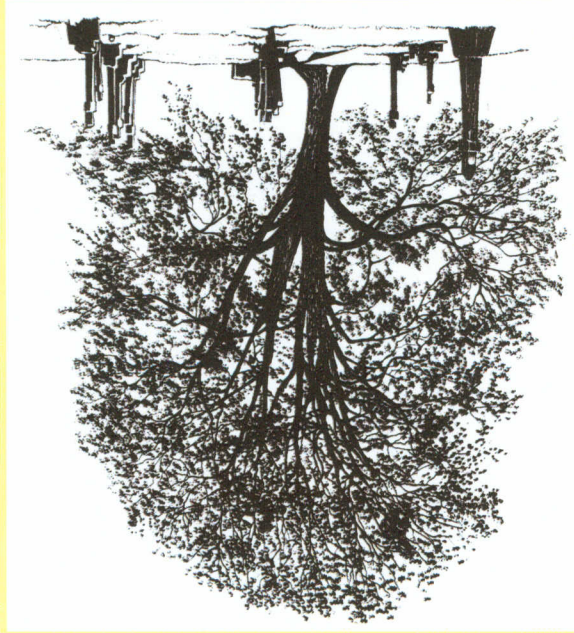


**The Wildlife of Bedford Cemetery
(Foster Hill Road)**

Brian Anderson



Illustrations by Liz Silk

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Cemetery (Foster Hill Road) 2008.

Map by permission of the Ordnance Survey.

Introduction.

This short guide is not a substitute for a field identification guide. For each of the groups of plants or animals described below there are a number of guides on the market and it is recommended that these be consulted if you wish to make detailed studies or identifications.

That being said, we hope you enjoy your visit and leave with pleasant memories of the natural life of the Cemetery.

Location.

The Cemetery is located towards the southern end

of the Clapham Wildlife Corridor. It is contiguous with Bedford Park to the south and adjacent to Hill Rise Local Nature Reserve to the west. Further north lie Brickhill allotments, Parkwood Local Nature Reserve and then replanted parkland and wood pasture taking you to Clapham Park Wood. This group of sites forms a green wedge coming close to the middle of Bedford and is known collectively as the Clapham Wildlife Corridor.

History.

The western part of the Cemetery was opened in 1855 and comprised approximately a third of the current area. The rest (apart from a very small recent addition adjacent to Mallard Hill) was added in 1889. There is some suggestion, based on the flora, that the upper north-eastern section might have been hay meadow before this time, a rare habitat nowadays, so this area is of considerable local importance. It certainly has a much greater botanical biodiversity than the south-western corner which may well have been seeded with lawn grass around the time the Cemetery was opened.

Geology.

The underlying geology of the Cemetery is boulder clay, which makes the soil over most of the Cemetery alkaline. In a few places, notably near the



*Clover and Seven-spot
Ladybird*

gatehouse, topsoil of much greater acidity has been imported. The plant species present here vary somewhat from those in the rest of the Cemetery.

Flowers and others.

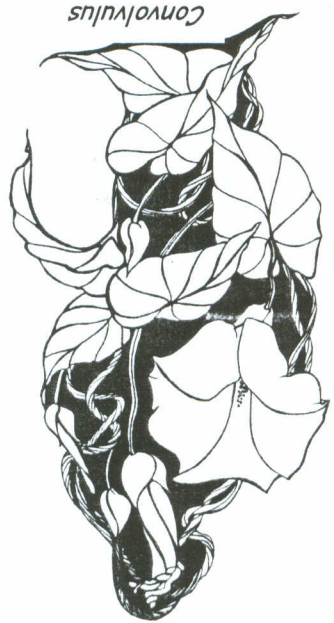
The conserved area in the east is typical of chalky grassland. In the spring the area is dotted with Primroses and Cowslips and many hybrids of the two (False Oxlips), as well as a couple of species of Violet. A little later, the area is dotted with most of the orchids found in the Cemetery: Common Spotted and Pyramidal. We hope that the Bee Orchid will return - this species is known for unexplained appearances and disappearances and was quite common until recently.

Through the summer this area becomes florally very rich, with Bird's-foot Trefoil, Lesser Knapweed, Restharrow, Ragwort, Dwarf Thistle, Lady's Bedstraw, Self-heal, Agrimony, Smooth Tare, Tufted and Common Vetch, Wild Parsnip, Field Scabious, Wild Carrot and Ox-eye Daisy being amongst the most common.

This profusion of flowers makes the area popular with many species of butterfly and a range of day-flying moths like the Cinnabar, Silver Y and the Five-spot Burnet.

An interesting grass occurs here too - look for a slender grass about 30cm high with heads like miniature oats. This is False Oat Grass. It is this area that contains most of the Cemetery's botanical diversity.

There is another conservation area right up against the northern boundary: more shaded but equally chalky. A little searching in early spring will reveal Wood Anemone, Winter Aconite and Lesser Celandine. In the late spring this area has Common Twayblade orchid. It is easily overlooked but look for two long leaves like Lily-of-the-Valley with a tall flower spike (300mm) and pale greenish-yellow flowers - most unlike the showy tropical orchids! This area also contains many (but not all) of the plants found in the main conservation area. Common Spotted Orchid is present and Early Purple Orchid has been seen nearby once. It also has Nettle-leaved Bellflower, Bluebells (English, Spanish and hybrid) and three species of Plantain.



No ferns have been recorded, but fern allies in the form of Horsetails are very common and present something of a menace to those whose task it is to keep the graves tidy!

Many plants rare to the Cemetery but not necessarily rare in the wider landscape can be found as single examples. Examples include Salad Burnet, Common Star-of-Bethlehem, Corn Parsley, Asparagus and Thorowax (this last is generally very rare, being extinct as a true native in Bedfordshire since the 1970's but very occasionally found as an introduction, often from funeral wreaths).

The more acidic area near the gatehouse, formerly a rose bed but now cleared and covered with imported topsoil contains typical plants of acid free-draining soil like Hare's-foot Clover and Common Stork's-bill.

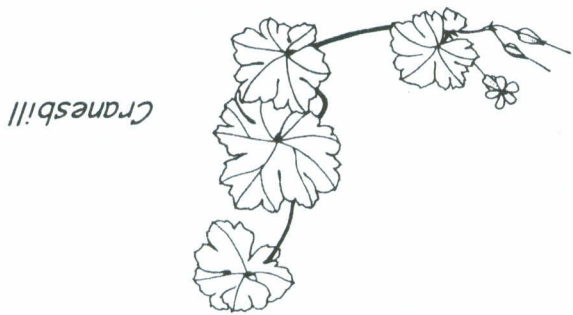
There is a wide variety of climbing plants. The obvious one is Ivy, which is occasionally rampant on some tree and monuments, but others such as Convolvulus (three species) and Black and White Bryony are also to be seen, often growing up through the denser trees and shrubs like Yew.

The rest of the cemetery is mown much more frequently, although it doesn't stop plants like Daisy, Creeping Cinqufoil, Yarrow, Autumn Hawkbit, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Spurge, Red Deadnettle and five species of Speedwells (Bird's-eyes) occurring frequently. The hedge lines and clumps of trees and shrubs normally have a fine show of Cow Parsley at their bases in the spring. Also at this time and in these locations Garlic Mustard (try eating a leaf and you'll see where the name comes from) or Jack-by-the-Hedge is in flower. This plant is one of the favourites of the caterpillars of both the Orange Tip and Green-veined White butterflies. They also feed on Lady's Smock (Cuckoo-flower or Milkmaids) which can be found in some of the damper areas. One shady area near the boundary with Bedford Park has Dog's Mercury. Other shady areas commonly have Lords-and-Ladies (Cuckoo Pint or Wild Arum). Opium Poppy grows on areas of disturbed ground.



Opium Poppy

Trees.



Cranesbill

The treescapes of the Cemetery and Bedford Park form a continuum. Many of the species exist in both places, probably an inheritance of the Victorian desire to plant exotic species. It has been argued that the combination of the Cemetery and the Park (opened in 1888) presents one of the finest urban treescapes in Britain.

The fact that so many of the trees are evergreen means that the Cemetery presents a pleasing view even in winter. There are many conifers (most of them not native), including Yew, Coast Redwood, Lawson's Cypress, Cedar of Lebanon, Monterey Pine, Lacebark Pine, Monkey Puzzle and Norway Maple. Other evergreen trees are Holm (or Holly) Oak and Box. Evergreen shrubs abound too - there are two species of Laurel, Evergreen Viburnum, Holly, Garden (Japanese) Privet and Mahonia.

British native trees (including those that were introduced long ago) are widespread and you can find Pedunculate Oak, Beech, Sycamore, London Plane, English Elm, Ash, Horse Chestnut, Walnut, Whitebeam, Elder, Silver Birch, Hawthorn, three species of Lime, Aspen and Wild Cherry. More recent tree introductions include Laburnum, Strawberry Tree and Turkey Oak. The Turkey Oak is, if anything, commoner in the Cemetery than our native Pedunculate Oak. You can tell them apart because the Turkey Oak has a very much longer leaf (although still indented) than our native species. Also, the acorn cups are "hairy" whereas the native cups are smooth. A very notable tree just to the east of the chapel was a fine Huntingdon Elm, in all likelihood the largest in the county (shown on the front cover) but now sadly infected with Dutch Elm Disease and now largely



Horse Chestnut

felled. It will be replaced with a resistant variety of Elm *Ulmus* "Sapporo Autumn Gold".

Deciduous shrubs include Snowberry, Buddleia, Shrubby Cinquefoil, Lilac and Bramble.

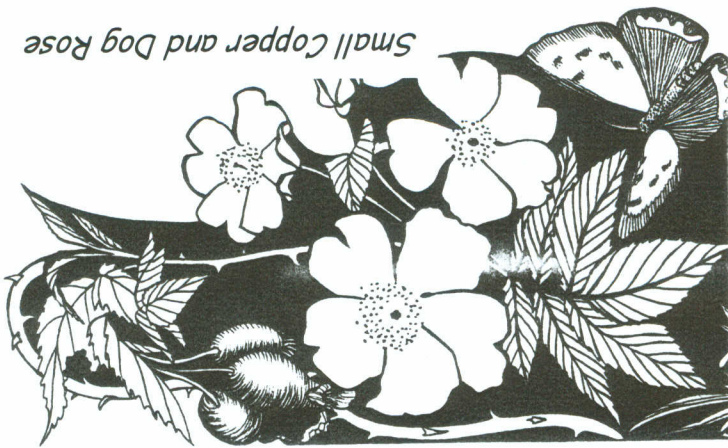
There are also a few oddities like the big Yucca near the gatehouse and Rosemary and Gorse growing on a couple of grave sites.

At the north-western edge of the Cemetery, between the boundary fence and the rear of Eagle Gardens, there is a footpath that probably represents the old boundary of the Cemetery, as there is evidence of a bank and ditch lying outside the fence. The larger trees along this path were probably planted at the same time as the trees in the rest of the Cemetery and represent some of the same species. The only species present which is not found in the Cemetery is Hornbeam. Persistent tree cover is suggested by the presence of Dog's Mercury and Wood Anemone.

Butterflies and Moths.

Most of the commoner butterflies on the British list have been identified in the Cemetery since 2001. What you see depends greatly on the time of year. On warm sunny winter days those species that over-winter as adults may be tempted into flight. You may see Brimstones, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells,

Commas and even (in these days of climate change) Red Admirals. All these species can be seen during the spring and summer months too. As the spring becomes warmer butterflies like the Orange-tip, Green-veined and other



Small Copper and Dog Rose

White species take to the air. At the same time, Speckled Woods will be evident in areas of dappled sunlight. This butterfly is unique in Britain in that it has a "choice" of over-wintering stages. Some over-winter as larvae and others as pupae. This means that the butterfly is continuously brooded and is seen in any month between March and October.

Later in the spring and into the summer, the numbers of species rises steeply. Large, Small and Essex Skippers are to be found on the grassland with Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Copper. Holly Blues can be seen almost anywhere in the Cemetery but numbers fluctuate wildly due to parasitic infection of the caterpillars.

High summer brings the Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and the occasional Ringlet anywhere the grass is long. At this time the new broods of Vanessa's (i.e. the Peacock, Comma etc. group) and Whites (all except the Orange-tip) are around and in a good year may be joined by reasonable numbers of Painted Ladies breeding on from Continental migrants.

As autumn approaches, large numbers of Commas and Red Admirals feast on the flowering Ivy or take fermented sap from any injured tree. A few Peacocks or Small Tortoiseshells may be around too. A warm summer may induce a late brood of Common Blues.

One other butterfly deserves special mention: The large number of Elms in and around the Cemetery provides a food source for the caterpillars of the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly which you may just be lucky enough to see near the tree-tops along the north-western edge in July or August.

No systematic investigation of the moth population has been undertaken, but the unmown areas have fair numbers of Cinnabar and Seven-spot Burnets. Silver Ys and Large Yellow Underwings are also quite common. A recent moth survey on the adjacent Hill Rise reserve suggests that the moth list for the Cemetery could be quite long.

Carrion Crow and Speedwell



Bird life in the Cemetery consists largely of what you find in most suburban areas in south-eastern Britain, although there are exceptions. House Sparrows are almost entirely absent but Blackbirds, Dunnocks,

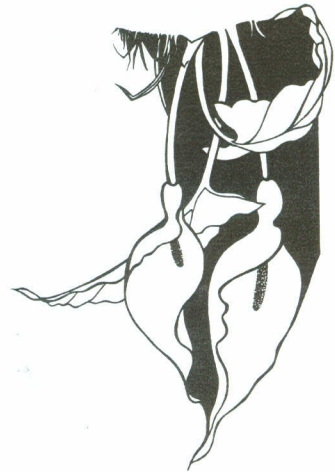
Birds.

The Common Frog, Common Toad and Smooth Newt have all been seen. Although there are no ponds, there are damp areas and breeding takes place in ponds in surrounding gardens.

Amphibians.

Although there are no ponds in the Cemetery, there are enough in the surrounding area for dragon- and damselflies to be seen quite frequently. The Blue-tailed, Large Red and Azure Damselflies are seen from the spring into the summer towards the northern edge of the Cemetery anywhere the grass is long and damp. Damselflies are distinguished from dragonflies as they sit with their wings parallel to the body, whereas dragonflies sit with their wings at right angles and are generally much larger. The earliest on the wing in the Cemetery is the Broad-bodied Chaser. Later in the summer, patrolling males of Brown, Southern and Migrant Hawkers can be seen defending their territories - sometimes this can be heard too as they collide in the air with quite audible clicks. In the late summer, smaller Common Darter dragonflies become common.

Dragonflies.



Wild Arum, Cuckoo-pint or Lords-and-Ladies - common names often confuse!

Blue- Great- and Coal Tits are very common. Long-tailed Tits are often seen along the northern edges, feeding in small groups in the trees. Goldcrests are found here too, generally around the larger conifers.

Perhaps the most obvious birds are Carrion Crows, Magpies and Wood Pigeons, although the distinctive "yaf-tle" call of the Green Woodpecker is also often heard. This woodpecker is much more often seen than the Greater-spotted Woodpecker even though that too is fairly common.

Warblers such as the Blackcap and Chiff-chaff now occur throughout the year instead of migrating south in the autumn. Mallards, Pheasants and Herons are not uncommon. Sparrowhawks are frequent.

Apart from Blackbirds, Thrushes include Robins, Song Thrushes, Mistle Thrushes and, during the winter, Redwings and Fieldfares.

At night Tawny Owls can be heard calling.

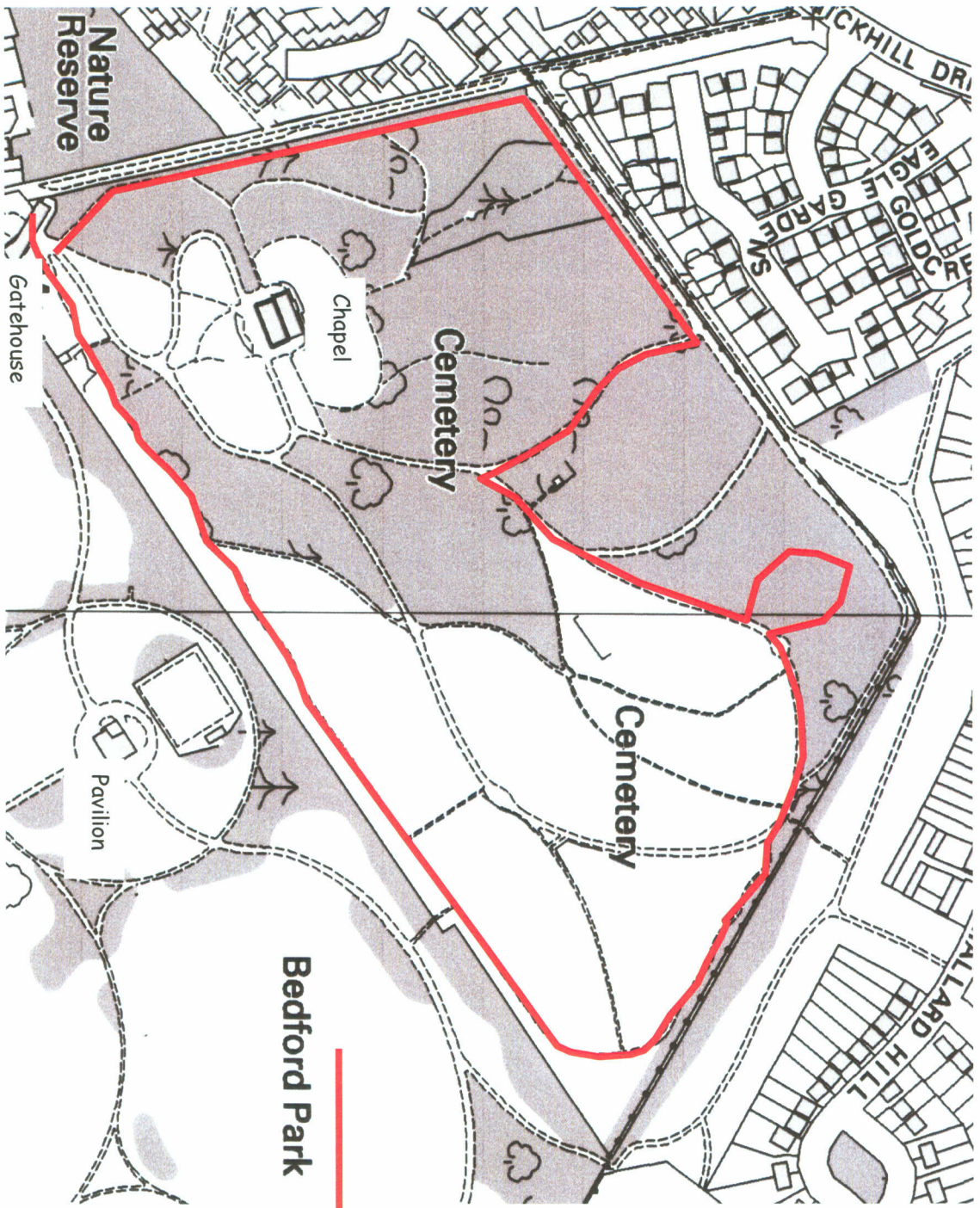
Mammals.

By far the most frequently observed mammal is the Grey Squirrel, an introduced species from America. In quiet periods, and especially in the evening and early morning, Muntjac deer (another introduction) and Red Fox are frequently seen. Shrews, voles and mice are probably very common but rarely seen. A family of Bank Voles did breed successfully in a neighbouring garden a few years ago. Hedgehogs are common.

Brian Anderson and Liz Silk
Spring 2007.



Daisy



Bedford Park

Butterfly transect

Friends of Bedford Cemetery (Foster Hill Road)

Membership Application Form

Return to: Mrs Margaret Carpenter

4 Harrington Drive

Bedford MK41 8DB

Phone enquiries: 01234 360003

Email: margaret.carpenter4@btinternet.com

I agree with the aims of the Friends and wish to become a member.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

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SIGNED.....

DATE.....

PHONE.....

EMAIL.....

Please enclose SAE if you require a receipt.

A member joining after September need not renew until the January of the year after next.

The annual subscription is £5
Payments payable to FFHR

Name & title.....

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Address.....

[] Yes, I am currently a UK taxpayer
[] Yes, please treat all my subs/donations to the Friends as Gift Aid until further notice.
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