

Devon's Best Churchyard Competition

Dear Samantha

Firstly, thank you very much for entering our competition this year. We very much appreciate the support of our competition in its fourth year.

Once again we had a wide range of entries from right across the county. We say it every year, but all the churchyards we visited are wonderful and the volunteers who look after them do an amazing job.

Because of the lockdown etc, judging was delayed, but was completed by the end of August. We really enjoyed visiting all the entries and it was really good to visit Moretonhampstead- you do a wonderful job there.

We judge the competition each year starting from scratch, so we are judging each year's entries against each other. This year we are delighted to award Moretonhampstead a **Certificate of Merit**, in recognition of the great work that you do there.

The full results are

Winner - St Andrew's, Ashburton

Runner Up - St Peter's, Budleigh Salterton

Highly Commended - St Mary's, Buckland Filleigh; St Swithun's Woodbury; St Swithun's Shobrooke.

A Certificate of Excellence is awarded to All Saints, East Budleigh and Most Improved is awarded to Holy Trinity, Buckfastleigh.

Our judges notes are set out below for this year which I hope you will find of interest and the link to our short film on YouTube.

We will post you the certificate and thank you once again for your support.

We look forward to next year!

<https://youtu.be/HJCiKiXeCEc>

Moretonhampstead – Report

The church and churchyard occupy a prominent position in the town and there are fine views of the surrounding countryside.

Strangely there is no name board or welcome notice on the main gates, just a sign overlaid with a child's picture proclaiming, 'pick up after your dog'. The double iron entrance gates need a little attention. To one side of these is a secondary single entrance which also serves as a public footpath. There is also an old stone boundary wall.

Inside, a notice instructs visitors to keep to the paths one of which bears to the right following the boundary another continues straight ahead towards the church building and a third veers to the left heading around the church. A large holly tree had a bird feeder suspended from a bough. There were two plastic refuse bins and the gravel path leads to another, smaller entrance to the graveyard. Small areas had been left to grow wild, but the entire area in front of the church had been mowed very short, beheading all the wild flowers. Old grave stones had been removed and were standing alongside the walls and in another area a feature had been made of other old monument stones having been reassembled into tight rows. At this point some small amounts of litter were seen.

Further on a third entrance/exit opened onto a recreation ground with children's play equipment, picnic tables with integral seats and further bench seating. A fine wooden millennium cross had been erected here, next to the old hedge/bank backing onto the churchyard. Returning to the

churchyard and following the path to the right and then at right angles to the left past a large lime tree arrives at an overspill burial area. The grass here had been left uncut and there were plenty of wildflowers blooming. Over to one side an area had been designated as a wildflower area and sign-posted accordingly. Evidence of small amounts of broken plastic flowers littered part of the grass ways with a discarded beer can and bottle that judging by the condition had been there for some time. A small kissing gate provided an exit into an adjoining field.

Leaving the wildflower area and by following the hedge line it seemed variable grass cutting had taken place leaving different lengths and, on a slope, sheltered by a boundary wall, a fine display of cowslips was in bloom. A shed was situated nearby. Areas of rough grass had been left at strategic points as well as alongside the boundaries. A large compost area had been constructed and contained a lot of nettles, left for insects and butterflies. Some grave stones had collapsed or were broken. A bin with a notice asking that no plastic should be deposited in it had been ignored as it contained plastic bags and plastic flowers amongst the green waste.

Next to the church was a dog bowl and water butt plus a bench (two other benches were noted elsewhere in the grounds). The church porch with stone seating contained notice boards with up-to-date notices and in the eaves was an old swallow's nest.

There was no sign of a management plan or map of the grass cutting regime, although a small map of the churchyard and one of the biodiversity did accompany the competition entry form. Enlarged to a decent size and displayed for the public these would have been most informative.

All in all, this churchyard has considerable potential for further improvement with bird and bat boxes and perhaps a bug hotel as projects involving the school or nearby youth centre, plus a nice welcoming name board. Bearing in mind the public footpath running through the area it was relatively litter free.