

Chalgrove churchyard hedge restoration project

Along the southern boundary of the St Marys Churchyard lies a hedgerow in need of some care. Part of it had been laid in 1999 however with no subsequent management it has become over grown and dominated by trees and brambles.

As part of the project to restore this hedge CWaCS (Chalgrove Wildlife and Conservation Society) have so far cleared a lot of the bramble and elder, these are not good for hedges as they will take over and suffocate growth of other species. We have also felled a couple of dying trees to open up space in the hedgerow and allow some light in for smaller trees to establish.



Today with the help of many willing volunteers we will be planting up the gaps with native hedge plants and coppicing some of the hazel stools to encourage new growth and allow the new plants some more light. Over time we hope to be able to restore this into a well managed hedge beneficial to wildlife.

Hedge Planting

Hedges are extremely valuable to wildlife providing food, shelter and corridors linking habitats. In the early 20th century Britain's countryside was a patchwork of small fields all separated by hedgerows most managed by hand, each region had its own style of laying and managing. But with the development of wire fencing and the agricultural revolution of the 1950s mechanisation took the place of skilled workers



and fences replaced living boundaries. During the last half of the century up to 50% of our hedgerows have been lost or neglected.

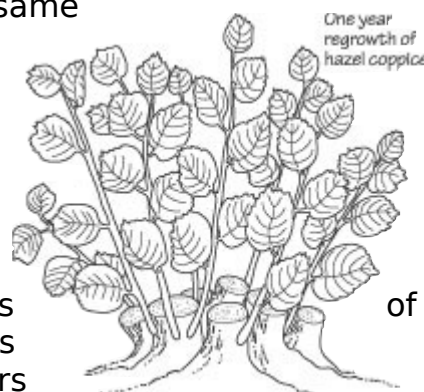
The species we are planting in the churchyard are Hawthorn, Hazel, Field Maple, Rowan and Buckthorn.

(A section of the hedge in summer)

Coppicing

Coppicing is a traditional method of woodland management, it involves felling a tree or shrub at ground level to promote new growth at the base. This can be done repeatedly to the same 'coppice stool' and historically many woodlands were managed using this method.

Different areas of the woodland would be coppiced each year on a cycle of 7-10 years, this creates a constant supply of timber, prolongs the life of the trees by up to a hundred years and benefits wildlife by creating a diverse habitat with different stages growth. When the stool is first coppiced light is allowed into the woodland floor and wildflowers that may have been dormant in the soil will flower, insects and butterflies will flourish, and as the tree grows again it provides habitat for birds and shelter for small mammals. Species such as Hazel, Ash and Sweet Chestnut thrive when coppiced.



The material produced by coppicing can be used for a variety of purposes. Hazel stems are often used to create hurdles, weave fences and as the stakes and binders in hedge laying. The left over timber was often used to make charcoal. Coppice stools also make excellent hibernation sites for animals such as the Hazel Dormouse.

Hedgelaying

Hedges need management to prevent them becoming over grown, tall and gappy. The most effective and beneficial method of management is to lay the hedge once it gets to a suitable height (8-12ft high). Laying is done by cutting the stem of the tree almost all the way through, leaving a small section attached to the base; this is called pleaching. The thin piece still attached includes the cambium layer beneath the bark which will feed the whole plant with nutrients from the roots. The stem is then carefully laid over and is held in place by stakes; binding is then woven along the top to secure it and finish it off. The style of binding and direction of laying varies from county to county.

We hope to be able to return in years to come and lay this hedge.

