

# All Saints Churchyard

*Dorothy Toyn*

Over recent months concerns have been expressed about the churchyard at All Saints' – both the increasing traffic and parking issues and the state of the churchyard itself.

Some years ago, in the late 1930's I believe, the churchyard was "closed" and burials were encouraged to take place at North Road Cemetery, except for graves with space. Closure takes place by an Order in Council under the Burials Acts, and these often happened in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century for public health reasons and the maintenance of the churchyard passed to the local authority that would have been responsible for public health.

When a churchyard is transferred to a local authority, they succeed to the functions and responsibilities of the PCC, and the Local Government Act of 1972 requires the authority to maintain the walls and fences in good repair and maintain "decent order".

The definition of "decent order" is down to interpretation, with some Councils doing little more than litter pick, and some argue that the church remains responsible for tree work, planting, stability of memorials and surfacing etc. However, Hertford Town Council has done more over the years, including tree maintenance and footpath resurfacing.

Recently the Council has been very proactive in trying to improve the churchyard. Nina Villa, the Town Clerk, came to explain to the PCC the work they wished to undertake. She was very keen to explain that the Council is not planning to flatten headstones as has happened in some places, but to actively repair those in greatest need of attention e.g. the Gripper and Saunders tombs.

The gates have been repainted and currently the team are removing troublesome ivy from some of the graves. As with all garden transformations, it looks a mess while being done and you only have

to walk through the churchyard to see the huge piles of ivy that has been removed.

This is all under the guidance of the Diocese to make a "Living Churchyard" where some clearance occurs to protect memorials and allow planting like wild flowers, but keeping enough undergrowth to encourage wildlife. When complete it is hoped the churchyard will be a place of beauty and tranquillity reflecting God's creation.



Increasing congregations and extra events means more people and more cars wish to use the churchyard. This has led to problems as it seems to be used as a free town car park by some people, a thoughtless few drivers show no respect for pedestrians (the area where cars drive are public footpaths also), travelling far too fast for safety; on occasion too many people try to park, obliging others to drive onto the grass.

On a recent occasion, the car park was so full prior to a funeral that the cortege could not get to the West Door without driving across the grass, and on another, wedding guests were unable to park at all as the car park was full before they arrived!

For all these reasons, the PCC will be discussing the issues and looking at a proposed action plan involving repair work, action to tackle the unauthorised car parking, a parking plan for events, including information about alternative parking, and communication to all involved.

Please bear with us as we try to resolve the issues and your co-operation will be greatly appreciated.