

LICHENS AT ST MARGARETS CHURCH AND YARD

Last September a group of lichenologists discovered over 100 species of lichens at the church and the graveyard which were relatively undisturbed. This report is what they found.

Lichens are curious dual organisms which grow on surfaces which are unsuitable for vascular plants including stonework and the bark of trees. Churchyards are hotspots for lichen diversity due to the presence of stonework of considerable antiquity, memorials of various different rock types as well as wooden structures and trees. Many lichen species are inconspicuous and lack distinctive features and hence our understanding of churchyard lichens is still developing. The first British record of *Verrucaria obfusans* was from an Oxfordshire church in February 2015, since when it has been found in several counties across England. **Its occurrence on a stone windowsill of Spaxton church is the first record for Somerset** (just to the right of the top of the ladder) Previously this lichen had not been recognised as different from other, similar brown crustose species despite the fact that it possesses characteristic microscopic features.



The number of taxa recorded at a churchyard gives some indication of its richness: anything over one hundred is a good total. (The term 'taxa' refers to species, subspecies and forms; it gives a total of all the different entities which were recorded). The length of the list is not the only consideration since the number can be boosted by common species on trees which are of less conservation importance than slow-growing species on old stonework. **114 taxa were recorded at Spaxton** (the list includes lichenicolous fungi as well as separate subspecies of lichens). None of the taxa are true rarities (*Verrucaria ochrostoma* and *Vouauxiella verrucosa* are currently classed as 'Nationally Rare' due to under-recording). Some of the lichen communities are notable however, including those growing on the old stone mouldings of the south wall of the church which is rich in lichen communities and also the old chest tombs and headstones in the churchyard.



Lichens tend to require no management, slowly doing their own thing if left alone. The largest threat to gravestone communities tends to be ivy which can quickly engulf a gravestone and kill off lichen communities which have taken many decades to develop. The British Lichen Society provides further information about churchyard lichens: www.britishlichensociety.org.uk. *This survey was conducted by Brian and Sandy Coppins, Mark Powell and Pat Wolseley and a complete list of the species recorded at the church and yard in this survey is available to view in the church porch.*

Spaxton Women's Institute

We started off the year with a 'Fish & Chip Lunch' on 12th January. This was well attended and enjoyed and thanks must go to Gail for allowing us to use her home.

On 3rd February we enjoyed a visit from our Somerset Village Agent. Village Agents visit and give free confidential practical support to local people and community groups needing support. The areas our Village Agent covers are Broomfield, Cannington, Durleigh, Enmore, Goathurst, Nether Stowey, Over Stowey, Spaxton and Wembdon.

'Operation Henry – Part 2' was the subject for 2nd March – this talk was a follow-up to a talk we enjoyed last year.

On 6th April at 7.30pm we have an Antiques Road Show and members have been requested to take two items each.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on 4th May at 7.30pm. We are holding a fund raising 'cream tea' in the Village Hall on 9th July and a visit to Looe and Polperro in the near future.



If you are interested in joining us for an interesting meeting please do come along.