

ST ANDREW'S  
CHURCH  
THELVETON  
PRAYER TRAIL



# 1. The Horse Chestnut

The tree gets its name from the leaf scars which look like tiny horse shoes, complete with nails.

It was brought to Britain in the 17th century to use in ornamental parks.

Its leaves have five or seven leaflets which stretch out like fingers on a hand. In spring it has tall white flowers known as “candles”. In the autumn it forms the familiar fruit known to generations of schoolchildren as “conkers”. When they are ripe these “conkers” are a deep brownish red with a beautiful, shiny, smooth surface. The fruit has a hard skin, and is also protected by a spiky green case. On the outside the case has sharp spikes, which are painful to hold, so that animals do not bite into it. On the inside it is soft and silky making a cocoon for the conker. If the conkers are planted as soon as they are ripe they are fairly easy to grow, especially if there is a hard winter to split the shell.

The leaves, bark, and fruit are mildly poisonous, but when treated properly make a herbal medicine for ulcers, haemorrhoids, and some blood disorders.

The horse chestnut is one of the earliest trees to turn colour in the autumn, and it usually puts on a wonderful display of red, brown, yellow and gold.

Since 1970 Horse Chestnut trees in Britain have been threatened by a disease called Bleeding Canker, which has no effective treatment and can kill the tree in five or six years.



*I am held in my hard chestnut coat, cocooned in milky-white silk.*

*I am safe where no harm can come, protected by the vicious spikes of my prickly shell.*

*But if I am to grow, if I am to become a beautiful tree I must crack open my shell, discard my prickles and my silk cocoon, soften the hardness of my coat, and submit to the harsh icy blast of winter.*

*Lord, protect me when my earthly protection is gone.*

## 2. The Beech Tree

Beech trees thrive in dry woodlands as they hate getting their feet wet. In the springtime, while the leaves are unfurling, light and water can get through to the woodland floor and spring flowering bulbs such as snowdrop, aconite, and bluebell can bloom. As the leaves develop they form a thick canopy making the ground beneath them very dark and shady. Rain has to be very heavy to penetrate to the ground. This means that although the ground is rich with leaf mould, not many plants grow there in the summer and autumn, so they are easy places to walk, and give cover for larger mammals such as deer.

In autumn the beech produces seeds, called beech masts, which are highly nutritious, but they are fiddly to eat, so the only creatures that really thrive under beech trees are small mammals. Similarly, larger birds do not like the dense canopy that the beeches form. Apart from small song birds, only the jay makes a habit of living there.

The dryness and shade of the summer and autumn may inhibit the weeds, but they make ideal conditions for young beech trees .

The beech tree is used both for hedging and as a specimen tree in parks and large gardens. In spring it is a vibrant green, but in the autumn the colours vary from deep red through oranges and yellows giving a wonderful, long-lasting show. The copper beech is a European variant found in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Germany and brought here as an ornamental tree.

The root of the word “beech” is the same as the root for “book”. In the dark ages runes were inscribed on thin slices of beech, giving it the name “book tree”.



*In the heat of the day I sit and dream  
beneath your shade.*

*As the storm breaks you give me shelter and  
a safe place to grow.*

*When I walk you give me ground that is dry  
and firm beneath my feet.*

*If I take the time, and have the patience,  
you feed me with the richness of your fruit.*

*Your autumn leaves lie dead on the ground  
to give life to your children.*

*Lord, though I am small and seem weak, I  
grow strong because of your care for me.*

### 3. Winter Flowers

This area of the churchyard is home to a host of early-flowering bulbs. For most of the year they hide underground and there is no evidence that they are here.

The snowdrops are the first to appear, sometimes as early as January. They were probably introduced to England in the sixteenth century. In some parts of the world it is associated with mourning, particularly for a child.

They are followed by aconites, which are not really bulbs, but tubers, part of the buttercup family. They are poisonous, a relative of monkshood. They were, nevertheless, used in small quantities in traditional herbal medicine despite being very bitter.

After the aconites come daffodils, mostly the small woodland variety. The daffodil, known as “Peter’s Leek”, is the national symbol of Wales. It is also known as the “Easter Lily” and associated with birth. It is used as the symbol for cancer research.

Last of all come the bluebells, which are associated with ancient woodlands and are rich in legends, especially concerning fairies. Anyone wearing a wreath of bluebells is said to be compelled to speak the truth.

When the flowers are over, the leaves remain, drawing in goodness from the earth, the rain and the sun in order to build new bulbs for next year. Each plant often makes more than one new bulb, so that the number of bulbs gradually increases over the years. Later the leaves die back and all signs of the plants disappear from above the ground. The bulbs remain undisturbed in the earth, protected from both the hot sun and from frost damage, until they re-appear to brighten the end of winter next year.



*Your beauty brightens the dark days when  
the grip of winter is hard.*

*You seem so fragile, so fleeting, yet you  
endure year after year, and grow and  
flourish.*

*You spend so long in the peace of the dark  
earth, unseen, unrecognised; yet you are  
always there; ready to bring a smile to  
winter-weary hearts; waiting to be reborn.*

*Lord, thank you, for the beauty of your  
peace.*

## 4. The English Oak

England used to be covered in huge forests with many oak trees. The wood of the oak tree is hard and durable. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was used to build ships. These were the “wooden walls” of Nelson’s navy and helped to defend our country.

The oak tree is one of the most generous trees in the country. Not only is its wood used for ships, furniture, panelling and cabinet making, but it supports a huge variety of life. It gives a home to nearly three hundred different types of insect.

The familiar lobed leaves appear in the spring, but its flowers are tiny and insignificant, sending their pollen out on the wind with very little sign of their own presence. The fruits, which appear in the autumn, are much more familiar. The acorn is a favourite food for a large variety of animals, including pigs. We used the cups in which the acorns sit for the fairy “teas” that we prepared in the woodland dells of my childhood.

Acorns are easy to grow. They don’t need any special conditions. Just plant them, water them, and in the generous spirit of the tree they will grow. Unfortunately this generosity is also their downfall, as an oak seedling is a tasty meal for any passing herbivore. Also, the adult tree takes many years to mature, and takes up an awful lot of space.

It is said that if the oak comes into leaf after the ash tree then the summer will be cold and wet, but if the oak tree comes into leaf first it will be a fine summer.

Thelveton churchyard has a number of fine oak trees, including some recently planted specimens, which should provide peaceful shade for centuries to come.





*I live on your generosity without a thought.*

*You give me everything that I need.*

*Your strength supports me, your sap feeds  
me, the life in you sustains the life in me.*

*You do not ask what I deserve; you do not  
ask what I can give to you. You give freely,  
sacrificially, of all that you have.*

*Lord, I range the world like a butterfly  
taking everything, but settling nowhere.*

*Yet when I return to you I know that I have  
everything that I need.*

## 5. Common Elder and Nettle

The elder is a tree belonging to the honeysuckle family. Gardeners hate it because it is invasive. You never plant it, but it arrives anyway. It seems hard to believe that in the dark ages every cottage planted this tree next to the house. This was because it was used extensively in natural medicines, as well as for jams, jellies, and in making wine.

The Elder flourishes in soil with high nitrogen content and is famous for naturally growing near badger setts, rabbit warrens, near compost heaps and in churchyards. It is often associated with nettles, which also do well in soil with high nitrogen content. Both plants are often found near where humans live, probably because of the domesticated animals enriching the soil. The site of long-gone crofts and cottages can often be identified by the rich growth of elder and nettle remaining in the spot.

Nettles are a favourite food of many larvae, and attract many types of butterfly and moth. Stinging Nettle has a flavour similar to spinach when cooked and is rich in vitamins A, C, and D, iron, potassium, manganese, and calcium. Soaked in water the nettle loses its sting so can be used in salads. It is used extensively in herbal medicine, and the dried leaves are used as a delicately flavoured, refreshing tea.

This area of the churchyard is usually used as a compost heap to dispose of dead flowers from graves and church decorations.

August 2019 – this area has recently been cleared. It will take a couple of seasons to return to its natural state. Such maintenance is necessary to encourage a variety of wildlife.

*I resent your presence, coming where I did  
not ask you to be.*



*You challenge me, annoy  
me, destroy my tidy world.*

*Yet, despite your brashness  
you have a wealth of  
wonder to offer*

*to me.*

*You can give me food, and drink, and  
healing; but mostly I reject them because  
they do not fit in with my expectations.*

*Lord, how often do I reject your  
gifts because they are difficult  
to handle, and may sting me?*

*Forgive my narrow vision of  
what is good.*



## 6. Boudicca's Way

The Boudicca Way runs from Frenze through Thelveton's old village centre, past Grange Farm and across the field to the churchyard.

It passes the churchyard beside the lych gate. In the Middle Ages, when most people were buried in just shrouds rather than coffins, the dead were carried to the lych gate and placed on a bier. The priest conducted the first part of the funeral service under the canopy before going on to the grave side. Later it was used as a shelter for the bearers while the service was conducted in church. The Thelveton lych gate is one of the most common forms. It is a simple shed over a wooden gate. It is composed of a roof with two gabled ends, covered with tiles. Sometimes such gates were thatched, decorated, provided with wooden benches, or contained stone platforms to rest the corpse.

From the lych gate the Boudicca way passes to the south of the churchyard, through a kissing gate. Its purpose is to give easy passage to people but, at the same time, act as a barrier to animals. .

After the gate, the path runs in an easterly direction past an old gravel pit, and passes to the north of Thelveton Hall then turns north towards Dickleburgh. This route gives one of the best views of Thelveton Hall, which is a fine Tudor mansion. There are sometimes cows in the field with their calves – proceed with caution!

Despite its name, the Boudicca Way is not an old right of way but a modern creation which joins traditional footpaths to make a forty mile long-distance walk. The maintenance of the gates and footpaths is the responsibility of the landowner, most of whom are extremely good about maintaining rights of way in a good condition. Norfolk County Council is responsible for seeing that the way is maintained.



*I follow the path that you set out before me.*

*You lead me through quiet meadows beside  
clear streams of fresh water.*

*If I follow your way-marks I will not stray  
from the right path. Your arrows and  
signposts will lead me on the safe track.*

*When I meet thorns, or difficulties on the  
path I call, and you help to clear the way  
before me.*

*Lord, lead me in the ways of your wisdom,  
into the joy of your kingdom.*

## 7 Living Things

Living things breathe, eat, move, react to their surroundings, grow, reproduce themselves, and get rid of waste. The churchyard is full of living things: flowers; grasses; bushes; trees; insects such as butterflies, moths, bees, and dragon flies; small animals such as rabbits, moles, bats and mice;



birds such as pheasants, owls, partridges, and sparrows. This abundance of life makes the most of the safe quiet environment that the churchyard provides. We, too, can make the most of the natural beauty and peace found in this place to rest, walk, picnic, and ponder on the generosity of life.

And this is good.

But the churchyard was not set aside for

All living things have a natural life cycle all, including humans, are born, live their earthly lives, and die. When our earthly lives are over we return to the earth from which we were made. This churchyard was set aside so that we can honour those whom we have loved in life; reverently dispose of their earthly remains; and find a peaceful place to reflect on the meaning of their lives, and of our own. In this spot we can find, not only death, but also healing for the soul.



this.  
and

Jesus said, "I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly."



*There is a time for everything, and a season  
for every activity under heaven:*

*a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to  
gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

## 8 Pine Tree

Pines are evergreen trees, which have a high resin content in the sap. They are generally quick growing, which is why they are often planted by the Forestry Commission. Even so they can live for several hundred years, and grow to a height of 60 metres.

When the tree is small it has seed leaves, followed by juvenile leaves which can last for up to five years before the familiar needles are produced. The adult tree bears two kinds of cones. The male cone lives only for a short time, and drops off when it has shed its pollen. The female cone can take up to three years to mature when once it has been pollinated. The cones then open to release their seeds. In areas where there are frequent forest fires the cones may not open until after a fire has burnt down the adult trees. The fallen cones open in the heat, shed their seeds, and re-populate the forest.

The wood is often used to make furniture, door frames, and roof frames. In the past it was used for boats, masts and other outdoor artefacts, but it does not last long outside unless protected with pitch. The resin is an important source of turpentine. The seeds are eaten by birds and squirrels. The needles are eaten by some moths, pine sawflies, and goats. They are rich in vitamins A and D and used to be steeped in boiling water to make tea.

In early times the tree was often planted as a marker in the landscape to mark ancient cairns, trackways, and crossroads, as well as to mark the burial place of warriors, heroes and chieftains.





*I scan the horizon for  
your distinctive  
shape.*

*You guide me to the  
next point on the  
road.*

*When I reach a  
crossroads I see you. I  
know that I must take  
time to think which way I should go next.*

*Lord, as I go from place to place about my  
daily work I know I can trust you to mark  
my way. If I look for you in the distance you  
will guide me to you. If I see you close at  
hand you will guide the decisions I make.*

*Lord, you guide me in your way until, at  
last, you mark the place where I am buried, and  
bring me home to you.*

## 9. Flint

Long ages ago, a time too long ago for understanding, myriads of tiny creatures lived, and multiplied, and died in a warm, shallow, salty ocean. For long ages their tiny bodies sank, in death, to the bottom of the sea where decay left only their calcite shells built into bone-white dunes on the ocean floor. Other plants and sea creatures on the ocean floor became trapped in this graveyard.

Slowly over the years these layers of bone and shell weighed heavy on each other and pressed down into a graveyard of chalk. Bacteria held within these chalky dunes did their quiet work over the eons, and in doing so generated hydrogen sulphide, that noxious gas that smells of rotten eggs. Oxygen dissolved in the sea water met this hellish gas, and the two made acid, sulphuric acid.

By processes mysterious and strange, chemistry worked its magic on this complex mix. The silica held within the sea creatures was transformed by the acid. The carbonate in the chalk was released and the silica moulded into nodules of fantastical shapes, held in their chalky cocoon. Trapped plants and sea creatures were transformed into rock in the exact shape and pattern of their living bodies.

Over millennia the earth moved. Ice came and went over chalky graveyard. It was pushed and shoved before the mighty force of the ice, until it was broken up, and at last laid to rest above the level of the sea, under a layer of fertile soil.

And men, as they do, dug in the soil and found these strange shaped gifts from God. They struck them to create fire; they shaped them into spears and arrows; they sharpened them into scrappers to transform animal skins into clothes; and they built walls, shelters, houses. Here in Thelveton they built this church.

*What eons brought you to this place?*



*What wondrous processes  
transformed your state  
from dead bones and  
forgotten creatures into  
this treasure for our use?*

*By what power were you  
placed so easy to find  
and so near to our  
hand?*

*You strike fire for us.*

*You give us shelter from the storms of this  
world.*

*So grey and dull, such an unlikely treasure,  
just a stone, yet life itself created you, and  
you gave your life for my comfort.*

*Lord, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for  
the giving of your life, for the love that  
worked over countless ages, and gives itself  
still, for love of me.*

## 10. Barn Owl

From time to time a Barn Owl roosts on the rafters here. We know this because of the owl pellets that we sometimes find under its perch.

Barn owls hunt small mammals such as mice, voles and rats but they also hunt fish close to the surface of the water and smaller birds in the tree tops and even in the air. Barn owls swallow their prey whole and then bring back up (regurgitate) the indigestible parts such as bones in the form of a small pellet.

Barn owls are one of the most widely distributed birds, found everywhere around the world apart from the polar and desert regions. Surprisingly, these common barn owls do not make the hoot sound that can often be heard at night. Instead the owls produce a high-pitched scream and can also hiss in a similar way to a cat or snake if the barn owl feels threatened.

Barns owls can most commonly be seen in the open countryside and along river banks, fields and even the verges on the side of the road. Barn owls are nocturnal animals meaning that typically barn owls rest during the light day time hours and emerge at dusk to begin a night of hunting.

Early one morning as I drove over to Thelveton a barn owl appeared ahead of me. He followed the road at a surprisingly swift pace, easily keeping ahead of the car. He seemed to glide along without effort and his wings barely moved. After about half a mile he veered off across the open fields, presumably heading for his rest.

The large eyes of the barn owl enable the barn owl to have fantastic eyesight even in the darkness of night, but barn owls also have incredibly accurate hearing. The ears of the barn owl are set with one higher than the other giving the barn owl better hearing in general but it also means that when the barn owl is hunting for prey, it can use one ear to detect noise on the ground below and the other ear is used to detect noise from the air and trees above.



*I prowl the night looking for my prey.  
Does it ever occur to me to pity them?*

*Here I am, top of the food chain,  
capable of awesome beauty,  
and sudden, swift cruelty.*

*I can live and thrive anywhere in the  
world, find a smaller animal to hunt,  
and feed my young.*

*I live in this moment,  
and serve only my own ends.*

*Lord does that really sum me up?  
or can I find compassion within me, and a  
desire to care for and to love your creation?*

*Lord, tame the owl within me,  
and give me a wider view.*

## 11. “Wellingtonia”

Sequoias and redwoods are often referred to interchangeably, though they are two very different species of tree. Both naturally occur only in California. They share a distinctive cinnamon-coloured bark, and tend to grow to overwhelming heights. Both need very specific, though very different, climates to thrive.

The giant redwood thrives in a moist, humid climate near the coast, where marine fog delivers the precise conditions necessary for its growth. The fog adds moisture to the soil and helps trap it there by lowering the rate of evaporation. Giant redwoods typically outreach their giant cousins in height, standing up to 378 feet tall.

Giant sequoias thrive in higher elevation habitats than giant redwoods and grow naturally only along the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, primarily between 5,000 and 7,000 feet in elevation. Giant sequoias require the periodic dry heat of the mountains in order for their cones to open and release seeds. Still reaching impressive heights of up to 311 feet, giant sequoias are typically shorter than their coastal relations. What they lack in height, however, they make up for in size, usually outweighing giant redwoods substantially. Through sheer incredible volume, giant sequoias claim the largest tree in the world. Known as General Sherman, this most giant of sequoias weighs a staggering 2.7 million pounds and stands 275 feet tall from its base, which is more than 100 feet wide. Not only is General Sherman the largest living tree, it also owns the title of largest living organism on the planet.

Redwoods can live up to 2,000 years, and sequoias up to 3,000 years. Our little cousin of the Californian giants was probably planted in the late nineteenth century, making it quite young. It probably lost its top in a thunder storm in the early twentieth century. The conditions here are not ideal, so it is unlikely to be one of the giants, even if it lives a very long time.

Far from home,  
Torn from your native land,  
Disfigured in your youth by passing storms,  
Struggling to survive in an alien world.  
Do you, like us,  
Long for the feel of your native soil?

Lord, sometimes we feel so far from home,  
and long to return to your loving arms. We  
are battered and bruised by the storms of  
life, disfigured by the world's shock.  
Here in this quiet place, let us rest a while,  
and remember the kingdom to which you  
lead us.

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is close  
at hand."

Here we feel its closeness, and our hearts lift  
at the touch of your breath.

## 12. Three Centuries

This post stands beside the grave of a man who lived in three centuries.

Gravestones are a reminder of a life once live, and a point of contact for the family and friends. They are also a great source of historical data. Sometimes they are hard to read because of the moss, mildew, algae, and lichen that thrives on them. These can be cleaned from gravestones with a cupful of household ammonia mixed in a gallon of water but, though it seems disrespectful, we are encouraged NOT to clean the lichen off the stones.

Lichen is not single organisms; it is a stable symbiotic association between a fungus and algae.

In unpolluted churchyards, lichens often form mosaics of colour, especially on the stonework, and also on trees, adding to the character and interest of the site. They vary in form from simple, powdery scatterings and crusts to more elaborate leafy or even bushy structures. There are over 2000 British species, some of them only remaining in graveyards.

Lichens perform useful functions in nature. They provide shelter for other organisms. They also provide food for animals and materials that they can use to build their homes or nests. When lichens grow on rocks, the chemicals that they release contribute to the slow process of rock breakdown and soil formation.

‘Provided there is sufficient light and moisture, lichens are able to colonize surfaces mostly unsuitable for flowering plants. Some grow very slowly, sometimes less than half a millimetre a year, while others grow more rapidly. Many are long-lived. Individual lichens may well be almost as old as the gravestones upon which they live. The ancient stonework of churches and churchyards, when undisturbed and unpolluted by chemical sprays, thus provides a sanctuary for them. The lichens on the shaded north side and the sunny south side of the church are markedly different.’ (*British Lichen Society*)



*Over the years we grow little by little into fantastical shapes, we two who rely so much on each other. Working together with the stones, we have all that we need to thrive in this isolated place, - food, a stable home, shelter from the storms.*

*We aren't much to look at, unless you take the time to look carefully, and notice our difference. We aren't always welcome, because we hide the carvings you made so carefully, but we create good soil from solid rock.*

*Lord, may we work together to provide good soil in which your Word can grow and thrive.*