

THE GARDEN AND CHURCHYARD OF ST OLAVE'S CHURCH

by Helen Fields



The garden at St Olave's has been long established but in the last five years it has been further developed with additional planting schemes. There are three main areas which have been the subject of further work, the front garden, the courtyard garden and the churchyard, overlooked by the imposing ruins of St Mary's Abbey.

Most of this work has been made possible through financial contributions from the Church and donation of plants, some from seeds and cuttings and some from plant division. The garden benefits from regular maintenance.

Front Churchyard Garden

This consists of a mix of shrubs and perennial plants. There are several roses, including 'Peace', 'Joie de Vivre', Claire Austin. The latter rose was planted by children of St Olave's Sunday school in memory of Clare Latham, who taught at Sunday school.

Pots of seasonal flowers are placed on either side of the front door to the church.



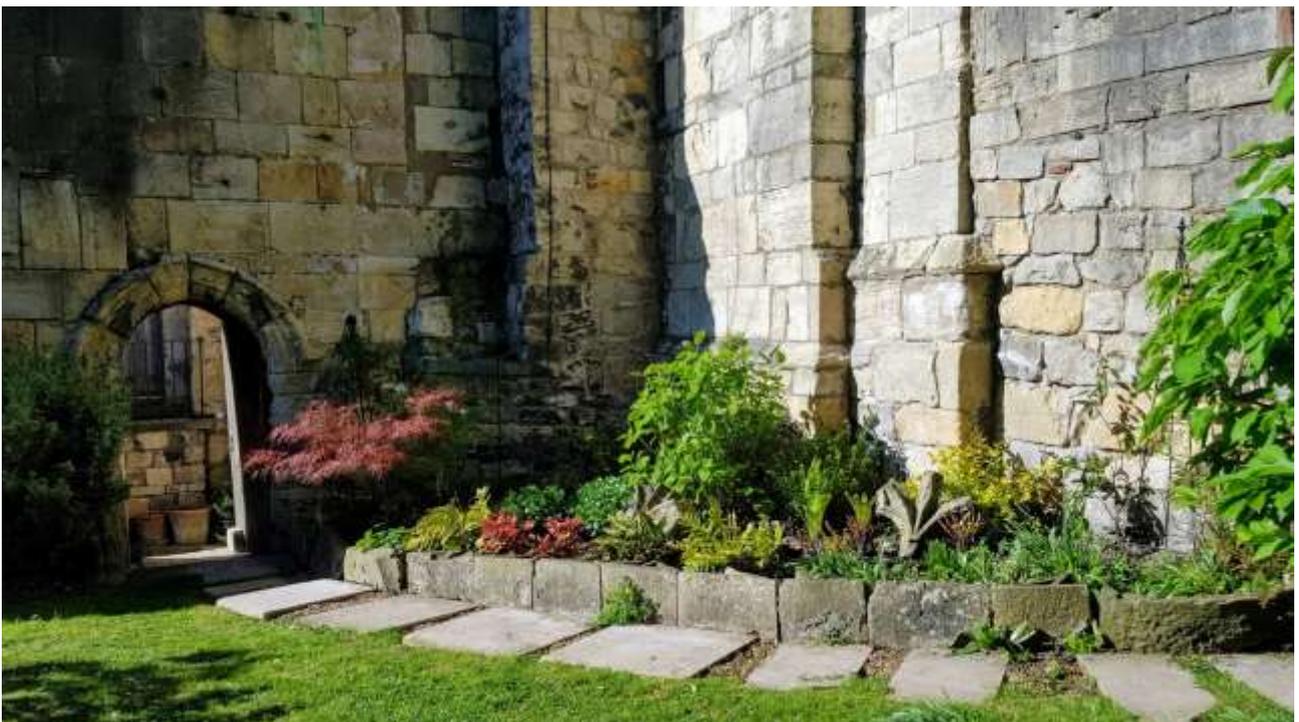
Japanese Acers have been planted. A small rockery area exists on the left side of the garden and a 15th century font in the recess of the City wall is planted with snowdrops and primrose and ivy.

During Easter, three wooden crosses are erected on the raised area behind the rockery. Spring flowering plants are placed at the base of the crosses.



The Courtyard

This area is enclosed by the walls of St Mary's Abbey. The plants in the courtyard are established and include a small prunus tree, a magnolia stellata, heuchera, several species of fern and Alchemilla. The latter is very good for flower arranging!



In early spring snowdrops abound alongside early dwarf iris, muscari and narcissi. A small stone seat has been donated providing a quiet area to sit and reflect or listen to birdsong. Most recently the courtyard has also been designated as a garden of remembrance for future cremated remains. Those interred will also be recorded in a book of remembrance.

A stone archway leads into the closed graveyard. Over the years, medieval stones from the Abbey ruins have weathered and dislodged. Some of these have been used as features in the courtyard and churchyard. They still reflect the skills of the medieval masons who crafted them and make an interesting contrast to plantings.



The Churchyard

The churchyard has recently been enhanced by the laying of a pathway, steps and a disabled ramp to the south door of the church. A triangular shaped area outside the rear door contains shrubs and perennials including acers, ferns, astrantia, eryngium, hellibores, alchemilla, rudbeckia, and dicentra. Previously this area was full of debris and stones from the construction of the path. To the left of the door a sloped grass bank has been re-seeded. Wild primroses, cowslips and fritillaries have been planted.





On the right side of the church yard along the line of the wall, there was an a very unkempt expanse of weeds and comfrey plants which had become overgrown, obscuring many of the grave stones. The canopy of trees on this side creates dense shade. The weeds and comfrey were cleared and the area was planted with shade tolerant shrubs and perennials. These include hosta, ferns, wild primroses, astilbe, alchemilla mollis, euphorbia, hydrangia arborescens, aquilegia, epimedium, dicentra, brunnera, hellibores. A few foxgloves will hopefully increase over time.



The tomb of Sir William Etty RA, probably the most famous grave in the churchyard, was overgrown with ivy and weeds. It is now kept tidy and planted with ferns, primroses, tiarella and cyclamen. Many people view this grave from the archway in the museum gardens. One side of the Etty grave below the abbey wall has also been planted with ferns and shade loving species. The Etty tomb is due for conservation work and funds are currently being raised.



The top north east end of the churchyard on the left, with a view of the Minster, was another unkempt area and one or two tombs remain in a dilapidated state. This has been cleared of brambles, weeds, glass, stones and other debris. Stones from the Abbey have once again been used as features, some, too large to move, remain where they were when the area was cleared. Planting again favours shade tolerant species.





In keeping with the largely wild state of the churchyard wild flower seeds have been sown to the right of the area and these are beginning to grow. They will hopefully seed themselves elsewhere in the churchyard over time. They will also attract bees, butterflies and birds. A hive of bees is situated at the rear of the churchyard. Most recently, a compost heap and insect 'lodge' have been constructed at the rear of the churchyard.

Tree creepers and other less common birds have been seen in the churchyard.

In the Autumn, further spring bulbs will be planted.

This is a peaceful and sacred place. The hope is that what has been done enhances the sense of peace in this beautiful churchyard, whilst ensuring it is managed sensitively. Occasional open days are planned each year to allow visitors and parishioners to view the churchyard.

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Images by Helen Fields and Ben Pugh (*front cover photo and Easter garden*)

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