

“The seasons bring the flower again...”



“The seasons bring the flower again, And bring the firstling to the flock; And in the dusk of thee, the clock Beats out the lives of little men.” Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The above lines are thought to have been written by Tennyson as he stood in the churchyard at his friend, Arthur Hallam’s, grave. He speaks to the ancient yew that has endured more seasons than the lifespan of ten men, standing regal and sentry-like against the ravages of time. Tennyson found solace and comfort underneath the branches of the evergreen, and the timelessness of the new season of spring that was bursting into bloom all around him.

We are indeed blessed with churchyards at the heart of each of our communities; sacred spaces that not only treasure the remains of our loved ones and immortalise their lives in stone for us to cherish but equally offer a welcoming reflective space in which to contemplate the meaning of our own stories and the time allocated to us, the seasons that *“Beats out the lives of little men.”* To wander around a churchyard is to take in, with a deep breath, the

reality of our own mortal nature and the challenge of what we want to do with the rest of our days.

Graves bring the message that life is a gift not to be taken for granted. Dates on stones remind us that no one of us knows what lies around the corner. Good health, in mind and body, and the capacity to live independently and fruitfully is never to be taken for granted. A fact perhaps even more pertinent in Tennyson's own thoughts, living in the C19th without the advances of modern-day science and a national health service.

For many hundreds of years, the Church of England has served the country by being the main provider of burial space. In most towns and cities, the size of populations and the pressure on land means that this is no longer the case. Civic authorities have had to step in to provide burial space. But we are still blessed within our own Benefice to have a place within which to lay our loved ones to rest not very far from our own Church doors. It is a blessing that the local Church of England shares willingly with everyone.

Our Parochial Church Councils all take very seriously the responsibility bestowed upon them to do their best in maintaining our churchyards. Resources are limited however, and we are grateful to all those who work and volunteer in helping to keep our churchyards in a state in which it is a delight to view "*the seasons*" that "*bring the flower again...*"

God Bless

Revd Mark Bailey