

OFFWELL SCHOOL'S E-TEAM HELPS NATURE THRIVE

On Tuesday 1st October twelve children from Offwell School's E-Team) helped plant English bluebell bulbs and yellow rattle seeds in the graveyard at St. Mary's, as part of their ongoing involvement with the **Caring for God's Acre** project, a national charity established in 2000 to promote the conservation of burial sites.

A churchyard, or burial site, is often the most ancient enclosed piece of land in a parish, even older than the church itself. Apart from grave digging the grassland will have been relatively undisturbed, re-seeding naturally for hundreds, if not thousands, of years creating a diversity of flowers and grassland.

During 'Churches Count on Nature Week' last June the whole school enjoyed exploring St. Mary's natural graveyard with the help of local residents John Burditt and Billy Leach. The children were fascinated to learn all about the moths caught in John's moth trap and they now have their own moth bucket trap at school. The children learnt how to measure ancient yew trees and how to identify some of the medicinal plants growing wild in the churchyard. These included daisies, used to make medicinal tea, and common hogweed, used as a digestive aid.

The children were asked what else they would like to see in the churchyard that would help enhance its ecology. They wanted log piles, bug hotels, micro ponds and bird boxes. The first three are already in place, thanks to John Burditt. The bird boxes have been made by Offwell resident, Clive Whithear, and they will be erected later this month. Church warden, Jonathan Paveley, donated the bluebell bulbs and yellow rattle seeds.

Mrs. Legg, Headteacher, said how grateful the school were to be part of such a fascinating and worthwhile experience and how important it was to make links between the local community, the school and the church: "The school are looking forward to continuing this journey. We hope these initiatives will enhance the children's education as well as develop biodiversity and improve the ecology of our natural environment."