

Ynys Tysilio / Church Island 2017 Tree-cutting, Clearance, Grass-cutting and Herbicide Spraying Report

In response to some questions and comments, the Friends of Ynys Tysilio / Church Island would like to provide the following summary of work carried out on the Island in 2017.

1. All the work has been carried out in the context of the following guidelines:

- to maintain the church and churchyard, providing safe access to the buildings and the graves, etc.
- to maintain the attractiveness of the island to visitors who come to walk, to visit the historic church and churchyard, to enjoy the natural beauty of the island, to enjoy the location of the island in the Menai Strait with views of the bridges and other islands, to watch the seabirds, etc.
- to manage and maintain the natural environment, bearing in mind that the Island has a rich biodiversity that has been documented at various times, and that it lies in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

2. All the work has been formally authorised by the United Parish of Bro Tysilio within the Church in Wales, but the Church has been advised by the Friends of Ynys Tysilio / Church Island. In addition to grass-cutting when necessary, the agreed priorities for 2017 were the following:

- the removal of invasive, non-native plant species, in particular cotoneaster around the cenotaph and on the southern tip of the Island
- the felling and thinning of carefully selected trees with the aim of providing more space for rarer species such as elm and whitebeam, creating better sightlines of and from the church and the cenotaph by removing multi-stems, the felling of diseased or dying trees that posed a risk, remedial pruning of some trees and shrubs to increase their vigour, etc.

3. Two volunteer groups have visited the Island in 2017. The Anglesey Coastal Path group worked on path clearing below the Cenotaph. All their work used physical methods. The AONB volunteer group came on two occasions (the first on the autumn of 2016) to clear cotoneaster from the southern tip of the island (not part of the churchyard). Again, they used physical methods to uproot the invasive cotoneaster there. The considerable efforts of both these volunteer groups are much appreciated.

4. Grass cutting was carried out twice: once after the spring flowers were finished and once at the end of October. Certain areas of grass where summer flowers were coming through were not cut in the summer. A balance always needs to be struck between keeping graves clear and accessible and providing habitat for plants. Church Island has one of the richest floras of any church yard on Anglesey.

5. The contractor for rest of the work on the island was Richard Boyce of Snowdonia Tree Services. In consultation with Gareth Hughes (Chair of the Friends) and Nigel Brown (Honorary Consultant to the Friends), Richard drew up an estimate and a schedule of work, which was approved by the Church authorities. There is Tree Preservation Order in operation on the Island so The Anglesey Tree Officer did a site visit and approved the proposed work. As far as the use of herbicide was concerned, it was decided that glyphosate should be used on the stumps of trees that were being felled and on the cut stems and any re-growth from the cotoneaster. It was also agreed that the perimeter path should be sprayed at the foot of the retaining wall. Richard has provided the following summary of the work he carried out:

6. Summary of work

14.02.2017: Cut and chipped invasive Cotoneaster on Cenotaph hill. Freshly cut stems hand painted with Roundup ProBiactive at 15% solution of product with water (in accordance with manufacturers guidelines), to prevent regrowth. Careful attention to protect gorse.

27.04.2017: Chip AONB Cotoneaster arisings from foreshore, spot spraying Cotoneaster regrowth on Cenotaph hill using Roundup ProBiactive at 200ml per 10l of water (in accordance with manufacturers guidelines).

07.08.2017 Treatment of bramble, nettles and general weeds at toe of perimeter wall where weeds were restricting path access (top of wall and outside NOT treated), also some bramble/weed covered / hidden graves; treated and spot sprayed Cotoneaster regrowth on southern tip of the island. Sprayed with Roundup ProBiactive at 200ml per 10l of water (in accordance with manufacturers guidelines).

03.10.2017 Takedown of Sawara Cypress (in decline, rot in centre)

17.10.2017 Various tree pruning, sycamore takedown, stump treatment hand painted circumference with Roundup ProBiactive at 15% solution of product in water (in accordance with manufacturers guidelines).

18.10.2017 Cleared windsnapped Oak blocking main path down to Island. Various tree pruning on Island including, Ash, Elm, Irish Yews, Common Yew. Crown lifting and deadwood removal. Brash chipped onsite.

7. Response to questions and comments

7a. Why use herbicides in addition to cutting and uprooting?

The aim of cutting back the cotoneaster is to eliminate it as far as possible from the Island. It is invasive and not a native plant. It had covered most of the Cenotaph hill, acting as a litter receptacle, stifling other plants and covering the attractive rock formations. Spraying and/or handpainting the stems and the regrowth with glyphosate means that we can get rid of it effectively, and without damage to the other plants. We don't have the resources to physically remove every root. Around the cenotaph a small band of cotoneaster has been left to act as a barrier at the edge of the rock – a natural safety warning.

7b. Why was the cotoneaster on the southern tip of the island sprayed?

The work in this part of the Island has been subject to some misunderstandings. The Friends were until very recently unaware that the tip of the Island is an SSSI, which makes it subject to different regulations. The wooded section of the island beyond the churchyard wall behind the church is part of the Glannau Porthaethwy SSSI. The Friends, represented by Nigel Brown, have now been in touch with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and gained retrospective permission for the use of a recognised technique for eradication of an invasive, non-native plant species. The advantage of careful spot treatment with herbicide is the avoidance of physical disturbance to neighbouring plants of interest such as orchids. Any future proposals to use herbicide to control invasive plants will be discussed with NRW and other stakeholders beforehand.

7c. Why were herbaceous weeds sprayed in the churchyard?

As stated above, we approved the spraying of the foot of the perimeter path wall. We don't have people to hand weed all the paths and we need to keep that path clear. It's not an ideal solution but we feel it is reasonable in the circumstances. The spraying of the brambles on some of the graves is perhaps more difficult to defend, but we will also get complaints if the graveyard is overrun with brambles. We are trying to encourage more volunteers to come and do some gardening on the island but the response so far has been muted.

8. In conclusion, we see the use of glyphosate as a short-term measure to help re-establish grass and herbaceous plants in areas at present overrun by cotoneaster, brambles, etc. We think it will also continue to be a useful tool in keeping the perimeter path clear. However, we are open to dialogue.

Please contact us directly with any concerns you have, or any offers of help. It is our aim to maintain the beauty of the Island and that includes its bio-diversity.

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