

Young people in a West Midlands village have tended war graves as part of a unique project which embraced environmental and conservation concerns.

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The initiative, launched by St Michael's, Pelsall, saw young people take responsibility for the maintenance of five Commonwealth War Graves – one from the First World War and four from the Second World War.

They were responsible for cleaning the memorials – all to soldiers from the Pelsall area – as well as weeding and clearing debris from trees around the site.

Working towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award, the young team are set to lay crosses for Remembrance Sunday on the graves.

St Michael's interim minister the Revd Alison Morris explained: "This task not only coincides with the 75th anniversary of the ending of WW2 but is integral to our desire by the church to work on conservation and environmental concerns.

"For the youngsters their aim is simply to show how we can care for God's earth in this challenging time.

"St Michael's sees our local community cemetery as a place of history and remembrance and as such is special to people far beyond the immediate church congregation.

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"For us it is a place which represents a precious resource which makes a huge contribution to the historical life of our Pelsall village. Not only does it provide a place of tranquillity and a place to grieve for our families, but it also contains a wealth of local and family history.

"We also value its importance for nature conservation with diverse species of flora and fauna. It is upon this rich heritage of history and conservation on which we wish to build our understanding, our support and connections between the church, cemetery and the community in which we serve."

The young people, supervised by the parish warden and a PCC member in a Covid-secure environment, began looking after the graves this summer, in partnership with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. It is believed to be the only local scheme of its kind in the country.

Revd Morris added: "In turn this will reconnect our locality with the First World War and Second World War stories held within our cemetery.

"Pelsall cemetery holds the stories of the people who have lived in the past – people who have shaped our past which in turn impact upon our future.

"This is an opportunity through the project for members of the community to work together with the church to inspire others to remember them, to safeguard our history and our heritage associated with our village of Pelsall."

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