

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

sixth edition 2015

**WANT
TO BE
BURIED
IN THE
GARDEN?**

**Have you
left a legacy?
Ethical Wills
are a great idea**

Plus

**SLEEPING
ANGELS**
the trauma of
a stillbirth
is everyone's
nightmare.

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

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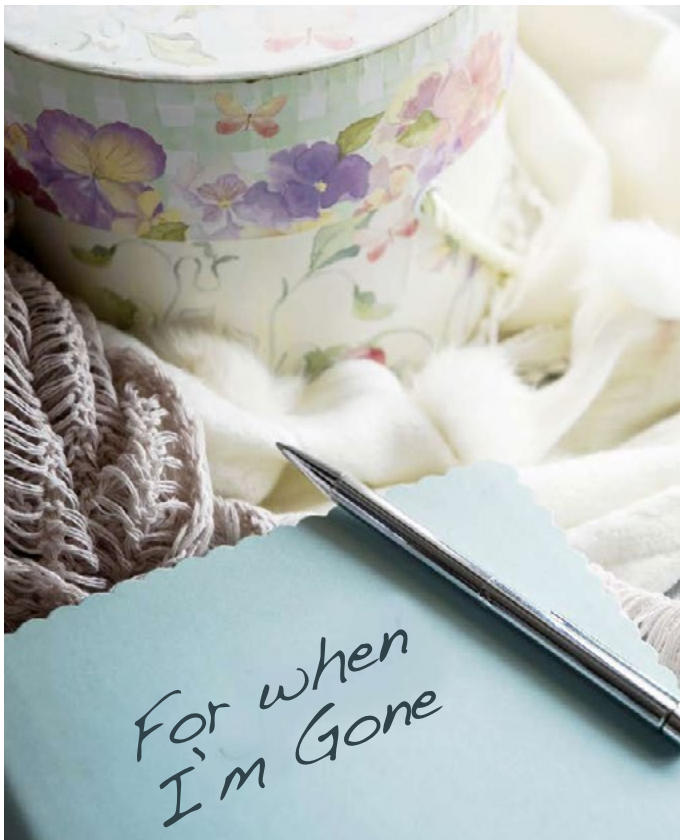
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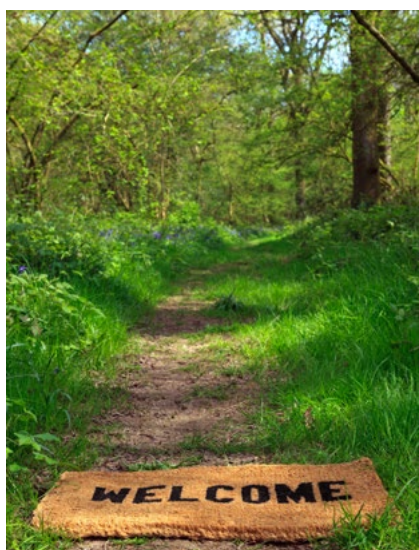
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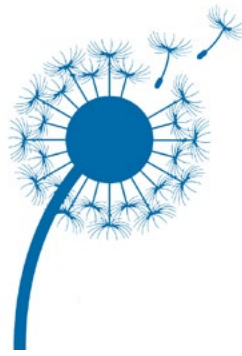
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Another full-on six months here at the bunker. The calls keep coming in and infuriatingly and depressingly the problems remain the same!

Yes, there does seem to be more deathly conversation in the media, helped by the likes of the death cafe movement.



However, the gatekeepers and the monied organisations and charities dealing with and promoting talk about death still failing to think outside of the coffin instead of helping the public by revealing all options which, for so many, are totally appropriate.. Their literature still automatically guides the bereaved down the same old path, with the same old presumptions, into the same old arms with the same old traditions.



The conventional funeral industry is generally stifled by an overriding sense of its own self importance and image. Another new sparkling fleet of black cars to be paid for by all their customers, the trade journals are full of such deliveries. Why would they want change when they have had things their own way for such a very long time.

Those firms that do not realise that modernisation, the Internet and the tide of artisan undertakers snapping at their heels will, in my opinion, lose market share and land up playing catch up with their more flexible and open minded competition.

tell your friends and colleagues about us

Guys, the families don't look at the cars, they are generally focused elsewhere.

In the mean time it is the unsuspecting public who will run the gauntlet when engaging help.

On a positive note, soap box away! Our new project, (see the Eden Valley article on page 56), will be bringing affordable burial within half an hour's reach of southern Greater London.

Where until now a grave will cost in excess of £3,000+ (Croydon for example), add to that the interment and undertaker fees and you are looking at burials in these areas costing in excess of £6000.

No wonder folk opt for cremation.

Anyway, our plot price of £600 means that burial will be comparably priced with cremation and once more, an affordable option in this part of the country.

It is also a very beautiful place.

Have a great summer everyone, as always interesting submissions welcome.

Rosie Inman-Cook
Editor



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Bury Me in the Garden

What a hot topic this has become since the MP for South Shields recently declared in the Commons that funeral poverty was forcing people to bury their loved ones in the back garden!

Well, yes and no. Firstly, yes, it will save you cemetery fees but no, generally people with the luxury of a privately owned garden are not usually the ones in funeral poverty.

What are the rules?

There are a few but this does not mean that a private land burial is necessarily a good idea. The landed gentry have been doing it for generations and calls to our helpline are generally from farmers, small holders, woodland owners and those with generous gardens.

There are cases of individuals being buried in smaller gardens but as we will read below these are perhaps more prone to be exhumed by future owners.

Owning the freehold of the land with no outstanding mortgage is key.

Being high and dry, where the digging of a grave is not going to breach the water table is a good start.

The Environment Agency have issued guidelines regarding distances from running or standing water and obviously a body should not be buried anywhere near a spring or borehole used for drinking water.>>

>>As long as the death is registered in the normal way and the registrar informed of the location of the burial within 96 hours, using the slip at the bottom of the 'green form', you essentially do not need permission from anyone to carry out a home burial.

You only need planning permission if you are changing the use of the land, ie turn it into a cemetery by either burying lots of people or changing the use of the land by erecting large monuments or fencing it off. So a garden must stay a garden and a paddock a paddock etc.

Every week I send out 'how to dig a grave' pdfs and sample burial registers to those undertaking home or private land burials (you need to leave a detailed record of the grave and its occupant with the deeds).

I always express caution on the subject, especially when the caller tells me that it is a garden burial in an urban area. I recently had a call from one gentleman from a Birmingham back-to-back with only a yard; he was determined!



So, on the one hand you have the likes of Kirstie Allsop burying her mother on her estate and then the case of Mr and Mrs X whose bodies were exhumed by professional exhumation specialist at Rowland Brothers and re-interred in the local cemetery once their house was sold.

Was this what they really wanted to happen or had their dream of lying undisturbed in their beloved garden been ill conceived, poorly planned and inadequately protected?

There is also a smattering of urban myth and assumption made about private land burial. The most common is that you will devalue the property.

True, you may be restricting the number of prospective buyers but if your land is beautiful and the grave is tucked away somewhere, the purchaser might well appreciate and respect your desire to remain there and wish to join you when their time comes. >>



>>One estate agent advised a widow that, by law, she must exhume her husband from their 100 acre estate before it could be put on the market. She duly obeyed only to discover that this was his presumption and the whole episode and subsequent mental trauma avoidable.

It is the duty of a vendor to disclose the presence of a grave. I heard of one case where the farmer's wife sold up and did not disclose the presence of his grave, nor attach anything to the deeds. The new owner only became aware of the burial when at the local pub he was asked if he minded having farmer X looking over the family from the top field? They took the wife to court, got permission to exhume and sued her for the costs.

Exhumation from non consecrated land. (if consecrated a whole other raft of church laws apply)

You have to apply to the Ministry Of Justice for a licence. There is no fee applicable but you have to employ a professional exhumation specialist and this can be pricey. Interestingly if you employ the same firm to re-inter the remains elsewhere, it is classed as a funeral and you avoid VAT charges.

I have just read back over what I have written and it makes for pretty gloomy reading. To counter this I would say that the vast majority of home burials are beautiful and the families are very happy with the choice they made. They cause no trouble and are, on the whole I hear, very quiet residents.>>





I have asked Michael Gill to share some thoughts, drawn from his experience and give his perspective on private land burial:-

Personal view by Funeral Director Michael Gill.

So, according to Emma Lewell-Buck MP, funerals are now so expensive people are being forced to bury their deceased in their own back garden, and I, as a Funeral Director of thirty years standing should, presumably, be preparing our company for more home burials than we have seen before. Presumably, Ms Lewell-Buck has some evidence to back up her statement. Maybe home burials are becoming more attractive in South Shields although I would guess it may not be because of economic factors. So what is the reason?

My personal feeling is that ease of visiting and being near to family is not the main sentiment. It is usually the interred who wish to be buried in this way, not the remaining relatives. It is, I think, a wish to remain in a place you loved in life, and to remain there undisturbed.

Does it work?

It's an almost unavoidable fact that, whatever one person buries, given time, another will dig up again. Even established cemeteries reclaim land from old, unattended burials, either by exhumation or 'cover & cut'.

So is it the feeling that being buried on the family 'estate' is more under the control of the bereaved?

I looked after the exhumation & re-interment of Victor Hervey, 6th Marquess of Bristol, who is now buried in the family vault of the private Church in the grounds of Ickworth House, Suffolk.

Effectively a garden burial and fairly secure as the estate is now owned by the National Trust. So, if this is the security you are looking for in perpetuity, with an estate in Suffolk, you can achieve it. Should your estate amount to less than 250 acres however, last week's exhumation would suggest garden burial isn't going to do it.

As long as it is known that deceased people are present on the property someone will wish to remove them, either future owners or neighbours. Anonymity seems to be more effective. King Richard III remained undisturbed beneath a car park in Leicester for over five hundred years (although it obviously wasn't always a car park) and Oliver Cromwell still lies undisturbed somewhere beneath what is now Marble Arch – both due to their graves being unrecorded, not an option available to garden burial as a register has to be added to the deeds.

There may be another advantage to garden burial that explains the renewed interest; ease of exhumation.

In my experience the most common reason for arranging an exhumation is relocation of the family. Having spent their working lives away from their roots, people wish to return home and want to take their deceased relative with them. Bury in your back garden and when the family are ready to move, the permission is issued by the Ministry of Justice in a matter of days. Bury in a cemetery and it is possible that the plot could be in ground consecrated by the Church of England.>>



LOVED

>>The view of the Church is that burial is in perpetuity, although, considering how many Church Yard projects I have advised upon, even those buried within the Church grounds are not immune to disturbance. The Faculty document is, however, in consequence, a nightmare permission to gain.

So, is it a good idea to be buried in your own back garden?

I think that can only be a purely personal sentiment and all the arguments in the world will not change someone's mind if that is what they feel they should do.

The exhumation Rosie referred to earlier in this article was that of an elderly couple whose whole lifestyle appeared 'different' and may not be representative of the reasons behind most people's interest in home burial. Their case does, however, illustrate some problems associated with the practice.

Their exhumation was an exercise in keeping a low profile whilst many curtains twitched. The burials had caused huge local debate and the exhumation just the same.

How would you feel if your neighbour had their own private cemetery in their back garden? The new home owner's decision was taken with a heavy heart, knowing that their last wishes must be overturned in order to prevent the property falling into decay.

I wouldn't wish to place my descendants in such an awkward position, would you?

Michael.A.Gill.

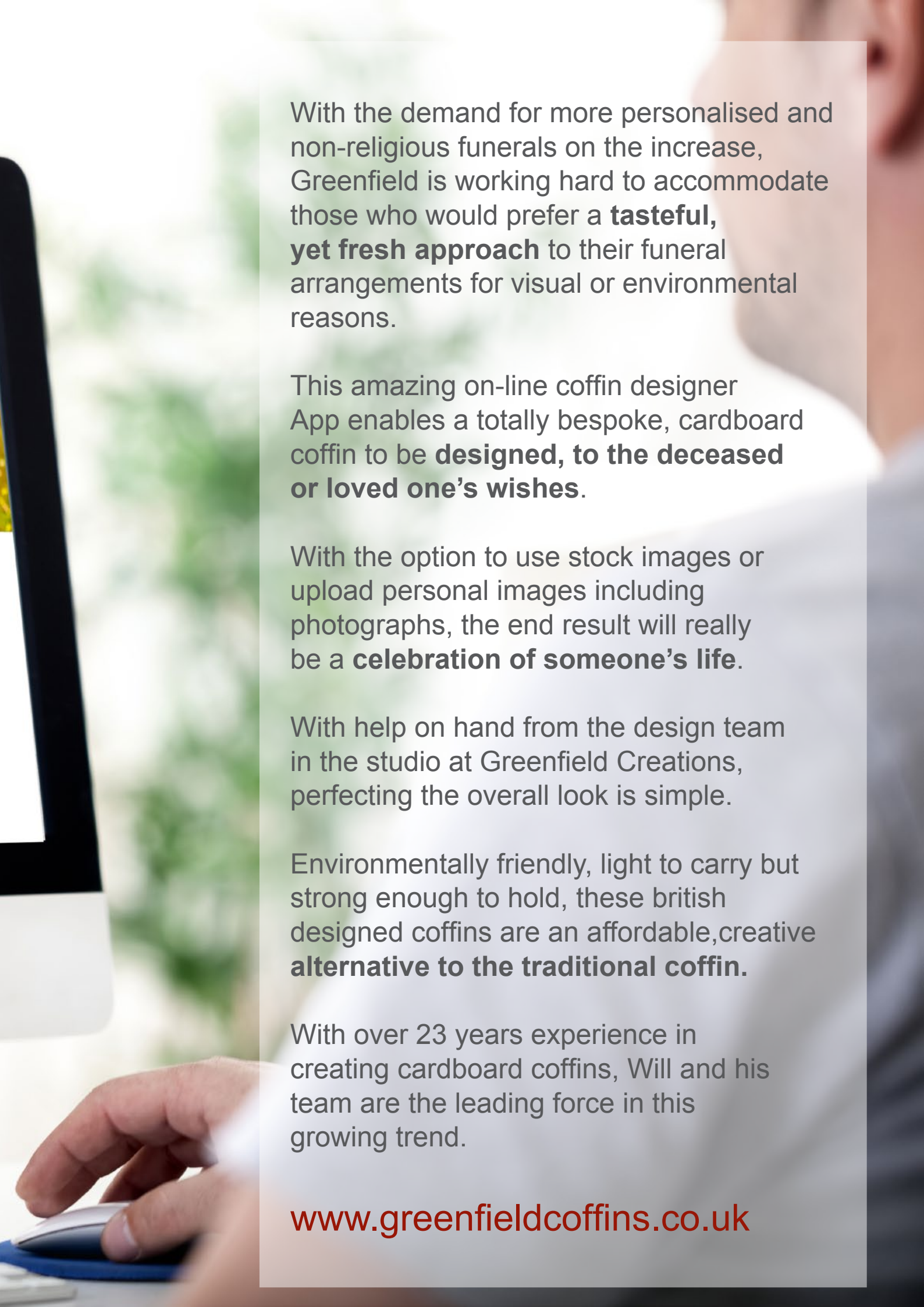




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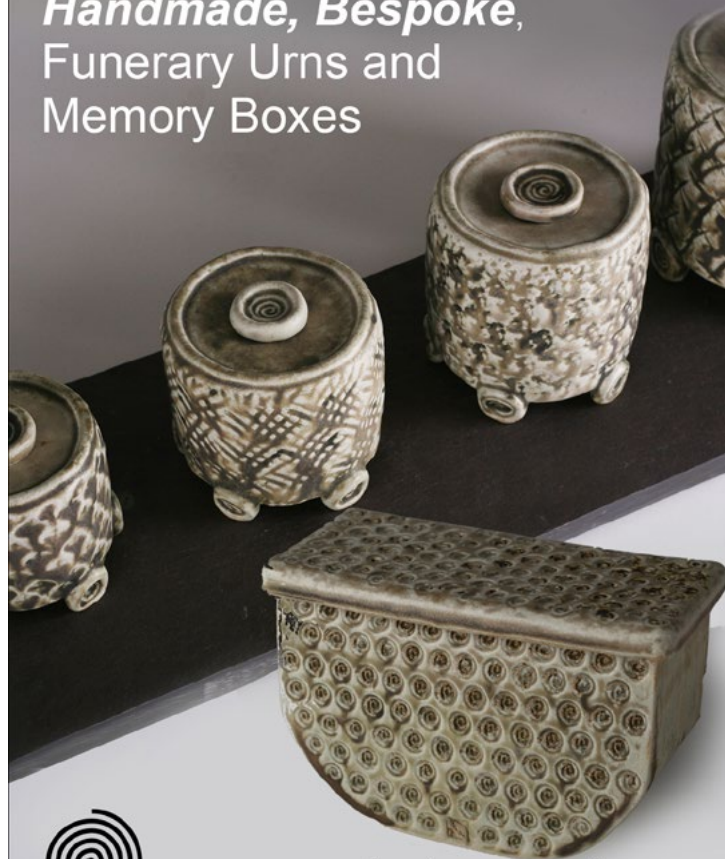
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The natural burial ground's People's awards 2015 - the only awards based on customer service.

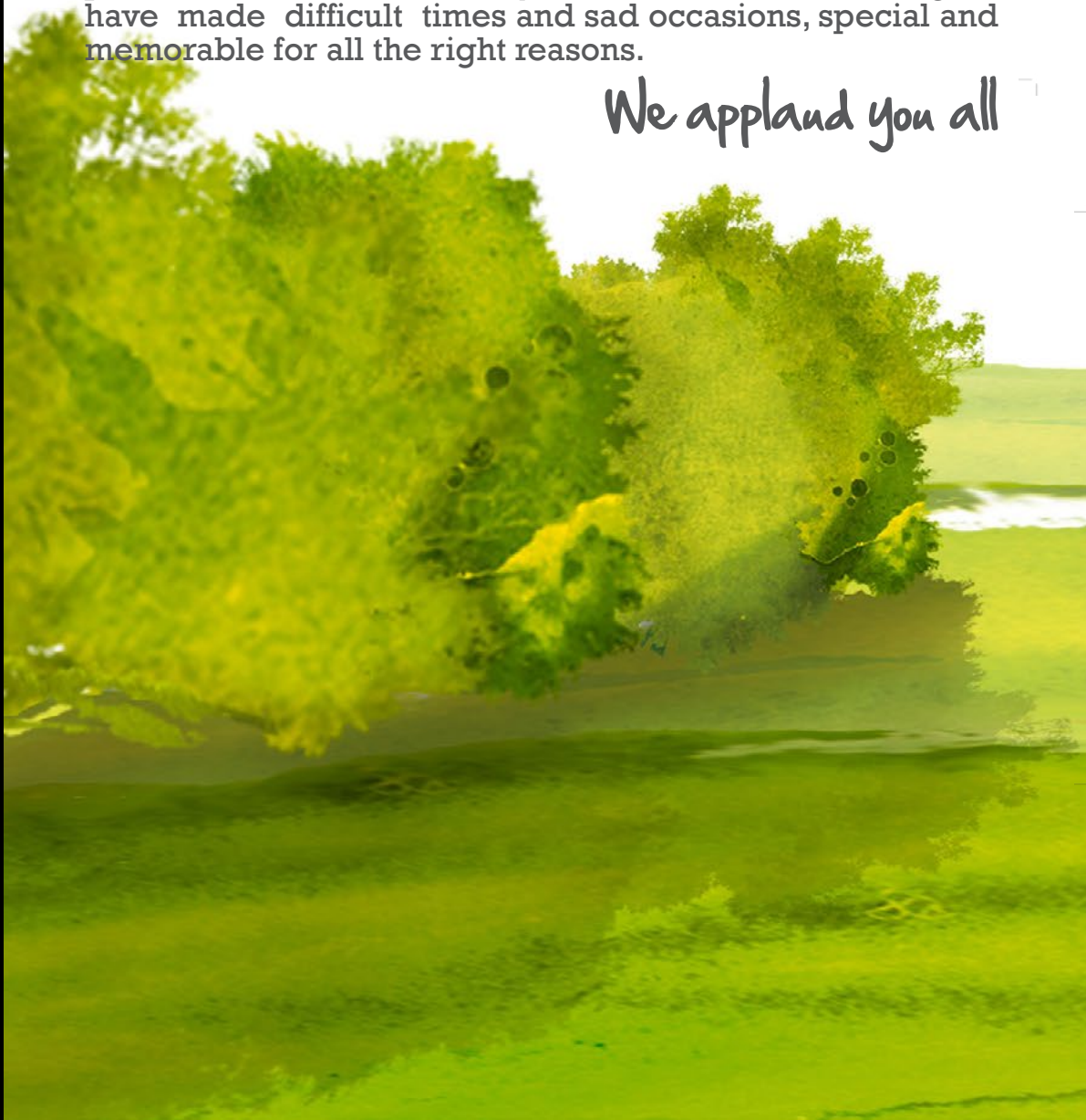
Every year we compile all the feedback forms completed and sent to us by families who have arranged an interment at one of the fantastic green burial grounds across the UK.

We received several hundred forms in the last 12 months. We first sort through them rating them on the marks, out of 5, given by families for things like support and information provided by the burial ground staff, to the general ambience and value. Adding all these marks up gives us the consistent top rated site in each region.

The feedback forms for these regional winners are then submitted to our Charity's Patrons. They choose the most outstanding site of all, based on the written comments and supporting letters that families have felt motivated to submit.

This all gives us a wonderful insight into the highly personal and intimate way these wonderful managers have made difficult times and sad occasions, special and memorable for all the right reasons.

We applaud you all



This years regional winners and runners-up are....

NORTH OF ENGLAND & SCOTLAND


Dalton Woodland Burial Ground,
Cumbria

Runner Up

Clovery Woods of Rest, Aberdeenshire



Dalton
Woodland
Burial
Ground



Clandon
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Natural
Burial
Ground

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

Clandon Wood Natural Burial Ground,
Surrey

Runner Up

South Downs Natural Burial Site, Hampshire



Higher
Ground
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SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

Higher Ground Meadow, Dorset

Runner Up

Great Bradley Cottage Natural Burial
Ground, Devon



Westhope
Green
Burial
Ground

WEST OF ENGLAND & WALES

Westhope Green Burial Ground,
Shropshire

Runner Up

Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground,
Warwickshire



The
Willows
Natural
Burial
Ground

EAST ENGLAND

The Willows Natural Burial Ground,
Leicestershire

Runner Up

Brightwater Green Burial Ground,
Lincolnshire

And the overall winner of the Peoples award 2015 is.....



CLANDON WOOD!!

Well done to Fran Hall and her team for their achievements throughout the year. Thoroughly well deserved!!!



Rosie presents Jo Vassie and her son Tom from Higher Ground Meadow with their certificate....



and Al Blake from South Downs Natural Burial Site..



...and Chris and Jenny Scroby from The Willows

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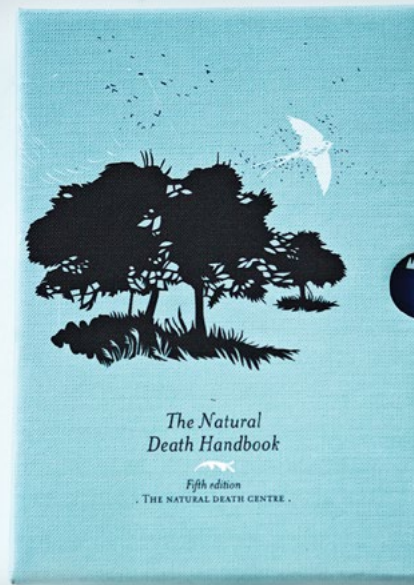


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Not only is the funeral industry having to accept that direct cremation is here to stay we now have direct burial.

The pioneer is our very own Gordon Tulley (green burial ground owner and shroud manufacturer) who is rolling the service out nationwide.

His new company is called Respect Direct Funeral Services and offers Express-Burials.

Just to recap, this is what is meant by a direct funeral:-

Direct funerals are a very, very basic service; essentially it is a funeral without a funeral. With direct cremation you



Holy Moly - Look what is happening now!

Nationwide Direct Burial Service is launched


have no choice over the time, date or even the crematorium where the cremation takes place.

The funeral director simply collects the deceased, organises the paperwork, provides a basic coffin, books the crematorium at a time that is convenient for them and carries out the funeral.

The NDC helpline still receives more calls about this than anything else and a 'Dear Claire' letter in an over 50s magazine last year generated hundreds of calls. It certainly struck a chord with thousands of pragmatically minded readers.>>



'hold a gathering at
a more suitable time'



>>So, Gordon, what are your Express Burials all about?

“Well, our customers receive a quality, no-frills service but get great value for money at the same time. That’s what my new company is now offering nationally. Imagine, cremation from £999.00 and Burials from £1,495.00 nationally?

We utilise the wonderful network of Natural, Green Burial Grounds throughout the UK and like direct cremations these are burials without a funeral!

Those who book in advance or whose family and friends choose to send the body for burial either have no ceremony at all or hold a gathering at a more suitable time, in an evening or weekend, when all the family and friends can get together and also include the children.

This is not for everyone but we are amazed at the up-take. We started by fulfilling the wishes of a Doncaster man whose initial wish was to gift his body to science but when his time came Sheffield hospital did not accept the donation so his family chose an Express-Burial where he was simply and respectfully laid to rest in our Green Burial Park in South Yorkshire with no family or friends attending.

The wife and daughter were so satisfied with the way everything was handled they both pre booked their own burial plots alongside him and have ‘expressly’ wished to be buried in the same way with little or no fuss.>>

>>Alison Finch the sextant and administrator explained, “We don’t ever question or judge our customers who are choosing an express service but we find an amazing array of reasons why.

There are those seeking the least cost option as they are facing funeral poverty and just simply don’t want to get into debt. Sometimes we receive calls from the next of kin who are either ill with the likes of Bi-Polar disorder or acute agoraphobia and simply can’t face the stress of a funeral”.

We also have some customers who state, “He just wanted a simple burial / cremation no fuss, no fancy cars, no wasting of money or pomp and ceremony to impress the neighbours”.

One wife stated, ‘He was ill for such a long time and all those relatives never bothered to come and see him so why should he pay for a funeral just so they can gather at his expense?’ We had one daughter who called this week who said “We would rather give a big cheque to the Hospice than have a funeral. I’m just too stressed to organise a funeral for a group of 95 year-olds and so we will have a lovely memorial luncheon in mom’s favourite hotel just as she wanted”

Some of the other widely differing reasons people choose Express Burials:-

- They are the last remaining person with no relatives and all friends have passed away.
- Their executor was instructed to carry out the funeral at the least cost to the estate.

- The deceased and immediate family are all non-religious and felt no need for any ceremony. Some people believe the body is just a vessel once the spirit has left.


- Others find Funeral Directors’ charges extortionately high and simply want a reasonably priced funeral.

On average Gordon’s price for burial is £1,495.00, compared to a national average of £3,590 according to the National Funeral Directors Association. That is a saving of £2,000!

Good independent funeral directors will also organise a direct burial and a couple of the natural burial sites offer a collection service, with the burial taking place at their convenience but Gordon and Alison are the only ones offering a coordinated, nationwide direct burial service.

How does it actually work?

“As an example, when we received a call from a gentleman near Penzance whose wife was undergoing intense treatment for a life limiting illness, he was wanting to book his own direct burial, as he expects to be the last surviving family member when his soul-mate’s time comes (she has already chosen cremation). He expressed his wish for a green burial in that region so we called those approved members in our organisation and pre-booked a plot for him with Sheridon of Atlantic Rest Green Burial Ground near Bude. We organised all the paperwork, contacted the Funeral Trust with whom we deposited the funeral plan monies. It is as simple as that. >>

A photograph of an elderly couple walking away from the camera on a paved path in a park. The woman on the left is wearing a long, quilted tan coat and a matching beret. The man on the right is wearing a long, dark grey coat and a grey beanie, and is using a wooden walking stick. They are walking under trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and red. The ground is covered with fallen leaves. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

'he just wanted a
simple burial..
no fuss or pomp'



>>When the time comes, we have funeral directing colleagues in that area who arrange the collection, wrapping of the deceased in one of our burial shrouds and transfer the deceased to the green cemetery. The burial ground organise the grave digging and provide pallbearers”.



“This is how the process works and how one of our many pre bookings are organised. One other benefit of burial over cremation is that we do not need to pass on the compulsory doctors’ fee of £160 that is generally payable by families organising a cremation”.

So do you always bury someone in the area where they die?

“Not always. If they are the last remaining relative and have not expressed a wish to be buried locally, we would aim to bury them in one of our own burial parks. We have over 24,000 green burial plots available. If relatives or the deceased prefer the burial to be local and we can find a plot that costs below a certain price threshold then we liaise and organise the interment, as above, in a natural burial ground.

We have four fleets of removal vehicles / private ambulances at our disposal and hearses if so required. It’s been quite a task to set up the system. It is working well and we are enjoying coordinating with our colleagues and fellow natural burial site managers around the UK”.

Gordon Tulley

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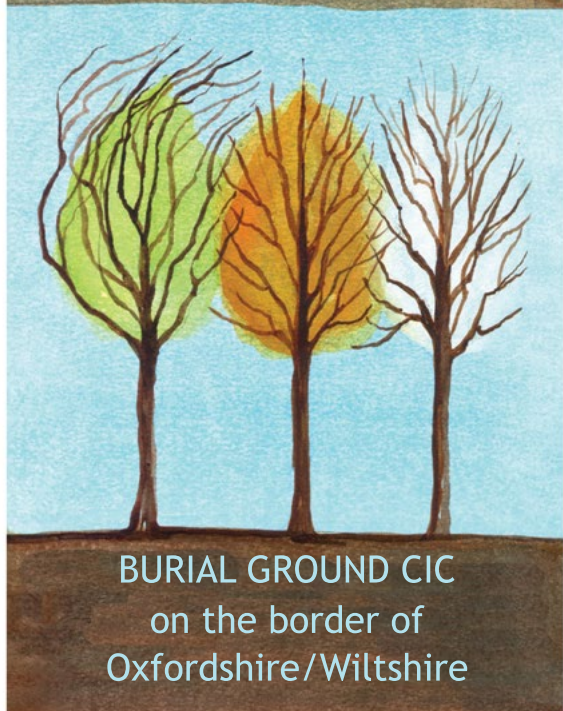
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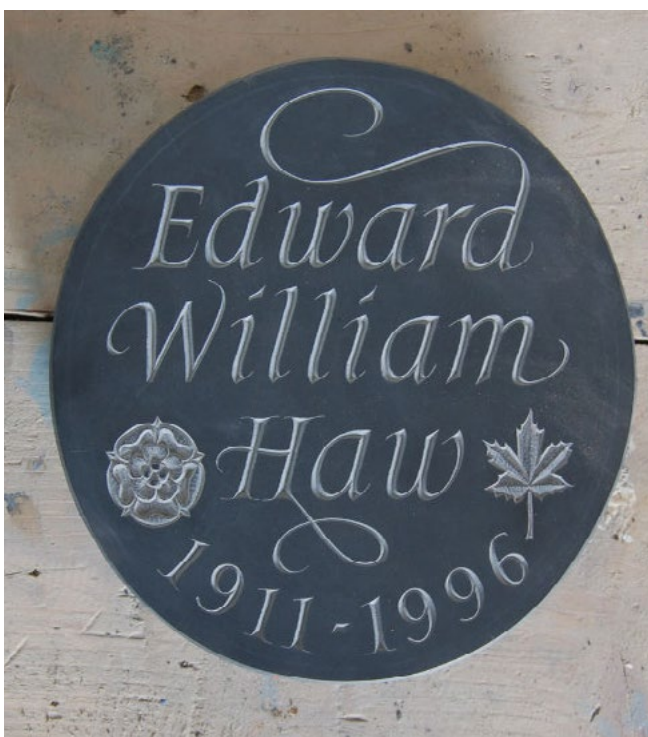
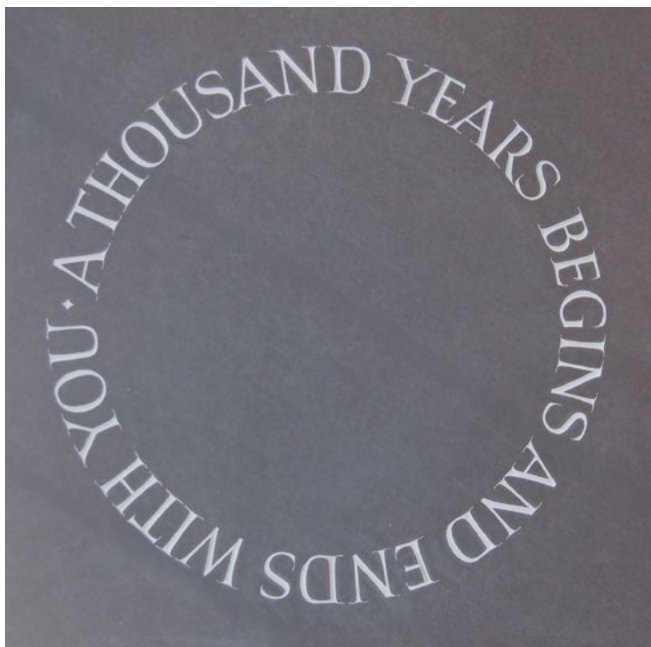
Alternative Gravestones & Memorials

Choosing natural burial can be the most wonderful option; the beauty of the landscape becomes the memorial and there is a reassuring feeling that the soul of the deceased is wholesomely integral to the environment.



For many however, when grieving, some sort of marker is needed as a focal point, to act as a shrine to the loved one. Of course the natural burial grounds need to be free of anything that doesn't fit into the landscape or interfere with their beauty.

Fortunately, there are alternatives to the conventional headstones you see in cemeteries, here we hear from **Fergus Wessel** and secondly **Dominic Ropner**, who both specialise in hand carved, alternative stone memorials.





Fergus, what sort of memorials are available as an alternative to a headstone?

I am often asked to make a memorial that doesn't necessarily mark the burial spot, but rather serves as a place to celebrate the life of a person.

Sometimes the memorial has a function, for example a sundial, bench or birdbath. But frequently the memorial serves no other purpose other than being a commemorative work of art.

It may go straight into the ground like an obelisk, or could be fixed to a wall in the form of a plaque.

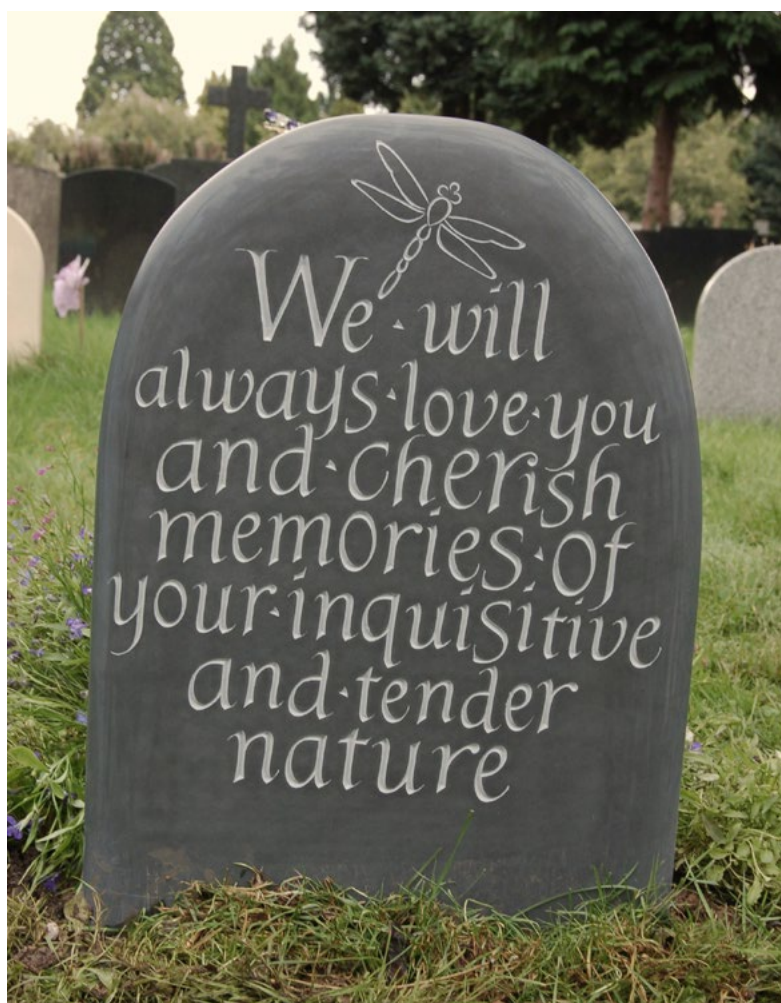
Another option is a small round "pebble" memorial that can rest amongst some trees or flowers. The pebbles are particularly tactile and warm to the touch, and they invite you to feel the stone and the lettering.

If you want a more conventional memorial, I also love the "pebble style" as a headstone. It is less imposing and more natural than a typical headstone. Again the sides are wonderfully smooth to the touch, and they need not be very tall.

These stones can be placed in a woodland setting if regulations allow or even in someone's garden.

How do you make the pebble stones?

The pebbles are shaped from a sawn block of stone. The finishing is done by hand to ensure a completely ripple free and smooth, flowing surface.





How do you choose the material and what stones would blend best into a natural burial ground?

It is firstly important to look at materials local to a site. We also look at the cemetery's regulations. Usually the client will have an idea of the inscription before the material is chosen, and so we need to choose the material to match the quantity of lettering. For example, slate can take lots of small, detailed lettering, whereas limestone needs larger, bolder letterforms. Shape and size are also factors when choosing the right stone.

How small can the memorials be?

As they do not necessarily mark a grave, they could be a small plaque, a pebble or paper weight. A memorial is often a record of a person's life, especially in a burial ground, but it doesn't need to actually record facts; it could simply invoke a memory, for example just the first name or a small carving might be enough.

However, if the stone is to be placed in a public place, it would be wise to make it heavy enough to prevent it from being moved.>>



Why is it important to make these memorials by hand?

Making a memorial by hand gives the maker complete control. One is not restricted to 'off the shelf' shapes and sizes, or locked into boring design templates.

What advice would you give to someone seeking a more natural memorial for their loved one?

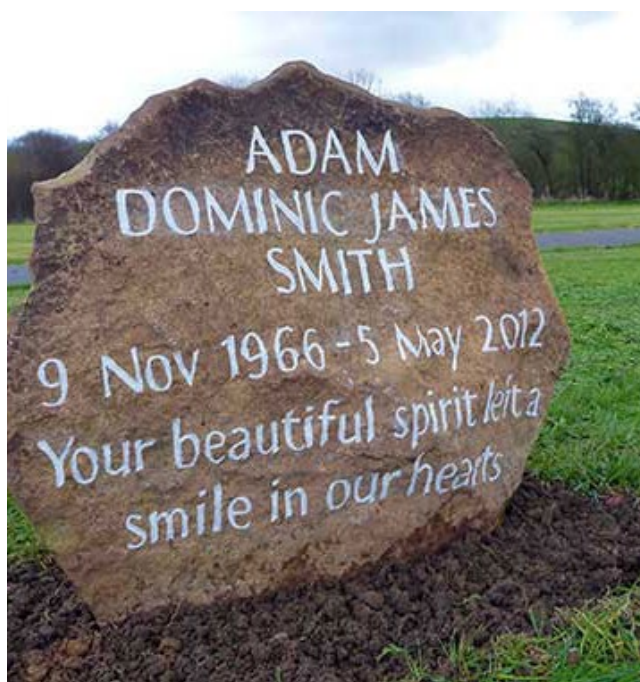
The most important thing is to take your time. Do not be hurried into choosing something straight away. I always advise people to wait at least a year after the death because this gives them time to reflect and for emotions to settle. If you choose a memorial too soon, you might later regret the wording you chose.

Do not be bound by convention. Almost anything is possible. You can make the memorial very unique and personal.

One client asked me to drill a hole in the stone where he placed his wife's wedding ring, with the intention that it would then be covered for eternity, a secret between himself and his wife.

Others might choose to have an inscription on a part of the stone that might be underground, again a personal message to their loved one. Almost anything that can be drawn onto paper can be transferred to stone.

The most important thing is that the stone is designed and made with love and care.>>







Dominic, what inspired you to become a stone mason?

My fascination with stones stems from the age of about nine, when my parents took us (my three older brothers and sister) walking along the Ridgeway from Wantage to Avebury.

We saw many wonderful ancient sites along the way including Wayland's Smithy, the Uffington White Horse and finally the huge Avebury henge and its ring of stones, I was hooked.

From that time I have visited many stone monuments up and down the British Isles and the stone that they are made from has always excited me. Now I am grown up and my relationship with these stones has be-



come even more exciting as I am able to work with them and pass them on to other people.

Which stones, other than the Wiltshire Sarcens, captivated you?

Well, at Stonehenge you have the wonderful mystic Bluestones from the Preseli hills in Pembrokeshire along side the huge Sarsen stones.

The fascinating Holed Stones from Cornwall like Men-An-Tol and the Tolvan Stone that were made from the solid Cornish granite. Then there is the beautiful red sand stone that was used for the building of The Stones Of Stenness on the far flung Orkneys Islands.

So what is unique about what you offer?

My memorials are made from weathered surface stones that I buy from farmers up and down the country. I mostly use Cornish granite, river washed limestone from the river Tees in Co Durham, Preseli Bluestone from Wales and Sarsen Stone from Wiltshire.

All the inscriptions and symbols are hand carved and I deliver and install stones all over the UK. I also have a stone display area and yard in Hampshire where people are able to view or choose stones by appointment.

Fergus Wessel's work can be found all over the UK including St Paul's Cathedral. www.stoneletters.com

For Dominic Ropner please visit www.timecircles.co.uk



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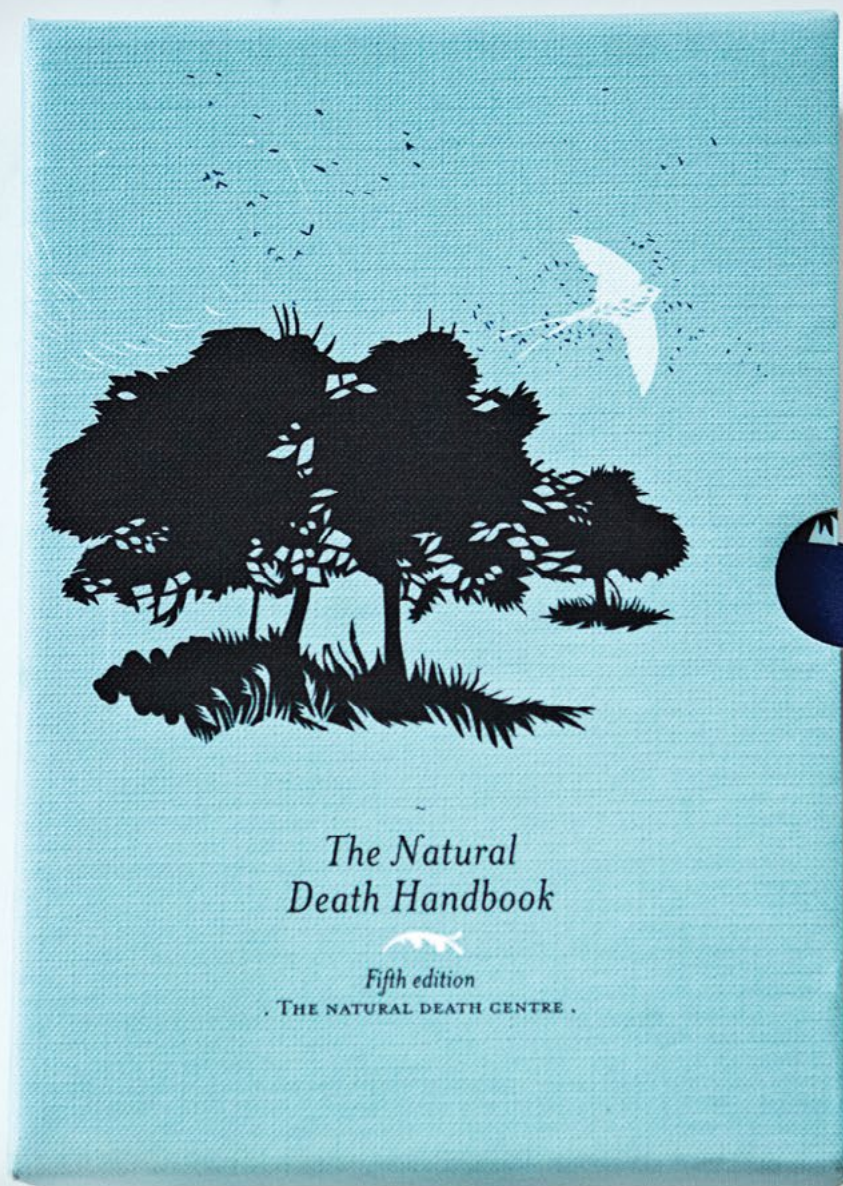
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WELCOME

BIG NEWS Huge News!

We, the charity, are opening a Woodland Burial Ground. The project has been simmering away for a couple of years and this summer we are very pleased to announce that we are now open.>>





>>Any profits will enable the charity to take on more staff back at the NDC's base in Hampshire, enabling the charity to tackle important projects and battles that, at present, we simply do not have the man-hours to take on.

We want to get the message to everyone out there about their consumer rights, all the hidden choices they actually have, exposing the truths, secrets and things that lie

within the conventional and often murky world of funerals.

The land already has seven acres of ancient bluebell woodland and the burials will extend this woodland across the whole site when it is fully occupied and planted with memorial trees.

The site is surrounded, on all sides, by tall, thick hedges and mature trees which in April are billowing



with thick, white clouds of black-thorn blossom; we are looking forward to the sloes!

In the burial areas there are some well-spaced young oak trees which fortunately give a slightly more established feel than some other new natural burial grounds. It feels open and spacious but still enclosed and private.



I spent another work-party weekend there last week and I am increasingly falling in love with the place; it is an idyllic corner of southern England and I am so looking forward to introducing it to and sharing it with families and individuals who need our help or who are getting their affairs in order.

I know they will love it too. >>

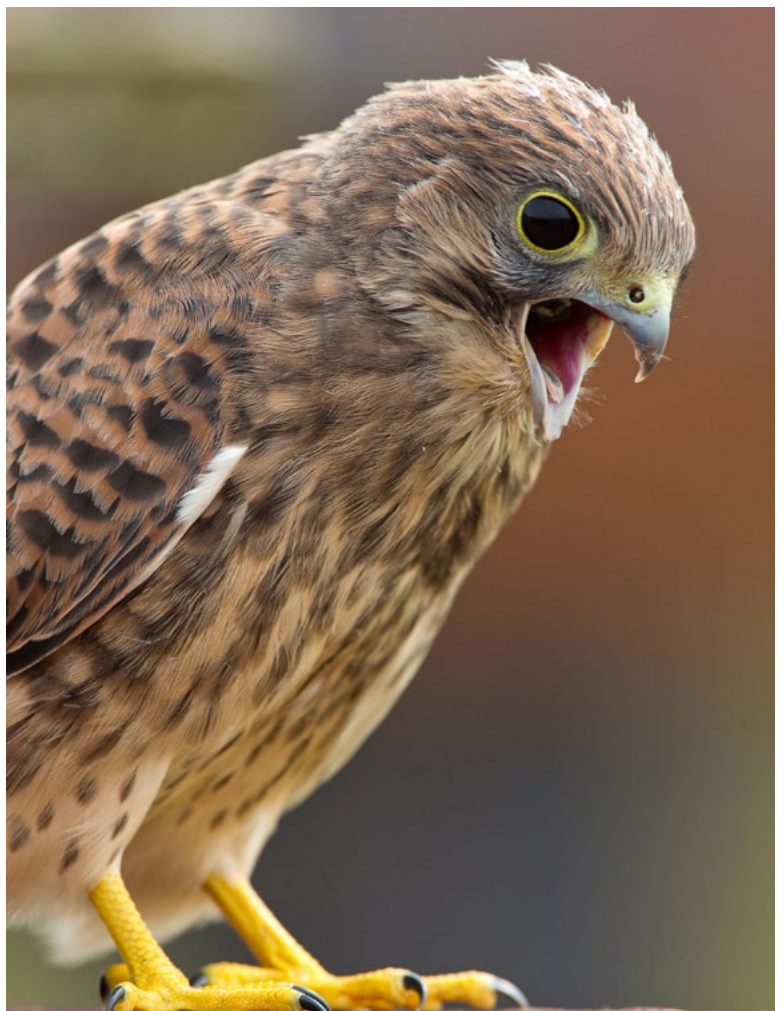
>>One terminally ill lady got wind of its existence a few weeks ago and became our pioneer - purchasing her plot even before we had the car park and gates in place.

There is no ceremony building on site but the adjacent Kent and Surrey Golf Club and Hotel (the burial site was once part of the golf course) has a licensed, flexible function room if families require one. Most importantly, our office is also within the golf club along with toilets and a bar.

We aim to provide an affordable burial option and the ground will be at the deeper green end of the spectrum regarding its maintenance, terms and conditions. For example, we will have a zero tolerance approach to grief litter and unlike some other so called 'woodland' burial sites we will not allow embalmed bodies or chipboard coffins.

Grief litter is a description for the gaudy clutter that some cemeteries allow to accumulate.

Our aim is that when seen by a passer by it should give no indication that it is a burial ground: it will look natural but still accessible and maintained.





Work parties have so far logged:-

A pair of **buzzards** nesting in an Oak right by the first phase burial area.

Orange-tip butterflies and their caterpillars' staple food stuff - **lady's smock**.

All the usual woodland flora like **violets, primroses, mosses and bluebells**.

A resident pair of vole-hunting **kestrels**.

Kingfishers, Redstarts and Turtle Doves

My favourite discovery - two **Nightingales**, who sing day and night and don't seem to be afraid of us moving around the land. In my 50+ years I heard one only once before: a fantastic and very special addition to the project.

Black cap warblers.

And a **Heron** on one of our two ponds.>>



>>I am very excited to get back to doing what I do best and how my career in 'funeral world' started some 16 years ago. I will be setting the site up and overseeing it.

The day to day running will be done by the lovely Martin House who is a trained landscape architect and works at the moment as a environmental consultant and his wife Amy, who is an experienced events manager working in the charity sector.

Readers of More to Death are very welcome to pop in and have a look around.

Rosie Inman-Cook
Manager, Natural Death Centre

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Natural Burials in a National Park

Editor's note.

I have to declare a special place in my heart for the **South Downs Natural Burial Site**. You see, I set it up many years ago before I worked at the Natural Death Centre and it is now in the very capable hands of Al Blake who has managed it for the last 8 years.

Here, Al describes the site and the way his team choose to run it.


We now lie within the new South Downs National Park not far from Petersfield in Hampshire. The site opened in 2000 and there are currently close to 1500 people buried here.

Our 55 acres had been planted with conifers by the MOD who owned it previously. We remove these non native trees, compartment by compartment and use the cleared areas for the burials.

Once occupied, these areas are then replanted with native broad-leaf species, on or near, the graves. This approach converts an otherwise quite sterile environment into an area of high value biodiversity.

The removal of the conifers allows light to penetrate to the ground level and encourages natural regeneration of long dormant seeds.

This is complimented by some inventive planting of native floral species by staff and families.>>

A group of people, mostly older adults, are walking along a path covered in fallen autumn leaves. In the foreground, a man in a bright yellow jacket and tan trousers is pushing a dark wooden cart. On the cart is a large white rectangular container filled with green plants. Another man in a dark jacket is walking beside him. Behind them, a line of people follows along the path. The path is flanked by trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and green. The ground is covered in a thick layer of fallen leaves. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and suggests a community activity or a walk in a park or cemetery.

‘the burial ground
has become a haven
for wildlife’

>> This programme has been hugely successful and the burial site is now teeming with native flora and fauna. Our customers take great pride and comfort from seeing how the burial ground has become a haven for wildlife. It boasts a healthy population of stoats, weasels, deer, owls, adders, grass-snakes, buzzards, red kites and an array of butterfly species - some rare. There are also bee-hives on site whose occupants thrive on the varieties of flora within the grounds and on the burial site.

As a deeply green Natural Burial Ground we dig all of the graves by hand. The exact size and shape of each individual coffin is noted and the graves are bespoke, neatly dug to size by our expert team of grave diggers. Many of our families come and engage with them whilst they are working and are impressed by the love, care and time invested in each resting place.

The grounds are also managed by hand. During the summer months, the pathways are kept open and the whole site is hand-scythed in the autumn. This approach not only keeps the site's carbon footprint to a minimum but is also far more selective and friendly to invertebrates, amphibians and small mammals.

The burial team is involved and witness all manner of funerals.

Approximately half of the burials performed each year are organised with a conventional funeral director. However, many of our families prefer to be more "hands-on" and decide to perform much, or all, of the process themselves.

It is quite normal for a funeral director to deliver the coffin to the site whereupon the family and our team assume the directing. Sometimes the family decide to transport the deceased to us in their own vehicle. Once on the premises there are two methods of conveying the coffin to the actual burial ground, which is nearly half a mile down into the woods. There is our replica Victorian hand-bier or a horse and gaily painted cart that some families elect to employ.

This has all become quite standard practice here.

Our team has now grown to four and on average we carry out around 135 burials per year. Only full burial is performed at the site, we do not accept cremated remains for interment. As part of a larger environmental, education centre it is felt inappropriate that we should encourage the cremation process in view of the current environmental impact associated with this practice.

The burial site is part of the Sustainability Centre, an environmental education centre. Both the burial site and education centre are owned by a charity - the Earthworks Trust.



The Trust's *raison d'être* is education. Some sixty different schools visit us each year. Many of these schools make multiple visits and some come on residential visits, staying in our 38 bed hostel. The education team deliver their programmes at any level – engaging with toddlers through to adults and environmental science students to those with acute learning difficulties. Excess funds generated by the burial business support these education programmes.

The wide variety of activities organised for schools is increasingly being based on Forest School principles and the education team are Forest School trained. The Sustainability Centre is developing as a training and support hub for teachers and practitioners. The first Level 3 Forest Schools Leadership Programme course started in early 2014. The education team also teach bush-craft, food growing, outdoor cooking and skills for low impact living. What is really cultivated here is trust, respect, hope and a real love of the outdoors.

Many of the families who choose the South Downs site as a resting place really love this dual usage and feel that their lost relative or friend would really appreciate the positivity of having so many young people buzzing around the place, learning, laughing and engaging with their environment. Positive projects being supported and coming from something that most folk would, in normal circumstances, consider negative and sad.

article by Al Blake

South Downs Natural Burial Site

www.sustainability-centre.org

‘what is really cultivated
here is trust, respect,
hope and a real love
of the outdoors’





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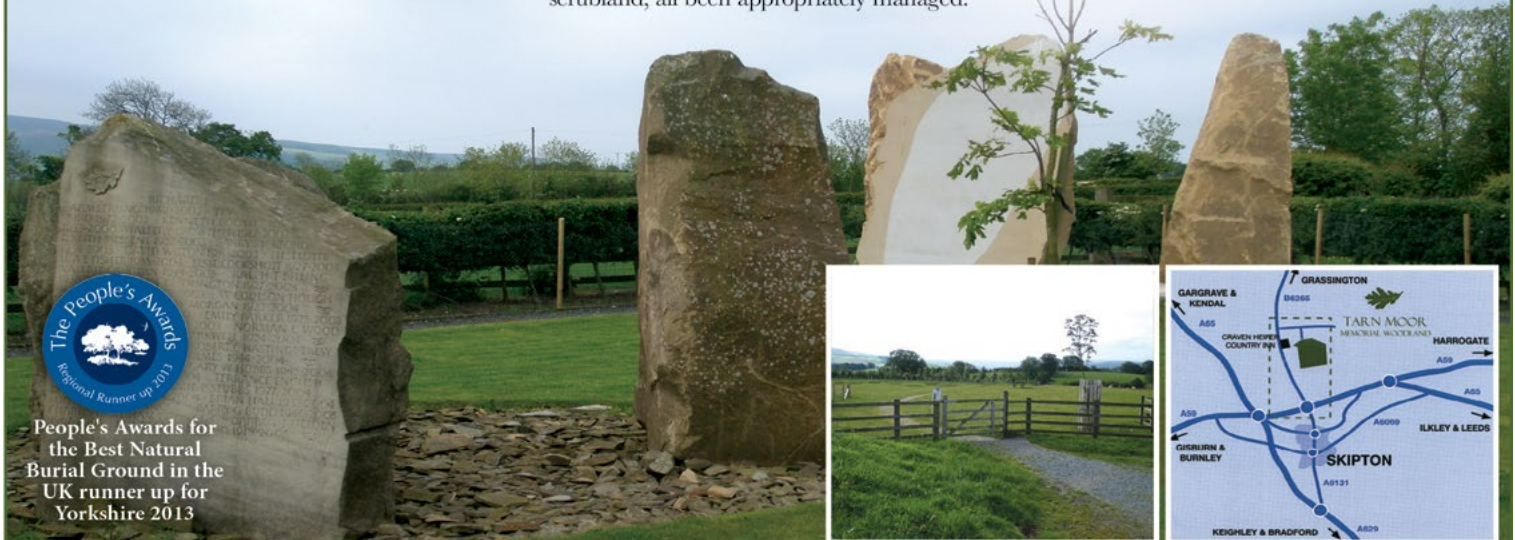
Diversity of beliefs, a wish for nonconformity and a conservation approach to death are some of the many reasons why burial outside the strictures of church or local authority is being sought and has been catered for by the memorial ground since opening in 2002.

The ten acres, or thereabouts, of land being the memorial ground is located to the north of Skipton, North Yorkshire with elevation and location giving long reaching, panoramic views over adjoining countryside.

The conservation approach will give an area of diverse habitat which will include areas of oak woodland, open pasture, traditional meadow and scrubland, all been appropriately managed.



People's Awards for the Best Natural Burial Ground in the UK runner up for Yorkshire 2013

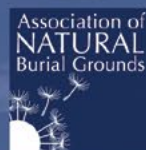


Access to the memorial woodland is always available during daylight hours, footpaths, seating and open areas giving a variety of areas for family gatherings but allowing quiet individual contemplation if required.

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FAMILIAL

Communication

The following two articles tackle the subject of familial communication and the effects that a breakdown or total lack of talk can have when dealing with death and loss. Both articles also focus on history but, as you will read, in two very different ways.

Firstly we hear from Mike Grenville, Celebrant, home funeral supporter and transitionist.

Although death is featured on the front pages of daily newspapers, Western society today has become death phobic. Talking about death is mostly taboo, and we actively avoid people who have been recently bereaved.

A century ago, life was more precarious and we all came across death many times in our lifetime. In 1910 most people died in their own beds at home, while a hundred years later, in 2010, 58% of all deaths in England took place in hospital and only 19% in their own home. [\[1\]](#)

While just over half a million people die every year in England, about one every minute, many adults may have never experienced someone close to them dying, and few have ever seen a dead body. Children are frequently kept away from funerals even when it is someone close to them and when they specifically request to be there.

While all life naturally seeks to avoid death, this is not the same as fearing it. If a branch falls from a tree, we step away. But we have an additional fear of what will happen after we die. Since fear of death is not the experience of every culture, it must be something that is somehow taught. In part this can be explained by our cultural story of there being a judgmental God. [\[2\]](#)

But why over the last century have we become so phobic about death?


Over the next few years I believe we have a unique window of opportunity to face and heal this trauma. This is because of the 100 year anniversary of the Great War, later named World War One. There are a number of reasons why the seeds of our death phobia were sown at this time, and were compounded by other factors in later years.

Firstly was the trauma of the war itself. The total number of military and civilian casualties in World War I was over 37 million. There were over 16 million deaths (which includes about 10 million military personnel and about 7 million civilians) and 20 million wounded, ranking it among the deadliest conflicts in human history.

About two-thirds of military deaths in World War I were in battle, unlike the conflicts that took place in the 19th century when the majority of deaths were due to disease.

Nevertheless, disease, including the Spanish flu and deaths while held as prisoners of war, still caused about one third of total military deaths for all belligerents in WW1.>> [\[3\]](#)





>>The horror of the war for those who survived was so great that afterwards they did not want to talk about it, and those back home did not want to hear it either.

The curse of the famous British 'stiff upper lip'. [4] At the time, most shell shock victims were treated harshly and with little sympathy as their symptoms were not understood and they were seen as a sign of weakness. So instead of receiving proper care, many victims endured more trauma with treatments such as solitary confinement or electric shock therapy. [5]

Although men were not compelled to fight until Conscription was instated in 1916, there was enormous social pressure on men to volunteer. [6] For example, at the start of the war in August 1914, Admiral Charles Fitzgerald founded the Order of the White Feather.

The organization aimed to shame men into enlisting in the British Army by persuading women to present them with a white feather if they were not wearing a uniform. [7] By the end of the war, the slaughter of millions of idealistic young men appeared catastrophic and senseless.

This created some sense of guilt in many who had been so enthusiastic supporters of the war at its outset and so had their own reasons to participate in the conspiracy of silence.

The trauma of these deaths was compounded by the fact that no bodies were brought home for a funeral or to bury. In the early days of the war a handful of officers bodies were repatriated to the UK with the cost paid by relatives. However repatriation from a war zone was banned from mid-1915 mainly because of the logistical, health and morale problems the return of thousands of bodies would create. >>

>>So all a family received was a telegram that began “Deeply regret to inform you...”[\[8\]](#)

[At](#) the end of World War One, the 1918 flu pandemic (that lasted from January 1918 through to December 1920), infected 500 million people across the world, including remote Pacific islands and the Arctic. It killed 40 to 100 million of people—three to five percent of the world’s population.

To maintain morale, wartime censors minimized early reports of illness and mortality in Germany, Britain, France and the United States; but the newspapers were free to report the epidemic’s effects in neutral Spain, creating a false impression of Spain as especially hard hit—thus the pandemic’s nickname ‘Spanish flu’.[\[9\]](#)

The virus predominantly killed previously healthy young adults and brought large scale death right into the heart of communities.

One more significant event in the 20th century has compounded this disconnection from death in society has been the creation of the National Health Service in 1945.

This has taken both birth and death out of the community and into institutions and the hands of professionals. This is compounded by the pervading view that considers death in hospital to somehow to be a failure.

The collective agreement of how to deal with large scale trauma and death at the end of the Great War, was not to talk about it. Tragically, far from being “the war to end all wars”, WW1 scarred western society whose



sons were sent to die in another war within a generation. This became parental patterning that taught the generation that lived through WW2 to not talk about it.

From my own experience I know almost nothing of how my mother lived under occupation in France and only a handful of wartime snippets from my father he told me in his dying months. Of my grandparents I know almost nothing, a gap in our family story that I hear echoed from so many people when I ask what they know about their grandparents in WW1. Not to know the story of your ancestors is to be cast adrift without a map.



So it seems that WW1 marks the point where we stopped telling the next generation about where they had come from. Losing respect for themselves, the next generation had no elders to look up to and learn from. Today we have replaced elders with celebrities chosen from amongst our peers without substance. This brings with it the fear of growing old and the loss of respect.

As Stephen Jenkinson [\[10\]](#) points out, we are a 'competence addicted society' so we fear this loss of abilities since it is only in our being able to do things that we derive our worth.

There is an important reason why we need to face our WW1 stories.

Studies with mice have found that the genetic imprint from traumatic experiences carries through at least two generations. [\[11\]](#) This means that the trauma of past wars is passed down.

This collective and individual unhealed trauma is a significant part of why we are unable to deal with death as a part of life in modern society. All these factors taken together have contributed to society focusing as little as possible on death as an integral part of life.

The preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO declares that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed". [\[12\]](#)

The current 1914-1918 centenary of WW1 presents us with an opportunity to critically reflect on both the legacy of World War I and the continuation of war in our world.

By doing this, together with connecting with our own family stories, we can begin to heal the pain passed on to us from our ancestors and contribute to bringing about the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible. [\[13\]](#)

Mike Grenville
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07974 924289

ETHICAL WILLS



Whilst putting Mike's submission together I came across this article and they seemed to be closely linked. It offers a constructive solution to many of Mike's points.

Here Susan Dolan, Nurse and End-of-life advisor puts forward the idea of Ethical Wills.

An ethical will is used to pass on personal values, beliefs, blessings, and advice to future generations. It is a way to tell stories and share your memories.

An ethical will is not a legal document; it is distinct from legal documents like a last will and testament or a living will (now known as advance decisions). The practice of leaving an ethical will is an ancient tradition referred to in the Bible and found in many cultures.

Whether you have years left to live or are facing death, you too can write a love letter to future generations. Writing skill, spelling, and penmanship don't matter. You can scribble on a grocery bag, compose an email, record your thoughts, or sit in front of a video camera and interview yourself.>>





>>What matters is content - your reflections of who you were and who you became.

What were the events that shaped you?

What are your priorities?

Your guiding principles?

What mistakes did you make; what did you learn from them?

What essential truths have you learned that you can pass on to future generations?

If you hope to be remembered for who you really are, disclose that person. Don't assume others know your inner self and the challenges you met and overcame. Offer blessings, advice, insights, and bits of family history that might otherwise be lost forever.

You might speak of what is good and admirable in each of your loved ones and of the gratitude you feel that each is in your life.

Even those who are closely bonded rarely express such feelings. In writing from the heart, you will discover more of who you are and what your true legacy is; you will better come to understand how you have fulfilled your purpose and what you hope to be remembered for. Whether your ethical will is limited to a few scribbled lines, several pages, or expanded into a book, there is great satisfaction in completing your gift and ensuring its safe passage to the next generation.

Ethical wills can be written and revealed at any time. Some parents and grandparents want to share this information while they are still alive



and can engage in conversations about the past.

Ethical wills can also be used to explain why certain decisions were made in a last will and testament or to tie the loose ends of a life together for oneself and others. They may be written and rewritten, read aloud, or put aside to be read at a special family gathering, funeral, or other rite of passage.

"I'd like to do all that, but it's too late," sighed an elderly woman who had lived an exciting life as a missionary in China when I suggested she write an ethical will.

If you feel too ill, too weak, can no longer write legibly, can't organize your thoughts, or don't know how to use a computer, enlist someone to be your scribe or recorder.

Start talking, if only for a few minutes at a time. Talk it out over a period of a few days, weeks, or even months. Hospice volunteers relish the opportunity to help facilitate such a life review.

If you struggle to come up with words of your own, borrow from poets, musicians, playwrights, biographers, saints, or my mother.

Below is an excerpt from my mother's ethical will.

"Children tend to think of their parents and grandparents as people who exist for and revolve solely around them. Yet adults live other lives, often unknown to their children.

My own parents were loving and generous to me, but other than a few brief stories, I realize that I know little of their childhood, their inner lives, their dreams and plans, what they hoped to achieve, and what they believed they did accomplish.

How I would cherish a letter from my parents or my grandparents telling me about their youthful dreams and hopes, their triumphs and their failures.

How did my immigrant grandparents feel when they left their childhood homes forever? Who were my parents before they became my parents?

Once they were all young, full of life, eager to embrace the freedoms and promises of a still-new land. All that history is lost forever. That's when I realized that something was missing in my will. I needed to say more, write something that went beyond that cold, dry, legal jargon, something more than the distribution of my worldly goods.

I wanted to leave a written statement, a link to those who had gone on before me and to the generations that will come after me. I wanted my children and my grandchildren to know of my journey, who I was, what I thought and believed.

Most of all, I wanted my family to know how much I loved them."





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"You won't believe what I heard!"

Great Myths of the Funeral World

Hardly a week goes by at Margaret Rose Funerals without someone quoting one of the many myths that surround funerals in the UK - here are just a few that we hear on a regular basis, and the truth behind the myth:

'Of course, they re-use the coffins at the Crematorium'

Perhaps the most common myth, but completely untrue.

'If you want to visit the Chapel of Rest then the deceased has to be embalmed'

Not true - any requirement prior to viewing is simply the policy of that particular funeral home, not anything that can be attributed to Health & Safety or any other legislation.

"You have to have a hearse for the funeral"

There is no legal requirement to use a hearse to transport the deceased - perhaps you would like a motorcycle or campervan hearse, or maybe you'd like to use your own vehicle. As long as the vehicle is big enough to carry the coffin, you can use any transport you wish.

'You have to have the service in a Church or Chapel'

Unless restricted by personal religious views, you may hold the funeral service in any place you would like (as long as you have the property owners permission!).

'All Funeral directors charge the same don't they'

Not true, the price can vary enormously, shop around and ask for fully inclusive prices (you may find it easier to ask a friend to do this for you).

Now you know the truth behind these myths - but there are many more out there, perhaps you've heard a few yourself!

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Sleeping Angels

It is one thing when somebody dies in old age, after a good life but it is truly devastating when a baby dies, or is born dead. It is the stuff of nightmares so we are very grateful to Claudia and Tim who have very bravely shared their experiences with More to Death.

Six weeks before the due date, parents Claudia and Tim were informed their unborn child did not have a heartbeat. Claudia was induced, knowing she would be giving birth to their stillborn child at 34 weeks.

Linda Wardlaw from Birth Matters MK, Hypnobirthing Practitioner and Doula was with Claudia at Warwick hospital.

"Linda stayed by our sides throughout our entire stay in hospital, providing so much support - physical, emotional and practical. >>



photos courtesy of the parents, Claudia and Tim



>>We managed to spend two days with our little Lewis following his birth and we have so many positive and happy memories of our time with him, thanks to Linda.

Linda contacted David Abel at Sleeping Angels and arranged for David to meet Claudia and Tim. Early in the conversation, Claudia spoke of her grief and the stark reality of the situation..

“He was born dead!” says Claudia.

That said, Claudia doesn't have an issue with the term 'sleeping babies' which is often used in the situation of a stillborn child and is most probably going to include it on Lewis's plaque at Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground).

Community midwife, Karen, provided outstanding support for Claudia.

"Karen comes to visit me every couple of days. We sit and chat about Lewis and about how I am feeling. It's really helpful to be able to chat to someone who has been with us on this journey. Karen has provided us with fantastic emotional support, and has become such a dear friend to us".

Lewis was born on May 1st and his family were able to spend many hours that day loving him and getting to know him – he claimed a special place in all their hearts.

Following a postmortem examination at Birmingham hospital, Lewis was taken into the care of David Abel at Sleeping Angels.

Sleeping Angels offer a free professional service to bereaved parents.

Sleeping Angels assist and advise on all matters relating to the funeral service.

They provide a specialized funeral celebrant who can give additional support to the family and then write and conduct the funeral service.>>





photos courtesy of the parents, Claudia and Tim

>>Claudia and Tim were taken to Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground, where they met the owner, Emma. They chose the final resting place for Lewis.

Babies are transported in a Sleeping Angels funeral vehicle, an ice blue Renault which is decked similar to a hearse internally without the appearance of a formal/traditional hearse.

When the little one is collected from their resting place; either hospital or home, a body bag will be used only as a very last resort.

Lewis was cared for and prepared for burial by Sleeping Angels. When parents choose to have their little one at home, non-invasive measures are taken to accommodate the parents' needs.

A cuddle cot (cold cot) allows parents to spend an additional few days with their baby at home, should they so choose.

The photo shows the beautiful wicker coffin supplied for Lewis.

On the day of the funeral, Lewis was taken, sitting between Mummy and Daddy, in a green jaguar car provided by Sleeping Angels.

"The funeral service that David wrote and delivered for Lewis was so beautiful and heartfelt - just perfect. For a day that I was dreading, I actually have wonderful memories.

It really was the most fitting, bespoke service for our beloved little boy. We couldn't have asked for more from the day".

A memorial service will be arranged for Lewis at a future date.





photos courtesy of the parents, Claudia and Tim

"The service provided by Sleeping Angels has been amazing. David took the time to visit us at home and also took us to see Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground, and possible places to hold a future memorial service. The service that David put together was just perfect – unique and personal to our little boy. We were able to travel the last ever journey with Lewis, with him lying in between his mummy and daddy, resting in the most beautiful willow casket.

"We feel that Lewis had the very best of care at Sleeping Angels and were very touched that he was never alone, and that the love and time was taken to read him stories and sing lullabies to him throughout the night. The 'quiet' room is set up so beautifully, with toys and butterflies on the walls, and a moses basket, just like a nursery at home.

"Since hearing the most horrible news that we had lost our precious baby, all I think about is my little Lewis, and I can't escape this at night either in my dreams. However, the only night I didn't dream about it, was the night before the funeral. I believe this was because I knew Lewis was safe and being looked after at Sleeping Angels.

So much warmth and kindness has been shown to us and it is incredible that this has been offered to us for free".

As Claudia writes, everything mentioned above is provided absolutely free of charge. Sleeping Angels have a transparency policy. Nothing is hidden. If there are any fees to be paid they will be declared sooner rather than later. An example might be buying and planting a tree if the burial is on a woodland site.

Sleeping Angels is able to provide this service due to generous donations from families and local businesses.>>

>>Sleeping Angels are NOT funeral directors, but can do everything a funeral director does without being the men "in black".

They cannot and should not be compared with corporate funeral directors for six reasons:

- They are a Community Interest Company, which is a special type of limited company that exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders.
- All profit is invested back into the local community.
- The intention is to remove concern about money - their service is free.
- They rely on generous donations and grants to fund everything they provide.
- They can be there for you before, during and following the death of your little one.
- Parents may spend as long as they desire with their little one in the 'quiet room'. This is far more than a chapel of rest. It is decorated as a nursery with butterflies all over the wall.

The vision for the future of Sleeping Angels is for a nationwide Celebrant led funeral industry. Bereaved families should be made aware of the choices available to them.

David would very much like to hear from funeral celebrants who might like to explore the possibility of working with Sleeping Angels in their area, in the future.

Only celebrants operating from their heart and soul, and not motivated by money, should contact David.

The nature of this specialized vocation generally involves additional time being spent with the family that is reflected in remuneration.

At the moment sleeping Angels serves families in North Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. Milton Keynes will be the next branch to open with plans to become nationwide in the future.>>



photos courtesy of the parents, Claudia and Tim





DAVID'S HISTORY

>>With a long history as an ordained Minister and Independent Celebrant, David was well established in performing firstly celebratory ceremonies and then, later, heartfelt funeral services in a personal and heartfelt way.

Before retirement, David was leader of two rural churches. He decided to pioneer a new organization helping couples 'tie the knot' in a less traditional way. This proved to be a welcome alternative to church and registry office ceremonies.

His style of funeral also changed: no longer restricted to the 'Order of Service' experienced in the church he started writing personalized, heartfelt funeral services that truly reflected the life, character and belief system of the deceased.

David became so busy with his new life as an Independent Celebrant, he formed FOIC - an organization to train celebrants in his style; funeral services that meet the needs of the majority of the population who prefer not to have a funeral in church (religious) nor that of a humanist service (non religious).

Writing and officiating tailor made funeral services with little religion or no religion is his passion.

In an attempt to make a significant difference to parents heartbroken by miscarriage, stillbirth and baby death, David established Sleeping Angels Funeral Services CIC.

Being a Community Interest Company, registered with Companies House, all profit is reinvested back into the local community.

David can be reached at admin@sleeping-angels.org.uk



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Honouring Uwe - Only With Love

In the Autumn of 2014, my husband Uwe died very suddenly and unexpectedly of a massive heart attack. It was a huge shock to hear that he had passed away, that he was dead.

When I was allowed to sit with Uwe's cooling body I felt that his essence was already gone – his so familiar body, his dear hands, his beautiful face, all this was there in front of me, but he wasn't there anymore.

I didn't really want to leave his body behind - but I accepted, gently squeezed his right hand, kissed him good bye on his forehead, and left him in the care of the hospital team.

I knew straight away that I wanted to bury Uwe's body in a natural place, not in a grave yard, and since he wasn't a church member, to find a way to say good bye and to wish him well which was ringing true not just with him, but also with me and other significant members of the family.

After all agreed that it would be best to bury Uwe's body close to our home in Oxford, close to where we lived nearly half of our nearly 30 years together, where he had his work colleagues and his friends, where we had put roots into the soil after our nomadic years, I knew that the Westmill Woodland Burial Ground in the Vale of the White Horse was perfect.>>



>>At Westmill, I met Liz Rothschild who manages the site with a lovely team of great people, and when she heard I was looking for an individual and flexible funeral director, she recommended Lucy Jane who had just started her business, “The Individual Funeral Company”.

She was fabulous in so many ways; we connected immediately and it was her who recommended Claire Turnham’s “Only with Love” services to help me care for Uwe’s body, and to plan and support his burial.

What followed was the most beautiful, and most empowering series of events possible; starting with reclaiming Uwe’s body from the hospital mortuary in his wicker coffin (with a blue band – he loved that colour, beautifying the room where he would stay from Wednesday until Friday with aromatic oils and candles and much loved red roses and purple anemones, and finally spending all the time we needed to be with him and to make him comfortable.

It sounds maybe strange, but this was the feeling we shared – a palpable relieve of the body – the spirit – who knows... - when we lovingly cared for it; starting with a welcome blessing by Claire, and a shared intention of deep love, washing and anointing the feet, the hands, the whole body, always remembering consciously and with deep thanks what all these parts have done in his life time.





I said at his burial how I am at peace, how, I am so grateful for nearly thirty brilliant years with a brilliant man, because that is what he is I believe: a brilliant soul, who I met in the body of this man called Uwe.

Claire's presence, her wonderful business model of giving from the heart truly inspired me, and empowered me to decide to not use the funeral director's offer to drive Uwe's body to the grave, but to do that myself – Lucy was absolutely supportive about that, even helping me to hire the car of the right size, and lending me her two half-broom sticks to make the coffin roll easy (Uwe's body was tall and heavy...).

On the day, we drove off in pouring rain and by the time we all got there, it had stopped raining, and by the time we started our celebration at 2pm the sun was shining warmly on my chest.

Miracles do happen – we just have to be open to perceive them!

We also trusted the music – Uwe loved his Bang & Olufsen system - so we took his box connected to his i-phone with us in a basket to the grave and put it on random shuffle play, after starting with James Taylor's "Here we are..." – walking hand in hand, which came to us in the same method the evening before when Claire supported us in structuring the next day. >>







>>I also trusted the right words would come to me – Claire was instrumental in welcoming the burial party, and holding the space, including her committal “May you always know how much you are loved...”

To come full circle, I just want to share how touching it was three weeks later to be invited to help Angela on the day of her husband’s funeral.

Claire was also her home funeral guide, arranger and celebrant . She asked me if I could drive Angela’s husband’s body in his coffin from their house to the Church and finally to the crematorium, only a few miles apart from each other in North London.

I was delighted that I could be of help and I suggested that if Angela wants to return the gift, she may donate something to MIND, the mental health charity, because I wanted to give something back and this was a good way for me to trust the process. I was very happy with my choice, and know Angela appreciated it too – it is good to feel this connectedness translating into actions and decisions – and it is even better to enjoy the

warm glow which comes from meaningful interactions, meaningful work and the feeling that one has met - or even made - new friends.

In my experience, it is all down to Claire’s motto: Only with love... I think I’ve done the best I could by caring for Uwe in the way I did– so what is death but a transformation we all will go through for sure. May it be a while for you and me on this earth. Until then–I love my life – it is a wonder and the greatest of all gifts.

Thank you, Marina Rose.

To read more, see photographs and watch film of Uwe’s burial please visit <http://uwe.schnberger.muchloved.com/>
To email Marina Rose - claire@onlywithlove.co.uk

Contacts

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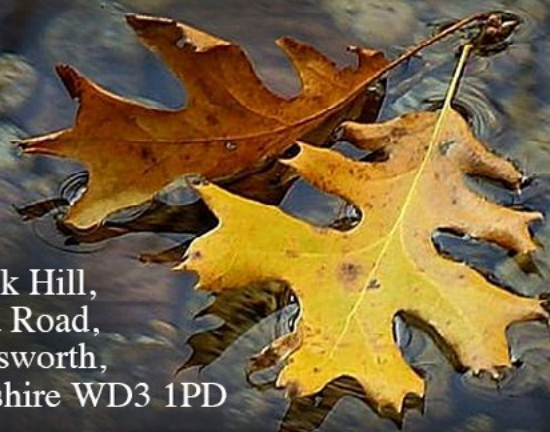
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Transformative Powers through Making

Back in the last century I was a maker of colourful hand-made felt tea cosies, felted seamless jackets and hats, and the occasional wall hanging.

As a member of the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, I was visiting schools on the Big Hand Little Hand scheme getting children and young adults involved in making felt, hopefully awakening their minds to the essential human trait of using your hands to unlock your creative potential in a way that schools are hindered from doing.

When I was at school, I'd read that a law of the 17th century decreed that the dead must be buried in wool. The Government of the day needed to keep the wheels of commerce stable and since wool was the most important industry in the UK at the time and death is a certainty, bringing the two together would hopefully keep people employed.

However pragmatic that might be, I found the notion comforting and 15 years ago I made my first shroud, answering a call for an exhibition about sustainable craft practice. I thought, we just don't do death in a nice way, we're bundled away in a plastic bag with a zip for goodness sake, as if we are last weeks rubbish destined for landfill.

Over the last century, people have relinquished essential life skills such as food production, childbirth and the laying out of the dead to the professionals.

We have settled into ineptitude without recognising the consequences, which are that we don't make real choices for ourselves, rather just accept what is offered. The body of the person who has died is hidden from us, brought out in a hard, nondescript box for a standardised ceremony that has little meaning, either for the mourners or the person inside the box. We pay the specialists to keep things neat and tidy to allow us to get on with our lives, but ultimately it denies us the knowledge and experience of the reality of life and death. Our griefs are unhealthily stored away to burst out occasionally in inappropriate ways. How can this be sustainable, and what good does it do to our inner beings?

The ancient process of making felt is very physical, rolling wetted raw wool fibres in an energetic way to make them felt together and shrink, similar to the actions of a washing machine on your best wool jumper. I'd been making big pieces of felt for years and I loved my work but it was very physically taxing and tiring.>>

>>I put the weight of my body into rolling the huge wet roll that was to become the shroud; back and forth for hours and days, because of course the first shroud was not right, nor the second. I sang songs in time with the rolling. The effort released physical energy I didn't know was there, but something else as well: a catharsis. I was thinking about death, really thinking about a body; my body perhaps, or that of someone I loved decomposing and for the first time in my life it wasn't scaring me. I can only describe it as an awakening.

I was aware that the grief I had held since the death of my father when I was 5 years old was being teased out from its deep seat within my psyche. The pushed-away taboo that death is, or was, for me was being rolled away in my efforts.

With every push of the heavy roll, a little more of my inside feelings were released. The equivalent of bashing big cushions in a therapy session but with an end result! And was this shroud for me?

Yes, it most definitely *could* be. I left that question open; after all I was only in my early 40s. I could at last admit, yes, one day I will die, and perhaps someone very lovely will tenderly tuck me into this woolly cocoon and put me in the earth to gently be transformed by a billion tiny mouths into nourishing soil that gives rise to brilliant life.

I was thinking about how humans have broken the sacred and fundamental concept of the Cycle of Life. This was perhaps a Universal Shroud indicating something gentler for our beaten up planet, Earth. As my shroud went on tour with the exhibition, interesting conversations about life and death arose.

I found myself with a commission to make a shroud for a man with terminal cancer.

This was certainly a new and strange turn in my career from making tea co-sies!

Everything in my work has now changed. I have developed the shroud into what is best described as a 'soft' coffin. It's



called the Leafcocoon; it has a sturdy wooden frame encased in layers of felt with padding, supported by six strong handles.

The shroud is strapped to the base and further layers of thick felt make up a smooth, soft woolly cocoon, leaf shaped and usually decorated.

Fortunately, a movement largely spear-headed by women to make death and everything associated with it a better passage, is changing attitudes.

Many young and not-so-young women (and men too), are busily involved in waking up a generation or two of us who have had stultifying experiences around the death of someone we loved.
>>







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The Good Funeral Guide and the Natural Death Centre have helped to encourage better practice in the form of advice, networking and awards.

A new wave of funeral advisers help people find what suits them and their families.

The internet has made it possible for people to research alternatives, seeking out the professionals that enable rather than prescribe.

I have felt empowered to create a business, Bellacouche, that helps people find other, more meaningful ways of creating ceremony.

After my mother's funeral my sister commented "we celebrated Mum's life without a hearse, undertaker and even a coffin!" To my surprise my two daughters pitched in to do the actual burial themselves.

I feel reassured that they will carry this real experience with them for the future; a person dies and you bury their body in order to create way for more Life.

This is the Cycle of Life and we can do no better than to know and honour it.

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