

WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Summer newsletter 2021

How green is your Burial Ground

Not necessarily something that many people think about but as the Climate emergency and biodiversity collapse are perceived with the urgency I believe they should be, here at Westmill we want to both blow our own trumpet and also to encourage engagement and any questions from both the Family and Friends Group and also wider environmental organizations around this question.

We believe that both the burial ground and the wider environment of Westmill farm are exemplars of positive engagement in the face of these threats and a challenge to the conventional status quo in relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and also reducing biodiversity loss.

The primary areas where Westmill is likely to be different from a standard local authority burial ground are:

- No pesticides nor any other synthetic chemicals or fertilizers have been or are used at the burial ground at any stage.
- We keep our management intervention of the site as low as we can, mowing only the paths and areas where we gather and then hand weeding to remove the few more aggressive or invasive plants that would take over the site.



- We only using UK provenance and organically grown seeds for any planting and only allow native species to be planted on the site.

The above measures over the last 20 years has led to an unusually wide range of plant species on the site. We have lots of bird boxes on the site thanks to our wonderful

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volunteers Colin and Jacqui... most of which are in use this Spring and bird surveys in neighbouring fields have revealed good bird

populations including the largest group of corn buntings in Oxfordshire.

We are gradually replanting with native trees, as sections are filled, and in time the burial ground will become an area of mixed woodland with some wildflower meadow areas.

This low disturbance management of the site together with the tree planting over time will drawdown carbon from the atmosphere. The grave marking discs that we placed onto the surface of different sections a couple of years ago have been covered over with 8mm of soil already as we build soil organic matter and therefore sequester carbon into the soil over the site.

- We try to keep our material usage to a minimum - there are no tarmac or concrete paths and our one structure is constructed mainly from wood with an earth floor and sedum roof; we use china cups rather than disposable ones at our open events and encourage families to do likewise. We only print a few newsletters for those who are not online and avoid oasis and plastic coverings for flowers wherever possible.
- Many headstones used in the funeral industry have travelled from India or China; we do not have headstones. Our one large communal memorial stone is made from a Lincolnshire limestone called Ancaster and we use Welsh slate for our horizontal memorial tablets for durability.



- All coffins and liners used at the burial ground must be biodegradable. There are now so many beautiful options out there produced in the UK that this does not restrict choice in any way. It is always worth shopping around as this can be one of your larger costs. The Natural Death Centre carries very useful information about coffins.

We belong to the Association of Natural Burial Grounds which has oversight over our practice and acts as a valuable source of support and information exchange between members.

- According to their guidelines we bury at a depth of four feet and do not have embalmed bodies unless they have to be expatriated. There is no need to embalm and not doing so reduces the amount of harmful chemical going into the ground.
- We do accept burial of ashes at Westmill because we feel the choice between cremation and burial is a very personal

one. However, the environmental implications are clear. Cremation, despite the newer cremators and improved chimneys, is still polluting and uses substantially more fossil fuels than burial and only a tiny number of crematoriums recycle the heat from the cremation. Currently 79% of the UK population choose cremation and this produced

115,150 tonnes of carbon annually. 134,000 acres of new woodland would need to be planted annually to offset the emissions in Greater London alone. Mercury abatement measures are also not in place in all Crematoria.

Probably most importantly to all these issues is the underlying ethos that underpins both the burial site and also the wider environment of Westmill Farm and that prioritises environmental and social justice principles and an emphasis on community engagement. Our active Friends and Family group brings people together and offers

activities that get people involved with the site and each other during the year (Covid allowing).

The majority of Westmill farm has been organically farmed for nearly thirty years. The areas that are not organically farmed (around the wind turbines) have been farmed using regenerative agricultural methods to improve the soil health and increase soil organic matter.

The farm has also been part of several environmental schemes over the past twenty years to increase plant diversity, restore and create new habitats, support more animals, insects and birds and put in over 4 km of footpaths.

It has also pioneered community renewable power generation www.westmill.coop/, westmillsolar.coop/ and continues to engage with the local community and schools and colleges around reducing greenhouse gas emissions (www.weset.org/) and also with the wider agricultural industry (www.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk/).

As well as the above there are several other environmentally positive organizations and businesses based at Westmill:

- Long established organic vegetable growers Jamie and Mary Carr - https://en-gb.facebook.com/BlacklandsOrganics/?hc_location=ufi;
- One of the very few organic fruit tree nurseries in the UK Tony Hinkes <https://m.facebook.com/Tonys-Trees-117487071742190/>
- Forester Guy Newton and his sons www.facebook.com/westmillforestryoxfordshire/
- The thriving horticultural therapy charity Root & Branch www.rootandbranch.info

A very Fond farewell



We know that many of you have benefitted from Jan's calm efficiency and expertise so it is with a heavy heart we report that she is leaving. We can see that it is the right move for her as she is planning to move back to Oxford and does not want to commute out here but we will miss her.

Over her four years at Westmill she has massively improved our administrative procedures, strengthened our relationships with a wide number of local funeral directors and navigated the move to our new office, changes in data protection rules and then the challenges of Covid. She has been reliable, thoughtful and steady throughout.

It is largely thanks to Jan's compassionate and clear support for families that we won last year's Association of Natural Burial Grounds Award as demonstrated by the consistent glowing feedback on the forms which frequently mention her.

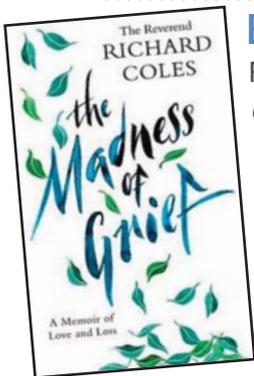
THANK YOU JAN. We wish you well in this exciting next stage in life for you.



What are the next steps?

So what are we planning to do?

Initially, having downsized from the larger farm Adam has said he can step in to support Liz in picking up the work Jan was doing. We plan to re-appoint but we wanted to get more involved in the day to day process again before thinking about how we want to advertise the post. This may mean a slight change in office opening hours but no decrease in overall availability as emails and messages will be regularly checked. Once our office hours are settled we will email the Friends and Family group and put it out on the website.



Book Review

Reverend Richard Coles - *The Madness of Grief*. Perhaps like me you knew him first from the Communards and more recently on Radio 4's Saturday Live. I have always liked his quiet wit and directness and this is in evidence in his moving book about the death of his partner David Coles. Weaving past and present into his account of grief he

brings into the light the challenges facing those living with people in the grip of an addiction, in this case, alcohol. Searingly honest and often very funny.

We wish to thank the family of Nick Waloff for their generous donation. Nick was a man of great intellect and wide interests. He inspired and motivated all who knew him. In his retirement he worked tirelessly to promote the food and drink industry in Gloucestershire. A kind and generous man, and a phenomenal networker, he will be missed greatly by his family, partner, colleagues and friends.

It is now very easy to donate via our website by going to the home page and pressing on the donate button at the top right. www.woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk

All articles written and edited by Liz Rothschild unless otherwise stated.
Photographs by Liz Rothschild, Jan Power, Simon French.
Design/artwork by Lee Hiom and Simon French

Dates for the diary

Our plans may still be subject to change due to Covid so do check nearer the time.

FLOWER SESSION WITH GOD'S ACRE GROUP Saturday 17th June - 5.30-7pm

Plant identification session. Fully booked but we plan to do another in the future.

OPEN DAY Sunday June 27th 2-5

(moved from 20th due to Covid restrictions changing) and add less widely advertised this year so a more intimate event we hope with the Friends and Family group.

ANOTHER GROUP WEEDING SESSION

tbc

MEMORIAL GATHERING

Saturday 18th September - 5.30-7pm

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DAY

Saturday 13th November

11-1 Plant trees and work on site, 1-2 lunch, 2-3.30 AGM of the Friends and Family Group

We will inform members of our Friends and Family Group and update the website with more details once we know what Covid restrictions are in place.

Mission Statement

- To make death approachable.
- To help people plan for the end of their life.
- To enable people to ask for and get what they want from a funeral.
- To show that funerals can be personal and beautiful without being expensive.
- To support people as they grieve.
- To create a community of people connected to the burial ground - our Friends and Family group.
- To create a beautiful nature reserve by increasing the bio-diversity and providing a place of peace and relaxation for future generations.