

WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Winter newsletter 2020

Wildflower survey

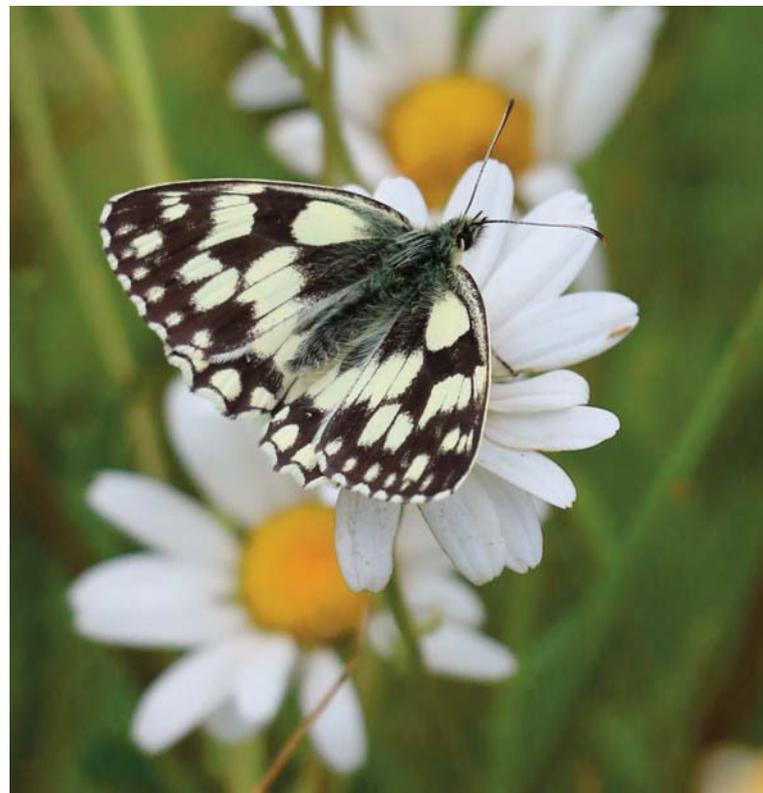
Katherine Hearn is a botanist who worked for the National Trust for many years and lives locally. She kindly agreed to come up and survey the site for us in September and write a report. We are so lucky to have someone with such expertise on hand who is so generous with her knowledge.

The report starts by mentioning the geology of the site. As most of you know the land is quite stony (some would say very!) and she defines this stone as calcareous Jurassic oolitic limestone with a probable sand component (definitely at the bottom of the site) and possibly on Portland beds. She points out that the nature of the soil makes the site prone to drought which is why we have to work hard to look after our trees and do sometimes lose a few but she also explains that the relatively poor soil is ideal for wildflowers. She describes the site as “rich in native grasses and wild flowers appropriate to the geology and soil”.

She says the variety of habitats - long grass, mown paths, disturbed ground all increase the range and type of flowers as does the grazing by deer and rabbit even though they sometimes nibble up our carefully planted wildflowers. Katherine describes it “as a locally valuable area for flora, attractive and varied of special value in the general surrounding landscape of large farmed fields.”

She listed 76 different types of “salad” plants (this does not mean lettuce!) and 15 varieties of trees. She was impressed by our control of invasive weeds like thistles, ragwort and nettles. This is down to a lot of hardwork by

Adam (site manager of the burial ground and farmer) and some of our funeral helpers. If you see these thugs when you are visiting please do remove them if you can.





Bird survey

If you have ever wondered what a Skylark looks like here is a lovely picture taken by Noah Walker during ringing and a glimpse into a nest.

populations of corn bunting on the airfield opposite the burial ground. Working alongside the bird survey team, we placed stakes in the crop thereby enabling the males to survey the area to encourage nesting and breeding.

Colin has made some more of his wonderful birdboxes and is offering them to Westmill families for a donation to the burial ground so do ring the office if you are interested and they can offer advice about how to locate them. He has also made some very useful wooden doorstops and an amazing wooden Christmas tree.

What fabulous crests they have. So often we hear them and see a dot rising higher and higher in the sky but seldom get a close up look.

Our most exciting breaking news is that the birdboxes that were put up last year were all occupied. Long Tailed Tits and Bluetits were our new residents and this is a fantastic success rate due to the skill of Colin and Jackie, our wonderful volunteers. Colin's own design is uniquely practical and attractive to birds and after placing over 600 birdboxes in Swindon they both know exactly where to site them. Thank you to them both.

In September at the burial ground there was a sighting of a Kestrel, Chiffchaff, Meadow Pipit, Corn Bunting and Linnets. What this does not reveal is that we have one of the densest

A strange kind of normal

We know that many of you will be finding the thought of the festive season very hard this year.

touch in whatever way we can and the huge value of the many online communities that have started up to provide a listening ear and practical

Restrictions mean we still cannot be with all those we want to be with and for many people a key person or people are no longer here with whom they can share this time.

guidance at this difficult time alongside pre-existing national and local organisations. Sometimes all we need is reassurance that what we are experiencing is normal - that we are not going mad, that the mental and physical symptoms we are experiencing are recognised as part of many people's grieving process.

One of the themes that emerged very strongly from a professional event I attended online looking at the impacts of Covid 19 on people's experience of bereavement is that many people are more traumatised and find they need support and for longer to enable them to cope with the huge stresses caused by deaths at this time.

So, don't forget we are here too and we love hearing from you and even if we cannot invite you in for a cuppa we can have a chat over the phone. And if you have experienced a death as a result of Covid there are many user led groups out there such as Covid Families UK which has grown very rapidly and works through Facebook to reach its members all over the country.

Another message that came through again and again was the value of community, the sense of neighbours getting to know one another, the realisation of how important it is to stay in

Dementia and bereavement

This is a version of the conversation I had with Hazel at my book launch of 'Outside the Box', and I feel this topic is so important I wanted to share it here.



How can people cope with the state of being bereaved when the person with dementia is still alive?

The state of feeling bereaved is so individual and is different for each person. When those feelings come but nobody has physically died, that's very confusing. But this state is strongly visceral, just as it can be with a physical death. The losses vary from person to person, There may be material loss such as having to give up a home to make different living conditions. Or the loss might be around roles and activities; loss of plans and hopes and loss of a certain type of relationship. Its complex and feelings can change over time or even day to day or hour to hour.

The most important thing is to find people who can step towards you rather than away. People who can hear you; people that you can talk to and people who recognise that you are experiencing losses; people who can acknowledge your feelings and provide you with comfort just in day to day contact connections and conversation. These may well be friends, neighbours or family members. Also though, there are some really good organisations out there who can offer joining carers groups where you can just be with people who understand and wont judge you.

The other thing is guilt. Those living alongside a person with dementia may feel guilty about the way they are feeling perhaps because they are "ok" and the person with dementia is not. That needs to be heard and held as well.

How can we help when someone with dementia has been bereaved but keeps forgetting that the person has died?

Listen carefully to the person with dementia and listen to their feelings, don't worry too much about the facts. I use an 'ABC' guide. A is for absolute truths which may not be a good idea. A stark "*she's dead*" out of the blue is an absolute truth but its unkind, unhelpful and unnecessary. On the other hand, we don't want B for blatant lies such as "*she's just popped out to the shops*". C for communication is best. Communicating and acknowledging feelings when the person with dementia is in the moment and experiencing grief.

Simple words such as "*it's very sad that has died*" - don't try and hedge around that "*it's not your fault*" and "*I'm here with you now, what can I do to comfort you?*" It's not necessary to keep reminding person that someone has died unless they ask.

Try to be creative in response by asking questions such as "*what would you like to say to*" and "*why were you thinking of right now?*"

Just a gentle approach talking about memories and feelings.

The healing power of nature

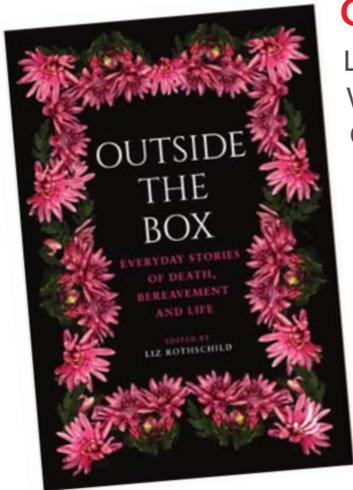
At a recent online conference about grieving there was a very good session on the role of nature in helping us grieve and reconnect with life.

I think all of us connected with Westmill know about this. I always love coming up and seeing people just quietly sitting on one of our benches enjoying the view or playing ball with their children on the grass.

The word people use most frequently

about Westmill is "peaceful" and peace can be a rare commodity in modern life so I know how precious this is.

Remember, our gates are never locked and you are welcome to come up any time just be respectful if a funeral is taking place.



Outside the Box

Liz Rothschild, the founder of Westmill Woodland Burial Ground, performer, writer and celebrant has just written a book. *Outside the Box - Everyday Stories of Death, Bereavement and Life* is published by PCCS and is now available from all good independent booksellers, Waterstones and Amazon. It can be purchased directly

from the publishers at a lower cost and they do not charge postage in the UK.

<https://www.pccs-books.co.uk/products/outside-the-box-everyday-stories-of-death-bereavement-and-life>

<https://uk.bookshop.org/books/outside-the-box-everyday-stories-of-death-bereavement-and-life/9781910919637>

We also hold a few copies in the office.

The launch at the end of November was a very celebratory occasion with 400 people attending and a mixture of storytelling and conversation with experts from a wide variety of fields followed by questions. There was music and pictures from the book and we have had some really lovely feedback. Liz plans to promote the book through a series of events next year both online and where possible live.

For more information visit www.fullcircleproductions.org.uk.

Warning - It might feature in the blog.

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, Rose-Anne O'Hare, Simon Hutchens, Noah Walker. 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.

OPEN DAY Sunday June 20th 2-5

SESSION WITH GOD'S ACRE GROUP

Saturday 18th September - 5.30-7pm

Learning about and surveying our wildflowers

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 will be allowed.

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.