



WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Summer newsletter 2025

MAY GATHERING

For some time now we have felt our summer event needed a rethink. We planned it originally as an opportunity for people to come and find out about green burial but in reality most of those that come are Friends and Family members so we are taking a different approach this year greatly helped by one of our FFG families.



One of the families Adam and I have had a long association with is the Philp family. We initially met Andy Philp when he was working for the Environment Agency when he came to inspect a project at the farm. We hit it off straightaway. Then when he was diagnosed with cancer he began to talk to us about the burial ground and his funeral plans. He lived on well for many years and during that time we met his sisters,

Christine and Diana, and then later his brother. Peter and his sisters share his extensive knowledge of plants and butterflies with us. He is Chairman of the Upper Thames Branch of

Butterfly Conservation. When he came up with his sister Diana they managed to identify 110 different plants in flower including several we were unaware of. Peter considers this pretty impressive on a site this small.



Sweetbriar grows near the bower - rub the leaves for a scent of apple

We started with some work on cutting back some blackthorn and hawthorn that was growing too densely and fantastic work was done on the memorial circle, cutting back the overhanging growth and clearing between the tablets. The rest will have to be completed at Friends and Family day.



Then we had lunch together and set off to look around the site.

A stoat was spotted scampering past (black tip to its tail telling us it was not a weasel) as we set off and



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Unfinished Youth



My wife died in her sixties; it seems too young. One of her favourite works of art was the Leonardo Cartoon, which hangs in the National Gallery in London. A framed copy of the cartoon hung in our bedroom for many years. It is still there today.

When Byron said “whom the gods love die young” he was suggesting that the gods desire to be reunited with good people sooner rather than later. This is small comfort to those of us left behind to mourn the death of a child, a youth, or even an adult. We see the potential that will never be

fulfilled, like lines drawn on a canvas that hint at the shape of a painting, but do not give us its realisation in glorious colour. Sadness, perhaps anger, lie in the expectation that has been taken away, sometimes without notice or with heartbreaking swiftness. We see a work in progress that will never be completed. It feels like a failed project.

I think of the Leonardo Cartoon: a drawing in charcoal and chalk on eight sheets of coloured paper glued together. It is a sketch of a boy child, on the knees of his mother and grandmother, playing with his cousin. The two children in the drawing grew to maturity, but both died at around thirty. There is no hint of the coming tragedy in the sketch.

Can we be content with Leonardo’s drawing? The finished oil painting, in a gilded frame, existed only in Leonardo’s mind. As a child, I loved drawing and painting, especially when the drawing was complete but before the colouring had started. I was fascinated by the richness of possibilities. Though unfinished, Leonardo’s drawing moves us. The faces are done, but the feet are barely begun. We need to use our own imagination to achieve a sense of completion. Dare we ask for more?

Beautiful handcrafted felt urns made here on the farm

We don’t provide coffins or urns here at Westmill recommending that families talk to their funeral directors about this or purchase direct. However, we did want to share with you these beautiful ashes containers made by Vera Hoenen here on the farm. You may remember the visit from a few of her flock a few years ago. They are all to be seen at the windfarm throughout the year and are kept for their fleeces. Vera keeps Cotswolds, Lincoln’s, blue faced Leicesters Shetlands icelandics and a variety of cross breeds.



Recently Vera’s ex husband died and she was responsible for organising his funeral with their

three sons. Her boys asked for something that looked a bit nicer than the cardboard box the ashes came in and after a bit of trial and error produced these beautiful tear shaped white vessels closed simply with a stick. Soft, practical and with a minimal environmental footprint these beat most other products we have seen. Some of you will recognise Vera because she regularly works on our funerals. If you want to know more you can contact her on verahoenen@gmail.com or find her as Thelittlespiral on the usual social media sites.



Who cuts our memorial tablets?

We work with two masons. One creates our handcut tablets and is based in Woodstock. His name is Bernard Johnson (www.bernardjohnson.co.uk). The majority of our tablets are machine cut right here in the yard at Westmill Farm.

For some time Mark and Andy were working here together for Bartletts but when the company decided to focus on their Trowbridge and Hull branches Andy looked for other work and Mark decided to set up on his own. We thought you might like to know a little more about him. Mark lives with his partner Rachel and their little eleven month old daughter Sophia. He became a stone mason by accident



while waiting to hear if he had been accepted by the police. Needing work he signed on to an apprenticeship with Highworth Memorials. He loved the work so much he withdrew his application and carried on working for the firm for many years until he was invited to join Bartletts by Brian Lane. This proved a lucky move as soon after Highworth Memorials stopped trading. Mark really enjoys being based at Westmill because the outdoors is very important to him. He appreciates the peace and beauty and the chance to be closer

to nature here. What he likes most about his job is dealing with people. He gets a lot of satisfaction from seeing people's reactions when

they see the finished job. He knows what it means to families. Mark is in his workshop 9-5 on weekdays unless he is away installing a headstone and you are welcome to drop in for a cuppa and a chat. www.hylandmemorials.co.uk 07349 717991

When a child dies

We have been working recently with a number of families to whom this has happened. Nothing prepares us for this and it takes a very long time to recover.

As I was just saying to one mother recently you are in heart time and so the years mean nothing as you try to integrate the loss and pain and create your life to include this. It is heartbreaking to lose an infant or have a miscarriage and it is also terrible when your child has grown and matured into an adult and then they die. We do recommend that this may be a situation in which some counselling can help and we are also very impressed with the work of the Good Grief Project run by Jane and Jim whose son



died in a motorbike accident abroad. She is a therapist, he is a film maker and their website is in itself a helpful resource.

www.goodgriefproject.co.uk. There is also TCF - the compassionate friends run by bereaved volunteers. One of the things parents report finding hardest is to be expected to have moved on before they are ready. You know what is right for you and no-one should ever tell you it is time to take down the photographs. The Good Grief Project looks at creative ways of still integrating your child into your life in ways that are meaningful to you.



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Meadow Sage

the blackcap was in full voice as we walked past the willow copse. We spotted meadow brown and common blue butterflies, various ladybirds which Peter explained used the teasle heads as hibernaculae (in other words spent the winter there). When in the green teasles provide wonderful reservoirs for insects collecting water at the base of their leaves around the stems. We saw grasshoppers and beetles

and moths and identified over 30 species of plant. Highlights would be the common broomrape spotted by Araminta and the lovely bee orchids coming up around the memorial circle near the large sarsen stone. Peter explained the bees are attracted to mate thinking the bottom of the flower is another



bee and the flower also gives off the scent of a female bee. This leads to the pollination of the orchid. We noticed the pyramid orchids just coming up in the undergrowth on the right of the avenue. In a week or so they will be on full display. We admired

the delicate quaking grass and, my favourite, the intensely coloured meadow sage which we have never seen before down towards the bottom of the burial ground. If you want to know more Peter recommends the apps plantnet or flora incognita for flowers and iRecord Butterfly for butterflies.



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 and Mick Gifford.
Photographs courtesy of Peter Philp and Liz Rothschild.
Design/artwork by Lee Hiom and Simon French

Dates for the diary

COFFEE MORNINGS Last Friday of every month unless notified of a change. 11-12 at Root and Branch. The Last coffee morning of the year will be held on 19th December rather than the last Friday of the month.

MEMORIAL GATHERING

Saturday September 27th - 4.15-6.15pm (Sunset 6.45pm) Make a memorial lantern, hot drinks and cakes, fire and readings.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DAY

Saturday November 22nd - Please tell us if you plan to have lunch

11-1 - planting trees and caring for the site. Bring tools, wellies, thermos.

1-2 - Lunch at Root & Branch - £5.50 booking required

2-4 - AGM

Other events may be scheduled and announced via email

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.