



WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Summer newsletter 2023

We are feeling a little sheepish



For a long time we have known that mimicking grazing with scything or using some live animals would probably improve our plant diversity and now we have come up with a plan.

This is what happens in the wild - animals pass through and nibble and then the plants regenerate. So don't be surprised if you spot a few woolly friends up here in the early autumn. They usually live over the road around the windfarm and are kept by a small group of people who live locally. They will not be with us for long but we want to see what difference they make.

Vera Hoenen says 'The flock is a co owned fibre flock, with Cotswolds, Lleyn, mules, Shetlands and a single Blue Faced Leicester called Rufus.

After a challenging period of moving around various farms we were lucky to land at Westmill where in previous years we buried two of our shepherds.

All of the sheep in the flock have names and they are real characters. Most of them love humans and happily rub up against you and check if there are treats in your pockets. We have a few troublemakers, some super cuddlers and some who are quite happy to be left to do their own thing'.

If you'd like to meet the flock sooner come to the solar and wind farm open day on the 10th of June- Free tickets available
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/westmill-wind-farm-and-solar-park-2023-open-day-tickets-621113245437?aff=eand>



Kicking the Bucket Again in Oxford and Oxfordshire

Dates from Mid October to November 5th

Those of you who have been connected to Westmill for some years may remember the Kicking the Bucket festival of living and dying that Liz first ran in 2012 and that then happened two more times. It faded away during Covid but is back even stronger this year.

We do hope you will come along to some of the events. One day is completely online so you can be in the comfort of your own home and

still be part of what is happening. The aim of the festival is to get people talking about end of life, gather information and inspiration and discover that when we tackle these things

together they get a lot less scary. Someone said the festival had been the best two weeks of her life when asked for feedback!



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We are aiming to create lasting legacy in terms of some training opportunities and highlight all the wonderful work being done in Oxford and Oxfordshire around death and dying and bring in specialist from further afield when they have specific or unusual expertise. We are working to ensure that the festival is truly inclusive of a wide variety of communities and are proud that already our presenters and our programming reflect this goal. We are working with a wide range of organisations such as Cruse, Crisis, the Oxford



Parks Department, Bodeian Library, Blackwells Bookshop, The North Wall, Catweazle Club and Bankrupt Club, Sobell House Hospice and St Katherine's hospice, OFS, Making Space, Oxford City Farm and others yet to be confirmed. We aim to reach a wide age range from Schools, universities through to those past retirement age.

Events will be fun, unexpected (such as wild swimming as an aid to processing grief) and thought provoking. There will be delicious food, good music, knowledgeable speakers and lots of resources. You can enjoy films, exhibitions, theatre performances, talks and panels. Some events are brand new such as a talk between a

midwife and a soul midwife about the links between birth and death and others are old favourites like our speed dating with death event - 7 speakers speak for 7 minutes on a wide range of key topics and then you get the chance to speak with them individually and over lunch. Hear about the future of death and disposal and its history. Reflect on suicide and Covid. Get introduced to many different approaches to grieving - how is it different for different communities and individuals. Learn what can help us integrate it into our lives (apart from wild swimming!). Dance the night away at our Day of the Dead Ceilidh or in a brand new East Oxford nightclub. Sing your heart in with our beautiful evening of varied songs and hear about the Companion Voice Network. It all starts with the planting of a Covid Memorial Tree in one of the Oxford parks. A chance to plant a bulb in memory of someone and create a memorial lantern.

To see the whole lineup visit www.kickingthebucket.co.uk. Full programme will be showing by the end of June. If you want to receive mailings about the festival then email us at info@woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk and we will put you on our Kicking the Bucket mailing list.

This year Liz is joined by a wonderful team of organisers, some of whom you may recognise from funerals at Westmill. Read about them here.....

THE TEAM



Lucy Till

As well as fundraising for the Festival, I love to both volunteer and conduct ceremonies at Westmill, and for the past year I have been Liz's tour manager for her one

woman show Outside the Box.

Post-Brexit I've retrained as a celebrant for weddings and funerals and divide my time between working in France and England.

My own mother's death when I was just 7 years old has given me a huge appreciation of the gift of life and a desire to make the most of it. I also strongly believe that we should all be talking more about death and grief, and in so doing, reduce the confusion, discomfort and mystery that surround them.



Christine Mckenzie

Christine is an experienced clinician, Psychotherapist and Organisational Consultant with a solid career history spanning twenty years working

across health and social care. Christine's practice has a strong focus on change, inclusive leadership and transition. She is a visiting lecturer at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust .

Christine's recent work includes facilitating reflective Practice groups for senior clinical psychologist. Facilitation of the NHS Graduate management trainee scheme experiential programme.

THE TEAM



Karen Lane

I am a helper at Westmill Burial Ground. I have been working here for a year now alongside some truly amazing people, learning so much along the way. I feel proud to be part of

the team and everything that we stand for and achieve.

My aim is to support the person I am caring for. This could be a bit of shopping or a trip to the library. It can be talking about care of end of life and expectations and what their wishes are. A lot of the time it's just sitting and listening with a cuppa and cake.

I'm also working to make our local libraries part of the Death Positive Library project. This will bring a fantastic a selection of brilliant books and resources about death, dying and bereavement into our local community. To learn more about this initiative visit <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/dea>

th-positive-libraries-national-framework.

Meanwhile, don't forget Westmill has a wide range of books you are welcome to borrow from the office.



Wendy Halford

Wendy is a former Registered Nurse who also trained as a Soul Midwife in 2013. She is motivated by the desire to help remove the taboo surrounding death and dying, whilst always

respecting people's individuality, cultures, and belief systems. She has developed a local community initiative called The Lost Art of Simple Dying. Wendy gives talks, runs workshops and facilitates a discussion group, all with the intention of inspiring people in the community to access their own innate wisdom. She believes that by "normalising" death we are less fazed by it, and this is regularly borne out by the feedback she receives.

Learning from other Traditions – Funeral in Zakros, Crete – Maxine Parsons

I heard a cry and realised that the old grandmother had breathed her last.

Aspassia who was 88 years old, was in failing health and her death was expected. She was born into a very poor family in the mountain town of Ziros and as with many poor families the children go to live with relatives in return for working for them. The families each have a house attached to the mother house and the generations mind the children and in turn the old people.

The whole ritual of death and burial follows a timeworn tradition. The first thing that I heard was the pick-up stopping outside and numerous plastic chairs being taken up the steps and placed outside Aspassia's house. Throughout the afternoon and evening, people passed by to pay respects to the family and many, especially the family, held a vigil throughout the



night. Long after I went to bed I heard cars and soft voices coming and going in the hot sultry night. Thirty six hours later, the same pick up collected the chairs to take back to the village square (platia).

Notices of her death were pinned to telegraph poles throughout the village saying her age and the time of the funeral, which is held within 24

hours and often less in the hot weather. The families prepare the body and only next day will the body be taken away and returned for the funeral itself. Everything is done with great gentleness and care. This society is isolated and therefore has look after itself.

The funeral was at 12 noon. It was a very warm day. When the church bell started to ring I joined others slowly climbing the steep hill into the town. I looked out towards the wonderful bare

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mountains that go down to the sea. What a place to spend your life. Life here is sometimes hard and difficult but I imagined the fun and the companionship she must have had. She had never been anywhere else, always had her family close by and lived with the certainty of things staying the same.

The old black Mercedes slowly came into view followed by the friends and family, arriving in the church square to be welcomed by most of the village. The large Greek Orthodox Church was already pretty full and was rather like a market with the congregation milling about and chatting and greeting. As they came into the church each person lit a candle so it was very hot before the service had even begun. I love the way people just stop work for a while and come in in their work clothes to pay their respects and then go out again. There was a lot of chatting, I wonder if old quarrels are settled on these occasions.

After the service everyone filed around to bless the coffin and the religious icon beside it. A final goodbye from the villagers some of whom have known Aspasia for many decades and shared many happy and sad times. As we came out into the burning heat we shook hands and expressed condolences to each member of the family receiving a honey and almond funeral biscuit at the door.

The hearse then pulls away on its final journey to the burial ground on the edge of the village followed by the family walking behind. All the mourners then walk to tables and chairs set outside the small kafeneons to be given the wonderful black, sweet Greek coffee and another biscuit.

There is another commemoration nine days later and after forty days a memorial service which represents Jesus rising from the dead. Some months later Aspasia's daughter moved into her house which made space for the next generation. And so it goes...

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, Vera Hoenen, Maxine Parsons and Becky Norman photographs. Design/artwork by Lee Hiom and Simon French

Dates for the diary

GARDENING SESSION - Thursday June 22nd 10-11.30 Can you lend a hand with some weeding to make us smarter for the Open Day? Please bring gloves, tools and thermos. Please contact us if you plan to come along.

OPEN DAY Saturday June 24th 2-5 including flower walk, talk on green burials, tea and cake

MEMORIAL GATHERING Saturday October 7th - 4.30-6.30pm (Sunset) - Lantern decorating, hot drinks, singing and readings in memory of those who have died.

KICKING THE BUCKET FESTIVAL - OXFORD - Saturday October 7th - Sunday November 5th

FRIENDS AND FAMILY DAY Saturday November 18th - 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

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.