



WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

# NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the Winter newsletter 2022*

## Cuppas and Clippers

*Recent years have meant that many of us have felt a lot more isolated and lonely. If you have been bereaved during that time those feelings are even more acute. We need support at such a time and for many that support was just not really around or only very remotely.*

I have wanted for a while to offer more regular activities alongside our three main annual events - the June Open Day, the Memorial gathering in September and the Friends and Family Day in November. I felt the Friends and Family group needed to have enough people in it to make it viable.

So this summer we started two new activities at the burial ground - coffee mornings and gardening mornings. The coffee mornings will continue throughout the year. The gardening, subject to interest, will run from late spring to late autumn.

The coffee mornings have happened at Root and Branch on the last Friday of each month 10-12. In the summer we spent several chatting under the grapevine on the terrace in the glorious sunshine and looking round the wonderful garden. Then we decamped to the office which as you can see proved rather crowded so next time I lit the fire at Root and



Branch and we settled into the art room looking out at the garden. The idea is just to have a bit of a chat and raise some money for local charities - Root and Branch itself, the horticultural therapy project we founded for people living with mental health challenges [www.rootandbranch.info](http://www.rootandbranch.info) and Wiltshire Treehouse the bereavement charity for children and young people in Swindon and Wiltshire which Liz helped to establish <http://www.treehousewiltshire.org.uk/> . Topics have ranged widely and there have been plenty of laughs as well as useful suggestions about what people have found helpful when things don't feel easy. Eventually, this group will probably run itself with a little input from us.

Gardening mornings which were the first Thursday of the month proved to have less

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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attendance and yet those who came really enjoyed it. We were not sure if we should really call it gardening - more weeding and clearing but we did help keep down some of the pernicious weeds that Adam works so hard to keep at bay and also created a lovely little glade next to the Roundhouse where people could

gather around a firebowl or just sit in the shade or out of the wind and rain yet closer to the trees. Most of the time it was just one person with Tony and Liz or Karen so we need to hear from you if this is something you would like us to continue with.

We know these kinds of things take a while to get established so we will wait to hear what you think.

## Clutter Coffin – Cathy Turbinskyj

*Some of you will have met our very dear friend Cathy at some of our events in the past. She is a woman of many talents - singer, artist, writer, lover of terrible jokes and very experienced gardener so you can imagine the mixed feelings we have sharing this article with you all.*

Phew. This September, 6 months after a diagnosis of Secondary Breast Cancer in March 2022, I finished decorating my cardboard coffin, and what a satisfying, pleasurable process it's been. It did feel like a race against time though, when for some weeks I was losing vision in my right eye, and I feared I was about to go blind (suspected brain tumour turned out to be only a bone tumour), (and right now, thanks to taking steroids, normal vision has been resumed).

With lots of advice and enthusiastic support from Liz and Adam, I chose and ordered the coffin and got to work on it, in a lovely sunny open stable at Westmill Farm. I have so enjoyed making the coffin a Home From Home...



decorating it with a collage of paper-cuts, cards and photos from family and friends (I photocopied a lot of them) that have surrounded me at home over the years,

continuing the Parcel theme that the shoe-box shape of the coffin suggested (Return To Sender!). I've lined it with a couple of familiar bedspreads, and my Coffin-Helpers have instructions to wrap me in my

bedding and quilt, with teddies, just like home. Inside are also dried moss roses and petals from my garden, a whoopee cushion, a little box containing the 4 back teeth I've had extracted over the years and saved to go back into the earth with me, and a box of ribbons, for pairs of people at my funeral to tie the coffin lid down securely. (A bit of an ice-breaker!).

It's felt like a Downsizing, from living at Clutter Cottage all these 29 years, to Clutter Coffin, my final resting place... Bed has always been my favourite refuge, and so my coffin, my final resting place, feels familiar, safe, comforting and all I'll need... And It's very beautiful! I've asked to be placed lying on my left side, just as I sleep, very Neolithic burial mound style.

All this I know is an indulgence - when I'm dead I won't know or care how my body's disposed of - but - it pleases me, and I've so enjoyed sharing the process with friends and a sister and brother-in-law who I think have found it helpful for them too, facing as they do the prospect of my death and burial. (I'd already booked a place up at the Burial Ground years ago, when you could still reserve a place).

If I sound very accepting of my illness and death, it's because I am. I'm 66, not 26, and it's hard to believe *The Best Is Yet To Come* (Grow Old With Me...). And I'll be spared the trials of

old age - who looks forward to that?!

The hard work in preparation for my decline and death was seeing to all the Admin Stuff. It was often stressful and a real brain-ache, but it's done now, phew. Sorted. I recommend the excellent *'Before I Go - The Essential Guide To Creating a Good End Of Life Plan'* by Jane Duncan-Rogers.

I think that all this being so pro-active and engaged around my death and funeral arrangements has been partly a way of maintaining an illusion of control. And now I've done almost all of the prep I want to (have yet

to design my *'Funeral Programme'* leaflet thing), I feel a flatness, and a depression after the high of these months since diagnosis... My coffin is finished and ready to go, I'm ready to go, so where are you Death?!

We're all in the same boat: we know we will die, and we don't know when, or how... I'm just feeling this challenge of living with uncertainty, acutely. How do I live the rest of my life? And the 64,000 dollar question: when the Bleep do I die? And exactly how?

Time for a nice pot of tea. Enjoy.

*Rebecca Brain used to be our site manager at the burial ground amongst other things. I know a lot of you enjoyed meeting her at our events or when visiting the burial ground. She then moved to Devon and since returning has started her own business. Read more about it below.*

## Soil Song Nursery – Rebecca Brain

***I my nursery in Bishopstone village, in early Spring this year. I had spent many years developing my nursery-woman skills while I was working at Root and Branch; growing plants in a charity with adults who were experiencing mental health difficulties.***

I love growing plants from seed, cuttings, and divisions. The deep connection with the seasons of nature and the nurturing process of caring for tender new growth, adjusting warmth, light and water, pricking out and potting on and all the joy of bringing on a healthy vigorous plant to the point of sale. It's very much like bringing up thousands of children, all at once, all with their different needs and preferences!

The deeper ecological intention behind Soil Song is to grow plants without harm to nature. I use peat-free, certified Organic compost and natural seaweed granules, rather than chemical fertilisers. I use coconut coir pots, fairly traded with a women's co-

operative in Sri Lanka, or second hand re-used plastic pots. Almost everything I sell has been home-grown here in Bishopstone and delivered to the farm shop (next to the Royal Oak pub) by wheelbarrow.

I grow cottage garden perennials, all the old favourites. Also, herbs, annuals and veg plants, not to mention lots of native wildflowers, which are now thankfully really

popular with gardeners as we learn more about gardening with, and for, insect populations.

You can find my plants outside the Bishopstone stores, near the back entrance to the Royal Oak pub. Parking there is easy. The shop is open 7 days a week. You can also drop unwanted used plant pots of any size to the back of the shop and I will give them a new life!

There has been so much local support and enthusiasm for the nursery and it's ethos. I'm very grateful for all my growing loyal and dedicated customers, who share my care of this planet, the other beings who belong here, and the resources that sustain us all.





## Kicking the bucket

The Festival of Living and Dying is back next year. Liz will be working with Lucy Till, Karen Lane and Wendy Halford

to create another festival of living and dying in Oxford in the Autumn of 2023. This is the fourth one she has organised and she is delighted to be co-creating it with such a wonderful team. There will be more about our plans and the team in the summer edition of the newsletter.

## Coping with the Festive Season

In memory of all those people who you will be remembering during the festive period. We think it is often easier to actually place a photograph somewhere that everyone can see perhaps with a candle or wreath or flowers rather than try and cope with an absence that everyone is feeling even if they do not dare say so. We will be lighting a candle for everyone in the office before we stop for the Christmas break.



### 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.

## Dates for the diary

*Held at Root & Branch next to our office.*

### WREATHMAKING WORKSHOP

Friday 2nd December 10-12 at Root & Branch.

Unfortunately Cancelled

### 2023

*Coffee mornings the last Friday of every month 10-12 except December. In Root & Branch near the office.*

*From late spring gardening sessions on site first Thursday of every month 10-12 subject to interest.*

### OPEN DAY Saturday June 24th 2-5

including flower walk, talk on green burials, tea and cake

### MEMORIAL GATHERING

Saturday October 7th - 5pm- 6:30pm -

*Details tbc in summer newsletter.*

a time to gently remember those who have died together

### KICKING THE BUCKET FESTIVAL -

OXFORD - Friday November 3rd - Sunday November 5th

### FRIENDS AND FAMILY DAY

Saturday November TBC

*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](http://www.woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk)*

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