

WESTMILL WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND CIC

# NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the Winter newsletter 2016*



## Family & Friends Group

For me Westmill means new life; hope in the midst of sadness. This was brought home to me at the open day in November. Seeing the trees, mere saplings for so long, suddenly stretching true branches out and up. Grappling wayward strands of the bower into place. Eavesdropping on family groups coaxing stony ground to accept wildflower bulbs.

New life too at the gathering later on where, after mugs of soup and fistfuls of cheese, we shared experiences and ideas for the future. We talked about how Westmill runs and will be run. We have an amazing resource in the people that have already chosen Westmill to help us reach out to more people. My interest is twofold: because it is a good thing to do; because more people choosing Westmill improves the viability of the project. Sharing our stories of being supported and enabled to reclaim the 'business' of death might help others. So how can we do this? Through the website; through our family, community and professional networks; through feedback to funeral directors, churches and interest groups. Would you be willing to take part in this? If so, what tools (flyers, DVDs, booklets) might be useful aids? Please share your ideas with Liz. - *Ian Craigan - Chair Family & Friends Group*



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 Wishing you comfort & joy this festive season at what we know can be a difficult time

## LEARNING FROM OTHER COUNTRIES - RITA WHITE

*In El Salvador, Central America, we commemorate our dead in three special occasions: the anniversary of death, the Day of the Dead and, if we have lost our mother, on Mother's Day. The rituals are a mixture of Catholicism, animism and remains of the Aztec and Mayan traditions. On the anniversary, most people will ask that the name of the deceased be mentioned by the priest in the evening mass. However, more traditional families, mainly in poor communities, commemorate with "rezos" at home. These are gatherings to pray using two books of prayers of the Catholic church. A member of the community will lead the prayer and people will chant and sing. There will be an altar with the photo of the deceased, flowers and candles, and a glass of water for the spirit of the departed. Family and friends gather for prayers every day for nine days leading up to the anniversary. On the day itself, apart from the prayers, there are food and drinks - "tamales" and sweet bread, specially "semita", coffee and fizzy drinks, and occasionally, alcoholic drinks for the men. Most of the praying is done by the women and children, while men stay outside the house, on the "patio", eating, drinking and playing cards. The "Rezo" this day lasts the*



*El Salvador, Central America*

*whole night until dawn.*

*The Day of the Dead in El Salvador (proper name "Dia de los Difuntos" or Day of the Deceased), is mostly celebrated in the Cemeteries. People go there to remember their departed relatives with joy, not sadness. Families bring flowers, chairs, umbrellas, and food and drink, and sit around the grave and enjoy a picnic. You can also buy or order food to be brought to your place by any of the food sellers that welcome you around the entrance of the cemetery; mostly enterprising poor families that take this good opportunity to increase their income (dad carries the cooking utensils, mum cooks and children deliver the food). They also offer their services for clearing the grass around the graves and painting the crosses, and selling water and other items like umbrellas for protection from the tropical heat. Common dish on offer is stewed chicken, salad, rice and tortilla, and a sweet type of bread called "torreja". The drink that will accompany your food will be coconut water in the shell or a local drink called "horchata". Families visit each other's graves to pay their respects. In the middle range and well off cemeteries, a stage is built where in the middle of the afternoon a band will play music, classical religious music and also popular music, mostly Mexican songs from the fifties and sixties, though we are in El Salvador 21st Century. By now the temperature has gone down to probably 25 Celsius, the grave has been cleaned and painted, you have had lunch, and it is the time to enjoy a nice cup of coffee with local a piece of the local cake called "semita" in the peace of the cemetery, with your family, remembering the life of the loved ones already departed. Mother's Day is celebrated at home, but if mother is dead the family goes to the cemetery instead. The ambience in the place is very similar to the Day of the Dead.*



## KICKING THE BUCKET – A FESTIVAL OF LIVING AND DYING

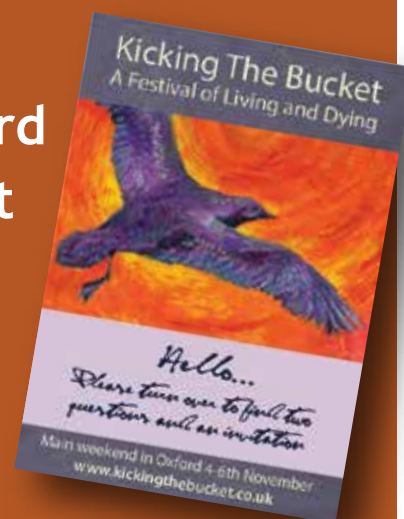
The Festival was the most successful one yet with over 800 people attending events and quite a number come to 6 or more different things. We had a lot of younger people involved through events at the Ark T and Story Museum and people travelled from villages and towns outside the city and from much further afield, one lady coming again from Hampshire having enjoyed it so much in 2014. The website created in March attracted over 5000 visitors up until mid-November. Many of our loyal volunteers are also staff at the burial ground and we offer them a huge thank you for all their hard work and in one case absolutely fabulous biscuits! Also a big vote of thanks to my fellow festival organisers, Sue Brayne, Edie Campbell and Duncan Forbes who were invaluable in making it the success it was alongside Hazel May and Anna Eden our dementia experts and Joan Gardner from Age UK Oxfordshire who organised all the Death Cafes. The next one will not be until 2019 so everyone can take a breath now. The subject is turning up everywhere and as some of you will have heard Radio 4 have been running a series hosted by Joan Bakewell about death. Very clear and thoughtful material from such a skilled and experienced broadcaster.

So encouraging to see such developments.



*The Festival organisers at the Cafe Rouge where they held a Death Cafe - Joan Gardner (Age UK oxfordshire), Edie Campbell, Liz Rothschild, Sue Brayne and Duncan Forbes*

## The Postcard Project



We got 60 postcards back out of the 350 we distributed which is a very respectable percentage and the answers to our two questions were rich and varied. We were asking what helped and what didn't help with people's grieving. Again and again people talked about being avoided or told that the other person knows how they feel when they felt quite clear they didn't or expected them to have 'got over it'. On the positive side they reported people who were just prepared to listen and be alongside them in anger or grief and not try and fix anything. One person told of going to a beach and writing his sister's name in the sand at low tide and then watching the tide gently wash it away. We are in conversation with various people about this project and are likely to produce a report on the responses. We would love to hear from you if you feel willing to share any of your own experiences.

## DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

### OPEN DAY - Saturday June 10th - 2-5pm

Come and look around. Tea and refreshments. Talk on Green Burial from Liz at 3pm.

*Please note, we will not be having a spring planting day this year*

### Our very own cards



*We are very excited to be collaborating with Root & Branch on this idea. Adam and Liz set up Root & Branch many years ago and it is now a thriving charity with a wide range of people attending and volunteering there including Al Cane, Faringdon councillor and photographer who writes this next section.*

*Near neighbours of the Burial Ground is Root & Branch, the therapeutic garden and craft project based at Westmill Farm, and over the next few months the two will be working together on a photographic project.*

*The principal aim is for people who use Root & Branch and have an interest in photography to take photographs of the burial ground in the different seasons at different times of day. and they will be working towards contributing to a set of greetings cards to be produced for the open day next June.*

*It is anticipated that some of the images taken will form part of a stand alone exhibition on the day and may be used for future newsletters and on the web site, together with photographs taken by other users of the burial ground.*

*So please get your cameras out or send us any pictures you already have.*

## Change in pre-bookings at Westmill

We have decided not to take any further pre-bookings from the end of December 2017. This is because in the current uncertain financial climate we do not want to hold large amounts of money which we cannot use (because they might need to be returned if people's plans change) and want to ensure our reserves remain under the current guaranteed amount. The exception to this will be those wishing to book an adjacent plot to someone who is already buried or interred with us at Westmill.

We realise this may result in more people deciding to book in with us during 2017 and that will not take us over the wise level of reserves since we are now only taking half the amount in advance to cover the rite of burial. The other amount falls due at the time of burial subject to interment costs at the time.

*Photograph Credits: Rose-anne O'Hare, Sarah Thacker-Pugsley*

