

Showcase: Developing the Woodlands Grounds



Our resident groundsman, Colin Wilcox, tends all of the Memorial Woodlands grounds, up keeping the trees, tidying the hedgerows, planting the flowers and ensuring the safety of the wildlife. He shares with us what it's like to work at the woodlands and what he's been doing with the grounds this spring.

How did you come to work at Memorial Woodlands?

Before I worked here I spent forty years as a farmer getting up at 4am. I could've retired after that but I didn't want to. I've always been motivated; I think that's the most important thing in a job and to be motivated you have to enjoy what you do – people seem to forget that these days. I've always been conscientious and worked on my own initiative – when I came here I didn't know anything about burials...but you live and learn don't you? I've been working at the Woodlands since day one – September 16th 1999. I first came on a six month basis and I've been here ever since!

What is it like working at the Woodlands?

I work six days a week, usually getting to the woodlands around 7am and leaving at 5 or 6 in the evening. It's an incentive to get up every morning – I've got a contented mind and enjoy working outdoors, it's what keeps me looking so young! I love the English countryside; I've never holidayed because I don't like crowds. And my work here, like when I worked as a farmer, keeps me healthy – last year was the first time I'd been to the doctors in twenty years! I do everything single-handedly, although I've got some good machinery that helps me out mind! I think the woodlands is a wonderful place and I enjoy being a part of its development. When I first came here I thought, "This is what it's all about".

How is the Woodlands developing?

We're planting 100 trees every year – over the past year, we've planted new oak, hazel and willow coppices. We need to keep taking photos so that when the Woodlands are developed in years to come, people will be able to look back and see how it once was, how it is now.

How have you be preparing the woodlands for spring?

I have started to plant some trees – Evergreen, Hazel, English Oak, Willow...but the ground is still quite cold and damp so it makes planting difficult because the roots have nothing to get hold of. All ground is different so it's not always what the experts say that is the correct advice. They advise to plant trees in autumn but at the Memorial Woodlands the ground was too cold so I will be doing a lot of the planting in a few weeks time when the ground is warmer. The daffodils, primroses and cowslips which I planted back in autumn have now begun to flower. I think spring is the best time of year because you know that everything's going to get better – after four months of dormant ground, things begin to grow.

What's your favourite thing about working at Memorial Woodlands?

The atmosphere and the pleasure of meeting people – I enjoy being able to give comfort to families. People thank me personally for looking after their plots and really appreciate the personal touches. I've always done the job as though I'm burying my own mother or father. I'll put hay in a grave before the coffin goes in and I'll always make sure the plots are kept neat and tidy, I treat them as though they're my own. It's nice to feel appreciated – people bring me bacon butties, doughnuts, cream cakes...I've got fifty or sixty bottles of whisky upstairs!

Share your views with the Natural Death Centre

The Natural Death Centre provides independent advice on funerals in the UK, giving people information about the choices available to them. They are especially known for their advice on environmentally-friendly funerals and woodland burial sites. We like to think that Memorial Woodlands offers something unique in the UK and we feel that people interested in natural burial would like to know about the choices we offer here. Since the Natural Death Centre base their advice on consumer feedback, we would be eternally grateful to anyone who would like to write to the Centre and tell them about the Memorial Woodlands. The address for the centre is:

12a Blackstock Mews, Blackstock Road, London, N4 2BT, email: mike@naturaldeath.org.uk

woodlands

NEWS

www.memorialwoodlands.com

Spring 2008

Spring is Here

We hope you enjoyed the first edition of Woodlands News in December. Thank you for all of the comments and feedback you sent in response – we are always delighted to hear from you. A lot has happened at Memorial Woodlands since our last issue. In December we were out and about in Bristol city centre finding out people's attitudes towards woodland cemeteries, January saw the internationally acclaimed play, *Colder than Here*, performed in our chapel and we were delighted to appear in the December/January edition of the world's most popular environmental magazine, *The Ecologist*. We also opened our new branch in Westbury on Trym.

If you have any news or stories that you would like to share or anything that you would like to read about in Woodlands News, please contact us at:

feedback@memorialwoodlands.com or write to us at Earthcott Green, Alveston, Bristol, BS35 3TA

'Colder than Here' Performs at Memorial Woodlands



On the evening of Saturday 26th January, we staged the internationally acclaimed play, 'Colder than Here' at Memorial Woodlands. The play, written by young playwright Laura Wade, centres around a mother determined to take responsibility for planning her own green funeral whilst her family gradually come to terms with her impending death by learning to talk to one another.

The play was performed in our chapel by Taboo Theatre Company in conjunction with the Martinsey Isle Trust who are committed to encouraging people to talk about the difficult and sensitive topic of death, offering workshops, talks and events around the country.

The play's focus on the choices people have when arranging a funeral is central to Memorial Woodlands and we felt that the emphasis on natural burial and the sacredness of the land made it particularly fitting to stage it in our grounds. We hope that the performance provided a source of comfort to those who attended.

We would like to say thank you to the Martinsey Isle Trust for their admirable work and to everybody who came along on the evening.

Chris Baker named "Local Hero" by Ecologist Magazine

In January we were delighted to appear in the world's most respected environmental magazine, *The Ecologist*.



The *Ecologist*, which is read by over 400,000 people worldwide, got in touch with us after a family had contacted them about the Memorial Woodlands, telling them that they should do a feature on us. A reporter visited and we showed him what we can offer families here. The magazine feature named our very own Christopher Baker, a "local hero" for his pioneering work in founding the Woodlands.

The four-page spread describes the environment of the woodlands as "uplifting", and commends our alternative approach to funeral directing, only ever holding one service a day and allowing families the choice to personalise a service as they wish. The reporter was particularly interested in the design and maintenance of the woodlands, noting how it "doesn't feel like a cemetery at

all" but is rather the "type of place you would bring a picnic".

We were thrilled to be recognised on an international scale by such a renowned magazine in the environmental arena. Creating sacred woodlands in perpetuity has been our vision from Memorial Woodlands' inception and we are proud that we are setting the standard for the future of the funeral directing industry and woodland cemeteries.

If you would like to read this article please visit our website, www.memorialwoodlands.com and see the 'in the news' section.

Memorial Woodlands open in Westbury-on-Trym

OPEN

In March we opened our new branch in Westbury-on-Trym to extend our services throughout Bristol. From here, services can be booked to take place at the Memorial Woodlands woodland cemetery as well as at local cemeteries or crematoria. Information on our funeral plans is also available inside the store for those who would like to know more about the benefits of planning and paying for a funeral in advance. We will be officially launching the store this spring when we will be giving away over a hundred tree saplings to people in the street for them to plant in their gardens. Make sure you are in the area to pick up yours!

Nature Watch

Spring is a great time to get out of the house and enjoy the great outdoors as the days finally draw out and the temperature gets milder after the cold season. At the woodlands the variety of wildlife continues to grow and over the last month we have witnessed many species come out of hiding to explore their environment. The warmer temperature has also seen the emergence of the daffodils, primroses and cowslips that we planted back in October adding clusters of colour to our grounds. We've been out and about to capture these on camera – here are a few:

For the next issue we are running a photography competition and will feature the photograph that we feel best captures the essence of spring in the next edition of Woodlands News. If you would like to enter, please send your photo along with your name, address and telephone number to Memorial Woodlands, Earthcott Green, Alveston, Bristol, BS35 3TA or email it to us at feedback@memorialwoodlands.com. Go on, get out and get snapping!

Rooting Out Bristolian Attitudes



"Are you as strong as oak?"

At the end of 2007 we commissioned a survey in Bristol City Centre to find out about people's attitudes towards woodland cemeteries. Woodland cemeteries are still relatively new here in the UK and we wanted to know more about what the general public think about sites like Memorial Woodlands and the growing trend towards a more environmentally friendly way of passing.

In our survey, we asked if people would prefer their passing to help the environment and if they would prefer to be remembered by a tree as opposed to a tombstone. Our survey found that the majority of Bristolians would prefer a green send off and liked the idea of being remembered by their favourite tree, which was often associated with a childhood memory or an aspect of their personality.

One thing which we did not predict was the strong relationship of favourite trees to traditional 'gender roles'; Oak was by far the most popular tree amongst men who claimed that the tree represents "strength and reliability", as well as being "good for construction", whereas women gave their vote to the fruit trees, largely because they can "use fruit in baking"!

CABE Calls for Cemeteries to be Included in Green Space Strategies

At the end of 2007, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) called for local authorities to include cemeteries in their green space strategies, designing them as places to visit in their own right; "places for the living, not just the dead." According to CABE, cemeteries can account for up to half of all green open space in some local authorities, yet most of these have been poorly designed, lacking ambition and planning. Many are neglected, offering little to attract anyone other than those visiting specific plots. Furthermore, conventional cemeteries are filling up, with many reaching full capacity which is why cremation is heavily promoted by local councils across the UK.

Natural burial sites like Memorial Woodlands are helping to re-establish cemeteries as places that can be enjoyed, creating beautiful woodlands that can be appreciated by generations to come. Unlike conventional cemeteries, which effectively take fertile land and turn it sterile, woodland cemeteries maintain and enhance our natural environment. The first woodland burial site in the UK opened in Carlisle in 1993, now there are 220. When we founded Memorial Woodlands in 2001, our vision was to create a special environment which those remembering their loved ones, as well as the general public, could enjoy visiting.

We wanted to take the fear and formality out of death and create a celebratory atmosphere of life. Our grounds are well maintained but not manicured to perfection so that nature – and life – can develop and thrive here. For the past fifteen years the hedges have been left to grow, increasing the amount of wildlife we have, and the species of flowers and trees planted are chosen for their ability to fit into the context of future indigenous woodland. We hope that Memorial Woodlands will help to set the standard for the future of cemeteries and demonstrate that cemeteries can once again be places to visit in their own right.

The Rich History of Thornbury

As we promised in our last issue, we have been finding out about Thornbury's history. We found most of our information on the internet from the following resourceful websites: www.images-of-thornbury.co.uk
www.thornburyroots.co.uk/earlyhistory.htm
www.thornbury.org.uk/about



The earliest evidence of occupation in Thornbury dates back to the Neolithic age. A recent discovery of a horde of Roman coins which appear to be attributed to Constantine the Great suggests that people were settling in

Thornbury around 300AD and there is also evidence of Iron Age settlement in the surrounding area.

Flooding in the lower Severn Vale has always been a huge problem to overcome, and the first sea wall was built in the Roman

era. Despite great obstacles, farming in the area thrived and Thornbury was documented in the Domesday Book in 1086 as a manor, one of the estates of Queen Matilda, wife of William the conqueror. Nothing demonstrates the prosperity of bygone times more than Thornbury Castle. Built by Edward Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, circa 1510, the palace was also a



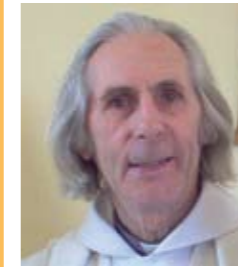
secure fortress, and a symbol of the owner's strength. However, Buckingham came to be regarded as a threat by Henry VIII, and the duke was executed for treason in 1521. The unfinished castle was abandoned for two centuries yet it was restored and today enjoys its worldwide acclaim as a luxury von Essen hotel.

St. Mary's church originated in the 12th century, with the magnificent tower emerging some 400 years later.

The principal streets - High Street, Castle Street, St. Mary Street and John Street - are predominantly lined with 17th and 18th century buildings. We found the following images on www.images-of-thornbury.co.uk



Spiritual Journeys of William Denning Published



In memory of the late Rev William Denning a book of his poetry and drawings was recently published

entitled *The Secret Garden of My Heart*. William Denning was a Methodist Minister whose ministry at Maypole Farm, Thornbury for many years included spiritual direction, retreats, quiet days and a monthly creative Eucharist. With his services, care and support William contributed a great deal to the Memorial Woodlands and is remembered with deep affection by the many people who knew him. William's book celebrates his work and will offer many people

the opportunity to share in his thoughtful poetry and beautiful drawings.

*There is a love
For those whose lives I touch
And want for them
The peace that I have found
I want for them
A sort of inner wholeness
Which all humanity must long for
Seek
And one day surely must
Will find*

By William C. Denning

To enquire about obtaining a copy of *The Secret Garden of My Heart*, please contact:
Gill Denning, Maypole Farm, Lower Morton, Thornbury, BS35 1LE
Tel: 01454 411133

You Say it Best – The Memorial Woodlands Documentary

Thanks to the kindness and generosity of those who took part, we have been able to create a documentary about what Memorial Woodlands really means to people in a way that we have never been able to through other means. Footage for the documentary was obtained when we started filming for our television advertisement and we spoke to families and individuals about their experiences at the Memorial Woodlands. We were tremendously touched by the way in which people spoke about the services they had attended here and the value placed upon being able to remember loved ones in a way that is personal, which has always been an integral part of the Memorial Woodlands' difference. We especially treasure these insightful accounts since they represent everything that we set out to achieve when we established the Woodlands and we are deeply grateful to everyone who bravely shared their experiences with us. The documentary is now available to download from our website, www.memorialwoodlands.com or if you would like to receive a copy in the post please contact us on **01454 414 999**.

'The Winter's Tale'

to Perform at Memorial Woodlands Summer 2008

We have recently booked an outdoor performance of Shakespeare's tragic comedy, 'The Winter's Tale' to take place in our grounds this summer. The play, which is being performed by professional theatre company, Rain or Shine, will take place on Saturday 2nd August at 7.30pm and promises a superb evening's entertainment. All are invited to come and picnic in our grounds, soak up the atmosphere and enjoy the performance. Tickets are on sale now priced at £12 (concessions £10, children, £5). For more information or to purchase your ticket please call **0800 612 9519**.

