

News

NATURAL SITE PROMISES A PEACEFUL RESTING PLACE FOR FAMILIES' LOVED ONES

Clandon Woods: The 'Savoy' of burial grounds

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IT'S a rare thought that even after you die, your body may not actually be laid to rest in a peaceful setting.

With cemeteries regularly becoming full or overcrowded, and in certain cases being used for development, there's every chance your eventual resting place may not remain as it was 30 years hence.

With this in mind, Clandon Wood Burial Ground and Nature Reserve has been giving loved ones an opportunity to guarantee that the plot of land where their relatives and friends are buried does not change.

The 31-acre site, in Epsom Road, West Clandon, offers a "natural" burial, where £250 of the fee goes into a fund to make sure the land is maintained as a nature reserve.

Adrian Shaw, the company's mar-

keting director, said: "For anyone who comes here, it's all about the beauty.

"When people bury their loved

ones here, they can choose whichever plot they want. That is really important to people, as well as the fact they are investing in Clandon Wood and the preservation of a soon to be important nature reserve.

"People who come here find this uplifting. We would never take away from the sadness of somebody passing and losing a loved one but knowing that coming here, someone's death, can provide life for the future is uplifting."

A natural burial is where a biodegradable coffin, made with wood, wool or any decomposing material, is buried at a depth of three-and-a-half to four feet. The shallower grave allows the body to decompose quicker, due to the amount of oxygen it receives, providing nutrients and minerals for the soil and wildlife.

Gareth Hurd, head groundsman at Clandon Wood, said: "With normal cemeteries, they receive money while they have plots - but what happens when the space runs out?"

"Councils spend a lot of money just maintaining graveyards and sometimes they can even ask relatives of someone who has been buried there to donate more money for the upkeep of the grave.

"Part of Clandon Wood is about finding a purpose for the land after we have run out of space and that is for it to be a nature reserve.

"There's a plan for the land here forever, in theory."

The site was named Best Burial Ground in the UK in 2014 and was a finalist again in this year's competition but was

eventually pipped at the post.

Founded by Simon Ferrer in June 2013, the ground has filled 700 of the 29,000 plots available - but it is unlike normal burial grounds.

Operations manager Christina Lawson said: "We don't have headstones - people who are buried have a raised plaque. You are also allowed to plant certain flowers and hang a wooden leaf in a nearby tree.

"What you see here today is what we want to see in 10 years' time. We all have personal experience of having to bury someone very close to us and a lot of people visit the grave a lot at the start and then taper off.

"We don't want this to happen here and it doesn't happen. A lot of people just come here for a walk. We occasionally get people who bring a deckchair and will sit and read all day."

Another interesting aspect is the fact that all the plots are levelled with no mounds, unlike most cemeteries.

Mr Shaw explained: "Headstones are very Victorian and hard to maintain. We don't have mounds and you can only be buried near a tree or under one. We don't allow trees to be grown on top of the burial.

"It helps us to not seem like a cemetery, which definitely appeals to people. It's a movement that's growing at the moment.

"We bury a disproportionate amount of young people and it makes sense because this is a modern way of burying people.

"We are the Savoy of the burial grounds, but cheaper. It's nothing like this anywhere else."

In terms of the wildlife to be found at Clandon Wood, the site is teeming with perfect habitats for an array of creatures.

There are two ponds, a hedge that dates back to 1789 and the land is

kept in a manner that attempts to replicate old farming techniques.

Mr Hurd said: "The land is managed in an old form of farming, called a hay meadow. No artificial fertilisers are used and it gets you a lot more bio-diverse grassland - much like a grassland from ancient England - 90% of this type of meadow has disappeared from the lowlands now [southern England].

"We are trying to create more of a naturalistic landscape and deliberately trying to make it a refuge for nature.

"It's not exactly what it looked like in prehistoric times but it's very close. We are just fiddling around with the land and trying to make it better again.

"Trying to recreate what land like this used to look before humanity harnessed power and totally transformed it and made a mess."

Mr Shaw added: "I asked a lady from Ghana who had buried someone here, why she chose here. She said it reminded her of Africa. The savannah is one of the most untouched places in the world.

"I think it's our natural landscape. With these colours and these shapes, it's what we're comfortable with instinctively. Somewhere you can be at peace."

Actor Brian Blessed, who lives locally, has already secured a plot there, describing it as better than being on Mount Everest.

One of Britain's top five rarest butterflies, the White-letter Hairstreak, can be found at Clandon Wood. About 900 types of moth are also found there, as well as rabbits, swans, ducks, voles and an array of other mammals.

The burial ground accepts any faith or spirituality and allows any type of service and wake to take place in its glass pavilion.

The natural burial ground at West Clandon is serene and peaceful

