

ALNWICK CEMETERY

Natural Burial information

As from 1st April 2017

What is Natural burial?

Natural burial - also referred to as woodland or green burial – is a new but old kind of burial, which offers people a different way of moving on and their families and friends a different way of remembering.

- To give a more natural memorial, no headstones are allowed and a standard marker stone is used
- To let your body to return to nature as naturally as possible, natural coffins or shrouds are used and embalming is not permitted
- To allow a more participative experience, families and friends may assist with the digging, burial and planting of a shrub / bulbs

Where can I buy a plot?

Currently you can purchase plots in the consecrated triangle of land on the right at the far end of the main cemetery avenue. Whilst plots can be bought in advance we are not able to offer a choice of plot as there is a predetermined layout plan for the natural burial area.

Consecration does not make the soil more holy, but it does set the area aside as a sacred space for ever, and is the greatest protection afforded by English Law. This assures that the natural burial area will remain as it is and cannot be sold for another purpose. Since the ground is consecrated by the Church of England as a sacred space, people who are buried there can lie in the land forever, until nature runs its course. Consecrated Natural Burial really does mean that loved ones will rest in peace forever.

Is it possible to purchase a double natural burial plot?

Yes. However, we cannot offer double depth burials because of the need for the burial to be as close as possible to the surface, and to avoid the disruption to existing tree roots from digging a plot a second time. Where people would like to be buried near a family member, we offer two adjacent plots.

Is it possible to use embalming prior to the burial?

In all but the most exceptional cases, no. Embalming fluid includes significant quantities of formaldehyde, which is a carcinogen. Because we want the area to be a natural green area and a haven for wildlife we only permit embalmed bodies to be buried in the natural burial area in exceptional circumstances – for example, where the person has died abroad and been repatriated.

What kind of coffin or container can I use?

We ask that you use a coffin or container made of natural materials which will break down (biodegrade) over time. This means that MDF veneered coffins and plastic lined coffins are not permitted but alternative materials such as rattan, willow or bamboo coffins, are welcomed as well as shroud burials.

Can the family help with the burial?

Yes – many people report feeling involvement with the digging and filling in of the grave as strengthening bonds within the group, and offering more comfort. Families are welcome to assist with parts of the burial.

However, we do have to ensure that everyone is kept safe, so please speak to the Cemetery Superintendent in advance to discuss what families would like to do.

How will each burial be marked?

A marker stone will be used to mark each burial which is 9” square, made of a natural material, and engraved with the number of the plot. Families can add their own engraving to this marker stone if required.

Around 3-4 months after the burial, depending on the time of year, the marker stone will be placed slightly below ground level at the top of the plot which will then be reseeded and a range of native flowering bulbs and / or wildflowers will be planted / sown.

A small natural plaque can also be purchased which will be fixed to the memorial rail in the natural burial area.

Can I have any other memorials?

For each natural burial we will plant a shrub along the stone wall which divides the natural burial area from the rest of the cemetery. These will be to a mix of foliage and flowering shrubs to help the area thrive as a natural space. Although you can express a preference for a particular shrub we cannot guarantee that we will be able to plant that one as we need a mix.

We aim to plant trees from October through to March each year, although planting may not be possible in some conditions, for example where the ground is frozen. If you would like to attend the tree or shrub planting, please contact the Cemetery Superintendent.

For a small additional charge, you can have a commemorative slate plaque mounted on the low wooden fence at the right hand boundary of the natural burial area.

How is the area maintained over time?

The natural burial area is intended to thrive as a natural wooded space, so we will cut the grass less often in this area – typically 2 or 3 times per year. We will not use any pesticides or herbicides in this area, except to remove invasive weeds or treat diseases.

We review and will sometimes thin the shrubs every 5 years, so we cannot guarantee how long any shrub will remain in place. We will also trim and replace shrubs to keep the area tidy.

Can I decorate the grave with anything else?

You are also welcome to lay wreaths and flowers at the time of the funeral. You are requested not to use plastic flowers. Wreaths and flowers will be removed after a period of time and the grave reseeded.

However, we do not permit other memorials to be placed above ground in the woodland burial site or to be hung from trees. Please respect other mourners by observing this. If we remove items from a grave, we will keep them at the Cemetery Lodge for collection.

How much does a natural burial cost?

The cost of a natural burial is higher than a standard single burial as there is only one burial allowed in each plot so each natural burial incurs the costs of purchasing the plot and the burial itself.

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