

## Wider application

The natural burial scheme at Carlisle was the first to be introduced with the express intention of creating woodland. It has since been replicated in over 100 private and local authority sites in the UK, and many more are at the planning stage. The woodland concept is loosely defined, and schemes vary. For instance, exotic species such as Japanese cherry are sometimes planted to create spectacular spring and autumn colour, although generally the wildlife and environmental benefits of planting native species are emphasised.

## Further information

### National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry.

If you would like further information on other case studies or their application, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

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<b>United Kingdom</b>	

The Natural Death Centre provides a befriending network for those who are terminally ill at home and for those caring for them. The Centre runs an Association of Woodland and Nature Reserve Burial Grounds and advises on options for environmentally friendly funerals.

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<b>NW2 6AA</b>	

### Further reading

**Carlisle City Council (undated)**  
*Woodland Burial: A Return to Nature* Leaflet from Cemetery Office, Carlisle City Council

**Carlisle City Council (undated)**  
*Woodland Burial Feasibility Study (£20.00)* Carlisle City Council

**Natural Death Centre (undated)**  
*The New Natural Death Handbook (£11.65 inc. p&p)* The Natural Death Centre, London

*Photographs: National Urban Forestry Unit, Carlisle City Council*

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# Urban Forestry in Practice

## Woodland burial



# Woodland burial

## Introduction

Urban cemeteries and burial grounds usually occupy significant greenspace in the heart of urban areas and they often have unused land which is suitable for use as a woodland burial ground.

Planting a tree on the burial site provides a memorial and a powerful sense of continuity. The bereaved are offered a living alternative to a conventional headstone, and this approach also helps to create more urban woodlands, thus benefiting the local environment.

## Specific example

### Project name and location

**CARLISLE WOODLAND BURIALS**, Carlisle Cemetery, Richardson Street, CARLISLE, Cumbria CA2 6AL  
Grid reference NY391 545

### Project partners

- Carlisle City Council

### Project objectives

- To provide a more natural, alternative environment for the bereaved
- To reduce the on-going management costs of burial grounds
- To use the land to provide a wider range of environmental benefits

### Site description

The 6ha site is adjacent to the 40ha Carlisle Cemetery, opened in 1855. It is part of a group of fields purchased by Carlisle City Council for future burials. The land has been farmed since Victorian times and is currently leased for grazing. Prior to the enclosures, it was a part of Inglewood Forest, but none of the original forest now remains.

### Consultation

The final layout of the burial woodland was approved by the City Council in 1995, following widescale consultation with the Cumbria Wildlife Trust, the East Cumbria Countryside Project, local undertakers and interested individuals, including current cemetery users.

### Implementation

A leaflet was distributed, explaining the woodland burial concept to the public, and a fee structure was established to enable individuals to secure specific burial rights for up to 50 years, and for gravedigging, backfilling and tree planting charges.

Initially, a modest area of just under 0.2ha (25m x 66m) was fenced against livestock, and 96 double grave plots were marked out. Each plot was marked by a metal number, mounted on a concrete block just below ground level. Part of the adjacent cemetery perimeter wall was rebuilt for displaying commemorative wall plaques.

The trees (mainly oaks) have usually been planted in the presence of the bereaved family during the winter planting season following burial. The trees have been grown by a local smallholder using acorns from an old established oak tree, and this has helped to provide an appropriate sense of local distinctiveness and continuity for the bereaved.

*Woodland burials are a new concept for most people and a simple explanatory leaflet proved invaluable*



### Establishment

Most of the trees are planted as 400-600mm bare root transplants, though some containerised young seedling oak trees have also been made available for summer planting. Each tree has been fitted with a mulch mat for weed control and a plastic spiral guard to protect against rabbits. Initially it was proposed that surrounding grass be cut only twice yearly. However, the tall vegetation made grave location very difficult, so a policy of using bark mulch was eventually adopted for the whole burial area. This proved visually attractive, whilst helping to encourage rapid tree growth and it also reduced the potential for vole damage. It also allowed for snowdrops, native daffodils and bluebells to flourish: a feature which is proving extremely popular with plot owners.

*Groups of young trees combine to form a significant living memorial woodland*



### Results

- Survival rate of the trees is over 95%, with average growth so far exceeding 300mm each year.
- The demand for woodland burials and advance purchase of plots exceeded all expectations, and by the fourth year, 35% of burials at the Carlisle Cemetery (65 out of an annual total of 200) were in the woodland, rather than in the more conventional open area. Additional graves were marked out during 1999, to provide a total of 300 woodland burial plots.



*Plywood, wicker basket and cardboard coffins are all available as appropriately biodegradable options for woodland burials*

- The woodland has developed great spiritual significance and this is increasingly reflected within the funeral services. The theme *A Return to Nature* is used to promote the concept and there is increasing public interest in this, and also in the opportunity to avoid the polluting effects of cremation. The principle extends to the choice of cardboard or wicker caskets, instead of timber, chipboard or plastic coffins. Avoiding the need for a permanent headstone also reduces funeral costs.

### Management

To provide access to graves for the second burial, enough space has been left to allow mini excavators to travel between rows of graves. A management plan for the woodland burial site is being written. No chemical weed control is now used and this has proved to be a popular policy.

In addition to the locally grown memorial oaks, small groves of Scots pine have been planted, as part of a strategy to attract red squirrels. The woodland is being integrated into a wider environmental policy for the adjacent cemetery, which includes nature conservation zones, bole carvings, lichen protection and guided walks. The cemetery was voted UK *Cemetery of the Year* in 1998 and is highly commended by the Natural Death Centre.