

A GUIDE TO

NATURAL BURIAL

A GREENER WAY TO SAY GOODBYE



Natural Burial
ALLIANCE

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WHAT IS NATURAL BURIAL?



Natural burial is an eco-friendly, peaceful and sustainable way to lay to rest those who have died. It is a rapidly growing choice worldwide as we become more environmentally conscious, and there are now close to 300 natural burial grounds across the UK.

Natural burial involves burying the body in a biodegradable coffin or shroud, without any type of chemical preservation process such as embalming. It is the perfect choice for those who wish to have minimal environmental impact when they die and be laid to rest in beautiful, natural surroundings.

There are many benefits and choices available for those exploring this option, so in this guide we hope to answer your questions and help you decide if a natural burial is right for you or your loved one.

“Natural burial was the ‘natural’ choice for my mum when she passed away. She cared deeply about the environment during her life, so why should her death be any different?”

STACEY

WHY CHOOSE A NATURAL BURIAL?

There are many benefits of natural burial, both from an environmental and a personal perspective.

Minimal carbon emissions

A 2023 PlanetMark report found that a natural burial releases 0kg of CO₂ into the air at time of burial, with minimal release after 10 years and no trace after 100 years. This compares with cremation which can release up to 126kg of CO₂, and traditional burial which releases 4.1kg and leaves traces in air, land and water after 100 years.



Meaningful funerals

Natural burial is not only kinder to the planet, it can also be kinder to the grieving process. Most natural burial grounds offer complete freedom and flexibility when it comes to the funeral service. Many choose to hold a ceremony by the graveside led by a celebrant, minister, or a family member or friend. Others choose to hold a celebration of life ceremony elsewhere, either before or after a small gathering by the graveside. Some burial grounds offer indoor or covered options for ceremonies in case of bad weather. There are generally no time constraints, and they welcome people of all faiths and none.

Peaceful surroundings

Natural burial grounds have a completely different look and feel to traditional graveyards. Most who choose this option love the idea that they can be laid to rest in peaceful, natural surroundings, where new life will continue to flourish. They are also beautiful places for friends and families to visit for years to come, remembering their loved one and enjoying the environment at their leisure.

"I wandered round just as if I were on a country walk. I sat, looked round at the wild flowers and the butterflies. And I didn't want to go home."

JILL

RULES OF NATURAL BURIAL



Each natural burial ground will have its own regulations and practices, but the golden rule applied to all is that everything buried or left at the graveside must be biodegradable.

This means no harmful substances on the body (from embalming), and coffins/urns made only from natural materials.

Headstones are not permitted, but many sites offer the option to leave wooden markers or even to plant a tree or erect a bench. Flowers can be left at gravesides provided they are not wrapped in plastic, foam or any other non-biodegradable materials.

These rules allow burial sites to remain fully natural, encouraging biodiversity and providing safe habitats for plants and wildlife.

“One of the best things about our local burial ground is how completely natural it is. I feel totally at peace and at one with nature when visiting the place I laid my wife to rest.”

MARTIN

CHOOSING A BURIAL GROUND

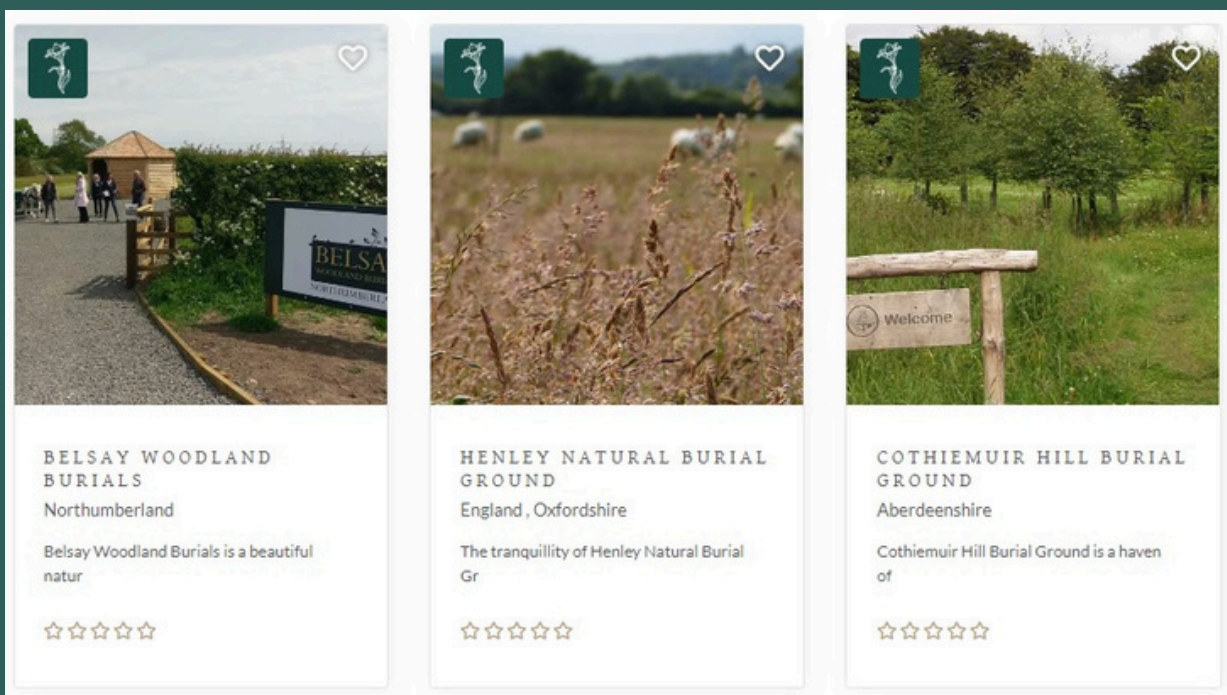
Every natural burial ground is unique, but all follow the same environmental ethos and are guided by recommendations for operators set out by the Ministry of Justice. They may be operated by local authorities, private owners, charitable trusts, or the Church of England.

In terms of the landscape, you will find a mixture of woodlands, fields and meadows, with one of the key advantages of natural burial being the opportunity to conserve land by creating new wild spaces.

FINDING A LOCAL BURIAL GROUND

You can find a list of the natural burial grounds registered with the Association of Natural Burial Grounds via the Natural Death Centre website: naturaldeath.org.uk.

You can also find a directory of natural burial grounds on the Natural Burial Alliance website: naturalburialalliance.co.uk. Although bear in mind that neither are exhaustive lists as there are close to 300 sites across the UK.



ARRANGING THE FUNERAL

If you're arranging a funeral, the ceremony itself may be one of your key considerations. This service is usually a crucial part of the grieving process, often incorporating meaningful elements such as eulogies, music, readings and words of committal.

Even if the person who has died requested a "no fuss" funeral, it is important for those mourning them to say goodbye in a meaningful way. This does not need to be complicated or expensive.



Natural burial grounds will usually welcome both large and small groups for whichever style of funeral is requested. It could be a short and simple committal ceremony. It could be joyful celebration of life, followed by the burial itself. It might be a family-only burial, followed by a larger ceremony and gathering elsewhere. The choice is yours.

We know it can be stressful planning a funeral with so many decisions to make. Adding in eco considerations can make things even more overwhelming, but there are plenty of people who can help ease the strain, so ensure that you take advice from trusted sources.

CHOOSING YOUR SUPPLIERS

You will likely need to work with a range of suppliers when arranging a funeral, all of whom can be coordinated by a funeral director if you wish. If you are planning an eco-friendly funeral, key considerations include:

- the burial ground
- the coffin or shroud (made from natural materials)
- the flowers (locally-grown, plastic free)
- the ceremony officiant (celebrant, minister or family member/friend)

All of these suppliers should be able to advise you on the most eco-friendly choices to make, if this is something you tell them is important to you.

CHOOSING A COFFIN

For a natural burial you will need to choose a fully biodegradable coffin or shroud. But within this category there is a variety of materials and designs available to suit a wide range of styles and budgets. Here are just a few examples.



Wicker coffins are available in a variety of styles and materials. Willow is often used as it's known for its positive environmental benefits. Willow is a perfect material for a natural burial and looks beautiful when woven into an intricately designed coffin. Other materials used include bamboo, pandanus, seagrass and banana leaf.



Cardboard coffins can be personalised and designed however you wish. Some cardboard coffins come pre-designed with a range of options to choose from. There is also the option to buy a plain cardboard coffin and decorate it yourself with pictures and messages, either ahead of the funeral or on the day itself.



Solid wood coffins remain the most traditional choice, but for a natural burial a solid wood coffin would need to be finished in untreated wood (i.e. unvarnished) and free from any plastics, screws, staples or chemical glues. Look for coffins made from environmentally sustainable wood from responsibly managed forests.



Pure wool coffins are a popular choice for those wanting a softer feel. Crafted around a wooden frame, these coffins are sturdy but with a more curved, natural look. Wool Coffins are sustainable and biodegradable, so ideal for a natural burial. Again, wool coffins come in a variety of styles, colours and sizes.



Material shrouds have been used for centuries but are definitely making a comeback. Shrouds are simple coverings for the body made from materials such as wool, cotton, hemp or flax. These are completely biodegradable, so perfect for those who would prefer an eco-friendly alternative to a coffin.

ECO COFFIN SUPPLIERS

There are a great many manufacturers and suppliers who produce eco-friendly, biodegradable coffins and shrouds. As a first step, speak to staff at your natural burial ground or funeral directors to ask for their recommendations within your budget. You can also do your own research online via the Natural Burial Alliance website.

Remember, a coffin or shroud made locally is usually the most environmentally friendly option.

PLANNING AHEAD

Some people like to plan ahead by choosing a burial ground and perhaps even reserving a plot ahead of time. This is completely your choice. But either way, it's important to clearly communicate your wishes (and your reasons for them) to those closest to you.



1

Find some burial grounds near you or in a place that is special to you, and give them a call to arrange a visit. The staff will be able to show you around and answer any questions you have. You can search burial grounds across the UK on the Natural Burial Alliance website.



2

If you find a burial ground you like and decide it's the right choice for you, you may have the option to reserve a plot in advance. This guarantees your place and can provide reassurance to loved ones when the time comes to know this is taken care of.



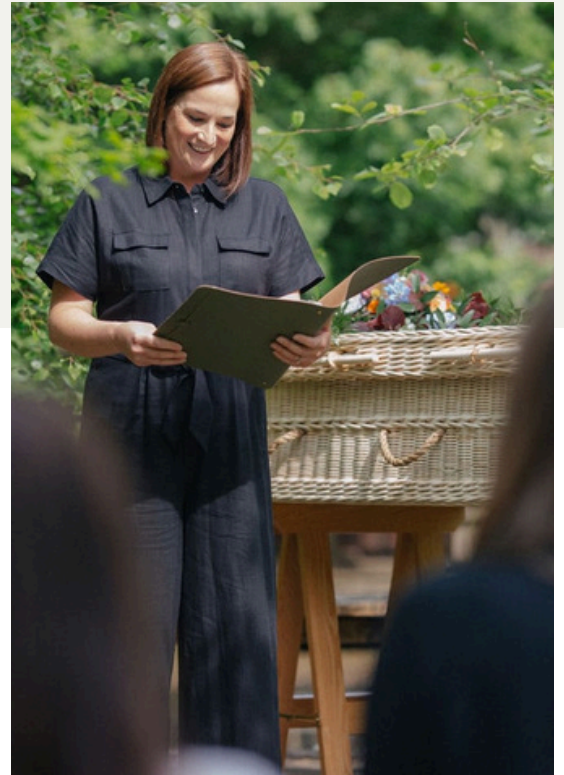
3

Speak to those closest to you about your wishes. Ensure that whoever is likely to be planning your funeral knows about any arrangements you have made and where they can find any important documents. You may also like to take them to visit the burial ground you have chosen.

THE NATURAL BURIAL ALLIANCE

The Natural Burial Alliance is an alliance of natural burial and green funeral professionals, united in the common purpose of promoting greener funeral practices in the UK.

Our website is the perfect place to find out more about natural burial to help you decide if it's the right choice for you. You can also find natural burial grounds and green funeral suppliers near you via our directory.



Our membership scheme focuses on education, continuing professional development, raising awareness of natural burial and encouraging greener funeral practices across the board. Membership of the Alliance is open to both individuals and organisations – primarily those who operate natural burial grounds and those who supply goods or services to the funeral profession.

We hope this guide has given a useful introduction to natural burial and its many benefits. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with our team who would be happy to help.

VISIT THE WEBSITE
TO FIND OUT MORE

Natural Burial Alliance



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naturalburialalliance.co.uk



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