



MASTERPLAN **experience plan**  
**BROOKWOOD CEMETERY**

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February 2020



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This Experience Plan prepared by Barker Langham supports the wider Masterplan for Brookwood cemetery developed by a team led by Allies and Morrison comprising:

Allies and Morrison  
Barker Langham  
Bradley-Hole Schoeniach Landscape  
Dr Roger Bowdler

This Experience Plan should be read with the two other documents setting out the proposals - the Masterplan and the Outline Business Plan.

**1**

# **INTRODUCTION**

# 1.1 Brookwood Cemetery

## 165 years of history

### Local, national, and global significance

Opened in November 1854 having been established by special Act of Parliament in 1852 and built by the London Necropolis & National Mausoleum Company, Brookwood Cemetery is the largest cemetery in Britain, and was at the time of its founding the largest in the world. Created to answer the need for additional burial space for overcrowded London cemeteries in the mid-19th century, today it represents a remarkable survival of a landscaped parkland cemetery.

Listed as Grade 1 by English Heritage, Brookwood and its history are of outstanding cultural and historical significance. The thousands of funerary monuments at the site (many of which are separately listed) constitute a formidable and extraordinarily diverse record of the varying burial traditions of a range of different communities, classes, cultures and faith groups as these have evolved across the past century and a half.

From a military perspective, the site incorporates both the main US First World War cemetery in Britain (administered by the American Battle

Monuments Commission), and the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery in the UK. It is also the hub of a busy calendar of commemorations linked to various nations' war efforts, with ties to nearby contemporary military communities: and is a place where officers in training come to learn about the realities of death before engaging in active combat.

In December 1914 the cemetery became the site of the first burial of an Indian Muslim soldier in this country; and, more broadly, as the oldest Muslim burial ground in the country dating to 1884, and thought to be the final resting place of a direct English descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, the cemetery remains an important part of the cultural landscape of British Islamic society today. It is also an expression of a powerful global interfaith movement (embodied in the story of Gottlieb Leitner) that is a force for peace in a world torn by conflict.

Environmentally, the cemetery's distinctive Surrey Heathland setting is protected by SSSI, Special Area of Conservation, BAP Priority Habitats and Green Belt designations; meanwhile its landscape

is recognised as a climactic example of Victorian garden cemetery design.

The London Necropolis Railway, which linked Brookwood with Waterloo station in London, is unique in British history. Though it was closed in 1941, with its London terminus having incurred damage in the blitz, the path of the former railway line can still be traced in the cemetery's contemporary landscape, and the fact of its former existence speaks powerfully both to the complex relationship between living human societies and their dead, and to an increasingly global history of industrialisation, urbanisation, and social atomisation in modernity.

'As a site of extreme importance [...] as a cultural, historical, and architectural record [...] the site has the potential to become a World Heritage Site.'

Brenda Wilson, Home Office report on the significance of Brookwood Cemetery

# A boundless future

## Restoration and renewal

Having been in private ownership since its foundation, and having suffered significant dilapidation from the 1970s onwards, Brookwood Cemetery was acquired by Woking Borough Council in 2014.

In the five years since that acquisition, the Council's efforts have, of necessity, been centred on the completion of emergency conservation and maintenance works, seeking to repair the damage caused variously by the unchecked growth of rhododendron and other aggressive plant species, by the significant failure of the cemetery's drainage systems (a cause of serious flooding which imperils both graves and mausoleums), and by the dumping of waste at various points across the site.

Today, with the site's management significantly improved, the Council is able to look forward to the next ten years, and to consider how Brookwood might be further restored, and re-established and expanded as a public amenity.



# 1.2 Brief

## Developing a sustainable visitor experience at Brookwood Cemetery

In the wider context of Brookwood's rehabilitation, Allies & Morrison (A&M), working together with Barker Langham, Bradley-Hole Schoenaich Landscape (BHSLA), and funerary heritage expert Dr Roger Bowdler, were commissioned to produce a Masterplan for Brookwood Cemetery to guide its development over the period of the next 10 – 20 years.

Within the overall Masterplan are considered manifold aspects of Brookwood's future, ranging from the conservation and rehabilitation of the cemetery's historic landscape, to the expansion of the existing funerary business, and the creation of new visitor facilities and interpretation on site.

As a supporting document to the Masterplan, this Experience Plan presents detailed research and recommendations relating in particular to the shaping of an enhanced visitor offer at Brookwood.

Developed by Barker Langham in tandem with the accompanying Business Plan, and hence grounded in a concern to ensure the financial viability and sustainability of all proposed developments, the

Experience Plan addresses the following broad areas of concern highlighted in the overarching project brief:

### Visitor Facilities

- In particular, the question of whether to build a visitor centre at Brookwood, as well as what purpose any such space or alternative spaces should serve.

### Audiences

- Considering how Brookwood can be opened up to attract and retain a wider range of audiences, whilst continuing to serve existing communities. Identifying opportunities to cement Brookwood as a pivotal site within broader attempts to promote Woking and its surrounding area as a visitor destination

### Interpretation

- Distilling key interpretative themes and messages, and proposing the ways in which these may be best communicated to audiences.

### Programming

- Making recommendations as to the kinds of cultural and/or community activities and programming Brookwood can support, that will be in keeping with its character, and that will help both to attract new audiences to the site and serve the existing community.

### Operations

- Providing for all the above by making recommendations on the future management and staffing of the site. Here we also looked closely at how Brookwood could develop its network of volunteers.

# 1.3 Vision

## A model future cemetery

### Increased profile

Central to our vision for Brookwood is enhanced recognition of the cemetery in keeping with its historic importance.

Currently something of a hidden gem, there is scope for greater involvement of surrounding communities in appreciating and using the cemetery. Brookwood will come to be acknowledged as a site of regional, national, and even international significance by audiences across the South East, in London, and further afield.

Established in the public imagination as a key cultural and historical landmark, Brookwood will play a vital role in putting Woking on the map, and contributing to the growth of West Surrey as a visitor destination.

### Increased usage

As Brookwood's profile grows, this will drive increased usage of the cemetery in three distinct areas.

Firstly, local residents will feel inspired to explore the cemetery's grounds and to reclaim the site as part of their own cultural landscape. Facilities designed to meet local needs will establish the cemetery as a valued public amenity.

Secondly, awareness of Brookwood's significance, allied to a growing reputation for high quality programming, will bring a steady stream of visitors to the site from across South East England. The Cemetery will be established as a leading visitor destination in Surrey.

Finally, Brookwood's resurgence will lay a strong foundation for its funerary business to grow into the latter half of this century. Local residents and visitors who have enjoyed and made memories at the cemetery will return to be laid to rest there.

### Enhanced environment

As Brookwood draws in new audiences, it will also generate increased revenue, supporting the enhanced upkeep and management of its grounds, building on the platform of works currently being undertaken.

Rising in the public's affections, the cemetery will become the centre of a busy community of volunteers helping to keep it looking its best.

Finally, on a regional, national, and global level, Brookwood will play a leading part in establishing green funerary practices, helping to steer the industry onto a more environmentally sustainable path, and serving as a model for cemetery development as we move deeper into the twenty-first century.

# 1.4 The Plan

## About this document

### Who is the plan for

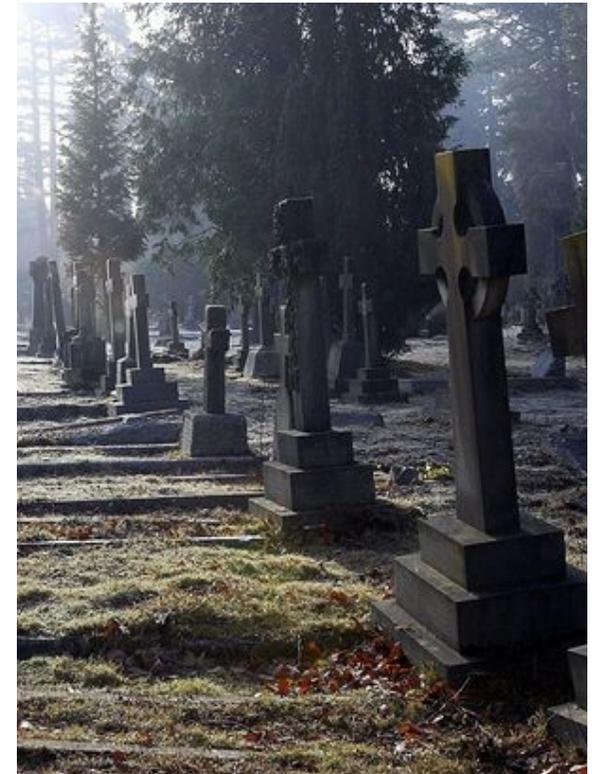
The Experience Plan is designed to serve a variety of purposes:

- For the cemetery’s managerial team and members of Woking Borough Council, the document is intended to help guide decision-making about the shape of Brookwood’s future. In conjunction with the accompanying Business Plan, which sets out detailed costing’s for each of the developments proposed, it summarises recommendations regarding the range of experiences and activities to be provided for current and future site users
- For staff, including any hires made to support Brookwood’s development in the future (prospectively, curatorial staff, a programming and volunteers officer, and an artist-in-residence), the plan can serve as a reference, guiding and supporting discussions around the creation of new programming and interpretative content, and signposting to a range of relevant networks, events, and other resources.

- Finally, the plan, or the relevant sections of it, may usefully be shared with any number of future partners, whom the cemetery’s management identify as being suited to delivering on-site programming, or to collaborating in the production of exhibitions and other interpretative materials.

Importantly, the plan should be treated as a living document. Incorporating a clear set of planning principles and a series of recommended interpretative themes, it establishes both an open framework and a consistent reference point, on the basis of which new interpretative content and relevant programming may be developed.

Given Brookwood’s vastness, however, as well as the depth and breadth of the histories it represents, and the sheer range of narratives associated with the more than 250,000 people buried at the site, we would recommend the plan be taken always as a point of departure, rather than a closed set of rules.



# Five Steps

## Incremental development

Mirroring the logic set out in the Masterplan, this document sets out five approximate phases for the development and elaboration of a new visitor experience at Brookwood.

Through each phase of development proposed, we anticipate Brookwood would work incrementally to expand its offer, enrich and diversify its storytelling, supplement its programming, and thereby attract and retain new audiences.

Summarised opposite to give context to what follows, the first four phases are returned to and presented in greater detail in the final chapter of the plan, 'Phasing', in light of the focused discussions of interpretative themes, media, programming, and audiences provided in the intervening chapters.

The last phase 'Museum' would need to be further developed and tested. At present it is an evolution of the direction set out in the masterplan.

## Step 1: Ongoing Tasks

- No significant change to baseline operations
- Visitor experience remains largely as at present, with improved waymarking and signposting to ABMC and CWGC.
- Gradual improvements to the landscape re-establish Brookwood as a high quality, cared for space

## Step 2: Initial Moves

- Superintendent's House is converted to café with limited, high level interpretation
- Increased tours and programming
- New hires to coordinate and recruit volunteers, and develop interpretation (pop-up exhibitions, etc.) with community.
- Visitor experience: a busier, more lively setting; an evolving sense of purpose; a warmer welcome and clearer orientation

### Step 3: Long Term Additions

- The creation of a new visitor centre with higher spec permanent exhibition enables richer and more diverse storytelling
- Higher capacity and higher profile programming
- A new crematorium on-site would bring with it higher volumes of visitors
- Visitor experience: local communities proud of the development, a sense of ownership, an increasing sense of history and connectedness.

### Step4: Expanded Programme

- Visitor centre expanded to house thematic temporary exhibitions
- High quality summer programming with site-specific outdoor cinema and music
- Visitor experience: multiple opportunities and different kinds of experiences available to visitors. An atmosphere of reverent celebration evoking Victorian mourning culture. Communities fully engaged in the developing content and sustaining site. Reputation for curious and thoughtful programming

### Step 5: Museum

- The concept would be to create a campus of spaces at Brookwood, with space as a point of departure for tours, a meeting point, a gateway. It will also be a place of debate and exploration of life and death, based on the stories and significance of Brookwood Cemetery – reverent but able to communicate big issues.

2

**APPROACH**

# 2.1 Brookwood Cemetery

## Towards an Experience Plan

### 8 Principles

In developing an Experience Plan for Brookwood Cemetery we have been guided by an appreciation of the unique spatial and environmental challenges the site presents, of the great emotional and memorial significance it holds as a burial place for existing community members, and of Woking Borough Council's aspirations for the cemetery's further development.

Added to this, we have also drawn upon our own critical understanding of both logistical and commercial aspects of designing a visitor experience, and of the opportunities heritage projects offer to re-shape and contribute positively to society as a whole.

Working on this basis, we have arrived at a set of eight principles that underpin our plan for the future of Brookwood Cemetery. Summarised opposite, these are explored in further depth below.



## 8 principles

### 1. Respectful

First and foremost among our principles is the recognition that Brookwood Cemetery is a working cemetery.

Any additions to the site, either materially to the built environment or in terms of new cultural programming, must respect that fundamental function, neither impinging on day-to-day operations, nor disturbing the atmosphere of peaceful remembrance characteristic of the grounds.

### 2. Flexible

In line with the overall logic that underpins the Masterplan, and reflecting the need for Brookwood to grow sustainably within relatively narrow financial constraints, the Experience Plan is designed to allow flexible, incremental development.

The individual elements of our plan are designed to be able to be iteratively tested and scaled prior to full implementation. For the most part, these components can also be added as discrete, cost-neutral bolt-ons to an emerging offer, rather than depending on large-scale, up-front infrastructure spending.

### 3. Integrated

While Brookwood Cemetery and the adjoining ABM and CWGC military cemeteries are formally distinct from one another and separately managed, it is important to note that visitors tend to approach the estate largely as an undivided whole.

As such, any offer to visitors must be an integrated one, encompassing all three parts of the site. Ideally, the integration of a visitor offer would extend to the coordination of interpretation materials, tours, maps, marketing and events programming.

### 4. Accessible

Brookwood's assets are dispersed across a vast space; one which may be difficult for newcomers to navigate, and daunting to visitors with limited mobility.

Responding to this challenge, in conjunction with A&M and BHSLA, a particular focus of our planning has been to create both legible routes for visitors to follow, and tangible centres around which they may gather.

These considerations also bear on the kinds of interpretation we have proposed, since we have to assume that any given group of visitors would struggle to cover the whole of the cemetery's territory in a single visit.

### 5. Active

Nestled between a series of relatively small villages, and otherwise surrounded by open countryside, Brookwood Cemetery has only a very limited natural audience within walking distance. We feel that its success as a cultural destination therefore hinges on attracting larger numbers of visitors from further afield.

Considering this problem raises the further issue of competition. For residents of Surrey, London, and the wider South East there is no shortage of alternative attractions offering visitors the opportunity for an interesting walk and a slice of cake.

To stand out from the crowd, and to create regular opportunities to appeal to diverse visitor groups, we therefore suggest Brookwood should aim to create an active programme of events, designed to cultivate loyalty and promote frequent repeat visits.

## 6. Collaborative

Building from this last principle, we also recognise that, at least in the first five to ten years of its development, financial constraints will make it both necessary and desirable for Brookwood to operate with only a limited core staff.

As such, it will be essential for the cemetery team to work in partnership both with existing communities on-site, and with an expanded network of cultural and educational institutions, artists, community groups and so on.

## 7. True to the Past

In proposing the development of a rich and varied programme of events, we also aim to show how these could be developed and delivered by third parties, with Brookwood more a host for and convenor of programming, than a direct producer or designer of events and content.

As well as respecting Brookwood's primary function as a cemetery, we also recognise the value of the history that it represents and which lives through it. In the course of our consultation with community stakeholders, it was clear that those closest to the

cemetery feared that substantial redevelopment would risk the site becoming something of the order of a generic country park, effacing the its singular character and significance.

Here, while we are confident that the scale of Brookwood's grounds is such as to allow modest additions to programming without disturbing the overall character of the site, nevertheless our resolve is to ensure that any such changes are developed in dialogue with Brookwood's past, and as a continuation of the traditions and memories it embodies.

The experience of visiting Brookwood must and will remain that of visiting a cemetery first and foremost.

## 8. Alert to the Future

In that same spirit of dialogue with the past, our final planning principle is drawn from Brookwood's history as an institution profoundly concerned to address challenges posed by the future.

Whether in terms of its founding aim of mitigating urban population growth, its historic role in the

promotion of green burials, or the welcome it provided to Muslim communities who at first struggled to find appropriate burial sites in the UK, Brookwood has, across the past 165 years, exhibited a consistent farsightedness, and a willingness to innovate to meet the demands of the future.

Building on this legacy, our intention is that new programming and interpretation at the cemetery will be responsive to, and explicitly engage with, relevant social, cultural, and environmental issues in the present, with a view to shaping the future.

**3**

**AUDIENCES**

# 3.1 Overview

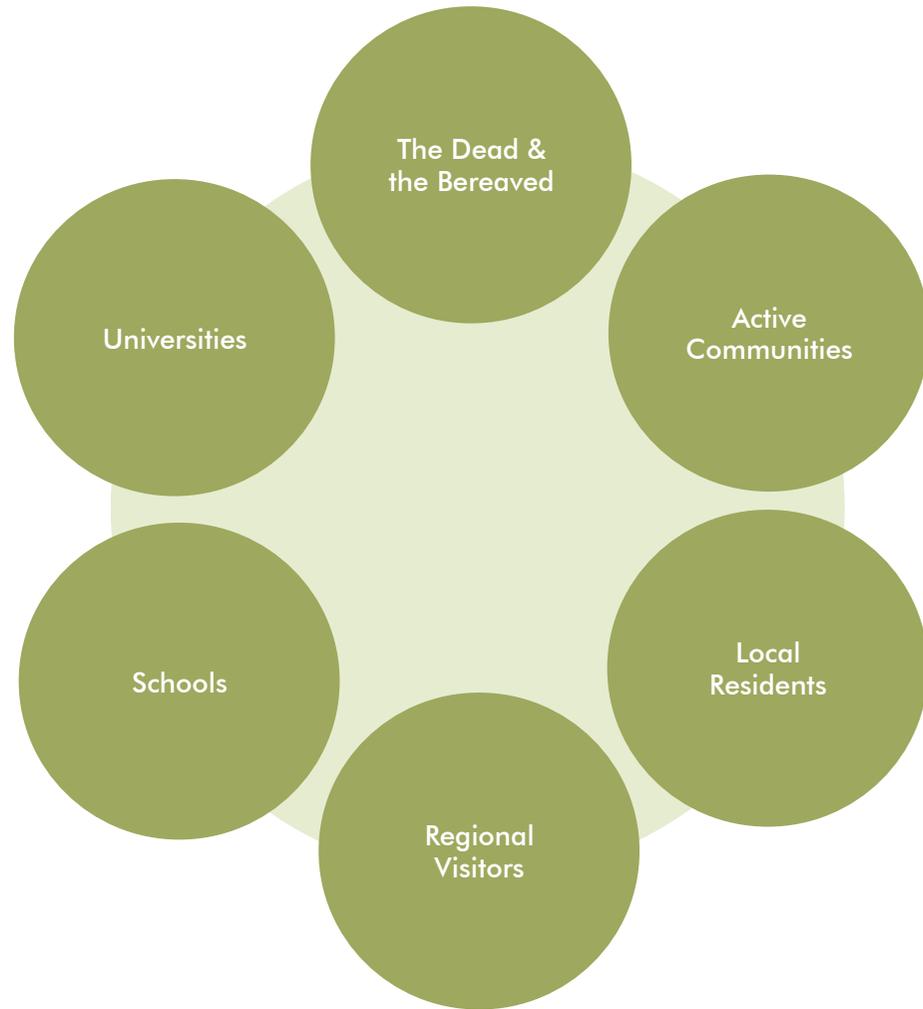
## Managed Growth

### Curiosity, Comprehension, Loyalty

Central to plans for the redevelopment of Brookwood Cemetery is the ambition to expand and diversify its community and broader audience.

While detailed audience projections are provided in the Business Plan, here we consider a series of key current and potential audiences and user groups in turn from the perspective of their experience and understanding of Brookwood, asking in each case what motivations for, and barriers to, using and visiting the cemetery they may feel and face.

These considerations underpin our proposals in subsequent chapters, as we work towards shaping an experience which will 1) pique audiences' curiosity about Brookwood; 2) communicate the site's significance and relevance to them, allowing them to make the decision to engage with it; and 3) encourage the respective audiences and user groups to form lasting and satisfying relationships with the cemetery.



## 3.2 Considering Audiences

### The Dead & the Bereaved

#### The number 1 priority

With regional growth, an ageing population, the redevelopment of Woking drawing new communities to the area, and a trend for increasing social atomisation (as people live, work and die ever more frequently away from their families and the towns and villages of their birth) there is every reason to expect that demand for burials and cremations at Brookwood should rise over the next decades.

At the same time, increasing choice in the funerary market (in particular for many Muslim communities who became rooted at Brookwood in a period when they had few other options locally), poses a significant threat to the cemetery's core business.

In the course of reviewing Brookwood's existing funerary offer and consulting with local community members, staff and other stakeholders through the masterplanning process, we identified four main opportunities to cement and grow this vitally important user group.

#### Trust

Numerous of our community consultees spoke in hushed tones and pained voices when reflecting on the dilapidation that was allowed to take place at Brookwood through the last decades of the twentieth century.

Of course, the decision to entrust the care of one's dead to a particular institution is not one taken likely, and prior to Woking Council's acquisition of the site, the cemetery suffered significant reputational damage.

Clearly, Brookwood's management is aware of this challenge. On-going efforts to rehabilitate the grounds and ensure their smart and well-maintained appearance are of great value.

This effort needs to be matched with proactive marketing, firstly to ensure that local undertakers are aware of the change of management, and secondly to spread good news: for example, Brookwood's receipt of several industry awards over the past two years.

#### Choice

The provision of choice is a hallmark of Brookwood's history. Since its founding, the Cemetery has offered its customers great freedom both in the selection of plots and the orientation of graves, and it has done so whilst selling its services at a wide range of price points.

This flexibility, as well as the beauty and diversity of its grounds should be strong selling points for the cemetery; however customers' freedom to choose is not always clearly communicated. At a time when demand for green burials is growing nationwide, Brookwood's sales of green plots have been markedly sluggish. We suspect one factor in this is that, as currently marketed, the green burial offer appears constrained to Gillian's Meadow.

Making a bigger commitment to marketing green burials, emphasising the availability of woodland for such burials, and perhaps embracing new forms of environmentally friendly disposal (see 4.2) could help Brookwood to expand in this market.

## London: Build on Heritage

With London's inner-city cemeteries again becoming crowded, and with a nationwide interest in varying expressions of local and community heritage become ever more pronounced in the twenty-first century, we consider London a prime market in which Brookwood can expand its customer base for funerary services.

Through the recent re-design of its website, the cemetery has given new prominence to its historic links with London. Nevertheless, these could still be foregrounded further.

Connecting with London-based undertakers and funeral directors in order to expand the marketing of Brookwood Cemetery to London audiences should be a key part of a future communications strategy.

Emphasising and diversifying opportunities for green burials and other emerging environmentally friendly forms of disposal, can play an important part in appealing to typically highly progressive (and currently under-served) urban audiences.

## Facilities

The acknowledgement of existing limitations in the provision of community facilities at Brookwood is a key driver for the site's on-going re-development.

A lack of toilets in the north part of the cemetery is soon to be addressed and will help to make the site more accommodating to visitors and funeral-goers alike.

Our discussions with on-site community leaders have also revealed a strong appetite for the provision of other amenities – notably a café and a space for holding wakes, receptions and other events.

Contrasting Brookwood's offer to visitors and other site users with that of the nearby Clandon Wood natural burial ground (pictured opposite) is instructive. Creating a simple, elegant space for mourners to congregate upon the conclusion of funeral services would help to cement the cemetery's improving reputation in the funerary trade.



Top: Tea served at Clandon Wood natural burial ground

Bottom: The reception space at Clandon Wood.

## Active Communities

### **Pride, dedication, energy**

In meeting with stakeholders at Brookwood we encountered no shortage of evidence of the great pride and affection local communities feel for the cemetery, and of the energy they put into maintaining particular plots and researching and communicating its history.

Looking to the future, it is essential that the development process works to harness that energy, and that communities feel supported to have their say in the interpretation of the cemetery's past, present and future.

A particular challenge in this regard concerns what we perceive to be a high degree of fragmentation between different user groups: a natural product in part of the sheer number of different national, religious and ethnic communities active at Brookwood, and, further, of the site's multiple ownership (notably the separate management of the CWGC and ABMC plots).

We are aware that, in recent years, with Woking Borough Council's acquisition of the cemetery and the creation of the new management team, community cohesion is rapidly improving, and that stakeholders feel increasingly confident in knowing who to contact with concerns, ideas and proposals.

With their dedication to the preservation and appreciation of the site, members of the Brookwood Cemetery Society (BCS), too, play a key role in organising and delivering tours, and championing the cemetery's history.

Nevertheless, in terms of the site's interpretation, there are clear gains to be made from promoting increased collaboration between different groups.

The creation of a volunteer coordinator and / or community artist post would, for instance, help to bring together diverse community members working in relative isolation on similar projects (e.g. we note the overlap between academic Ole Jensen's

enquiry into Brookwood's multicultural heritage, and the research conducted through the Everyday Muslim project – two strands of work that could be productively combined; and two networks that could be fused to the benefit and, no doubt, enjoyment of each).

Those posts would also be valuable in supporting less confident or self-starting community members to explore and share relevant histories, ensuring that interpretation is more representative of the vast array of cultural groups collected on-site.

And they would enable the recruitment of new volunteers in a variety of contexts. Here, for example, there are significant opportunities to found a cross-community volunteer gardening group, to grow membership of the BCS, and to work in partnership with universities to attract students with relevant subject specialisms to commit time to the cemetery.

## Local Residents

### **Growing appreciation**

Based on conversations with community members living in Brookwood for many decades, we understand that in the past few years in particular, following a long period of neglect, local residents have shown a growing interest in visiting the cemetery and exploring its grounds.

This is to be welcomed, nevertheless in comparison with other cemeteries of similar vintage and importance, Brookwood remains under-visited, and its historical significance appears under-appreciated by residents in nearby villages and Woking.

Several barriers to engaging with the cemetery underpin this problem. First, again in contrast to other Victorian cemeteries typically located in urban centres, Brookwood has a small natural catchment and minimal passing pedestrian traffic. Among the initial steps proposed in the Masterplan, repurposing the Superintendent's Lodge as a café visible from Cemetery Pales should help to attract passing road traffic and underscore the point that the Cemetery is open to visitors

Second, links between the cemetery and the town of Woking can be made clearer. The current development of a heritage trail linking Woking Mosque with the historical Muslim burial ground is a good example of the kind of initiative that will help to articulate Brookwood's ties to the town, and help local residents understand the cemetery as a part of their own heritage.

Third, there is the question of safety. Through our stakeholder consultation work, we met several individuals who highlighted their concerns about walking through the cemetery unaccompanied: a history of petty crime, vandalism, and more serious assaults on site (even if this has become exaggerated in the popular imagination) must be addressed.

In this regard, perhaps the best way of making visitors feel safe in the cemetery grounds is to demonstrate that it is in active use. Increasing the frequency of tours, and redoubling efforts to publicise those events (along with other programming) will help to make Brookwood feel more lived in.

Marketing efforts should be addressed to as wide a range of communities as possible. While present communications are (we understand) channelled primarily through the cemetery's website (prioritising audiences that already have Brookwood on their minds), taking simple steps like leaving pamphlets with local pubs, cafés, houses, shops, schools etc. will help to reach the uninitiated.

By promoting greater engagement with the cemetery, these measures should in turn eventually help to deter less savoury elements from making their own uses of the site.

## Regional Visitors

### Cutting through the noise

Surrey is enjoying a renaissance of interest in its cultural sites, and the county is a great area for Victorian heritage in particular. In looking to attract visitors from outside of Woking and its immediate surrounds, Brookwood Cemetery can, on one hand, capitalise on being part of Surrey's cultural offer. In time, with an excellent programme of conservation and interpretation, it will be able to present itself as part of a circuit of cultural sites.

On the other hand, however, in looking to attract these visitors, the cemetery currently faces stiff competition. While there is no comparable historic institution in Surrey to rival Brookwood, there are nevertheless an abundance of heritage sites and beautifully landscaped gardens from which potential visitors can choose, many of which have a more obvious appeal to groups looking for a pleasant spot to enjoy a Sunday stroll and slice of cake.

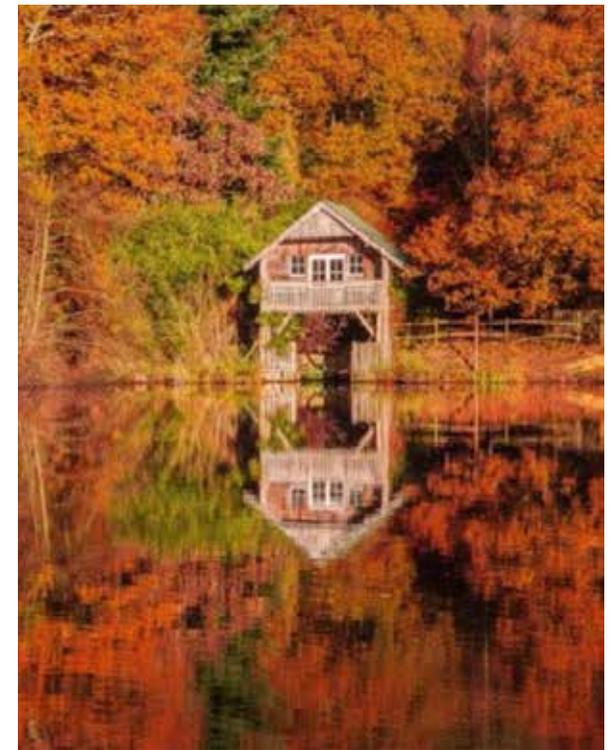
Looking further afield to London, meanwhile, while we are confident that a visit to the city's necropolis at Brookwood will appeal to inquisitive day-trippers, it is also clear that with the 'Magnificent Seven' in easier reach, Brookwood does not have the

market to itself. The relatively high cost of travelling from Waterloo to Brookwood by train (at the time of writing, an off-peak return costs £14.40) also represents a possible barrier, and may make staying within city bounds a more appealing option.

In order to contend with these twin challenges, we propose that the cemetery should look both to maximise the diversity of its offer, and to create frequent opportunities to market to new audiences.

A rich array of programming incorporating talks, walks, workshops, and other events will help to build a buzz around the cemetery and create new reasons for diverse members of the public to make their first visit. Finding, upon their arrival, a site of both great size and beauty, many will commit to visiting again.

For London audiences, producing high quality temporary exhibitions on a range of themes (see Chapter 4), will set Brookwood apart from other cemeteries. Marketing specifically to museum and arts audiences via sites like Londonist will help to attract visitors perhaps less likely to leave the capital for a walk alone.



Unquestionably beautiful in its own right, Brookwood Cemetery must nevertheless compete for visitors with many other spectacular sites, including the nearby Winkworth Arboretum, pictured above.

# Schools

## An unparalleled learning resource

Brookwood Cemetery can derive numerous benefits from working to develop lasting relationships with local and regional schools, and establishing the site as a regular choice for educational visits. With large groups of children arriving for class trips, the potential to connect subsequently with their families and encourage repeat visits is substantial. Meanwhile, contributing to schools' educational objectives offers a key route to demonstrating social impact, helping to strengthen the foundations of future funding applications and efforts to drive philanthropy.

At the time of briefing in July 2019, the cemetery had welcomed two groups through the early summer. Building from this platform, we feel there is significant scope to formalise and expand an extensive schools programme.

Of course, there are real barriers to attracting school visits. Both constraints on curriculum time, and recent funding challenges in the education sector can make it difficult for teachers to either justify travel costs and time out of the classroom, or to

think outside of the box in terms of identifying field trip opportunities. More specifically, the limited range of facilities at Brookwood today (lacking sufficient toilets and classroom and dining space for rainy days) may pose a logistical challenge to schools.

Assuming this last barrier is mitigated by an overall improvement in facilities targeted to general visitors and by the creation of a suitable learning space, there are further steps the cemetery's management can take to connect successfully with schools: identifying relevant subject leads and communicating directly with those individuals rather than relying on general mail outs; building by targeting schools situated only a single bus ride away and underlining that convenience in marketing materials and, most importantly, working in dialogue with teachers to draw out connections between Brookwood's history and the curriculum they are required to teach.

## Connecting with the curriculum

	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Key Stage 5
Science	Seasons Habitats Materials		Ecosystems; Health & disease	Ecosystems
History	The World Wars			
	Local history study	Britain, Industry and Empire		
Geography	Settlement and land use	Population & Urbanization	Cities and urban society	Cultural landscapes & place- making
Art	Drawing, painting and sculpture	History of art, design and architecture		
General	Cultural diversity			

Listed above are aspects of the English National Curriculum we feel are of particular relevance to Brookwood Cemetery's history. Though religious education is not governed by a national curriculum, there is a clear opportunity to build links with relevant school departments

# Universities

## Active partners

A highly particular and active audience, building strong relationships with academic partners can yield benefits in a number of ways, whether in terms of supporting the creation of new interpretation and programming (drawing on experts' knowledge and enthusiasm), helping to grow audiences (by connecting with existing specialist networks), attracting funding (through the formulation of joint-research projects), or recruiting new volunteers (e.g. targeting MA students pursuing careers in heritage / end of life care

Essential to working with universities will be to identify specific departments, and ideally named individuals, whose interests relate to Brookwood's past and future. General mail outs are unlikely to garner any response. Opposite are highlighted some potential partner universities and how they might be approached. This is, however, only the tip of the iceberg.

## Royal Holloway

The university's Social, Cultural and Historical Geography group is well placed to support work on diaspora, mobility and memory

## UCL Institute of Archaeology

A world leading department with specialists in funerary archaeology, London archaeology, heritage and memory



## University of Winchester

MA in Death, Religion and Culture examines historical and current to death and dying and bereavement rituals in different cultural and religious contexts. It is targeted to students seeking careers serving the dying and bereaved

## University of Surrey

A world leader in environment and sustainability. Could Surrey be interested in researching green approaches to burial and cremation?

4

**THEMES**

# 4.1 Overview

## The development of interpretative themes

### Looking backwards to the future

Building on the brief introduction to Brookwood Cemetery given above, this chapter presents seven recommended key interpretative themes, which may be drawn upon to shape future programming and to inform the production of visitor materials.

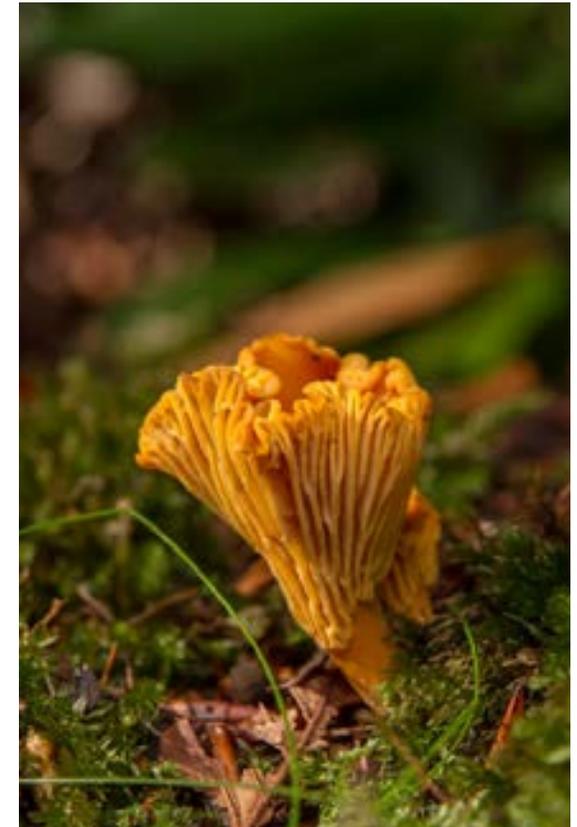
Reflecting the overall approach, each theme is presented in two parts, looking first backwards with a view both to celebrating and honouring Brookwood's past, and then forwards, connecting the site's history with wider contemporary debates and social issues that are of relevance not only to communities directly involved with the cemetery, but to the whole of our evolving British society.

By presenting each theme in turn as providing both a particular frame on the past, and a window onto the future, we intend that those who visit the Cemetery will come away not only with an enhanced appreciation of the site itself, but also with the means to look anew at a range of issues: life, death, class, the environment, and much else besides.

### Research and consultation

To help ensure that they achieve the conceptual breadth appropriate to the cemetery's rich history, and that they reflect the views and interests of relevant communities, the themes proposed here were developed through a process of extensive research and consultation.

Two rounds of stakeholder meetings were a wonderful opportunity to hear from members of the local community what they value about the cemetery, and the stories they associate with it: from grand histories – the arrival of former Czech servicemen in Britain after WWII and their establishment of a plot at Brookwood; to sad tales of misfortune – the mistrial, execution, burial, and exhumation of Edith Thompson; to the minutiae of everyday life at the cemetery – thus a visit to the Saint Edward Brotherhood revealed its members' taste for mushrooms foraged from the grounds. We also encountered many new histories, still taking shape, learning, for example, that research currently underway points to Brookwood perhaps being the last resting place of a direct English descendent of the Prophet Muhammad.



## 4.2 Key Themes

### Seven themes

#### In brief

Opposite are summarised the seven key themes proposed as the basis for the development of future interpretative materials at Brookwood Cemetery. Each is discussed in greater detail below.

While all may be considered to be of value as interpretative lenses, the central theme, The Best Possible Death, could be considered also to serve as a kind of conceptual glue for all of the others, foregrounding the question of how human societies approach the challenge of dealing with death and their dead.

Importantly, this plan does not anticipate all of the themes and content discussed below necessarily being used simultaneously, exhaustively or given equal weight. Proposals for how best to apply certain themes are given in Chapter 5, Media.



# The Best Possible Death

## The past

“Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead and I will measure, with mathematical exactness, the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals.”

Often attributed to William Gladstone (though never definitely proven to have passed his lips), the above quote – whatever its true provenance – resonates strongly with the history of Brookwood Cemetery.

As noted above, Brookwood’s founding marked a response on the part of government to an extreme problem of overcrowding in mid nineteenth century London. As the city grew, and the number of its dead increased, so churchyards reached capacity, graveyards overflowed with the dead, and a public health crisis ensued. A cholera epidemic which killed more than 14,000 Londoners between 1848-49 greatly exacerbated this problem, and led to large numbers of bodies being left to decompose in plain view of the living.

A further problem for residents in Victorian London lay in the cost of disposing of their dead. To be buried ‘on the parish’ (i.e. with public funds) in an era of growing class-consciousness was considered a public shame and mark of dishonour. However, overcrowding, and a consequent surge in demand for existing private burial plots, made death a prohibitively expensive business for many.

By turning over some 2000 acres to London’s dead and charging only modest rates, Brookwood allowed all but the very poorest members of society a relatively dignified burial for their departed. Further, by moving the dead away from the metropolis, the cemetery provided for the improved health and hygiene of London’s residents.

In essence, from the very moment of its genesis, Brookwood represents an attempt on the part of society as a whole to ensure the best possible care be given to its dead.

To not invoke, to not think of the dead makes us gradually inhuman and increases our sense of unreality. We are already with them: it is our unavoidable destiny. We do not continue where they left off ; they continue where we have not gone. A meditation on life is inevitably a meditation on death: and vice versa. If our imagination about death fails, ultimately so will our imagination about life.

Ben Okri, ‘The Muse of Archaeology’, in Renfrew et al (November 2015) *Death Rituals, Social Order and the Archaeology of Immortality in the Ancient World*

# The Best Possible Death

## The future

Working in dialogue with Brookwood's history of helping to alleviate social, environmental, and public health crises, future interpretation can help to draw attention to and inform public debate around a series of related challenges facing contemporary Britain.

In terms of its burial capacity, and despite the creation of numerous inner city cemeteries at around the time of Brookwood's founding, London is again becoming overcrowded, with multiple boroughs no longer accepting burials, and numerous others resorting to disinterment or deepening existing graves to make room for new bodies.

Environmentally, while cities no longer face the problem of graveyards overspilling, there is a growing awareness of the damage wrought to the environment by cremation, embalming, and the seeping of other toxins contained in human bodies into the earth.

Numerous alternatives to traditional burial and cremation have been proposed in recent years, from 'resomation' or 'water cremation' (a process of dissolving bodies in an alkaline solution, which both reduces atmospheric pollution and reduces fuel consumption), to still more esoteric options, such as the disposal of corpses in body bags lined with mushroom spores, designed to detoxify and expedite the decomposition of human remains. As well as pioneering the adoption of such technologies (and thus tapping new markets), Brookwood could help to lead a debate about the role green burial plays in wider struggles to preserve the environment and prevent global warming.

Finally, considering the idea of the 'best possible death' in broad socio-cultural terms, groups including the Dying Matters Coalition, Death Positive, and the Order of the Good Death represent an avant-garde addressing a serious lack of public conversation about death that has been recognised in UK government policy. A 2014 ComRes survey found that 83% of the public are uncomfortable

discussing death and dying, with many failing to prepare for the end of their own lives. A broad trend for increasing life expectancies globally means people are living longer than ever in fear of death.

What does the best possible death look like in the twenty-first century? This is a question Brookwood Cemetery is well positioned to address.

"Adults who are racked with death anxiety are not odd birds who have contracted some exotic disease, but men and women whose family and culture have failed to knit the proper protective clothing for them to withstand the icy chill of mortality."

Irvin Yalom, Psychiatrist, cited in Caitlin Doughty (October 2017) *From Here to Eternity*

## Centres & Peripheries

### The past

This theme draws attention to Brookwood's complex socio-spatial history, considering the cemetery as an object lesson in the relationships between centre and periphery at multiple scales.

First, as above, the theme can be used to frame Brookwood's relationship with London, and to draw attention to the way in which urban population growth and crowding led to a fundamental restructuring of living populations' relationship with the dead. Formerly buried within parish boundaries, typically close to friends and relatives, the dead were now displaced beyond the city margins.

Second, and more intimately, one sees a spatial imagination at work in the zoning of the cemetery for the dead of different classes: the wealthy and well-to-do handsomely commemorated in the cemetery's historic ring, with the poor dispersed around the fringes.

Third, there are vast entangled histories of war and empire and their effects on the make-up of British society waiting to be told at Brookwood. As

the British empire expanded, so it drew diasporas from across the globe inwards to its centre. The enormous range of nations and cultures represented by those buried at Brookwood speaks to Britain's changing place in the world throughout the past 165 years.

Finally, fourth, that today the cemetery constitutes a centre for multiple Muslim communities reflects powerfully on Woking's status as the historic heartland of not only British but also wider European Islam (an effect in part of Gottlieb Leitner's ambitious project to establish the town as a fulcrum of interfaith scholarship, and his founding of Britain's first dedicated Muslim cemetery). And it speaks, too, to the power of another centre in shaping the site's history: when Brookwood became a favoured cemetery among Muslims migrating to Britain from the 1960s, we understand from conversations with community members that this was in no small part because alternative sites were unable or unwilling to accommodate their need to be buried facing Mecca.

Brookwood's 'hygienic' distance from London prevented working-class access because of limited leisure time and disposable income. Modernity's spatial paradigm had extended control over the communal past and broken the long existent relationship between living and dead, a move recognised by *The Times*, which commented that,

Generations have been born, have lived, and have been buried upon the same spot. Henceforward the homes of the living are to be separate from the broad lands allotted to the dead.

[...]. Unable to easily access their history, and locate it clearly within a community burial space, connection was lost with the collective and family of the past.

Agatha Herman (*Journal of Historical Geography* 36 (2010) 305-314) *Death has a touch of class: society and space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853-1903*

## Centres & Peripheries

### The future

Given the 'buried up' state of London cemeteries and people's future quest for a resting place, Brookwood Cemetery can once again offer an answer to London's need for space for its dead.

London's growth, allied to broader continuing urbanisation in the UK, the overcrowding of cemeteries, and the depopulation of the countryside, means the distance between living and dead looks set to stay. Brookwood Cemetery currently provides a resting place for the dead from a wide range of London communities. But even given this distance, Brookwood has become an important centre for these communities.

If, as is currently planned, bodies displaced from St James' Gardens at Euston by the construction of HS2 are moved to Brookwood (as was also the case with many of the dead unearthed in the building of the Metropolitan line), this would present an interesting opportunity to foreground the question of the relationship the living maintain with their dead.

Considering the number of diasporic burial grounds at Brookwood also invites a focus on the ways

in which subsequent generations of what were originally migrant communities have adapted and continue to adapt to long-term settlement in Britain. Writing on the importance of cemeteries as centres of place-making among the first large-scale Muslim communities in the UK, Humayun Ansari of the University of London notes that, increasingly, larger numbers of Muslims born and raised British prefer to be buried in Britain, rather than having their bodies 'returned' to extended family networks overseas.

At the same time, however, the increasing provision today of Islamic burial grounds around the country means that for many, Brookwood is no longer an automatic choice.

Tracing still emerging geographies of displacement and reconsolidation in the histories of those buried at Brookwood Cemetery can provide a fruitful means of understanding both the site and the contexts it has grown out of. This could strengthen the historic and ongoing connections which London's communities feel for Brookwood Cemetery.

The mass migration of Muslims to Britain from the nineteen-sixties meant that the burial of their dead assumed particular importance. Brookwood cemetery – because of the non availability of burial space for Muslims elsewhere, because of the historical associations of Muslims with the place, because family or friends might be buried there, because it is a beautiful site, and because some Muslims do not like being buried on top of Christians – became a popular final place of rest for Muslims from all over the country.

Humayun Ansari (Historical Research, vol. 80, no. 210 (November 2007) '*Burying the dead*': *making Muslim space in Britain*)

## Signs & Wonders

### The past

Every headstone, and every grave site at Brookwood tells multiple stories. How graves are marked (or left unmarked), the iconography used to celebrate the dead, and the innumerable other additions placed at gravesides – flowers, flags, fences, stones – all embody complex histories cross cut by class, gender, identity, faith, and personal biography

Many of the monuments placed at Brookwood are miniature wonders of design and craft: for example the tomb of Venetian glassworker Giulio Salviati, whose mosaics adorn St Paul's Cathedral, and whose own style is mimicked in the obelisk erected to his memory by his widow Henriette.

Elsewhere, as in both the CWGC and ABMC military cemeteries, monuments are defined by their uniformity: a reflection of a desire to honour all of the war dead equally, without distinction by rank.

And, of course, throughout the cemetery one finds an array of more or less cryptic iconography: urns, anchors, broken pillars, a multitude of variations on the cross, and dozens more besides.

As the final emblems chosen to mark a life at its end, grave markings of course reflect the pasts of the dead. But they also reflect a great deal about the people doing the marking, and the social norms that govern our relations with other living people.

Ostentation in headstone design might speak to great love, unbearable sorrow, or, just as easily, to class anxiety: a desire to be seen by one's peers to be doing death properly.

It is notable, finally, that the great majority of those who are buried at Brookwood, having only pauper graves, also have no marking. For Brookwood's team, a key challenge in interpreting the cemetery will be to ensure that those individuals, lacking memorials, are not altogether overlooked.



## Signs & Wonders

### **The future**

There is a deep connection between the ways in which graves are marked and subsequently maintained, and the first theme outlined above: the question of what makes for a good death.

Considering the range of different religious burial traditions represented at Brookwood affords an outstanding opportunity for visitors to learn about the diverse practices of other members of their local communities, and to think deeply about life, death, and perhaps, life after death.

With religious observation declining in Britain, this theme also allows Brookwood to frame discussions about the changing nature of commemoration. What signs and symbols will survive the twenty-first century? Which others will come to carry the burden of remembrance?

'Men have lost their reason in nothing so much as their religion, wherein stones and clouts make martyrs; and since the religion of one seems madness to another, to afford an account or rational of old rites requires no rigid reader. That they kindled the pyre aversely, or turning their face from it, was an handsome symbol of unwilling ministrations. That they washed their bones with wine and milk; that the mother wrapped them in linen, and dried them in her bosom, the first fostering part and place of their nourishment; that they opened their eyes towards heaven before they kindled the fire, as the place of their last hopes or original, were no improper ceremonies. Their last valediction, thrice uttered by the attendants, was also very solemn, and somewhat answered by Christians, who thought it too little, if they threw not the earth thrice upon the interred body. That, in strewing their tombs, the Romans affected the rose, the Greeks amaranthus and myrtle: that the funeral pyre consisted of sweet fuel, cypress, fir, larix, yew, and trees perpetually verdant, lay silent expression of their surviving hopes.

Sir Thomas Browne (1658) *Urne-Buriall*

# Making Death Pay

## The past

From the beginning of the Victorian period, calls for burial reform and the increasing inability of church and parish to accommodate the growing number of the dead, opened the door to private cemeteries.

While, as *The Times* noted in 1852, the Bishop of London (among others) 'entertained great doubts as to whether any private parties ought to be allowed to speculate in a traffic of the dead', from this point onwards, the disposal of the dead would take on an ever more industrial character; meanwhile funerary fashions would come to be shaped significantly by the logics of a capitalist consumer society.

At Brookwood, the London Necropolis and National Mausoleum Company (LNNMC) struggled to strike a balance between accommodating pauper burials (striking substantial contracts with London parishes to provide for all of their dead), and attracting other more well-to-do middle and upper class customers.

Careful zoning, as well as the creation of a tiered offer helped to address this challenge. On the London Necropolis Railway, customers (dead and

alive) could travel by 1st, 2nd or 3rd class depending on their means, and would be treated accordingly to differing degrees of comfort while travelling, as well as to more or less careful handling of the dead, and to a greater or lesser choice of a range of coffins of varying quality. In this way, albeit with limited success, the Cemetery attempted to create a sense of exclusivity, and to shake a reputation as somewhat of a second tier burial ground.

In the late Victorian period, middle and working class customers are understood to have become more cost-conscious and to have sought out more modest burial options. There was a late Victorian reaction against sepulchral ostentation in some cases, and there are more headstones of a modest variety in later nineteenth century areas than in earlier ones. It is certain, however, that for much of the nineteenth century, ostentation and expense in the dispatch of one's dead were considered essential to maintaining social standing.



A 19th Century cartoon depicts an undertaker eager to profit from the 1840s cholera epidemic (Science Museum)

# Making Death Pay

## The future

As an operating business, any discussion at Brookwood of the cost of funerals should be approached with great sensitivity and caution.

Nevertheless, there are significant links to be made between Brookwood's history as a cemetery offering an affordable service to the poor, and to present market conditions in the UK, where average funeral costs of £4,200 place a dignified burial or cremation beyond the means of many thousands of Britons and force increasing numbers of people into so-called 'funeral poverty'.

With the relationship between death and money a theme for discussion perhaps most helpfully through temporary programming and future-focused exhibitions, Brookwood could take a lead in stoking and informing public debate about what is a pressing and emotive issue.

The LNNMC operated along inclusive lines but sought to temper the reformist discourse in order to remain financially viable [adopting] an eleven part tariff system that catered for all in its graded offerings that balanced quality and ostentation with price. The lowest level of service offered respectability and simplicity for £1.5s: '1 horse hearse to convey coffin only, smooth elm coffin, finished with black or white nails, a Plate of Inscription, lined &c'.

In contrast, the top level of service demonstrates the continuing desires of elite clientele for material distinctions to be maintained and a certain level of ostentation; for £35, the LNNMC offered a 'hearse & 4, 3 mourning coaches/broughams, elm shell lined with fine swansdown & satin, English Oak case, French polished/ lined with fine cloth, massive brass fittings & stout lead coffin, or Patent 'Earth-to-Earth', covered with crimson or black velvet & 8 assistants [...] The company brochures offer a range of further services that emphasize natural elements, following Loudon's aesthetic emphasis, such as 'turfing grave' (2s. 6d.), 'planting grave with spring flowers' (10s. 6d.) and 'planting, turfing and maintenance in perpetuity' (£21). These services would have been restricted to the higher classes by cost, which provided the capacity for further distinction from the masses and demonstration of ones financial, and hence social, worth.

Agatha Herman, *Death has a touch of class: society and space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853-1903*

# Who's Who

## The past

Integral to Brookwood Cemetery's own history are the stories of the more than 250,000 people who have been laid to rest there: the good, the bad, and the anonymous

Many of these stories are known and already celebrated through Brookwood's website and other visitor materials. They include : John Singer Sargent, Zdenka Pokorna, Rebecca West, Zaha Hadid, Edith Thompson (now departed), and Gottlieb Leitner.

Building upon current practice at Brookwood (for example the recent development of a map of the Czech community plot, or the creation of materials documenting Brookwood's rich Islamic heritage undertaken through the Everyday Muslim initiative, there is significant scope to build themed tours and maps around the histories of these and other noted inhabitants, and to create temporary exhibitions, perhaps responding to significant anniversaries in their lives.

## The future

A key opportunity for Brookwood going forward is to promote and work to orchestrate community and volunteer research around hidden and under-trumpeted histories. Here we see significant potential to tie in interpretation to national and global events like LGBT History Month, Black History Month, and International Women's Day and to create special tours responding to those particular themes.

We also feel there is an opportunity to do more to acknowledge, explore and represent the histories of the vast number of anonymous working class people given pauper burials at the cemetery.

Above all, perhaps, our time at Brookwood -incorporating the community-led discovery of myriad new histories even in a few short months - argues in favour of a flexible and fluid approach. Interpretation should not be fixed, limited to those lives already known best, or commemorated most lavishly. Instead the investigation and celebration of people buried at the cemetery should be considered an evolving and open process.

Who knows whether the best of men be known, or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? [...] Oblivion is not to be hired. The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been, to be found in the register of God, not in the record of man.

Sir Thomas Browne (1658) *Urne Buriall*

# Death Obsession

## The past

The dual fascination with death and dedication to mourning characteristic of Victorian society (in particular its upper and middle classes) have been much remarked upon both by modern day scholars and contemporaries like Charles Dickens.

Explanations for the intensity of Victorian funerary practices are many and varied, and range from suggestions that falling death rates made loss a more unusual and hence noteworthy occurrence, to analyses of ostentatious grief as a symptom of rising consumerism, to psychological analyses associating death obsession with all manner of other repressions.

Whatever the truth of these and other competing interpretations (and all would make fascinating content for temporary exhibitions, talks, and lectures in the future), what is certain is that death at Brookwood Cemetery was often a real social event. Often many thousands of mourners would attend the funerals of noted public figures.

## The future

Connecting once more with the core question of how best to confront and deal with death, the history of the Victorian culture of grieving will present a valuable opportunity to foreground and discuss contemporary attitudes to death and dying.

'With cruel irony, the Brookwood funeral which seems to have attracted the largest audience was that of the Victorian freethinker, Charles Bradlaugh. A crowd of 5,000 or so gathered for the interment of this renowned opponent of Christianity and conventional respectability. The Necropolis Railways was pressured to dispense with its usual elaborate funerary rituals for the occasion, which took on a different tone altogether and had some of the gaiety of a seaside railways excursion; it seemed more like Brighton than Brookwood cemetery. Only Mrs Annie Besant - Bradlaugh's co-worker - wore black.'

R. C. Richardson (2003) *The 'Broad Gauge' and the 'Narrow Gauge': Railways and Religion in Victorian England*

# Paradise on Earth

## The past

This final theme draws attention to Brookwood's value both as a precious and ecologically diverse green space, and as perhaps the pinnacle example of the Victorian tradition of garden cemetery design.

The combination of memorials alongside nature gave, and continues to give, the landscape its power and poignancy. The cemetery's sculptural monuments, mausolea and array of more modest headstones were carefully set in designed landscape. Originally laid out by Robert Marnock following the principles of eminent cemetery designer John Claudius Loudon, and supplemented from the mid 1940s with a new section - the Glades of Remembrance – planned by another noted designer, Edward White - Brookwood's grounds are as spectacular as they are conducive to peaceful rest and contemplation.

Its extensive evergreen planting is crowned by perhaps the largest collection of Wellingtonias anywhere in Britain (a species first introduced to the country in 1853, only a year before Brookwood's opening). The double avenue of these mighty trees

that flanks the former railway line is a striking feature in the cemetery's landscape, and a powerful reminder of its past. As well as constituting a splendid setting for visitors to admire and explore, Brookwood's landscape (as reflected opposite) is, in itself, an embodiment of a strong set of ideals and convictions regarding the respectful treatment of the dead and the attitudes of the living.

That the site is so vast is a factor in part of burial reformists' wishes that even paupers be allotted an individual grave site in which they might be buried with dignity. Meanwhile, the cemetery's great beauty was expressly cultivated so as to edify the souls and minds of visitors.

'Churchyards and cemeteries are scenes not only calculated to improve the morals and the taste, and by their botanical riches to cultivate the intellect, but they serve as historical records.'

John Claudius Loudon: *'Principles of Landscape Gardening applied to Public Cemeteries'*

Loudon was much concerned with the burial of the poor, and was opposed on health grounds to common graves being sunk in the London clay. He advocated the burial of London's poor outside London, as the price of land within ten miles of London was much too high to admit of burying paupers singly in the London cemeteries. With remarkable foresight, he suggested the purchase of two thousand acres of poor land at Woking, where the gravelly soil was ideal, and would enable yews, junipers, pines, and firs to grow. This idea was obviously the beginning of Brookwood Cemetery, near Woking

James Stevens Curl, *John Claudius Loudon and the Garden Cemetery Movement*

# Paradise on Earth

## The future

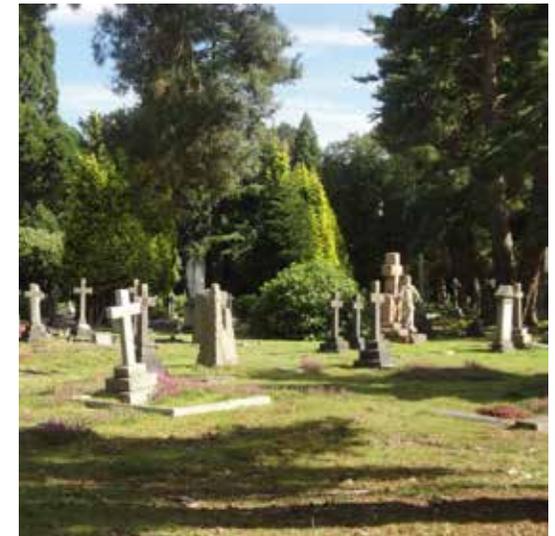
As well as speaking to the complex set of morals, tastes, and reformist verve upon which Brookwood was founded, the cemetery's landscape today also speaks persuasively to the importance of care for and stewardship of the land.

In this context, there are abundant opportunities to develop interpretative content reflecting upon the former dilapidation of the site, the ease with which nature reclaims neglected land, and the role Woking Borough Council has played in restoring Brookwood.

The cemetery now contains a number of rare and protected habitats and species. Lowland acid grassland and relict heathland support unusual varieties of moss and fungi as well as uncommon plant species such as Devil's Bit Scabious which provides an important nectar source for rare bee species. This special biodiversity, a result of the long years of neglect, now yields an added layer of richness to this paradise on earth.

The sustaining of this ecology, however, needs to be integrated with the retrieval of the cemetery's heritage significance. Ecological conservation must be balanced with the conservation of the cemetery's designed landscape and its monuments. These are all essential elements in this paradise on earth. The conservation of the Colquhoun chapel is an exemplar in which invasive vegetation has been carefully cut back and managed to reveal one of the heritage gems of the cemetery. The example needs to be followed across the cemetery, gradually revealing and conserving its great array of memorials and their varied landscape setting.

Considering the theme of landscape renewal more broadly meanwhile, and connecting this to the aforementioned growing recognition of the impact of the funerary industry on our environment, there is also potential to situate Brookwood within a broader narrative of conservation and care, and to do so in conjunction with the development of an expanded, more ecologically sustainable funerary offer.



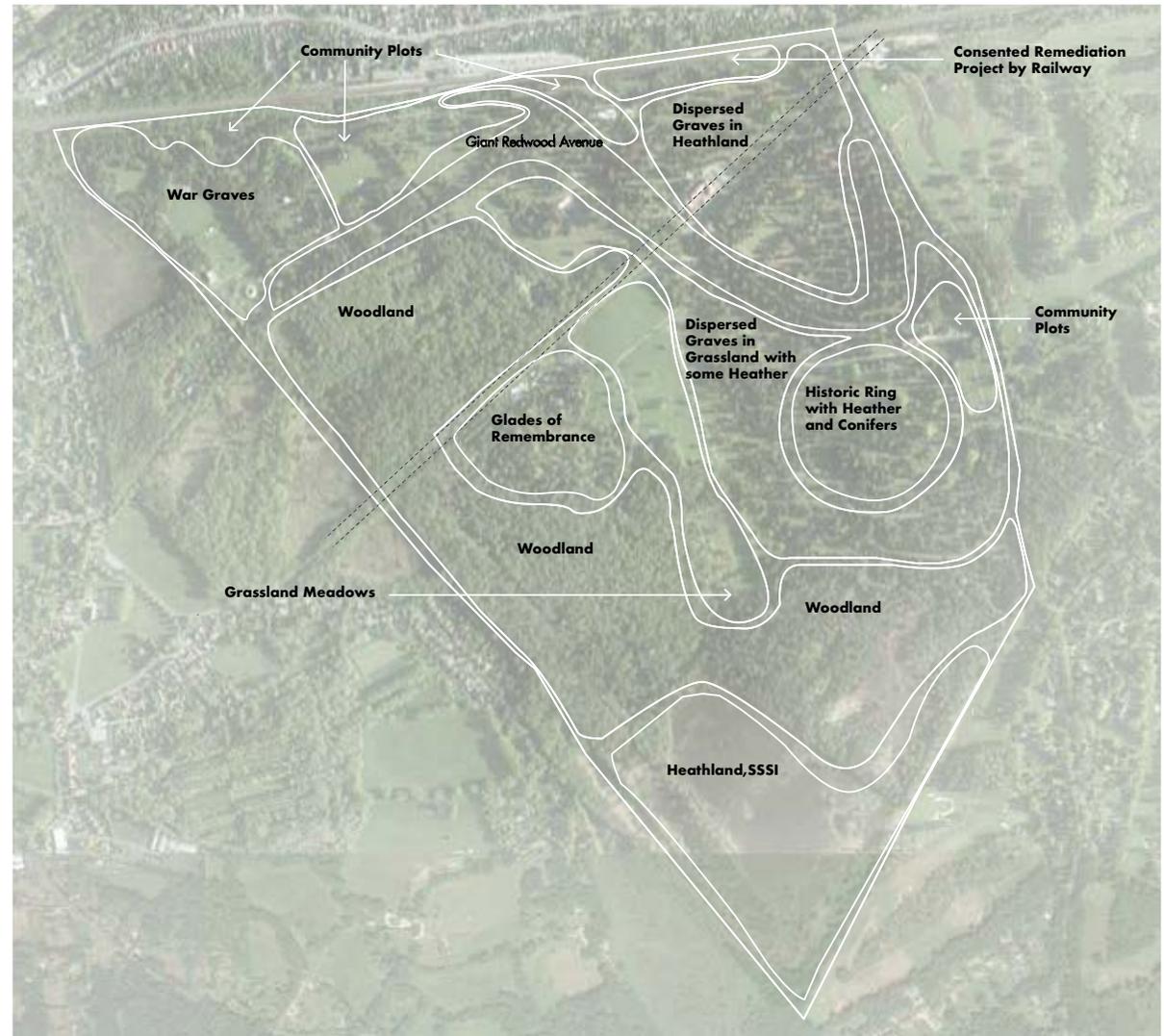
# Paradise on Earth

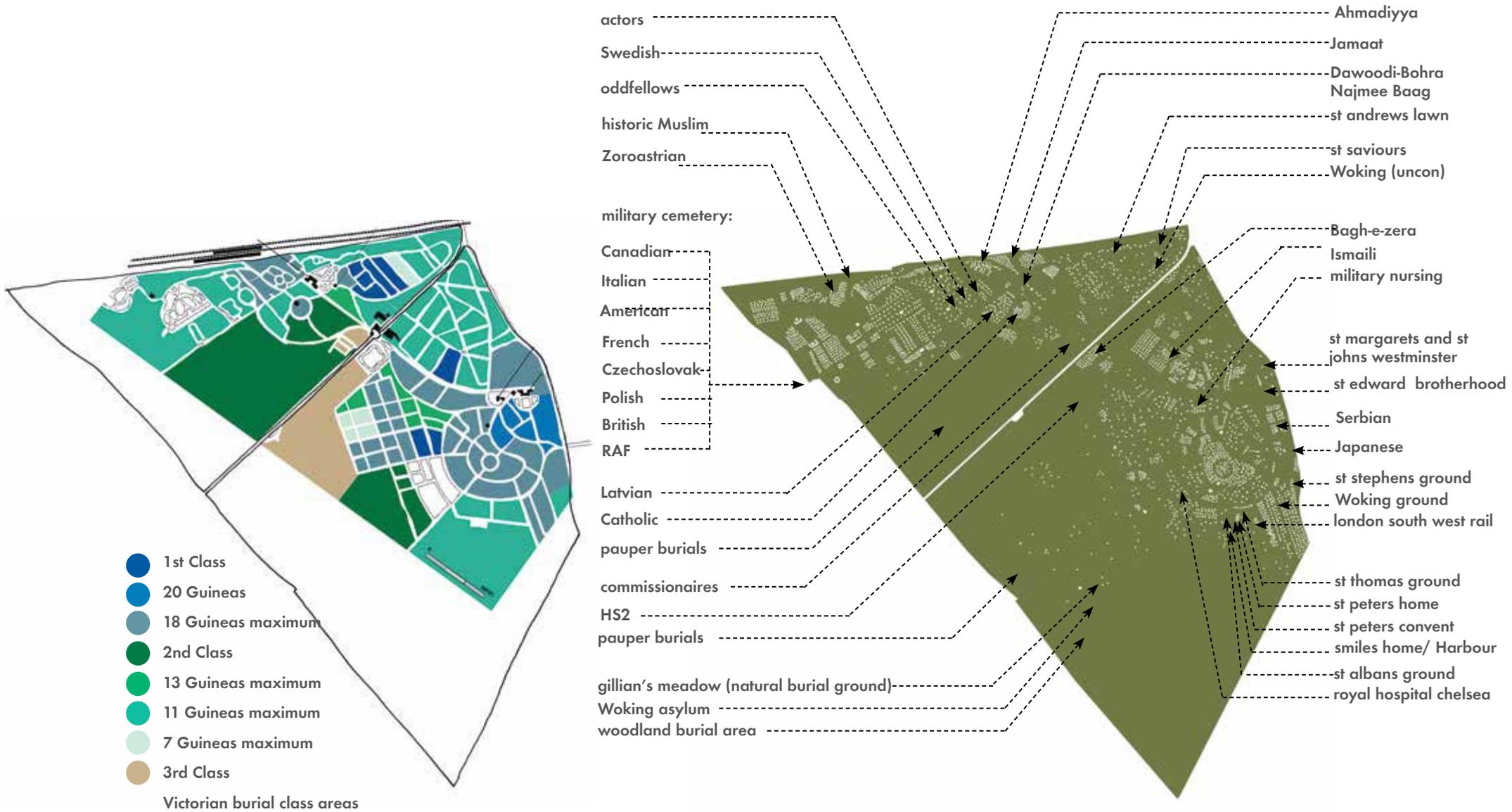
## A landscape of intimacy, grandeur, monumentality - and legibility

In interpreting and opening up Brookwood to a wider public, it is imperative not to lose sight of the Cemetery's original function, the way that this function informed and continues to underpin its superb landscaping, and how that landscaping in turn both supports and provides for a range of human experiences, and reveals the history of the site.

Careful management and maintenance of the Cemetery's grounds will help to draw out its original zoning and spatial structure, which will help make it more legible again. The balanced conservation of the cemetery's monuments, its designed landscape and its ecology will all contribute to the different qualities of place found across the Cemetery. Careful integration of new memorials into the landscape will enhance the experience of the Cemetery for the many different groups who use it.

For those who bury their dead at Brookwood, the landscape is the most important medium for expressing and facilitating emotional, corporeal dimensions of mourning.





**5**

**MEDIA**

# 5.1 Overview

## Modest, Minimalist, Mobile

### A restrained and easily updated media palette

The need for financially sustainable, long-term development at Brookwood, the scale of its estate, and the splendour and variety of the cemetery's grounds all argue against the use of overly complex, or intrusive interpretative media on site.

In a setting in which each monument, and every gravestone tells its own story, we suggest that additional interpretation is best deployed sparsely: to orient visitors around the landscape, and conceptually frame a visit.

Any new materials should aim to lead a visitor's senses, and provoke a targeted questioning of their surroundings.

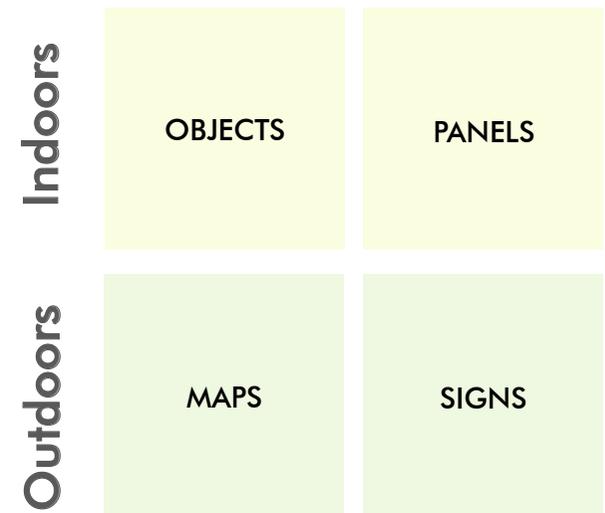
But they should avoid overwhelming through the addition of surplus text in an environment already liberally strewn with information

Above all else, Brookwood is a site that invites multisensory immersion and respectful exploration.

Its sights, sounds, smells and textures are all equally deserving of attention. As such we would caution against the development of any media (for example an audio guide), which would unduly disrupt or distract from the experience of the site as it is.

We also feel that given budgetary constraints, neither an audio or digital offer would offer value for money at Brookwood.

With these thoughts in mind, our proposal is for a modest and easily maintained and updated core set of interpretative materials, as opposite.



# Maps

## Guiding and educating the senses

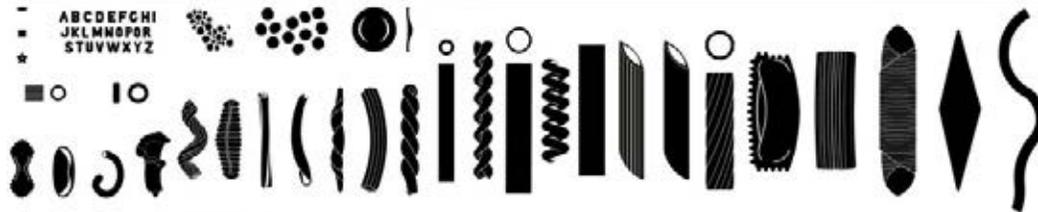
A suite of high quality, beautifully and distinctively illustrated, printed maps can also double as guides based on specific themes.

Maps need not be over dense with information, but can emphasise typologies – educating the eye as to what to look for in gravestones and monuments, or drawing visitors attention to the variety of natural life in the cemetery.

Other themes discussed above (in particular, Centres & Peripheries, and Who's Who?) would also be amenable to mapping, with a great benefit of the format being that individual examples can easily be updated and iteratively developed, either in light of evolving community research, or responding to seasonal events and programming.

As a relatively cheaply produced take-away for visitors, these maps will be eye-catching mementoes, helping to draw new visitors to the site in the wake of their friends. For this reason, it will be worth spending time in design to ensure a lasting impression.

## Inspiration



Top: Artist Adam Dant's illustrated map of Shoreditch – an example of a map worth treasuring and sharing with friends

Bottom: Detail from Caz Hildebrand and Jacob Kennedy's The Geometry of Pasta, a beautiful example of an illustrated typology, of the kind which could be used to illustrate funerary iconography, leaf shapes, famous faces, and all manner of other highlights at Brookwood.

# Signs

## Orientation over interpretation

Introducing new signage to Brookwood's landscape is essential to help visitors navigate its grounds.

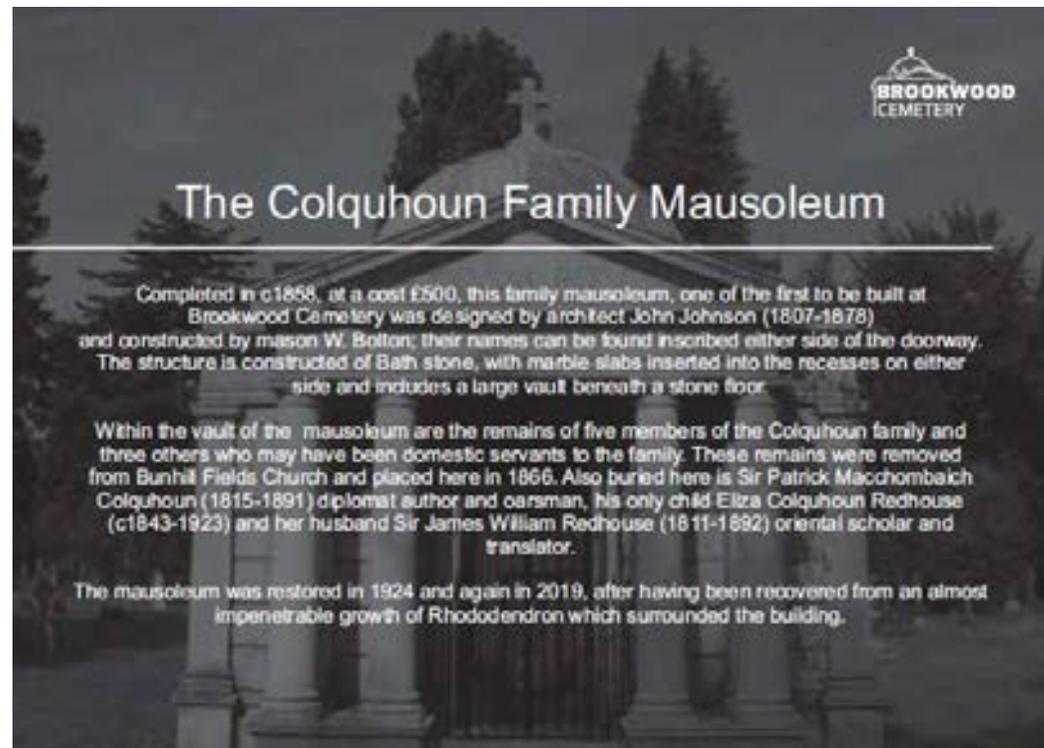
We are aware of the existing signage project that is underway at the cemetery, and therefore do not make any further proposals here.

We would however caution against overloading signs with text. And, whilst it is very desirable to identify landmarks and help guide the way to remarkable tombs and outstanding people, signage should not imply that only these monuments are valuable, or the graves significant. Signage should be always be discreet and encourage further exploration.

Above all, visitors should be guided in how to navigate, and how to understand the cemetery. Signs should help to open up the cemetery, rather than working to narrow the focus of visitors' exploration.

Interpretation should, where possible, be thematic.

## Inspiration



An example of the new interpretation produced through Brookwood's signage project.

## 5.2 Detail & Comparators

### Objects

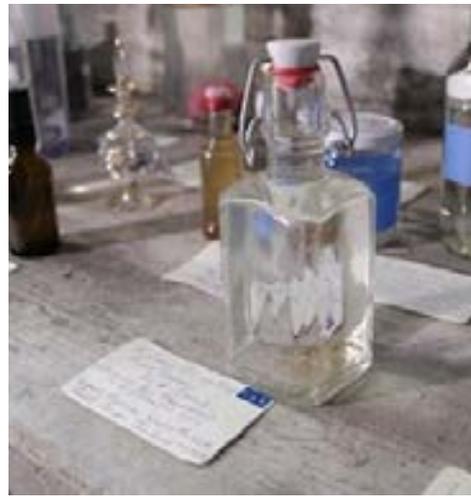
#### Showcasing community objects

Whether in the small space of the planned superintendent's house café, or in a larger visitor centre setting, Brookwood can subtly introduce key themes, and keep its displays fresh by spotlighting a small number of objects at a time in one or two frequently replenished vitrines or small display cases.

Objects may be drawn from two principle sources. First, while the larger part of its collections exist in the form of archives and documentation held by the Surrey History Centre, Brookwood has a modest array of physical objects it can draw upon, including for example: tickets from the LNR (as are currently displayed in the visitor space of the St Edward Brotherhood); or the large leather-bound burials registers currently stored in Glades House.

Second, there is great scope to work with local community members to identify single meaningful objects that speak to their relationship with the site. These need not be particularly rare or precious materials, but they will be the basis for stories that illuminate the cemetery's living significance.

#### Inspiration



clockwise from top left: a sample provided by a member of the public to the Museum of Water at Somerset House; a spray of tinsel and artificial flowers - the kind of humble yet powerful object community members might showcase; A jar of pickles & a symbol of lost love, donated by a member of the public to the Museum of Broken Relationships; more chanterelles, reinforcing how simple objects can tell marvellous stories and connect Brookwood's visitors to existing communities.

# Panels

## Simple. General. Low Cost

The primary purpose of a visit to Brookwood should be to experience its grounds. While modest interpretation might gesture to the historic qualities of the landscape and introduce key concepts: class, commerce, the makings of a good death (and so on, as discussed above), the overall aim of any indoors exhibition should be to illuminate, frame and orient a walk outdoors rather than to replace it.

As such, the use of panel displays, within the café and future visitor centre spaces need not be over-elaborate.

Simple, brief texts, printed on low-cost materials will give basic information about the cemetery's history. Given the diversity of stories and personalities that could be explored, these semi-permanent panels should refrain from highlighting any particular individuals. Rather than reinforcing a canon of a few select figures, it feels important that priority should be given to foregrounding key themes and narrative frames.

## Inspiration



Clockwise from top left: an elegant use of low cost materials at Historic England's Immortalised! Exhibition; simple panels at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, as well as a low-cost pinboard allowing visitors to contribute memories and tributes; free standing display boards and frames would allow limited café space to be used efficiently and flexibly.

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**PROGRAMMING**

# 6.1 Overview

## Inspiring action and reflection

### A diverse and distinctive offer

Considering the competition for visitors Brookwood faces from other historic and landscaped gardens in Surrey and the broader South East, as well as from the 'Magnificent Seven' Victorian cemeteries in London, we feel a key method for allowing the cemetery to achieve sustainable growth as a visitor destination will be the incremental development of a diverse range of on-site cultural programming.

Aimed at raising Brookwood's profile among communities both locally and further afield, a carefully planned programme of events, tours, exhibitions and workshops would supplement more permanent interpretation, helping to communicate the cemetery's significance to audiences, as well as providing additional opportunities for further learning suited to its landscape, acting as a meeting point for local residents and supporting revenue generation.

### Overview of proposed activities



## 6.2 Programme

### Guided Walking, Accessible & Cycling Tours

#### **Making meaning, maximising mobility**

Already a strong point of Brookwood Cemetery's offer to visitors, we propose that the existing tours programme be expanded, and somewhat regularised.

As a platform from which to build, the existing tours already provided by members of the Brookwood Cemetery Society should be celebrated both for the passion and dedication with which they are delivered, and for the diversity of perspectives they offer on the site (comprising, for example, specialist introductions to particular burial plots, local ecology, Victorian social history, funerary processes, Islamic heritage, and much else besides).

Whilst retaining this diverse programme of tours, we would propose also providing a set of new, regular introductory tours of the site, targeted specifically to first time visitors and scheduled for regular times on Saturdays and Sundays. Specially accessible tours could be designed for those with impaired mobility and other challenges. Bicycle tours, offered in addition to walking tours, would allow visitors to take in more of the site and could be provided either through on-site hire, or on a 'bring-your-own-bike' basis.



A tour takes place at the CWGC Brookwood military cemetery. The past year has seen increasing collaboration between the CWGC and Brookwood teams, with visitors now offered combined tours of the entire grounds.

## Community Meet-Ups

### Inspiring repeat visits

The creation of a dedicated café space will allow Brookwood to host a range of easily managed community-oriented events targeted primarily to local residents.

As well as promoting the adoption of Brookwood Cemetery as a hub for those living closest to the site, such activities will also help to drive weekday business through the café, strengthening revenues outside of peak times.

While programming of this kind can in principle take countless forms and may arise naturally as residents' interest in the site grows, specific forms of meet-up can also be promoted by the cemetery team itself, for example, a reading group, a monthly plot-holders meeting, or a quarterly death café.

The latter, an informal gathering for guests to meet and discuss issues around mortality and end-of-life planning over food and drink (already delivered once previously at the cemetery) can be delivered by an appropriately trained facilitator, prospectively on a volunteer basis.



Informal discussions between attendees at a Death Café in Seattle. The Death Café model was formalised by Jon Underwood, based in Hackney in East London. Operating as a social franchise, the main Death Café network supports anyone interested to deliver their own sessions on a non-profit basis.

## Talks & Lectures

### Growing understanding

As discussed above in introducing the interpretative themes, Brookwood Cemetery is blessed with both a near inexhaustible stock of stories waiting to be told, and an active community driven to conduct their own research into the site's past.

A regular monthly lecture, built upon and aimed at disseminating such research, perhaps with complementary refreshments for guests would represent a social occasion for villagers and serve as an opportunity to encourage deeper engagement on the part of visitors: piquing curiosity, and pointing to the richness and complexity of an environment in which there is always more information waiting to be unearthed.

As well as providing moments of deserved recognition to local community members able to tell their stories, talks and lectures could also be delivered by partners in local schools and universities, helping to cement cross-institutional ties, and sharing related subject specialisms, e.g. around disposal, mourning practices, death rites, local history, etc



There are few limits to the topics that could be relevantly linked to, and addressed through talks, at Brookwood Cemetery, including (from top left) the cemetery's own history; its ecology and historic landscaping; historic and contemporary approaches to mourning; and the achievements of the people who have been buried there – pictured here is the Heydar Alyev Center in Baku, Azerbaijan, created by architect Zaha Hadid.

# Arts & Crafts Workshops

## Learning from the landscape

With its splendid and varied landscape, Brookwood represents an ideal setting in which to develop new craft skills with each also offering a new way of experiencing and learning about the cemetery.

As an first step in developing this kind of offer, we would propose that the cemetery seek to host photography, painting and drawing classes, delivered in partnership with the Lightbox in Woking, and building on the success of the latter's existing workshop programme. There could also be classes associated with the ongoing conservation of monuments in which people could engage with stonework, letter-cutting, and seeing conservation happen. In the longer term, there are countless opportunities to connect with specialist craftspeople and invite them to work and lead groups on site on a freelance basis. Here, for example, we would note the success of the green woodworking courses delivered at Nunhead Cemetery. In September 2019, Gullnaz Mahboob will lead a class in Islamic calligraphy at the Lightbox. Again, with the site's abundance of intricate carving and masonry and historic example of Islamic funerary inscription, Brookwood could present an ideal environment in which to deliver such a course.



# Forest School

## Building attachment to the land

Forest Schools are places for outdoor learning that encourage pupils to learn independently and get to know their natural environment. Hosting a forest school during school holidays, prospectively in partnership with Surrey Wildlife Trust (which already offers training and accreditation to new instructors) would be a great way to maximise enjoyment of Brookwood's beautiful woodland ecology and build revenue (see Business Plan)

A great benefit of hosting a Forest School would be the opportunity it offers to build lasting relationships with families, hopefully cementing a long-term attachment to the site and seeding an interest to explore more

Abney Park Cemetery runs a highly popular forest school for 6-11 year olds in during half-terms and school holidays. Children explore the surrounding woodland, build dens, go on nature walks, make natural art and craft, play games etc. The school is organised and run by an independent partner organisation. Participants pay £40/day or £190/week (Mon-Fri) per child. Last year, the Forest School had 309 children attend.



Building with sticks and leaves: encouraging a hands on approach to the environment at the Abney Park forest school.

## Temporary & Pop-Up Exhibitions

### Responsive interpretation

Given the aforementioned competition for visitors in London and the South East, we feel a key part of Brookwood's strategy must be to create regular reasons to advertise and for people to visit. A rolling programme of temporary exhibitions would fulfill this need, allow for a full exploration of the site's narrative potential, and present opportunities to respond to emerging social issues over the coming decades.

With the Lightbox as a key partner, Brookwood has enormous knowledge and expertise to draw upon in formulating exhibitions. Partnerships could also be developed with other museums and research institutions further afield. The creation of a community-artist-in-residence post would allow for the development of smaller pop-up exhibitions with communities (to be hosted, for example, in a café or visitor centre space), complementing and feeding into larger annual or bi-annual shows. The material created for one exhibition could perhaps serve cemeteries all across the country, since so many of these need for material display beyond telling 'their' story. The possibility could be explored of 'rotating displays' traveling around cemeteries, creating a network.



Temporary exhibition programming could build on a resurgent interest in death and its social impacts among contemporary artists and researchers. Pictured left: images from Walter Schell's exhibition *Life Before Death* at the Wellcome Collection; Right: design for an environmentally friendly water crematorium, created by Royal College of Art graduate Moying Huang

## Classical Music, Theatre & Cinema

### **Making a scene**

Given the size of its grounds we are confident that Brookwood Cemetery can accommodate a limited programme of thoughtfully curated outdoor theatre, music and cinema. Staging series of such events through the summer would be a wonderful opportunity to connect with new audiences, build Brookwood's reputation as a cultural destination, and become a much anticipated fixture in visitors' calendars..

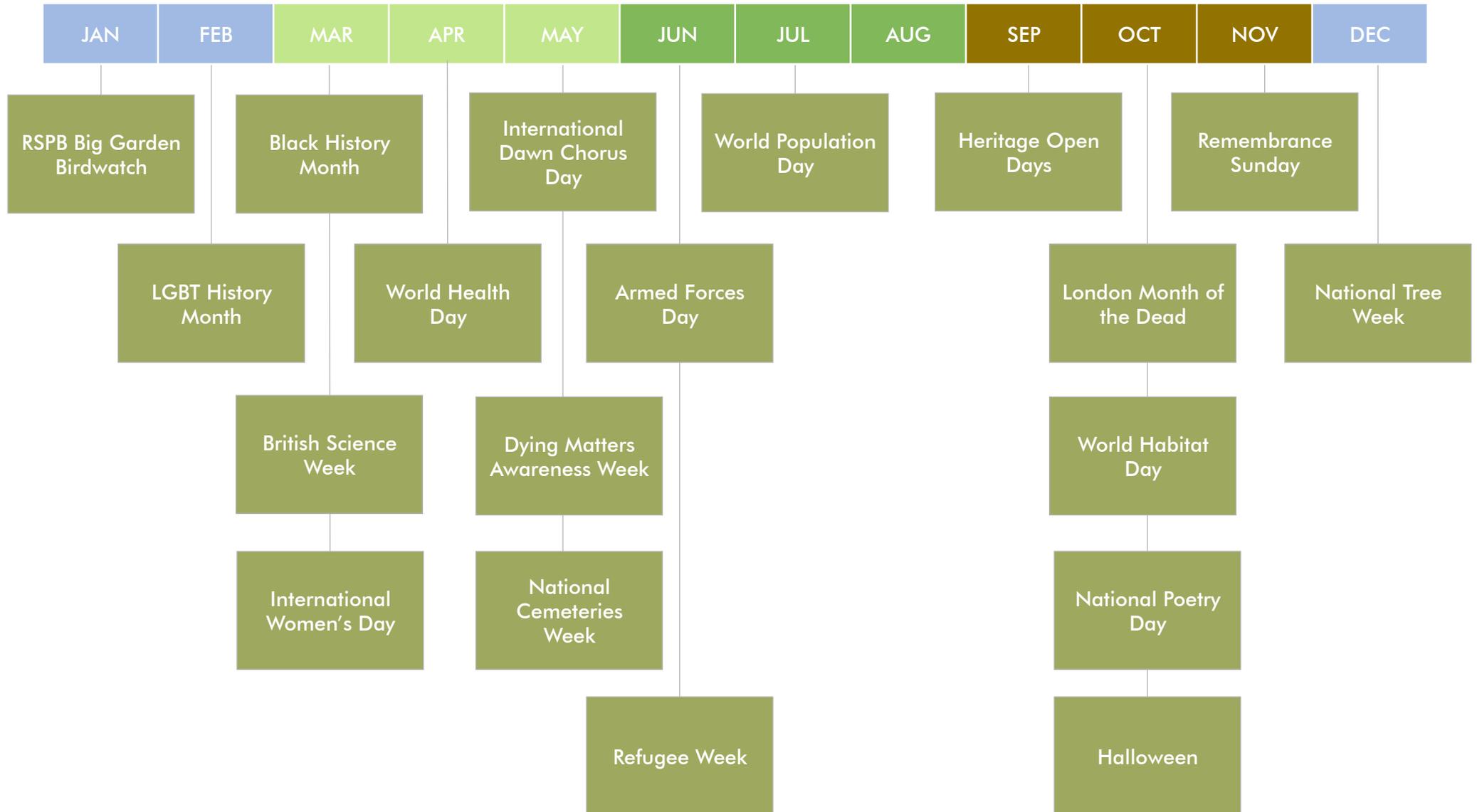
Such events need not be large. A ticketed event limited to 50-150 attendees would retain a valuable feeling of exclusivity and cause no greater logistical challenge than a large funeral. A precedent for an event of this size is provided by the CWGC's showing of a film recounting the life of Second World War special agent Violette Szabo (commemorated at Brookwood), which drew 150 attendees.



Set amid woodland glades, as above at Nichols Arboretum in Ann Arbor, a small stage, bandstand or canopy, would make for a respectful addition to Brookwood's landscape, and a truly beautiful setting for small-scale performances.

# 6.3 Calendar

In developing programming, national and regional events and celebrations offer Brookwood the chance to connect with established audiences. Summarised here are a range of the most relevant dates for the cemetery's diary.



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**PHASING**

# 7.1 Overview

## Incremental Growth

### A diverse and distinctive offer

As described above, this Plan assumes that the future development of Brookwood Cemetery will take place over an extended period of time, and occur incrementally.

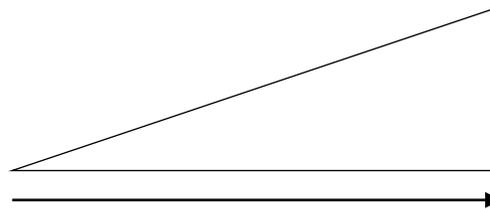
Below and overleaf are summarised, first, the overall trajectory of the growth envisaged by this plan, and, second, the four phases through which we consider a fully operational programme and visitor experience can be built up and maintained

### Basic Waymarking & Interpretation

**Stable Funeral Business**

**Tours & Meet-ups**

**Build Local Partnerships**



### Richer Storytelling

**Radical Funeral Business**

**Expanded Programming**

**Diversify Partnerships**

# 7.2 Phases

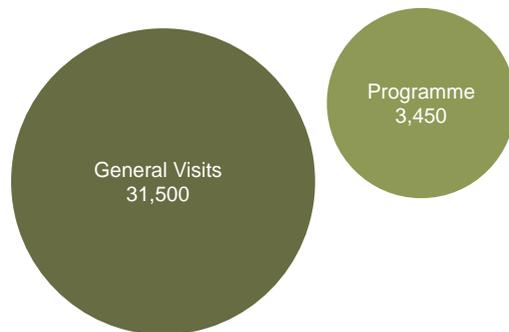
## Initial Moves

Minimal intervention, re-purposing existing buildings

Efforts focused on improving basic facilities (gardens, grounds parking, toilets), making a warmer welcome, raising local profile and supporting business and community through café

Low cost pop-up exhibitions supported by an artist-in-residence build community and alert Woking's most avid cultural consumers to change at Brookwood

Visitors mainly local, self-led heritage enthusiasts



Year Five Visit Projections (see Outline Business Plan)

PROGRAMME
<p><b>Walking &amp; bicycle tours</b></p> <p><b>Open days</b></p> <p><b>Forest school</b></p> <p><b>Low cost pop-up exhibitions in cottage</b></p> <p><b>Workshops (painting, photography, drawing)</b></p> <p><b>Talks and lectures</b></p> <p><b>Volunteer gardening</b></p> <p><b>School visits</b></p> <p><b>Free café events (e.g. Death Café, Book Club)</b></p>
INTERPRETATION
<p><b>Maps &amp; leaflets with self-guided tours</b></p> <p><b>Information boards in café space</b></p> <p><b>Signage in landscape</b></p> <p><b>Foreground CWGC, St. Ed. and ABMC displays</b></p>
STAFFING
<p><b>Volunteer coordinator (0.5FT)</b></p> <p><b>Programming, Learning &amp; Engagement (1 FT)</b></p> <p><b>Community artist-in-residence (1 FT)</b></p>

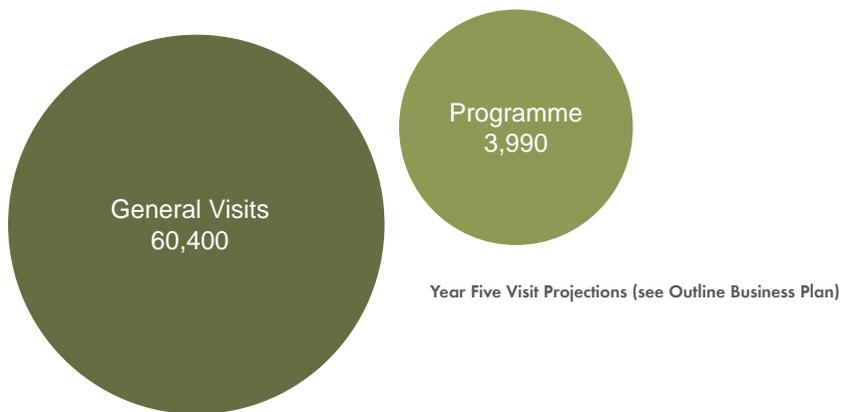
## Long Term Additions

Visitor centre supports increased profile and generates buzz reaching less independently motivated audiences

Expanded permanent exhibition allows for richer storytelling

A space from which to generate rental income

Improved facilities and increased capacity for schools and other groups to support more ambitious programming



### PROGRAMME

As per Initial Moves at increased scale

### INTERPRETATION

As per Initial Moves, plus

Higher spec and larger permanent exhibition

### STAFFING

Volunteer coordinator (0.5FT)

Programming, Learning & Engagement (1 FT)

Front of House Manager (1FT)

Community artist-in-residence (1FT)

## Expanded Programme

A significant diversification of Brookwood's offer to attract diverse audiences from Woking and London

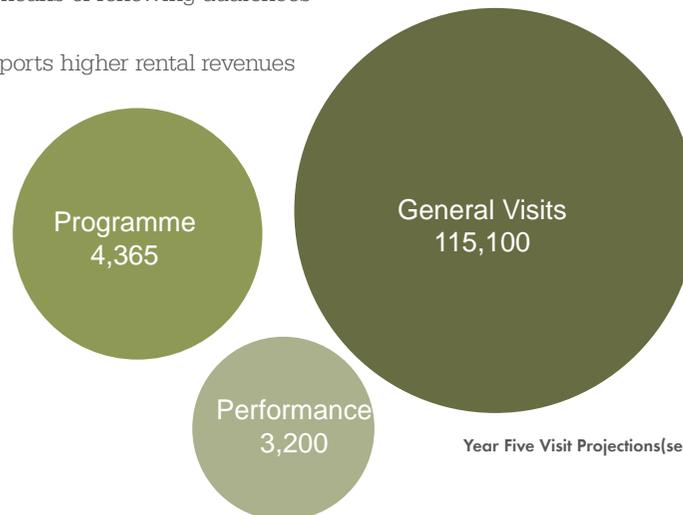
High quality temporary exhibitions respond to core interpretative themes, adding depth and speaking to new audiences further afield.

A summer series of carefully curated open-air film screenings builds on CWGC's successful trial

A parallel series of open air classical musical performances adds a further dimension to the offer

New programming creates new opportunities to advertise; a regular means of renewing audiences

Increased space supports higher rental revenues



Year Five Visit Projections(see Outline Business Plan)

### PROGRAMME

As per Long Term Additions, plus  
 Temporary exhibitions  
 Small scale, classical open air music  
 Open air cinema

### INTERPRETATION

As per Long Term Additions, plus  
 Thematic temporary exhibitions  
 Site and context specific film

### STAFFING

Volunteer coordinator (0.5FT)  
 Programming, Learning & Engagement (1 FT)  
 Community artist-in-residence (1FT)  
 Front of House Manager (1 FT)  
 Visitor Experience Assistant (1 FT)  
 Curatorial Assistant (0.5FT)

# Museum

## Introduction

The masterplan establishes a framework which could respond to even more ambitious plans in which, for example, the cemetery becomes the setting for a new museum. Perhaps, provocatively, this would be a Museum of Death, taking front-on, and as its primary purpose, a subject which no other museum in Britain has done.

Death, as such a huge part of life, is something we need to talk about in new ways and from many perspectives. At present there is no one key place in Britain that does this. Brookwood Cemetery is at that powerful intersection of life and death, a place of mourning, celebration, memorial, remembrance and reflection. It is one of the most significant death related locations in Europe - and is important on a national and international basis. Originally envisioned as a city of the dead, that legacy remains. Its original vision was ambitious – the cemetery was created in response to urgent calls for burial reform in the mid nineteenth century; a response to urban overcrowding and a democratisation of death to better serve middle and working class members of the public.

Today, it can draw on that heritage to inspire and promote dialogue around a new era of much-needed reforms: addressing the environmental effects of human disposal, continuing funeral poverty in the twenty-first century, and a trend for social fragmentation and isolation that sees people living and dying ever further afield from friends and family. The graves, the communities and traces of the former London Necropolis Railway speak of the history of western modernity, including the great transformations of national and international population change. Where and how people have laid their dead at Brookwood tells us something about our world today.

## Place of dialogue

The site itself has national and global significance. Based around its rich story, context and the contemporary relevance of the subject, there is scope to create a powerful place of dialogue at the heart of this special place. A place dedicated to the idea of society and death, and with it the art, music, with space for performance, exhibition, technology and above all debate. It could be contemporary, challenging, insightful, a place of dialogue and debate.

Powerful new partnerships could have their home here – from the creative, to academic, from the artistic to deep research – as part of a cluster of leading universities pushing the boundaries of research into death, funerary practices, cultural memory, and cultural landscapes (Bath, UCL Institute of Archaeology, Royal Holloway, etc). There will also be a close relationship to The Lightbox and wider cultural programming in the area and sub-region.





