

A cemetery is where we commune with the dead.

Our dead. Our ancestors. We know them. They were like us.

But with time, everything fades. Colour goes. Stories forgotten. We forget to tend to them when we stop remembering them. The little gifts we leave for the ones we do, blow away, and will be forgotten too.

If we were tasked with retelling the cemetery's history, aware of how ephemeral our connections in fact are, we would consider the following:

MAP

Focus on those elements which withstood the passing of time, such as the 'processional road' up to the chapel: the centuries-old backbone of the cemetery experience.

Organise the map along social or habitual lines: walk where different ethnic groups (ie, the Chinese, or the poor) walked, walk where certain individuals (ie, a widow, or even a stone mason) walked.

GUIDED TOURS

One theme might be burial or mourning rituals, and mention the role of flowers in the Victorian era.

WEBSITE

The cemetery now focusses- visually, on information panels and such- on the area's green values. In this narrative, the gravestones representing the dead on which the trees feed are only architecture. This could be turned around in several ways. For instance, the website might represent the ephemeral elements by literally fading away. Or its colour might be as dull as the cemetery itself displays.

EXHIBITION

An exhibition on burial practices might learn from how we experience, and what we know to have happened on relatively modern cemeteries such as that at York. How the colours of life fade first through the black fashions of mourning, then are put away in the dark whilst their aboveground monuments turn grey. How burials in the far past might have been accompanied by gifts of a fleeting nature, reflected in the teddy bears on children's graves.

COMMUNITY

The living tend for the dead. They are, as we began, them. It should be of great importance to ask them first how they wish to continue, and the role they wish the cemetery, the place they know they too will rest, should in the future have.