

Crossbones Graveyard

Our living manifesto

Introduction	2
The purpose of this manifesto	3
What is Crossbones Graveyard?	4
Who's welcome?	4
Our living manifesto: Preservation and accessibility	5–6
Acknowledgements and links	7

Introduction

With remembrance, humanity

Crossbones Graveyard has profound historical, cultural, social and spiritual significance. This manifesto brings together shared beliefs about a unique place in the backstreets of Southwark dedicated to the marginalised and outcast dead.

For centuries the site was a paupers' graveyard for the area once known as The Mint, one of London's slums. Before then, according to local lore, it was the final resting place for the 'Winchester Geese', medieval sex workers licensed by the Bishop of Winchester to work in the brothels of The Liberty of the Clink, which lay outside the law of the City of London. Thanks to local people, this site has been saved and transformed into a garden of remembrance.

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The purpose of this living manifesto

Just as the activism of the past saved Crossbones Graveyard, this manifesto continues the legacy by expressing a commitment to the site's preservation and accessibility.

It is a simple reference point for everyone to understand our ethos about this place. By being clear on what Crossbones Graveyard stands for, we can honour the past, shape the present and guide the future of the site sensitively together.

Helping us to:

Establish a three-way partnership between the local community, Landsec as landowners and BOST* as site managers

Inform decisions and positive progress in shaping the site's future, while reducing the scope for discontent

Evolve Crossbones Graveyard alongside collective aspirations, being a living, updateable document

*Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST) is an environmental & volunteering charity that manages open sites across the neighbourhood.

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Drawing from a chorus of voices

Creating this manifesto is a collaborative effort, co-authored by those who care most about Crossbones Graveyard.

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What is Crossbones Graveyard?

Crossbones Graveyard is a burial ground with a garden of remembrance, honouring the lives of those who would otherwise be forgotten. It is also an oasis in a bustling part of the city for visitors of any or no faith to pause in the rush of life.

The fact that there are nameless bones beneath visitors' feet – many of children and women – means we never see this place simply as public realm, or a tourist sight.

Beyond this definition, Crossbones Graveyard means different things to different visitors, from providing connections to the past and nature to opportunities for reflection, learning, spirituality and self-discovery. A visit often evokes deeply personal feelings. Many say they find peace, solace and healing here.

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Who's welcome?

Everyone and anyone during visiting hours, who is open to hearing about the context of the place and the need for respectful access.

Key to the experience is the presence of trained volunteer wardens, who welcome every visitor, protecting the atmosphere and tone of Crossbones Graveyard and Garden of Remembrance. These passionate stewards make sure that there is respectful engagement and provide information about the site.

Visitors are also welcome at The Shrine at The Red Gates in Redcross Way, including outside of opening hours. There is an important outer to this site too, with a memorial plaque on the gates to commemorate the outcast dead buried within. The shrine has evolved spontaneously and is regularly renewed by visitors with flowers, ribbons and mementoes to loved ones who have passed away.

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Local importance and global appeal

Each year, Crossbones Graveyard welcomes local residents and workers, UK and international visitors, school parties and other interested groups, spiritual seekers and more.

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Our living manifesto: Preservation and accessibility

At the heart of this manifesto is a twofold objective: to safeguard what makes Crossbones Graveyard special, while enabling accessibility through sensitive evolution of the site.

The guiding principles set out here will help us judge all future ideas and proposals for Crossbones Graveyard and Garden of Remembrance.

Preserving Crossbones Graveyard **Guiding principles**

Four things are paramount to think about when weighing up future decisions about this unique place.

Uncommon respect

Crossbones Graveyard reclaims the dignity of the disregarded whose memories would otherwise be cast aside. We respect the site as the final resting place for the marginalised and forgotten souls of this part of London, and as a symbol of resilience and unity within the community. We recognise that the stories of the past resonate in the present, and many visitors also reflect on this hard fact.

Precious tranquillity

The Garden of Remembrance is a silent tribute to the shunned. It is also a safe and quiet place amidst the city unlike any other public space. First, because this is hallowed ground, lending itself to contemplation. Secondly, because the garden has grown naturally. Its wildness reflects the site's history, is testament to the beauty of the unexpected, and a reminder that life cannot be confined.

Total inclusivity

Crossbones Graveyard is a beacon of social inclusion. All, including those who feel alienated or have traditionally been excluded, can feel a sense of belonging. Transcending differences and divisions, every individual is welcome, regardless of background, belief or identity. The site also offers many people a rare opportunity for creative expression.

Community activism

The place simply wouldn't be here today were it not for the determination of largely local people who campaigned to save Crossbones Graveyard for future generations, transforming derelict land into a shrine and remembrance garden. The work continues. The indomitable spirit lives on. A torch has been passed on and this manifesto will help keep the light shining on the site's history and meaning.

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Enabling accessibility

Guiding principles

We want as broad an audience as possible to connect with Crossbones Graveyard's history, feel its profound legacy and benefit from visiting in their own personal way. This means striking a careful balance between preserving the site's authenticity and opening it up further.

Mindful entry

Access to Crossbones Graveyard should always be sensitive and respectful to the memory of those who rest there. We never forget this is a burial ground, and that this fact may not be obvious to visitors at first sight.

Not a blank canvas

Each proposal should be judged on whether it responds to, and enhances, what already exists, rather than imposing its own 'top-down' vision. The site has grown organically with the hearts, minds and hands of many different people.

Sensitive evolution

Each proposal should also respect the site's historical, cultural, social and spiritual context, as well as the struggle and work to reclaim Crossbones Graveyard as sacred ground over a long and convoluted period.

Shared aspirations

The Crossbones Graveyard Committee will help shape decisions about future site proposals of any nature. Central to this will be community engagement, making sure that everything is driven by collective wisdom, diverse perspectives and shared aspirations.

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With thanks to:

All who have helped co-create this manifesto, notably Crossbones Graveyard's activists, wardens, committee members, other dedicated volunteers and contributors who care so much about this precious piece of the city.

Links

<https://crossbones.org.uk>

<https://www.bost.org.uk>

<https://landsec.com>