

ARNOS VALE DISCOVERY TRAIL

Discover the people, wildlife and history that make Arnos Vale so special.



2 A haven for wildlife

Arnos Vale is a valuable habitat to many species of wildlife and the clues to their presence are all around in the sights, sounds and smells of the cemetery.



4 No expense spared

When it came to funerals and gravestones, the Victorians wanted the grandest they could afford. The Matthews family spent £1,000 on their memorial (about £61,000 in today's money).



5 Bristol's best

Arnos Vale is the last resting place of many people who played an important part in shaping the city. Mary Carpenter set up a 'Ragged School', providing free education for Bristol's poorest children.

To learn more about Mary Carpenter why not pick up one of our specialist trails, available in the gift shop?



Start beside Garden of Rest 1

1 A working cemetery

Arnos Vale Cemetery opened in 1839, and has stayed open as a working cemetery ever since. There are now more than 300,000 people remembered here.



3 Not all as it seems

When is a gravestone not a gravestone? When it's a grave-wood. This memorial at the fork of the path is made of Burmese teak. Others made of stone can be carved to look like wood, boulders or plants.

6 Secret symbols

Gravestones can use symbols as well as writing to give hidden messages. Often these were used to express feelings of sadness and loss, but some can tell us details like a person's age, faith and social status.

Decipher the symbols in our guide book available in the gift shop.



16 Saved but not safe

Arnos Vale was saved after decades of neglect and is now managed by the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust as a charity dependent on public donations.

Please help with a donation to ensure the future of Arnos Vale for generations to come. The main donation box can be found at the top of the Spielman Centre steps.



15 A place of pilgrimage

This impressive monument marks the grave of one of Arnos Vale's most famous people. Rajah Rammohun Roy is known around the world as the "father of modern India" and his grave is a place of pilgrimage for visitors from near and far.

Bristol landmarks to visit: His statue on College Green and painting in the City Museum.



14 Lost but not forgotten

Arnos Vale is the last resting place of more than 530 servicemen and women who lost their lives during WW1 and WW2 and other conflicts. The 239 men buried in 'Soldiers' Corner' are casualties of WW1 who came from the UK, Ireland and the commonwealth.

13 Home sweet home

For generations, cemetery staff lived with their families in the Lodges at Arnos Vale. While no one lives in the lodges anymore, the tunnels underground make a comfortable home for roosting bats.

12 Meet the neighbours

Arnos Vale wasn't the only cemetery established by the Victorians in the neighbourhood. Next door to the east is Holy Souls Catholic Cemetery, and St Mary Redcliffe's Cemetery is across the Bath Road.

11 A place for all faiths

Arnos Vale was divided on religious lines to provide a burial space for different religious groups. Arnos Vale was built with two Mortuary Chapels and burial areas to accommodate both Anglicans and other 'non-conformist' faiths.



10 Height of fashion

The beautiful evergreen trees towering overhead were considered very fashionable when the cemetery opened, like the Himalayan Cedar here and Austrian pines nearby. Other exotic species favoured by the Victorians from around the world, are the Chilean Pine (or 'Monkey Puzzle'), Western Red Cedar, and Irish Yew.



9 Brunel's Bristol

Bristol is dotted with Brunel's iconic landmarks, and some of his associates are buried in Arnos Vale too, including James Hosken, Captain of the famous SS Great Britain. Look out for this simple stone block on your left.

To learn more why not book onto one of our expert led tours?

8 Traces left behind

This is the tallest obelisk in Arnos Vale and would have taken great skill to carve. Like paintings in a gallery, memorial masons liked to sign their work, perhaps as a way to advertise their skill.

Can you find the makers name?



7 Showing its age

After more than 175 years, the landscape has transformed since the first burial of Mary Breillat, here on 29th July, 1839. At that time this whole hillside was open fields, with a clear view through the Victorian smog to industries along the river Avon.

Optional buggy route (blue dotted line).

Continue along the main path and follow it downhill until you meet the main road. Stop at the grass island.



- Toilets
- Disabled Access
- Information
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- Parking
- Discovery trail
- Buggy route