

Underground, overground

It's not only the living that jostle for space in our overcrowded cities, it seems now that the dead are also running out of room to breathe (as it were).

Recent reports say that inner London cemeteries will be full within seven years. In response, mae architects has designed a burial ground that provides more than twice as much space for burials as the traditional lawn cemetery and doubles up as a landscaped park.

Mae's scheme alternates strips of raised lawn (underneath which coffins



are stacked three deep in concrete chambers) with sunken courtyards. Headstones can be viewed from the courtyards at the ends of the coffins, leaving the landscape free for use as an urban park.

A columbarium for urns is set into the floor of the courtyards, while the raised landscape is bordered on either side by a memorial bench and planter for shrubs such as bay and rosemary.

"The design of cemeteries in Britain is rarely given the consideration it deserves – not since the Victorians has there been a strategy that addresses aesthetic, emotional and environmental issues," says Alex Ely, founding partner of mae.

"Our design is about making cemeteries socially acceptable places that provide recreational areas, as well as burial space, that cater for both people and ecology. We aim to bring the cemetery back into the mainstream of local planning and civic culture."

