Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914

Julie-Marie Strange

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With high mortality rates, it has been assumed that the poor in Victorian and Edwardian Britain did not mourn their dead. Contesting this approach, Julie-Marie Strange studies the expression of grief among the working classes, demonstrating that poverty increased – rather than deadened – it. She illustrates the mourning practices of the working classes through chapters addressing care of the corpse, the funeral, the cemetery, commemoration and high infant mortality rates. The book draws on a broad range of sources to analyse the feelings and behaviours of the labouring poor, using not only personal testimony but also fiction, journalism and official reports. It concludes that poor people used not only spoken or written words to express their grief, but also complex symbols, actions and, significantly, silence. This book will be an invaluable contribution to an important and neglected area of social and cultural history.

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Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870–1914

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In loving memory of Sylvia Ann Bamber 1944–1993

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throughout my academic career (and, of course, beyond); I owe a great deal to them. My husband George has lived with me and my book for the last five years, has sat in my office until the early hours of the morning when I wanted to finish something on numerous occasions and loved me regardless of my quirks and foibles: thank you sweetheart.

Abbreviations

BALS	Bolton Archives and Local Studies
BOHT	Bolton Oral History Transcript
GRO	Gloucester Record Office
LRO	Lancashire Record Office
LVRO	Liverpool Record Office
Man. OH	Manchester Oral History
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
PP	Parliamentary Paper
PRO	Public Record Office
WRO	Wigan Record Office
YRO	York Record Office

1   Introduction: revisiting the Victorian and Edwardian celebration of death

> There's a grim one-horse hearse in a jolly round trot;
> To the churchyard a pauper is going, I wot:
> The road is rough, and the hearse has no springs,
> And hark to the dirge that the sad driver sings:–
> Rattle his bones over the stones;
> He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns...
>
> Poor pauper defunct! he has made some approach
> To gentility, now that he's stretched in a coach;
> He's taking a drive in his carriage at last,
> But it will not be long if he goes on so fast!
> Rattle his bones over the stones;
> He's only a pauper, whom nobody owns...
>
> But a truce to this strain! for my soul it is sad
> To think that a heart in humanity clad
> Should make, like the brutes, such a desolate end,
> And depart from the light without leaving a friend.
> Bear softly his bones over the stones,
> Though a pauper, he's one whom his Maker yet owns.
>
> (Thomas Noel, c. 1839[1])
>
> At length the day of the funeral, pious and truthful ceremony that it was, arrived ... two mutes were at the house-door, looking as mournful as could be expected of men with such a thriving job in hand; the whole of Mr Mould's establishment were on duty within the house or without; feathers waved, horses snorted, silk and velvets fluttered; in a word, as Mr Mould emphatically said, 'everything that money could do was done'.
>
> (Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 1844[2])

The pauper grave and the lavish funeral are notorious symbols of the popular culture of death in the long nineteenth century. As the extracts above demonstrate, the two funerals are easily juxtaposed as binary

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[1] 'The Pauper's Drive' by Thomas Noel cited in full in A. Wilson and H. Levy, *Burial Reform and Funeral Costs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 56.
[2] Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London: Everyman, [1844] 1968), 309.

opposites in a literal and metaphorical sense: burial in a private grave was the 'cornerstone' of respectability whilst to have a body buried on the parish was to bear 'a lifetime's stigma'. The pauper grave signified abject poverty and carried the taint of the workhouse; the pauper corpse was tossed unlovingly into a pit to rot in anonymity; and, should anyone mourn this creature, they were to be pitied. Conversely, giving the dead a 'good send off' epitomised respectability; it provided an excellent opportunity for revelry and display; and the funeral party were the object of jealousy and social rivalry. As stereotypes, the excerpts above are invariably linked to perceptions of the nineteenth century as a period of booming consumer culture, expanding life insurance schemes and punitive attitudes towards poverty. The poet Thomas Noel is well known for championing the cause of the poor but historical perceptions of the Victorian culture of death are largely derived from the journalism and novels of Charles Dickens. An ardent critic of the Victorian 'celebration of death', Dickens ridiculed the middle and working classes for aping the obsequious burial customs of the aristocracy. The tendency of the populace to equate extravagant funerals with respectable status did little more, he suggested, than render such spectacles absurd. That they were 'highly approved' by neighbours and friends reinforced the notion that the disposal of the dead was a theatrical display where any concept of grief was rooted in pride and snobbery rather than the personal expression of loss.[3] Notably, when sincere cries of sorrow were manifest, they were deemed inappropriate and contrary to the idea of the 'genteel' burial.[4] The facilitator of these exhibitions, the undertaker, was invariably cast as a parasite, growing fat on a morbid diet of death, extravagance and social jealousy.[5] Critical of the putrid and overcrowded churchyard, where coffins and their contents spilled from the earth, Dickens was also suspicious of the commercialisation of burial space, embodied in profit-making joint-stock cemetery companies.[6] A thriving trade in funeral dress and increasingly complex codes of mourning etiquette signified a fascination with the macabre and required yet more needless expenditure.[7] In contrast, pitiful burials 'on the parish' testified to the

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[3] See, for instance, the funeral of Pip's sister in C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1861] 1982), 298–301.

[4] See Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 312–13.

[5] Ibid., 303–14. See also C. Dickens, 'The Raven in the Happy Family' in B. Matz (ed.), *Miscellaneous Papers of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, [1850] 1908), 192–6.

[6] See C. Dickens, 'A Popular Delusion' in H. Stone (ed.), *Uncollected Writings from Household Words* (London: Allen Lane, [1850] 1968), 113–22. For references to overcrowded churchyards see C. Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Norton, [1853] 1977), 202.

[7] See C. Dickens, 'Trading in Death' (1852) in Matz, *Miscellaneous Papers*, 349–58.

punitive philosophy embedded in the New Poor Law.[8] A champion of funeral reform, Dickens called for burial to return to a mythical pastoral idyll, as exemplified in the burial of Little Nell in a leafy, peaceful rural churchyard.

Dickens excelled in portraying the sordid and proselytising against social injustice and it is unsurprising that historians have fastened onto the more spectacular aspects of the death culture present in his works to conclude that bereavement in the nineteenth century was characterised by consumerism and a preoccupation with social status.[9] Like many dichotomies, however, the juxtaposed images of the pauper and the respectable burial have lent themselves to oversimplification. Notably, there is a tendency to refer to the contrasting burials as the single defining feature of working-class attitudes towards death. This is not to suggest that all accounts of death and burial have been reduced to a crude dichotomy, but, rather, that such literature fails to grapple with the cathartic effects of the funeral and the use of ritual as a forum for the creation and expression of loss whilst overlooking the fluid meanings invested in notions of respectability and pauperism.

Images of rampant commercialism and the horror of the pauper grave have attributed the Victorian celebration of death with a sense of uniqueness. To a point, of course, this is deserved. Victorian Britain witnessed funerals of unprecedented ostentation, such as that for the Duke of Wellington in 1852, a military spectacle which took three months to organise.[10] Perhaps the most significant shift in burial practice lay in the rise of the joint-stock cemetery company, a phenomenon that moved the business of interment from the near-monopoly of the Anglican Church into a commercial and multi-denominational arena. According to James Curl, writing in the 1970s, the establishment of the commercial cemetery sprang from interest in Romanticism and the desire to civilise the populace. By the 1820s, however, the sanitary issues raised by reports on overcrowded graveyards, such as George Walker's *Gatherings from Graveyards* (1827), made the creation of extra-mural burial sites imperative.[11] Other studies have emphasised the complex and overlapping

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[8] C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1838] 1982), 25–33.

[9] See especially J. Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians* (London: Studio Vista, 1971) and J. Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral since* 1450 (London: Hale, 1991).

[10] See O. Bland, *The Royal Way of Death* (London: Constable, 1986), 157 and J. Wolffe, *Great Deaths: Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[11] J. Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, 2nd edn (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), 1–36. See also 1st edn (Devon: David & Charles, 1972).

dynamics driving the establishment of commercial burial space: motives included Dissenters' protests concerning burial privilege, the need to protect corpses from body-snatchers, and the desire to use commercial space as a landscape for the expression of a secular identity.[12] More recently, Patrick Joyce has examined the cemetery in Foucaldian terms of liberal governmentality, suggesting that the organisation of the dead in commercial burial space was inextricable from conceptions of the city as a body needing careful regulation to maintain healthiness.[13]

Focusing exclusively on the commercialisation of burial, Thomas Laqueur's essay 'Religion and the Culture of Capitalism' explored the significance of the joint-stock cemetery company in shaping cultural attitudes towards death. The move from traditional burial in the Anglican parish churchyard to interment in the secular cemetery was, Laqueur suggested, 'a sign that the underlying cultural assumptions of capitalism had taken root'.[14] The rise of the joint-stock cemetery company was tantamount to trading in death, hitherto an outrageous proposition. Founded on principles of profit, the cemetery represented 'a new kind of institution' that enabled the expression of 'new cultural formations'.[15] This was especially evident in the distinction between the private and the common grave, 'an almost parodic equation' of the gulf between the respectable middle classes' retreat into suburban privacy and the poor who lived and died in public.[16] Overall, the language of the commercial cemetery broke from a religious and reverential vocabulary to speak unashamedly in consumerist terms that not only reflected social

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[12] J. Morgan, 'The Burial Question in Leeds in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in R. Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), 95–104, S. Rawnsley and J. Reynolds, 'Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), 215–21, R. Richardson, 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, F. Barker (introduction) and J. Gay (photographs), *Highgate Cemetery: Victorian Valhalla* (London: Murray, 1984), J. Rugg, 'The Emergence of Cemetery Companies in Britain, 1820–53', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 1992, J. Rugg, 'A Few Remarks on Modern Sepulture: Current Trends and New Directions in Cemetery Research', *Mortality*, 3, 2 (1998), 111–28 (118–20), J. Rugg, 'Researching Early Nineteenth-Century Cemeteries: Sources and Methods', *The Local Historian*, 28, 3 (1998), 130–44, P. Jupp, 'Enon Chapel: No Way For the Dead' in P. Jupp and G. Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 90–104 and J. Pinfold, 'The Green Ground' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 76–89.

[13] P. Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 89–91.

[14] T. Laqueur, 'Cemeteries, Religion and the Culture of Capitalism' in J. Garnett and C. Matthew (eds.), *Revival and Religion Since 1700* (London: Hambledon, 1993), 183–200 (185).

[15] Ibid., 186.   [16] Ibid., 197.

change but 'embodied it, making it manifest, translating it into emotionally resonant forms'.[17] In highlighting this new 'cultural pluralism', Laqueur possibly overplays his hand: the emphasis on change overlooks continuities in burial practice, not least the overwhelming tendency for most burial parties to request some form of religious burial service and expression of denominational affiliation. Nevertheless, Laqueur's thesis that concepts of death were imbued with meaning in a larger web of cultural transformation highlights the potential for shifting analysis of the cemetery to new ground.

The expansion of the commercial cemetery was mirrored by a burgeoning industry in funeral and mourning paraphernalia (clothing, jewellery, stationery, shrouds, plumes, hearses and so on). At the heart of this consumer market was the undertaker whose perceived greed is best encapsulated in comparisons with the Vampire.[18] Much of the prejudice against the undertaker sprang from the supplementary report of sanitary commissioners into interment in towns in 1843. Authored by Edwin Chadwick, the report drew attention to the undertakers' marketing of heraldic burial customs to a popular clientele.[19] With the expansion of credit facilities to the working classes, the canny undertaker could exploit the anxieties of the bereaved concerning their position within local social and economic hierarchies. As Paul Johnson notes, the persistent financial insecurity of most working-class families fostered a culture of saving for extraordinary expenditure (the funeral is typical – but clothes, day trips and ornaments are other examples). The items purchased subsequently acquired a symbolism beyond their intrinsic economic value. Thus, for people who owned very little, 'almost any possession and the display of this possession, was a way of broadcasting and establishing one's social worth'.[20] In this sense, expenditure became synonymous with a specifically working-class concept of 'respectability' and the celebration of death was 'as popular in the slums of the East End as in the royal household'.[21] According to John Morley, the funeral thus epitomised the narrowness of

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[17] Ibid., 200.

[18] J. Scandura, 'Deadly Professions: *Dracula*, Undertakers and the Embalmed Corpse', *Victorian Studies*, 40, 1 (1996), 1–30.

[19] Reports of Commissioners on Sanitary Condition of Labouring Population of Great Britain: Supplementary Report on Result of Special Inquiry into Practice of Interment in Towns, by Edwin Chadwick, PP 1843 (509) XII: 395. See also Samuel E. Finer, *The Life and Times of Edwin Chadwick* (London: Methuen, 1952).

[20] P. Johnson, 'Conspicuous Consumption and Working-Class Culture in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 38 (1988), 27–42.

[21] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending: The Working-Class Economy in Britain, 1870–1939* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 11.

working-class definitions of respectability, depending as it did on one payment of burial club money.[22]

The relationship between expense, respectability and notions of decency has dominated historical discussion of the working-class culture of death. Yet respectability was (and is) a slippery concept. A term familiar to the Victorians, the conceptual fluidity of respectability gained increasing recognition among historians in the 1970s alongside growing interest in the divisions within the working classes which operated to create separate and conflicting identities and interests.[23] Even Geoffrey Best's 'brisk, conclusive and uncomplicated' notion of respectability (the aspiration to be a gentleman) acknowledged the adoption of the 'respectable front' by the working man.[24] Later studies located respectability as a specifically working-class concept rather than one invoking the absorption of middle-class values.[25] By 1979, Peter Bailey asserted that respectability had moved from being 'convenient and unfocused shorthand' for elite values to representing a notion 'invested with a new consequence and complexity'. Nonetheless, Bailey was critical of historians who continued to underestimate the dynamics of respectability, to overlook its relation to human geography and the behaviour patterns of the urban dweller and to portray it as a cultural absolute that pinned the 'working-class respectable' into a 'characterological strait-jacket'.[26] Rather, Bailey contested, respectability was a role adopted in particular situations and used as a 'calculative' or instrumental ploy in relations with members of other social groups. More recently, Ellen Ross criticised historians of respectability for their exclusive focus on male culture and the workplace at the expense of analysing female identity. Ross further suggested that the dichotomy between 'rough' and respectable, favoured by Victorian and Edwardian commentators, drew on standards of moral behaviour and material status. It was this link between the moral and material that made respectability such a 'mystifying word' and which

[22] Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 19–31. See also Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 9–11.

[23] Much of this interest was borne out of a critique of Hobsbawm's 'labour aristocracy' thesis. See E. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, [1964] 1979), 272–315.

[24] P. Bailey on Geoffrey Best's use of 'respectability' in '"Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?" Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability', *Journal of Social History*, 12, 3 (1979), 336–53. See also G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain, 1851–1875* (London: Fontana, [1971] 1979), 286.

[25] See especially G. Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: Notes on the Remaking of the Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, 7, 4 (1974), 460–508, and B. Harrison, *Peaceable Kingdom: Stability and Change in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

[26] P. Bailey, 'Will the Real Bill Banks', 336–7.

continues to render the concept 'confusing' today. Pointing to the differ-
ing criteria for respectability according to social position, Ross was at
pains to emphasise that working-class respectability was not 'a filtered-
down version of its bourgeois forms'. Rather, respectability referred to a
'fluid and variable idea' which was constantly redefined. Those who
adhered to fixed definitions of respectability often did so to their own
cost: it meant fiercely defending privacy and prohibited borrowing money
or goods whilst militating against participating in gossip and wider social
networks of friendship and exchange.[27]

If respectability was so fluid, is it not possible that the concept of the
respectable funeral was also subject to multiple, diverse and highly indi-
vidual interpretations? This is not to dismiss respectability from analyses
of working-class culture, but, rather, to suggest that almost glib refer-
ences to the funeral as the touchstone of working-class respectability need
further exploration. Definitions of the 'respectable funeral' were usually
set in opposition to the pauper burial. Passed by the Whig government in
1834, the New Poor Law inaugurated the era of the workhouse wherein
the pauper grave came to represent the harshness and stigma of the new
regime. Often referred to as a 'pit', the pauper grave was little more than a
hole into which the bodies of the abject poor were packed in flimsy
coffins, with little or no ceremony: it was the 'ultimate degradation' for
the individual and the 'ultimate disgrace' for a Victorian worker's
family.[28] Two years prior to the passage of the New Poor Law, the
Anatomy Act legitimised the donation of the unclaimed pauper dead to
anatomy schools for dissection. Previously reserved as a post-mortem
punishment for hanged felons, the Act was perceived as a direct assault
on the liberty and beliefs of the poor. Assessing popular response to the
Anatomy Act, Ruth Richardson concluded that fears for the integrity of
the corpse shaped the Victorian culture of death: the trappings of increas-
ingly expensive funerals were indicative of a desire for a secure burial
(with double and triple lead-lined coffins for instance) rather than a
simple reflection of growing consumer markets.[29] To a point, this is a
convincing thesis. It is worth noting, however, that the Anatomy Act only

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[27] E. Ross, '"Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep": Respectability in Pre-World
War One London Neighbourhoods', *International Labour and Working Class History*, 27
(1985), 39–59.

[28] C. Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity: The Urban Poor in England, 1834–1914* (Manchester:
Manchester University Press, 1995), 104, and F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of
Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830–1900* (London: Fontana,
1988), 200.

[29] R. Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,
1987).

ever applied to unclaimed pauper corpses and that, by the latter decades of the nineteenth century, poor law guardians increasingly refused to co-operate with the demands of anatomical schools. Indeed, Richardson concedes that the principal 'sub-text' in antipathy to the pauper burial by the end of the period was 'respectability'.

Undoubtedly, antipathy to pauper burial found expression in the material culture of the funeral and it is not surprising that this neat correlation has shaped the questions asked about a working-class culture of death. What is surprising is that so few studies have examined the interpersonal dynamics of working-class responses to death, disposal and bereavement. In her study of gravestones in the Orkney Islands, Sarah Tarlow reflected that the omission of grief from explorations of the material culture of death was startling given that most contemporaries assume death and grief are inseparable.[30] Where grief has been the subject of analysis, it has been located in the culture of the social elite. Pat Jalland's *Death in the Victorian Family* (1996) is the most recent addition to this trend, resting on an interpretation of the 'Victorian family' as exclusively middle and upper class.[31] Moving the discussion of Victorian cultures of death beyond a fixation with funeral rites, Jalland charts a complex history of grief where concepts of loss stretch from the onset of fatal illness to post-interment commemorative and memorial practices. Adopting the term 'Victorian' as a chronological tool, Jalland acknowledges that attitudes towards death among the elite were far from static in this period: changing demographic patterns, increasing secularisation and shifting medical paradigms (especially related to diagnostic practice and palliative care) wielded considerable influence on responses to terminal illness and expiration in the decades prior to the Great War. Nonetheless, Jalland posits a case for understanding cultures of grief in the Victorian period in terms of religion. In particular, she suggests that Victorian cultures of grief can best be characterised by the Evangelical ideal of the 'good death', characterised by persistent faith, humility and submission to the will of God in the face of loss. In this model, prolonged and agonising deaths were a spiritual test where suffering with fortitude was understood as a virtue (Christ's own suffering was held as the supreme example); alternatively, the drawn-out death provided time for the unbeliever to repent and turn to God. The positive psychology implicit in this model was undermined, however, by the 'bad death', that is, the sudden death that gave little or no time to reaffirm belief or

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[30] S. Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

[31] P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

denied the unbeliever the opportunity for conversion. Suicide represented the worst form of bad death as self-murder was held as a grievous sin against God. It is doubtful how far this single model is applicable beyond those within an Evangelical and High Anglican elite. Indeed, Jalland concedes that even the most committed Christian struggled to reconcile the trauma of the deathbed with the spiritual ideal. Rather, she urges us to appreciate the value of a 'good death' ideal as a strategy for coping with terminal illness and the deaths of the young.[32]

Jalland is committed to 'experiential history'. She believes the people of the past 'must first speak to us in their own words' to reveal 'their innermost lives'.[33] She locates this subjective experience in the diaries, correspondence, wills and memorial literature of fifty-five families, spanning the period from 1830 to 1920. Referring to the 'immense obstacles' in the path of experiential history, Jalland notes the assumption that private experience is impossible to research. Yet she interprets these problems in terms of source material rather than more substantive issues associated with the construction of experience. Enthusing that 'rich experiential source material certainly does exist', Jalland slips between reading this material as evidence of grief and acknowledging that it is a representation of grief.[34] She is, moreover, reticent concerning her involvement in such texts or her re-creation of these narratives in a different context.[35] This is not to suggest that we cannot write about grief, but, rather, to note that the words and deeds of those in the past are not inevitably a reflection of an innermost life, as the inner life is only accessible when mediated through multiple linguistic and symbolic representations. Indeed, Jalland is concerned with the ways in which the external customs associated with death and burial were appropriated to assuage personal grief: mourning rites drew on communal networks of support whilst offering consolation through the affirmation of religious belief and the articulation of private and social memory.[36] Post-interment 'rituals of sorrow' (such as indulgence in consolation literature and memento mori) provided long-term strategies for dealing with the onslaught of grief. The use of mourning rites and paraphernalia in this way did not, surely, depend on Evangelicalism or social class. Why, then, has this approach not been extended to include the working classes?

Of course, historians must be sensitive to the danger of assuming cultural trends percolate down the social strata. As David Cannadine

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[32] Ibid., 17–76.   [33] Ibid., 2.   [34] Ibid., 8–11.
[35] Sarah Tarlow notes that the historical analysis of grief always represents an implicit analysis of one's own response to loss. Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration*, 21.
[36] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 12.

notes, the assumption that the attitudes of a 'much biographied elite' were representative of a working-class culture of death is 'easier to assert than it is to prove'.[37] Jalland also recognises that cultures of death in Victorian Britain were class-bound and warns of the pitfalls in 'assuming that the behaviour and beliefs about death of the middle and upper classes automatically filtered down to the working classes'.[38] Acknowledging that working-class attitudes towards death were obscure, both Cannadine and Jalland focused exclusively on elite cultures. The reasons for this are, perhaps, twofold. First, the working classes left little correspondence or memoir. Secondly, there appears to be an assumption within Victorian death scholarship that high mortality rates, poor living conditions and persistent poverty fostered fatalism and resilience towards personal loss. The lavish funeral, in this context, was not only an exercise in snobbery and an excuse for a party, but it also provided an adequate forum for the expression of mourning: grief was contained within the rituals surrounding death. Once those rituals were complete, a family could take stock of the financial outcome of death and burial and return – recovered – to daily life.

The exception to this trend, David Vincent's essay 'Love and Death and the Nineteenth-Century Working Class', was published in 1980.[39] Whilst other historians have touched upon issues of sensibility, notably Ellen Ross in her splendid *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (1993) and more recently Trevor Griffiths's *The Lancashire Working Classes* (2001), Vincent's essay remains the most comprehensive analysis of love and death. Engaging with the difficulties inherent in locating 'feeling' among the labouring population, Vincent observed that 'bereavement is everywhere' in working-class autobiography. Yet life stories were not dominated by death. For Vincent, this indicated a capacity to survive experiences which, in the late twentieth century, would have a 'shattering effect' on the personality and life of the bereaved. Vincent's analysis starts, therefore, from an assumption that death was not a shattering experience for the majority of working-class families in nineteenth-century England. Unlike Jalland, however, Vincent readily engages with the difficulties of reading autobiography as a text on experience, not least because most working-class autobiographies seemed to omit discussion of private and emotional feelings. Where such details are

[37] D. Cannadine, 'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain' in J. Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa, 1981), 187–242 (241).

[38] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 1.

[39] D. Vincent, 'Love and Death and the Nineteenth-Century Working Class', *Social History*, 5 (1980), 223–47. Reprinted in D. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Working-Class Autobiography* (London: Europa, 1981), 39–61.

addressed, the authors' grasp of language tends to prove inadequate, encouraging the use of religious and secular clichés. Vincent suggests that many biographers felt such material was inappropriate for respectable narratives concerned with the development of moral, political and intellectual personalities. Assessing these silences, Vincent warns against the imposition of the historian's own interpretations on silent landscapes. Rather, Vincent tentatively interprets autobiographical silence on matters of love and grief as indicative of a culture of emotional containment.

Limited vocabulary aside, the 'key factor' in this culture of containment, Vincent suggests, was the interaction between death and poverty. Clearly, material circumstances were integral to the manner in which families dealt with the dead; financial fortunes could be adversely affected by death as much as they might be relieved. Yet the claim that 'The loss of a close relation was so bound up with the material problems of life that at worst it seemed no more than an intensification of the misery of existence' betrays a belief that the working classes were rarely touched by extreme, or to use Vincent's phrase, 'pure' grief. In reading a culture of 'containment' in relation to financial management, Vincent seems to deny the working-class autobiographer the capacity for human emotion which he implicitly confers on those in wealthier circumstances. Indeed, he uses an example of 'atypical' grief (a father who abandoned work on the death of his child) to argue that: 'Nobody else could afford the luxury of investing so much emotion in a child that its death, and its death alone, could have such a devastating psychological effect.' This assertion rests on two assumptions. First, Vincent appears to suggest that grief and work are mutually exclusive. In arguing that few men had time to mourn, he equates grief with a suspension in daily routines and responsibilities. It is also worth noting that Vincent refrains from explaining his distinctions between emotional containment, grief and 'pure' grief. Moreover, in concentrating on the working man (most of the autobiographies were authored by men), he neglects bereaved women and overlooks the potential for friends and relations to turn to each other within domestic time and space. Conversely, whilst depression and despondency may have been inappropriate subjects for respectable biography, there may also have been cultural taboos against expressing negative feelings in public, especially when greater responsibilities (economic, emotional and/or social) towards surviving family members had to be fulfilled. This leads us onto the second assumption in Vincent's account. Having noted the difficulties inherent in reading silence in autobiography, Vincent then equates literary emotional containment with 'coping' and recovery in an experiential context. Approached from a different perspective, it could be argued, as this book does, that silence speaks volumes.

Pioneering in its attempt to approach the interpersonal dynamics of the working-class family, Vincent's essay now appears to be both a product of its time and an indication of historiographical shifts to come. Notably, Vincent's concern that women's voices tended to be absent from the story indicates an awareness that emotion was mediated through a gendered identity, although this line of enquiry was not pursued in the essay. Similarly, his assertion that family experience differentiates 'otherwise homogeneous social, economic and occupational sections of the population' suggests an underlying discomfort with generalisations about class and emotion.[40] Indeed, having argued that the working classes were unable to 'afford the luxury' of 'pure' grief and that poverty blunts the sensibilities whilst affluence facilitates more 'humane' feelings, Vincent closes the essay stating that this cannot be equated with an 'obliteration' of affection among the poor.[41] In short, Vincent seems dissatisfied with narrow sociologies of class and the materialist paradigm of emotion. Despite massive shifts in the theory and practice of social history since Vincent's essay, however, there has been almost no revision of working-class attitudes towards death and bereavement.

This book suggests we shift our analytical gaze away from materialist paradigms and dichotomies between respectable and pauper funerals to consider flexible definitions of grief and mutable notions of respectability. The approach adopted throughout the book is best illustrated with reference to George Gissing's novel *The Nether World* (1889). There are three major funeral or deathbed scenes in the novel, each of which represents a different story to be told about working-class cultures of death. The reader is first introduced to death in the opening pages of the novel when the cruel Clem Peckover, eldest daughter of the landlady of the house, makes sport of Gissing's delicate child-heroine, Jane Snowden, whose position in the house is one of domestic slavery. Situated in the back kitchen of the house is the 'encoffined' body of Clem's grandmother, dead some six days. Aware that Jane is terrified of the corpse, Clem makes her enter the kitchen in the dark to fetch matches from the mantelpiece.[42] Having situated the Peckover character as callous (Clem has no 'common criterion' with civilisation), Gissing invites his reader to the funeral celebrations for the grandmother. The scene emphasises the Peckovers' ostentatious display of mourning paraphernalia, their neighbours' admiration for the expensive coffin alongside speculations about the Peckover coffers, and the boisterous revelry of the wakes tea. Suitably impressed, neighbours and guests exclaim: 'Everythink [sic]

[40] Ibid., 59–61.   [41] Ibid., 60.
[42] G. Gissing, *The Nether World* (London: J. M. Dent, [1889] 1986), 7–8.

most respectable, I'm sure!'[43] Vaguely ridiculous in their superficiality, the Peckovers are also unsettling in their apparent lack of humanity and disregard for notions of dignity.

The second major death scene in the novel provides a stark contrast to the Peckover sham, focusing exclusively on despair. The character John Hewett is dogged by poverty and misfortune. He is a well-intentioned, kind-hearted fellow but the reader's sympathy for his plight is tempered by frustration at his pride and obstinacy. The death of his wife coincides with the financial collapse of his burial club and the disappearance of all his insurance contributions. Destitute, Hewett must face the prospect of burying his wife in a pauper's grave. Robbed of dignity in life, Hewett rages that his wife must suffer an ignoble death: 'It's a nice blasted world, this is, when they won't let you live, and then make you pay if you don't want to be buried like a dog! She's had nothing but pain and poverty all her life, and now they'll pitch her out of the way in a parish box.'[44] As the pauper grave is the antithesis of the 'respectable' funeral, so the anguish of Hewett is a foil to the shallow hypocrisy of the Peckovers.

Towards the close of the novel, however, Gissing introduces a third funeral which throws a question mark over the neat dichotomy between the pauper and the respectable burial as embodied in the previous two scenes. The deathbed scene of Michael Snowden, the idealist of the novel, is described in terms of love, tenderness and reconciliation with his granddaughter, Jane, who has disappointed his philanthropic ambition. In the account of his funeral, the details of his coffin and the procession to the cemetery are not remarked upon. The only evidence of mourning paraphernalia is a passing comment by a visitor to the house that Jane is wearing black. Drawing attention to a solitary gesture of condolence, the touch of Sidney Kirkwood's hand, Gissing suggests that Jane can find little comfort in the effects of death. Instead, the narrative focuses on Jane's solemnity and the depth of her sadness: she can 'neither speak nor understand anything that was said to her'.[45] No sunlight falls onto the open grave, yet the air is mild, the trees are 'budded' and we are told that a 'breath which was the promise of spring' passes through the cemetery.[46] The melancholy of the day, Gissing seems to suggest, will pass to renewal. The death of Michael Snowden represents an alternative to the excesses of commercialism and the indignity of the pauper grave; it reflects the humanity of Jane Snowden and her idealistic grandfather. Jane partakes in the modest rituals which signify the passing of life but is unable to articulate her loss or her hopes for the

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[43] Ibid., 40–3 (41).   [44] Ibid., 190.   [45] Ibid., 349.   [46] Ibid.

future. Gissing leaves us, therefore, with a picture of sincere grief which is mute, confused and lonely.

In shifting analysis away from a preoccupation with consumerism and respectability, this book will take up the themes and metaphors of Gissing's third funeral in order to reframe a narrative of working-class responses to death in terms of grief. It seeks to emphasise the complexity of responses to death alongside the inarticulacy of bereavement and it demonstrates how public rituals of mourning and commemoration were appropriated by individuals and given unique meaning. In this sense, a single funeral could represent shared understandings of death and mourning but was fragmented into multiple meanings by those who participated in it. Ultimately, it suggests that the apparent candour and resignation of the working classes cannot be equated with apathy; neither was material insecurity tantamount to a blunted sensibility. Poverty necessitated pragmatism, but that did not necessarily compromise the sentimental and emotional underpinnings of family life. First, however, we must establish a chronology and outline some of the concepts, definitions and identities deployed throughout the book.

Since the late nineteenth century, definitions of death have been located in a medical discourse that has described expiration as an event.[47] However, death is also an abstraction and declarations of death (through hospital staff, medical certification, newspaper classified messages or relatives) are a cultural process.[48] Death, dying and the disposal of the dead are, moreover, inseparable from other cultural concepts such as health, hygiene, community, family and spirituality. Crucially, death is inextricable from notions of loss and bereavement. The term 'loss' is used to refer to the removal or deprivation of something (or someone) that one had at a previous time. 'Grief' indicates the emotional pain and suffering an individual feels at such loss. Since the publication of Freud's essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' in 1917, grief in Western culture has been increasingly pathologised, acquiring a symptomatology and recognised 'stages' of recovery and resolution: initial responses of shock, disbelief and denial are followed by an intermediate period of acute mourning,

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[47] Death is medically and legally defined as the moment when the heart and lungs cease to function. There are, of course, numerous ethical questions concerning assisted death, brain death and the artificial sustenance of physiological functions. See, for instance, D. Lamb, *Death, Brain Death and Ethics* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), R. Lee and D. Morgan, *Death Rites: Law and Ethics at the End of Life* (London: Routledge, 1994), and F. Kamm, *Morality, Mortality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[48] See K. Grandstrand Gervais, *Redefining Death* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1986), J. Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York: Collier, [1963] 1973), 81–7, and L. Prior, *The Social Organisation of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1989).

typified by severe somatic and emotional discomfort and social withdrawal, which eventually leads to restitution.[49] Thus, the cultural scripts which render bereavement comprehensible in the West in contemporary society draw heavily on concepts which define grief as 'normal' but which also set it against loose understandings of 'normal grief'.[50] Bereavement is a state of being that usually refers to the process of loss and, more particularly, to the aftermath of death when rites of mourning (cultural representations of bereavement) identify those who have lost and provide the means for disposing of their dead in a meaningful way. The bereaved are usually defined as those who knew the deceased with a degree of intimacy. Despite the pathologising tendencies of Western medicine, grief and bereavement are increasingly defined as unique experiences: 'Grief is not a linear process with concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid phases that vary from person to person.'[51] Bereavement has become part of the 'religion of the self'.[52] Or, as the sociologist Tony Walter, quoting Frank Sinatra, states: 'I did it my way.'[53]

As Neil Small suggests, it would be easy to identify a 'commonsense' division between inner feelings and the outer actions which signify bereavement. Yet this approach would overlook the 'complex and reflexive relationship between emotionality, subjectivity and social practice'. Culture provides the resources through which we understand, or theorise, emotional responses to loss, whilst the multifarious effects of grief (physical, spiritual and intellectual) are manifest in a cultural context.[54] Similarly, Paul Rosenblatt urges that 'culture is such a crucial part of the context that it is often impossible to separate an individual's grief from culturally required mourning'.[55] Indeed, recent cross-disciplinary scholarship of death and grief is typified by a tendency to borrow heavily from

[49] S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' in J. Strachey (ed.), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, [1917] 1953–74). For other major works in the development of a pathology of grief see M. Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 21 (1940), 125–53, and C. Murray Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1986).

[50] S. Shuchter and S. Zisook, 'The Course of Normal Grief' in M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe and R. Hansson (eds.), *Handbook of Bereavement: Theory, Research and Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23–43 (23).

[51] Ibid.

[52] C. Seale, *Constructing Death: The Sociology of Death and Bereavement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 61.

[53] T. Walter, *The Revival of Death* (London: Routledge, 1994), 2.

[54] N. Small, 'Theories of Grief' in J. Hockey, J. Katz and N. Small (eds.), *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001), 19–48 (20).

[55] P. Rosenblatt, 'Grief: The Social Context of Private Feelings' in Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement*, 102–11 (104).

anthropological studies that concentrate on social and cultural practice. As Douglas Davies illustrates, theories concerning death, grief and mourning ritual in foreign cultures can be reformulated into tools for approaching both contemporary and historical culture; for exploring that which is pre- and post-modern.[56]

In a global and historical context, there is an assumption that some form of mourning ritual is universal: dealing with the death of community members overwhelmingly takes place within the context of verbal and symbolic social rituals which acknowledge bereavement, provide a rationale for mortality and an afterlife, and assist the bereaved with reintegration into the world of the living.[57] Interpreted within a Durkheimian framework, the performance of such rites is fundamental to the maintenance of social order and the incorporation of individuals within society.[58] Mourning ritual is also tied to a language of hope and survival, prompting some to interpret the performance of death rites as an attempt by different social groups to contain and control death. Acknowledging the importance of group and individual welfare, some early anthropologists shifted analytical emphasis towards the organisation of rites into a phased process defined by the changing status of the deceased and the bereaved. Notably, French anthropologist Robert Hertz (1907) argued that rites associated with death and mourning were characterised by moving the status of the dead from the realm of the living into an afterlife; the identity of the deceased was not lost, but, rather, reconstituted into something meaningful for the group.[59] Refining this theory, Arnold van Gennep coined the term 'rites of passage' to argue that death rites assisted people in transitional relationships with society. On expiration, the deceased exchanged their 'living' status for an intermediary identity as a corpse. Following burial, their status shifted into a new phase, immortality, and a new society, that of the dead. For mourners, bereavement represented a transition from the world of the living into a separate state of mourning; they would return to living society once the rites disposing of the dead were complete. For both the deceased and the mourners, then, the transition between expiration and burial was a period of separation and isolation from society.[60] Further revisions of these theories in the 1960s focused on the transitional (or liminal) period. Notably, Victor

[56] D. J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites* (London: Cassell, 1997).

[57] See J. Whaley, 'Introduction' in Whaley, *Mirrors of Mortality*, 1–14, and J. Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[58] E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, [1915] 1982).

[59] R. Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand* (Glencoe: Free Press, [1907] 1960).

[60] A. van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage* (Paris: Nourry, 1909).

Turner conceptualised the movement of individuals into groups during periods of extraordinary pressure and shifting identities as 'communitas', that is, the sharing of fellow feeling. Hence, mourning was a moment of 'communitas' that enabled the bereaved to survive the trauma of loss.[61] More recently, Maurice Bloch has returned to the concept of liminality to suggest that individuals use the transitional period between the separation occasioned by death and the reincorporation into society in order to transcend death. The negatives of death are reformulated by the rites associated with burial into positive affirmations of life.[62] As Douglas Davies notes, burial rites help the bereaved 'conquer' an old identity shaped by loss.[63] At the heart of mourning custom, then, is not the universal symbolism of death, but, rather, that of life.[64]

Davies's own model of liminality is that death rites represent 'words against death'; death rites represent a positive language for repositioning the deceased into an afterlife, whether that is a spiritual world or a secular sphere rooted in memory. Funerary rites frame a response for negotiating the challenge death poses to the individual's self-consciousness; surviving bereavement transforms humans whilst re-energising culture. Acknowledging the potential superficiality of such a general approach, Davies nonetheless argues for the importance of 'words against death' as an analytical tool for approaching the complexities of cultural representations of death and grief. Indeed, Davies considers notions of 'performing' grief as the embodiment of cultural expectations concerning the manifestation of emotional feeling. Notably, he posits arguments against a Freudian division between worlds of the public and the private self to suggest that the success of funeral customs as 'words against death' depends on the degree of consonance/dissonance between inner languages of grief and public languages of rites.[65] Davies's approach allows acknowledgement of the diverse responses to death whilst retaining a sense that there are identifiable cultures of death within a broad societal context; it allows flexibility to consider grief as a unique experience whilst recognising that the individual exists within a broader web of understanding concerning social and cultural practice.

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[61] V. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, [1969] 1995).

[62] M. Bloch, *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[63] Davies's discussion of the 'liminality' theories is particularly lucid. D. J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, 12–13, 17–19.

[64] R. Huntington and P. Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[65] D. J. Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief*, 1–3, 46, 92.

This brings us to consider the social practices commonly termed the 'Victorian celebration of death'. Whilst most commentators have nodded towards the uniqueness of grief, there has been a tendency to identify a Victorian culture of death as a self-contained story of ostentation and expenditure sandwiched between, on the one hand, simplified pre-modern rural burial practices and, on the other, the tragedy of the Great War. Notably, post-war commemorative culture drew on the reverse of Victorian display: silence and simplicity. The war ushered in an epoch of 'invisible' death whereby death was removed from the domestic sphere and resituated in hygienic and controlled environments, such as the hospital. Indeed, pioneering commentaries on Victorian cultures of death were formulated from negative evaluations of a post-war privatised culture of death. Geoffrey Gorer's essay, 'The Pornography of Death', first published in 1955, argued that death in modern Britain had become as 'disgusting' as sex had been to the Victorians. Declaring that 'no censorship has ever been really effective', Gorer called for the readmission of grief and mourning into modern society with full Victorian 'parade and publicity'.[66] Gorer's tirade was echoed in Phillipe Ariès's *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1976), later expanded into *The Hour of Our Death*.[67] Often referred to as 'magisterial' and 'pioneering', Ariès's texts highlighted four consecutive epochs that defined the Western culture of death: the tamed death, death of the self, death of the Other and, finally, the invisible death.[68] The Victorian culture of death, the death of the Other, moved away from early modern preoccupations with divine judgement to fix attention on the mourner, ultimately recasting death in a romantic–tragic frame: deaths were unbearable and imprinted the bereaved with lasting melancholy. The twentieth century ruined the 'beautiful' death by making it invisible, forbidden and pathologised. Like Gorer, Ariès saw this as a failure both for the community and the individual and called for a return to the Victorian celebration of death.[69]

Critics of Ariès have argued that he relied upon superficial readings of narrow material, made unsubstantiated generalisations across cultures (notably between Catholic and Protestant countries) and described rather

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[66] G. Gorer, 'The Pornography of Death', first published in *Encounter*, October 1955; reprinted in G. Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain* (London: Cresset Press, 1965), 169–75.

[67] P. Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* (New York: Knopf, 1981), and P. Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Marion Boyars, 1976).

[68] Walter, *Revival of Death*, 14, Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 7, and Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss*, 63.

[69] Ariès, *Hour of Our Death*, 559–601.

than analysed cultural change. Moreover, Ariès's definition of 'culture' was tied to educated and wealthy elites and overlooked diffuse identities such as class, gender and ethnicity. *The Hour of Our Death* has also been described as a naïve polemical tract that drew conclusions from 'confused' historical evidence and relied upon emotional involvement with, and the idealisation of, a bygone culture of grief and loss.[70] Jonathan Dollimore suggests that the chief problem with Ariès is his underlying thesis that Western culture moved from a healthy relationship with death to a pathological one where death was taboo.[71] Not only is the concept of cultural change as a neat and self-contained process questionable, the notion that the twentieth century heralded an unhealthy culture of death has increasingly been challenged. David Cannadine, for instance, criticised both Ariès and Gorer for constructing a 'beguilingly symmetrical argument' which drew on a highly sentimentalised vision of a 'golden age of grief'. Contesting the retrospective romance of Victorian mourning, Cannadine turned the argument around to suggest that it was the interwar British who were obsessed with death and that the best time to die and grieve was not the nineteenth, but the twentieth century.[72] Others have taken up this contention. Tony Walter and Lindsay Prior, for instance, argue that far from being surrounded by silence, death in the twentieth century was spoken of in new and/or different languages (largely legal and medical) which Ariès either failed or refused to recognise. Indeed, noting the proliferation of publications concerned with death and the boom in academic 'death studies', Walter suggests that death at the close of the twentieth century was 'everywhere'.[73] Philip Mellor posits a more fluid paradigm based on the presence and absence of death in twentieth-century culture: the sequestering of death from public space highlights modernity's fixation with control which, in turn, makes death's presence in private space threatening.[74] Neil Small also points to the issue of control. Acknowledging Ariès's concern with layers of significance within symbolic representations of death, Small criticises his notion of historical time as a discrete and identifiable process. It is through such modernist structures, Small asserts, that

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[70] Whaley, 'Introduction' in Whaley, *Mirrors of Mortality*, 8–9. See also N. Small, 'Death and Difference' in D. Field, J. Hockey and N. Small (eds.), *Death, Gender and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 202–21 (208).

[71] Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss*, 121.   [72] Cannadine, 'War and Death', 187–8.

[73] Walter suggests that whilst notions of grief are absent in public discourses of death, they find expression in a personal (and emotionally painful) private discourse of death. Walter, *Revival of Death*, 23. Prior argues that death has not disappeared but has been invested with new meaning. Prior, *Social Organisation of Death*, 4–12.

[74] P. Mellor, 'Death in High Modernity: The Contemporary Presence and Absence of Death' in D. Clark (ed.), *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 11–30.

Ariès seeks to control and contain his subject. Indeed, in emphasising death as the apotheosis of control, Small highlights the irony inherent in death scholarship which 'claims too much of the domain of rationality' and, therefore, 'seems to miss the mark'.[75]

As critics of Ariès warn, cultural change rarely fits into convenient chronological categories and cannot be examined in isolation from perceptions of social, cultural and economic change or factors such as gender, religion, class and ethnicity. In this sense, confident references to 'the Victorian culture of death', based upon an exploration of a social and economic elite, power relations and a growth in consumer markets, begin to look unstable. Most of the images we have of 'the Victorian celebration of death' have been selected and privileged over others; the Victorian culture of death is a myth of our making. Moreover, there is a danger that the division of time into epochs has identified a linear progression, driven largely by the middle classes, towards the modernisation of cultures of death. Not only do such histories tend to ignore the fluidity of grief, they also overlook the capacity of 'modern' cultures of death to borrow the symbolism and memories of the past.[76] Indeed, as Jonathan Dollimore asserts, nothing is entirely new in Western cultures of death. Rather, attitudes towards death and loss are characterised by the perpetual appropriation and reinterpretation of familiar themes.[77] Dollimore's approach reminds us of the continuities across chronologies and cultures in addition to the changes. In separating attitudes to death into epochs, historians risk creating categories which inevitably shape, and limit, the questions asked of those cultures.

Bearing these criticisms in mind, it seems peculiar that so much has been written about the impact of the Great War upon cultures of death when so little is known about the bereavement experiences of ordinary people in the decades prior to it. Concentrating on the second half of Victoria's reign up to the outbreak of war, therefore, this research explores working-class attitudes towards death and grief in the context of rising living standards, shifting attitudes towards poverty and improved access to medical provision. Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain also witnessed declining mortality rates, shifting patterns of religious worship, the expansion of leisure facilities and the growth of the provincial social survey. In addition, the 1880s are usually cast as the apex of funeral extravagance among a social elite. The book questions conceptions of

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[75] Small, 'Death and Difference', 209.
[76] Hockey, 'Changing Death Rituals' in Hockey et al., *Grief, Mourning and Death Ritual*, 19–48 (20).
[77] Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss*, ix–xxxii.

'ostentation' and asks how different groups of people defined 'respectability' in death. Moving away from a theoretical framework that conceives of the pauper and private grave as social and economic opposites, this study reframes the notion of respectability as a movable point within a broad, flexible and colourful landscape of death.

Given the criticism levelled at materialist paradigms of grief and collective categories such as respectability, adherence to the term 'working class' may seem curious. Of course, 'class' is a notoriously problematic concept and frequently perceived to be at odds with an acknowledgement of decentred identities. As Patrick Joyce has argued, few members of the proletariat defined themselves in a vocabulary of class consciousness. Rather, identities were configured in multiple forms that were often extra economic and overlapped with each other.[78] Reclaiming class as a tool of analysis, Andrew Miles and Mike Savage contest that the examination of language as a self-contained text is 'unduly restrictive'. Instead, they posit a framework of analysis which is sensitive to contingency but argues for class formation by making connections between diverse economic, social, cultural and political developments.[79] 'Class' is not used as a tool of analysis here; it is used as an adjective to loosely signify manual workers and their families. 'Popular' or 'plebeian' might have been used but 'popular' is, arguably, even baggier and more meaningless than class whilst 'plebeian' carries different generational and colloquial connotations ('pleb' now being a colloquial term of abuse). Class, however, has broad purchase and, as David Cannadine notes, represents a category for organising the understanding of social difference that was all pervasive in British society throughout the period under consideration here.[80] Notably, the 'working classes' are not defined here as a culturally cohesive body nor does use of the term imply a rigid occupational categorisation, not least because labels such as 'manual' and 'non-manual' are inherently arbitrary and do little to convey the complexity of households.[81] In addition, specific attention is drawn to 'the poor' as a distinct group within the working classes. Again,

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[78] P. Joyce, *Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Joyce argues that if there is a broad category of identity to rival class it is that of 'populism', which he locates as a 'set of discourses and identities which are extra-economic in character and inclusive and universalising in their social remit', 11. See also P. Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and P. Joyce (ed.), *Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[79] M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class, 1840–1940* (London: Routledge, 1994), 17.

[80] D. Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[81] J. Lawrence, 'The British Sense of Class', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, 2 (2000), 307–18.

this is a problematic and abstract definition as 'poverty' and 'privation' are concepts invested with individual and shifting meanings often related to further arbitrary notions of a poverty line.[82] In contemporary texts, the poor were variously referred to as the 'un/deserving poor', the 'residue', 'people of the abyss' and, of course, 'paupers'. Within the context of this research, 'the poor' is used as a general term to refer to the least well-off among the working classes; it includes a shifting population of those whose fortunes rose and fell in addition to those perceived as shiftless; it refers to people whose lives represented an ongoing struggle to avoid the workhouse as well as those who obtained relief from the parochial authorities.[83] Crucially, I am not arguing for a single working-class culture of death and bereavement, nor am I suggesting that working-class culture was hermetically sealed from outside influences. This research emphasises difference among and between collective identities (such as gender, religion and locality) whilst ultimately emphasising the importance of the individual as the author of their own grief. Overall, I work within a framework which configures a working-class culture of death as Other: working people were perceived and perceived themselves as removed from a prosperous middle-class culture. This difference was written into both the external and internal representations of their cultural practices, including those surrounding death and bereavement.

The book is structured thematically and roughly follows the pattern of bereavement. Chapter 2 focuses on terminal sickness and attitudes towards the dying to contend that familiarity with death among the working classes did little to annul the shock, fear, devastation and despair of terminal illness and bereavement. The chapter further illustrates how responses to death were framed in relation to identity, affective relationships, the mode of death, and the availability of networks of support. Chapter 3 expands these concerns to explore customs relating to the care and exhibition of the corpse, arguing that these rites facilitated the renegotiation of the bereaved self in relation to the dead. In fulfilling obligations to the deceased, the bereaved asserted their ownership of the cadaver and ensured that it was treated with dignity and respect. Chapter 4 develops the analysis of death

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[82] G. Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Knopf, 1991) and A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900–1939* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992), 26–8.

[83] See B. S. Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., [1901] 1922) for discussion of causes of primary and secondary poverty, and W. Grisewood (ed.), *The Poor of Liverpool and What is to be Done For Them* (Liverpool: Egerton Smith, 1899) for analyses of destitution caused by unemployment, ill health or the death of a breadwinner.

rites in its reading of the funeral as a public forum for expressions of personal loss, sympathy, condolence and confirmation of the identity and dignity of the deceased. Furthermore, it suggests that stereotypes of extravagant funerals and social rivalry have been exaggerated: most rites associated with the disposal of the corpse cost little and were often improvised. In this sense, I read the 'respectable' funeral in dual terms: as the public means by which private understandings of grief were mediated and the assertion of the identity and dignity of the deceased. Turning to an analysis of parochial burial, chapter 5 reads antipathy to the pauper grave against the significance of caring for and claiming the corpse. In demonstrating that parish authorities often circumvented or prohibited rites of mourning and commemoration whilst removing ownership of the cadaver from relatives of the deceased, I contend that antipathy to pauper burial was rooted in the denial of access to shared languages of loss and identity. The historiographical preoccupation with the pauper burial as the antithesis of respectability has obscured the potential to redefine respect. Thus, whilst the pauper funeral was far removed from cultural ideals, this did not preclude the bereaved investing rudimentary gestures of dignity and identity with individualised understandings of respectability.

The significance of claiming dignity and identity in the immediate context of the funeral is pursued in chapter 6 with reference to the cemetery as a landscape for grief. I explore the significance of burial ground as a sacred space and argue that whilst municipal authorities were keen to promote a fixed definition of the sanctity of the cemetery, the bereaved public invested burial space with individual and fluid meanings. Nonetheless, attitudes towards gravespace in the post-interment period were often characterised by ambivalence. Such ambivalence did not annul or eclipse the desire to commemorate the dead, but, rather, as chapter 7 demonstrates, must be read against a pliable and pragmatic culture of grief. In particular, I challenge contemporary perceptions of privation, pragmatism and resignation in the face of death as signifiers of working-class fatalism and apathy. Subdued expressions of loss were symptomatic not so much of suppressed grief or blunted sensibility, but, rather, of deliberate strategies to manage feeling in tandem with the necessities of life. Indeed, it was the absence of a coherent and shared understanding of what grief looked and sounded like outside mourning rites and sentimental vocabularies that rendered it so ephemeral to external observers. Chapter 8 unites the themes of the book to examine attitudes towards the deaths of babies and children. Overall, this exploration argues that sensational claims concerning the extent of infanticide (especially in relation to the insurance of infant lives) have obscured a working-class culture of grief. The final chapter is intended as an epilogue, engaging with the literature of death and bereavement in

relation to the Great War and arguing that responses to soldiers' deaths not only drew upon existing conceptions of mourning, but, also, reframed and perpetuated those notions into a twentieth-century culture of death.

This research exploits a range of little-used empirical material. The minutes and correspondence for numerous burial boards (especially the remarkably rich records of Bolton Burial Board in the north-west of England) indicate a municipal discourse of the respectable funeral, the sanctity of the cemetery and the commemoration of the dead. They also highlight substantive issues relating to the desecration of graves, the acquisition and maintenance of burial plots and the use of the cemetery as a landscape for grief in the context of the funeral and commemorative practice. Transcripts of meetings of poor law guardians demonstrate the creation, implementation and, sometimes, the rejection of definitions of the pauper grave which drew on notions of degradation and antipathy. These records also offer insight into the meanings inscribed by the poor onto the pauper grave. The language utilised in these texts is richly suggestive. In particular, criticism of the guardian's treatment of pauper corpses was repeatedly framed through references to the burial of dogs, an emotive analogy which highlighted the inhumanity and incivility of the pauper grave. The detailed visitor reports of Liverpool's Assistant Medical Officer of Health, meanwhile, tell stories about people caring for the sick and nursing the dying through the value-laden lens of the professional who sought to contain death and disease in the city's poorest environs. A bias towards municipal records created in the north-west of England gives the research a strong local dimension. This is not, however, intended as a local or regional study. Rather, the location of the regional material within the context of the national makes links between specific cultural practices and broader consensual understandings of death.

The research also makes extensive use of the work of investigative journalists, novelists and contemporary social commentators. These texts represent self-conscious attempts to gain an insight into working-class life yet the rhetorical devices used to describe facets of working-class culture are also suggestive of elite perceptions and sensibilities concerning 'Other' attitudes towards death. Notably, attempts to understand working-class lives (and deaths) were bound by an inability to empathise with a mentality that prioritised the immediate present over the possible future.[84] Nonetheless, such texts advance perceptions of a 'real' social world and the relationships between its inhabitants. This material is integrated with readings of national

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[84] R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880–1950* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 167–96, and M. Freeman, 'The Provincial Social Survey in Edwardian Britain', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), 73–89.

sources, such as the medical journal the *Lancet*, which sought to provide an Olympian commentary on the habits of the people and to make strategic interventions that would change many of those habits.

Despite David Vincent's scepticism concerning the presence/absence of a sentimental culture of bereavement in the pages of working-class autobiography, this research draws heavily on personal testimony. Concurring with Vincent's observation that death is 'everywhere' in these narratives, I question his conclusion that grief is contained. Rather, I suggest we shift our focus from a concern with sentimental vocabularies to read descriptive accounts of dying, death and funerals as languages of loss in themselves. As Vincent warns, there is a danger that in attempting to 'read between the lines' historians will impose their own perception of grief and humanity onto seemingly dry testimonies. This is, I think, unavoidable. Indeed, Vincent notes his perception that grief is 'shattering' in post-industrial Britain. I am acutely aware that in trying to write a history of emotion, I risk sentimentalising a working-class culture of death, not least because my instincts and experiences refuse to permit me to believe that poverty robs people of feeling. Nevertheless, this book does read between the lines of textual representation. In particular, it suggests that sentimental vocabularies can be redefined to include non-verbal gestures such as physical touch, self-sacrifice, intonation and, significantly, silence. Borrowing from the techniques of cultural history, it also reads the use of metaphor and rhetorical device as richly suggestive of attitudes towards love and loss.

The value of retrospective testimony as a reliable narrative of the past has repeatedly been questioned; memory is inherently selective and draws on multiple myths and ideas relating to public and private selves, the present and the past.[85] As Carolyn Steedman notes, the very act of reconstructing the past changes it. The reader's interaction with that reconstruction adds further inflection.[86] For Joan Scott, 'experience' is always already an interpretation and that which needs to be interpreted.[87] Such problems need not, however, negate the value of individual narrative: much depends on how we read and interact with this material. Martin Kohli, for instance, suggests that the mythical element in a personal interpretation of the past is indicative of the narrator's current identity.

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[85] See R. Samuel and P. Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), 1–22. See also A. Hankiss, 'Ontologies of the Self: On the Mythological Rearranging of One's Life History' in D. Bertaux (ed.), *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 1981), 202–9.

[86] C. Steedman, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), 5.

[87] J. Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, 17, 2 (1991), 773–97.

This present self evaluates and references the past to give a 'situational' and 'historical truth', specific to that moment and individual.[88] Alessandro Portelli agrees that the stories related through personal testimony offer subjective visions of a social world. Yet when academic analysis draws upon a 'cross-section of subjectivities', he contends that these stories are no less credible than alternative narratives (qualitative and quantitative) since all sources are necessarily subjective.[89] In this sense, personal testimony can be read as one individual's window into a particular past; the distance of time and retrospection need not detract from the validity of the account to the author within the context of narration.

This book argues for a flexible and inclusive definition of a working-class culture of death which embraces difference and seeks to privilege alternative languages of loss. The vast majority of bereaved families participated in death rites which were not only expected performances of mourning, but were also imbued with shared understandings of decency, dignity, custom and respectability. In the context of common burial rites, therefore, it is possible to identify a culture of bereavement. However, it is imperative to recognise that whilst the rituals of mourning were inscribed with shared social meaning, they were also appropriated by individuals and invested with personal significance. Moreover, personal concepts of death and grief were elastic and subject to perpetual reinterpretation. Overall, the working-class culture of death was a social forum for mediating a private discourse of grief and condolence. Thus, whilst images bequeathed by Dickens continue to offer a colourful representation of 'Victorian' cultures of mourning, there is little of Dickens or his caricatures in this celebration of death.

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[88] M. Kohli, 'Biography: Account, Text, Method' in Bertaux, *Biography and Society*, 61–76.
[89] A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 96–107. For a discussion of history as inseparable from the literary genre, see H. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 80–100.

2   Life, sickness and death

By the end of the nineteenth century, mortality rates for all except infants had been in decline for several decades: the overall death rate dropped from 21.8 per 1,000 in 1868 to 18.1 in 1888 and to 14.8 in 1908.[1] Diseases such as phthisis (pulmonary tuberculosis or 'consumption'), typhoid, cholera, smallpox, measles, diphtheria and diseases of the circulatory system were still common, especially among the populous urban working classes, yet fatalities from these diseases had dropped dramatically since the mid-Victorian period.[2] Shifting paradigms of contagion combined with enhanced public health legislation improved attempts to quarantine infectious disease: the homes of the dead and diseased were stripped, disinfected and lime-washed; individuals could be removed to hospital on warrant; and medical officers could instigate the closure of shops and schools thought to harbour germs.[3] Access to the hospital also expanded in this period, especially among the lower classes, whilst the transfer of some poor law medical facilities to the control of the Local Government Board in 1871 encouraged a degree of reform and modernisation in health services.[4] Medical insurance had long been available through friendly societies but the introduction of National Insurance in

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[1] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 5.

[2] See R. Woods and N. Shelton, *An Atlas of Victorian Mortality* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997) for breakdown of cause of death according to age and region.

[3] M. Worboys, *Spreading Germs: Disease Theories and Medical Practice in Britain, 1865–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also A. S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1983), F. B. Smith, *The People's Health 1830–1910* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), W. Bynum, *Science and the Practice of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), A. Hardy, *The Epidemic Streets: Infectious Disease and the Rise of Preventative Medicine, 1856–1900s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), S. Sheard and H. Power (eds.), *Body and City: Histories of Urban Public Health* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), C. Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick, Britain 1800–1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[4] F. B. Smith, *The People's Health* and R. Hodgkinson, *The Origins of the National Health Service: The Medical Services of the New Poor Law, 1834–1871* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1967).

1911 formalised a fragmented culture of putting money aside for welfare purposes.[5]

Nonetheless, access to healthcare during this period remained uneven. Insurance schemes may have increased access to medical care but subscription was biased towards families with steady incomes and the health of the male breadwinner.[6] Moreover, improvements in healthcare facilities must be set against the continued association between hospitals and the workhouse and, after 1871, the erosion of outdoor medical relief.[7] Even in the 1920s, patients entering a poor law infirmary were obliged to obtain an admission order from the parochial relieving officer.[8] Overall, despite a general rise in living standards towards the end of Victoria's reign, material insecurity, poor housing and limited or irregular access to medical provision predisposed many of the poorer working classes to disease and malnutrition whilst reducing their chances of recovery.

With disproportionately high mortality rates and little evidence of investment in formal medical provision, poorer families were often perceived as apathetic in the face of illness and death. Yet attitudes towards medical care are difficult to measure, not least because they constantly shifted in relation to economic security, understandings of sickness and relationships with medical practitioners. Similarly, contemporary definitions of 'care' tended to rest on interaction with formal medical structures whilst overlooking the informal patterns of caring for the sick within the household. Expressions of fatalism were easily taken at face value and apathy confused with changing priorities: if death seemed inevitable, for instance, resources could better be expended on soothing the dying rather than pursuing medical aid which would ultimately prove fruitless. Recognition that economic insecurity impacted upon responses to sickness and death does not, however, locate such responses in a material framework alone. Rather, practices relating to the care of the sick can be read as sites for the negotiation of relationships, expressions of attachment and attitudes towards death.

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[5] J. C. Riley, *Sick Not Dead, Sickness among British Working Men during the Mortality Decline* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[6] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 55–7.

[7] A. Hardy, *Health and Medicine in Britain since 1860* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), J. Charlton and M. Murphy, *The Health of Adult Britain, 1841–1994* (Norwich: Stationery Office, 1997) and A. Digby, *Making a Medical Living: Doctors and Patients in the English Market for Medicine, 1720–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[8] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 73.

Familiarity with death

The language and symbolism of death permeate accounts of working-class life in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Margaret Penn's description of her childhood in late Victorian rural Lancashire is peppered with references to death as a rhetorical device to emphasise negative feeling. Penn's mother would 'as lief see our John lying stiff in' is coffin as walking out wi' Winnie Dumbell'. When an aunt marries, Penn's grandmother weeps 'as if she was preparing for [her] funeral instead of her wedding'. Later, the same grandmother sews her drunken son-in-law inside a sheet (in order to beat him) and looks 'as though she wished it were his shroud'.[9] Deborah Smith (born 1858) claimed her mother 'would rather have buried' her daughter than witness her wedding. The reference is telling: much of Smith's autobiography is an account of being metaphorically coffined in a miserable bond of wedlock.[10] Attitudes towards death and the dead also permeated accounts of morality. Journalist and former railway navvy Patrick MacGill (born 1890) pinpointed a willingness to 'rob' the corpse of one's own mother as a badge of low moral standards, clearly expecting readers to share perceptions of the corpse as something sacred.[11] References to death might also be invoked as grim humour. In his social commentary *People of the Abyss* (1903), Jack London described a malnourished elderly man who, baring his wasted torso, asserted that he was only 'fit for the anatomist'.[12] On a more literal level, the paraphernalia of the dead littered the homes of the living. One dressmaker from Bolton (born 1903) recalled how winding sheets were sometimes given as gifts. Her own linen sheets, 'for when I died to be wrapped in', had been bought for her by an aunt.[13] Shrouds could also be put to practical use as nightgowns or baby clothes before they clothed the corpse.[14]

The forthright manner in which working-class families discussed death was often shocking to middle-class sensibilities. Pat Jalland has identified a growing trend among wealthy families in the late nineteenth century to protect the sick from knowledge of terminal illness and impending death,

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[9] M. Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles* (Sussex: Caliban Books, [1947] 1979), 6, 30, 50.

[10] D. Smith, *My Revelation: How a Working Woman Finds God* (London: Houghton Publishing Co., 1933), 21.

[11] P. MacGill, *Children of the Dead End: The Autobiography of a Navvy* (Sussex: Caliban Books, [1914] 1980), 217.

[12] J. London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1903), 87.

[13] Bolton Oral History Transcript (BOHT), Tape 166, Reference: AL/LSS/A/007.

[14] R. Johnson, *Old Road: A Lancashire Childhood, 1912–1926* (Manchester: E. J. Morten, 1974).

preferring the deathbed to be 'uncluttered by emotional confessions and farewells' or 'scenes of intense religious significance'.[15] They also began to distance themselves from physical contact with the corpse, increasingly employing professional nurses to wash and dress the dead.[16] In this context, it is hardly surprising that during her survey of ironworkers' families in Middlesbrough (1907), Lady Florence Bell was horrified at the frankness with which friends and relatives treated impending death. On calling at one house, she noted that imminent death was not only 'discussed quite freely' before the dying man but that his family were explicitly making plans dependent on his death: 'they were going eventually to move into another house in a healthier quarter, but could not do so as long as he was alive'.[17] Such candour was shocking to Bell yet the example also suggests that, for some families at least, a brusque attitude towards death was matched by bitter awareness that environmental circumstances fostered and compounded poor health. Moreover, whilst Bell recoiled from unequivocal confrontations with mortality, the domestic arrangements within many working-class homes necessitated sharing living space with the sick, the dying and the dead. To a degree, such proximity with death demystified the dying process and left little room for embarrassment or denial. Studying working-class life in rural Surrey, George Bourne observed that even where attempts at privacy were made for the sufferer's sake, there was little refuge for the family from evidence of terrible sickness and impending death.[18]

This open culture introduced death to young children and it was not uncommon for children to 'play at' funerals.[19] Recollecting her childhood in Edwardian Bolton, one mill-worker noted that the wax effigy of a dead infant displayed in the window of a local undertaker's office commanded much interest from local children who liked to compare the 'doll-like' figure to infant corpses they saw in neighbours'

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[15] Jalland links this to changing paradigms of palliative care that emphasised freedom from stress and the decline of Evangelicalism. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 117–18.

[16] Ibid., 100 and 211–12. See also M. Chamberlain and R. Richardson, 'Life and Death', *Oral History*, 11, 1 (1983), 31–44 (40).

[17] F. Bell, *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town* (London: Virago, [1907] 1985), 87–8.

[18] G. Bourne, *Change in the Village* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1912] 1984), 33.

[19] D. Jones, 'Counting the Cost of Coal: Women's Lives in the Rhondda, 1881–1911' in A. John (ed.), *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830–1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), 109–34, and E. Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 189. See also J. Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 29–44, and D. Dixon, 'The Two Faces of Death: Children's Magazines and Their Treatment of Death in the Nineteenth Century' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 136–50.

houses.[20] Such childish pastimes brought a shudder of horror to the bourgeois commentator, however, for whom the easy acquaintance with death held sinister connotations. A newspaper account of 'Squalid Liverpool', published in 1883, noted that the sight of a passing hearse held no horror for children. This was, he implied, evidence of the brutalising consequences of poverty and high mortality rates.[21] Within the context of time and space, however, candour was a pragmatic response to the conditions in which people lived and died. Crucially, the absence of fear or revulsion enabled bereaved families to maintain a degree of order, as defined by themselves, to their domestic living and sleeping arrangements. As a small child, one Bolton weaver (born 1906) had briefly shared a bedroom with her dead grandmother and two dead siblings. Asked whether, in retrospect, the proximity of these silent relatives had not been frightening, she responded that it was 'something were always [sic] had been'.[22] It only became distasteful when evaluated in a cultural context where such practices were no longer the norm.

There is a danger, however, of confusing a familiarity with death with a devalued appreciation of life. In her autobiographical account of Edwardian London, *Jipping Street*, Kathleen Woodward (born 1896) recalled a female friend who, 'in the days when she little dreamed of death', often expressed a desire to be wrapped up well in her coffin 'to prevent the "maggots taking liberties" with her'.[23] Woodward's story indicates the candour and humour with which the young might treat the prospect of decay when death was regarded as a distant phenomenon. In practice, however, confrontations with death were inextricable from a multitude of complex emotions, ranging from shock, disgust and fear to relief and desolation. Indeed, the very notion of familiarity with death was (and is) subject to multiple interpretations. In her autobiography *A Bolton Childhood*, Alice Foley (born 1891) observed how children 'of the streets' were acquainted with death from an early age. For Foley, this acquaintance was rooted in visiting the houses of the dead in order to view the corpse. Despite experiencing direct contact with the physical remains of the dead, death as a metaphysical phenomenon remained 'something awful and mysterious' which 'would never be known to me or mine'. Thus, when Alice's brother died, 'suddenly and without warning', all notions of familiarity seemed irrelevant to the unfamiliar anguish wrought

[20] BOHT, Tape 89b, Reference: AL/SP/1/015.
[21] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 November 1883, 5.
[22] BOHT, Tape 15b, Reference: AL/LSS/A/010.
[23] K. Woodward, *Jipping Street* (London: Virago, [1928] 1983), 79.

by personal grief.[24] Growing up in a pit village in South Wales, Wil Edwards (born 1888) was accustomed to hearing of mortal tragedies associated with mining accidents. At the age of thirteen, however, he remained deliberately oblivious to the gravity of his mother's illness: 'I thought of many things, but not of death.'[25] Life stories that set the emotional distress of personal bereavement against accounts of general-ised attitudes towards death suggest a conscious desire to emphasise the psychological impact of grief in a culture where death remained frequent and unpredictable. Likewise, biographers might heighten the tragedy of bereavement by setting narratives of loss in a context where love is measured by a dread of death. V. W. Garratt (born 1892) thus described his childish love for his mother in a framework that emphasised his fear that she might die: it was a prospect he 'could not' contemplate. Almost immediately afterwards, Garratt narrates his mother's pitiful decline and slow death.[26] As a narrative strategy, Garratt's pseudo-premonition mag-nifies the horror of the bereavement. Narrative plots aside, the story alerts us to the possibility that whilst families might anticipate or contemplate the death of a loved one, such ruminations did little to prepare them for the shock of grief.

Social commentators were also alive to the possibilities of using famil-iarity with death as a political tool. In emphasising the horrific conditions in which some of the working classes lived, death could be cast as an ethereal friend, heralding release from hardship and privation (more so than the workhouse).[27] Writing before 1910, district nurse Margaret Loane suggested that few of the poor were afraid to die; the promise of expiration made the bitterest struggle seem tolerable.[28] Surveying the lives of the poor, George Sims commented: 'there are men and women who lie and die day by day in their wretched single rooms, sharing all the family trouble, enduring the hunger and the cold, and waiting without hope, without a single ray of comfort, until God curtains their staring eyes with the merciful film of death'.[29] Rather less eloquently, Jack London related the sentiments of an elderly and destitute man queuing for admission to the workhouse: 'I wish I was dead, I wish I was dead. Can't come any too

[24] A. Foley, *A Bolton Childhood* (Bolton: WEA and Manchester University Press, [1973] 1990), 37.

[25] W. J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1956), 54–5.

[26] V. W. Garratt, *A Man in the Street* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1939), 72.

[27] See K. S. Guthke, *The Gender of Death: A Cultural History in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) for discussion of personification of death.

[28] M. Loane, *The Queen's Poor: Life as They Find it in Town and Country* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 33.

[29] G. Sims, *How the Poor Live* (London: Garland, [1889] 1984), 56–7.

quick for me.'[30] In the novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914), Robert Tressell suggested that an inclination among the working classes to wish their time away was, unwittingly, a desire to die. In an explicit portrayal of the death wish, Tressell's protagonist Owen repeatedly contemplates family suicide as a means to ending privation: 'it would be far better if they could all three die now'. Similarly, Philpot, a colleague of Owen's, looks to the graveyard where 'all those who were dear to him had been one by one laid to rest' and muses that 'he would not be sorry when the time came to join them there'.[31]

This depressing vision of life as a slow and bitter journey towards the saving grace of death was an effective rhetorical strategy for reformist and socialist writers. The flipside of this device was that the working classes, especially the poor, could also be portrayed as indifferent to death, even to the point of callous neglect. Such narratives reveal little, however, of the poor's vision of themselves whilst negating the possibility of small pleasures within a life of material struggle. Indeed, it is worth noting that Tressell's hero Owen ultimately rejected his intention to kill his family: 'We've always got through somehow or other ... and we'll do so still.'[32] Jack London noted that tenderness and affection were not unknown to the most abject: 'some were poor, wretched beasts, inarticulate and callous, but for all that, in many ways very human'.[33] Similarly, George Bourne cautioned that the meanest looking men were often generous, kind and gentle.[34]

Fatalism or apparent nonchalance may tell us more about gendered codes of behaviour than the emotional lives of the poorer classes. Describing his giant-sized and solemn Glaswegian father, David Kirkwood (born 1872) noted a man who thought it shameful, weak and 'unmanly' to permit explicit displays of sentiment and affection. Nonetheless, Kirkwood constructed a story of a devoted father whose powerful emotions were manifest in the perpetual war he waged against privation and awkward, inarticulate gestures of parental responsibility. Notably, the day Kirkwood's sister left home to enter domestic service, the father reassured her that, wherever she was, if she ever had need of him, he would go to her immediately.[35] In this sense, paternal identity that was rooted in providing for and protecting one's kin could be invested with metaphorical and emotional significance. Even when men

[30] London, *People of the Abyss*, 65.
[31] R. Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Flamingo, [1914] 1993), 93, 66 and 506.
[32] Ibid., 585.   [33] London, *People of the Abyss*, 96.
[34] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 22–3.
[35] D. Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London: Harrap, 1935).

deviated from a masculine breadwinner ideal, paternal pride in their offspring and subscription to particular codes of behaviour could be interpreted positively by children keen to counter perceptions of family life as devoid of emotional attachments. Sketching the personality of his father, H. M. Burton (born c. 1895) outlined a coarse and feckless man who, nonetheless, was considered to be fond of his children because he was proud of their achievements, albeit in an 'unsentimental' way. His resolution never to use violence against his wife, meanwhile, was interpreted as evidence of devoted marital loyalty.[36]

That narrative device could manipulate perceptions of working-class cultures of death and sensibility highlights the potential gulf between a language of fatalism and the diverse experience of individuals. Notably, elite perceptions of working-class fatalism could be understood as a deliberate strategy to distance the distress of others. The annual report for the Catholic Benevolent Society of Liverpool for 1881 reflected on the 'wretchedness' of the poor, arguing that old age and death were often 'clouded with anxiety, devoid of calm'. Those to whom poverty was 'alien' protected themselves from the 'spectacle' by '[screening] off its saddening details'.[37] Writing over twenty-five years later, Florence Bell produced an ostensibly unflinching account of life for the families of ironworkers in Middlesbrough. Noting that the occupational hazards faced by ironworkers represented a constant source of anxiety to their dependants, Bell found the 'simple heroism and endurance' with which fatalities were met a 'constant source of wondering admiration': death was 'ever present and ever anticipated'.[38] Such stoicism implied a degree of helplessness in the face of adversity, yet Bell's account also suggests a steely determination to confront death and disaster where they occurred. Indeed, as the wife of the proprietor of the ironworks and thus implicated in the deaths of ironworkers, Bell held a vested interest in extolling the fortitude of ironworkers' families and, perhaps, shielding herself from less heroic interpretations of occupational accidents.

Stories of resilience and fatalism also concealed the horror and trauma of the dying. Bessie Wallis (born 1904) recalled that her grandfather committed suicide rather than suffer a slow and painful death from liver cancer.[39] Kathleen Woodward painted a vivid image of her slow-dying father repeatedly inquiring, with 'sunken eyes filled with tears', what he

[36] H. M. Burton, *There was a Young Man* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), 35–6.
[37] Report of Catholic Benevolent Society Committee at AGM 23 December 1881, MRO 361 CAT 2/1.
[38] Bell, *At the Works*, 103.
[39] J. Burnett (ed.), *Destiny Obscure: Autobiographies of Childhood, Education and Family from the 1820s to the 1920s* (London: Allen Lane, 1982), 308.

had done to deserve such suffering. He was simultaneously afraid, filled with self-pity, and remorseful for the burden he placed on his family.[40] In her capacity as a district nurse, Margaret Loane witnessed numerous deathbed scenes among the working classes. Writing of her experiences before 1910, Loane was moved to recall an 'especially sad' case of a man, aged twenty-three, who had cancer in his face: 'Just a lad like thousands of others, neither better nor worse, and this awful tragedy come into his life! He cannot resign himself: over and over again he asks, "Why should it be me? 'Taint as if I'd been worse 'n other chaps." It is most pitiable.'[41] Like Woodward, Loane encourages her reader to make the distinction between general perceptions of resignation and the particular distress of the dying who viewed death with fear, resentment and a quasi-religious belief that untimely expiration was punishment for some previous misdemeanour.

Fears concerning the pain and mystery of death were compounded by anxieties for those left behind. In *The Nether World*, George Gissing uses scenes of death and dying as a device to explore diverse identities and experiences among the working classes. The Hewett family are poverty stricken and seemingly dogged by misfortune. Gissing's account of Mrs Hewett's struggle with declining health and her slow, painful death reflects the family's efforts to survive poverty: 'She made a brave fight against disease and penury and incessant dread of the coming day, but month after month her strength failed. Now at length she tried vainly to leave her bed. The last reserve of energy was exhausted, and the end was near.' Gissing intimates that it is the responsibilities of motherhood (to nurture, care and oversee family life) that create a psychological barrier to Mrs Hewett's acceptance of death. Indeed, it is only when she confesses, and by implication transfers, her fears for her family's future to an old friend, Sidney Kirkwood, that Gissing permits Mrs Hewett to slip from life 'without a pang, as though death had compassion on her'.[42] Familiarity with, and the inevitability of, death rarely relieved the distress of those who lay dying or those they left behind.

Caring for the sick: formal medical aid

As Pat Jalland has demonstrated, shifting paradigms of preventative and palliative medicine in the second half of the nineteenth century made a considerable impact upon elite cultures of death.[43] Among working-class families, however, relationships with formal medical care services are difficult to measure. Few would have known the easy and equitable

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[40] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 16.   [41] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 175.
[42] Gissing, *Nether World*, 186 and 190.   [43] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 77–97.

doctor/patient relations experienced by the affluent. Moreover, associations between the hospital and the workhouse combined to make working-class access to healthcare problematic. Likewise, despite an overall increase in wages during this period, medical provision represented a drain on the domestic budget. Household income and expenditure varied widely at the turn of the century, with the earnings of 'the poor' averaging less than eighteen shillings a week whilst skilled male workers could earn almost forty shillings per week.[44] Paradoxically, the poorer a family were, the greater the percentage of their income was spent on rent. Among the poorest, approximately 29 per cent of income was spent on rent.[45] Even in the comparatively comfortable households of skilled workers, ill health constituted a drain on resources, especially if the patient was also the breadwinner. Notably, recourse to professional medical assistance was far from uniform. Charitable dispensaries had long provided medicines to the poor. Helen Bosanquet noted that in the metropolis medical practitioners' fees were often adapted to suit the pockets of patients. Cheaper healthcare could also be obtained from less experienced physicians, with charges for visits ranging from eighteen pence for a qualified physician down to four pence for a trainee.[46] Sliding scales operated in less urban contexts too. Surveying social and economic conditions in Edwardian rural Wiltshire, Maud Davies observed that doctors exercised sensitive discretion when charging poorer patients, either stalling requests for payment or permitting people to pay in instalments.[47]

Burial club schemes, to which most working-class families subscribed, had long provided a model for thrift among the poor. Many friendly societies and trade unions ran sick relief schemes in conjunction with life insurance plans. By the turn of the twentieth century, a significant percentage of those in stable employment subscribed to a friendly society; at the end of 1904 approximately 19 million people held some form of death or sickness insurance.[48] The popularity of friendly society schemes for medical and funeral relief in Edwardian Norwich was 'remarkable' according to social commentator C. B. Hawkins.[49] Nevertheless, burial policies appeared to attract a disproportionate amount of investment

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[44] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 73, L. G. Chiozza Money, *Riches and Poverty*, 10th edn (London: Methuen, 1910), 48 and 108–11.

[45] J. Burnett, *A Social History of Housing 1815–1985* (London: Routledge, 1978), 146–54.

[46] H. D. Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London: Macmillan, [1896] 1913), 36.

[47] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village: An Economic and Historical Survey of the Parish of Corsley in Wiltshire* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1909), 254.

[48] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 15. See also F. M. L. Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 200–3.

[49] C. B. Hawkins, *Norwich: A Social Study* (London: P. L. Warner, 1910), 278.

over health insurance.[50] Oral histories of Lancashire funeral customs indicate that subscription to burial club insurance was widespread: from a sample of 170 histories, one respondent said their family did not subscribe to a burial club. In comparison, only a handful of respondents recollected their parents paying health insurance.[51] To a point, this may be explained by the vagaries of memory: funerals were extraordinary events in family histories. As Paul Johnson notes, however, there existed in many working communities a 'hierarchy of thrift', with life insurance taking precedence over health or unemployment benefit.[52] This tended to reflect the financial security of policy holders. In Blackburn in 1913, for instance, subscribers to life insurance tended to be factory hands whilst holders of policies covering health and death were limited to the artisan class.[53] This is not surprising given the cheap rates obtainable for death insurance (a halfpenny per week) compared to the relative expense of health insurance. In particular, some friendly societies insisted on members achieving a minimum wage threshold of twenty-two to twenty-four shillings a week before allowing them to join.[54]

Nonetheless, the perceived lack of interest in health insurance encouraged a contemporary stereotype that poorer families prioritised death over life. In his collection of stories about the working population in late Victorian London, Arthur Morrison caricatured those among the poor who aspired to an extravagant funeral. The essay 'On the Stairs' focuses on the excited exchange between a mother, whose son is sick, and a neighbour concerning plans for his funeral. A visit from a gullible young doctor interrupts the women. Assuming the mother cannot afford medicines, the doctor donates a shilling from his own pocket towards a stimulant which might save her son's life. The mother pockets the coin and makes no pretence of attempting to buy medicine. The following morning, she proudly announces to neighbours that her boy makes 'a lovely corpse' and that she now has the funds to bury him with 'plooms [sic]' and be 'respectable, thank Gawd [sic]!'.[55]

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[50] Thompson and Johnson note the difficulty of assessing numbers of sickness policy holders as the term 'friendly societies' included societies providing a range of policies and those which dealt with burial insurance only. Nevertheless, Thompson and Johnson agree that numbers taking insurance for medical provision and/or sickness benefit were much smaller than those holding burial premiums, although the popularity of health insurance increased towards the turn of the twentieth century. F. M. L. Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 200–3 and P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 48–74.

[51] E. Roberts, 'The Lancashire Way of Death' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, pp. 188–207 (190).

[52] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 59.   [53] Ibid., 24 and 55.   [54] Ibid., 61.

[55] A. Morrison, 'On the Stairs' in *Tales of Mean Streets* (New York: Books for Libraries, [1894] 1970), 154–62.

It is doubtful, however, just how far this negative stereotype held true at the turn of the twentieth century. The issue of thrift was far from straightforward. As debates concerning state provision of old-age pensions highlighted, working-class definitions of 'judicious expenditure' differed from bourgeois values in that they rested on investment in goods which brought immediate benefit, such as furniture.[56] To exponents of thrift, even the cautious working classes failed to plan strategically. Noting that doctors in Edwardian Oxford were 'very good in treating poor patients at very low rates', Violet Butler observed that 'many people, careful and provident in other respects, nurse their families without advice in minor complaints, and pay the doctor's fee, of perhaps half a crown a visit, when they have to call him in for a serious illness. This is comprehensible but obviously imprudent.' Butler conceded, however, that irregular work often militated against making adequate provision for bouts of ill health.[57] From the perspective of poorer families, weekly payments into a health insurance scheme which might never be needed (death was inevitable) were a luxury. Investigating the budgets of thirty Lambeth working-class families between 1909 and 1913, Maud Pember Reeves concluded that burial insurance was a 'calamitous blunder', the only beneficiary being the undertaker. Indeed, if the mania for burial insurance, 'the one great universal thrift of the poor', were channelled into maintaining health, Britain would be 'a stronger nation'. Yet Reeves also recognised the difficulties inherent in financing a funeral, especially as many insurance policies failed even to cover burial costs.[58] Florence Bell was similarly sympathetic to the financial demands made on the working-class household budget, noting that even with excellent household management and a regular income, few families could afford to spend money on patent medicines: 'the spectre of illness and disability is always confronting the working man; the possibility of being from one day to the other plunged into actual want is always confronting his family'. That 'even the sensible and respectable' workman often failed to join a sick club could be rationalised: most breadwinners were aware of the value of insurance but harboured suspicions relating to the security of their money, bureaucracy, and the need to undergo medical examinations.[59]

[56] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 196.
[57] C. V. Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1912), 198, 244.
[58] M. P. Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (London: Virago, [1913] 1979), 73–4. See chapter 4 for discussion of funding funerals.
[59] Bell, *At the Works*, 47, 67 and 118.

Rather more damning was Clara Rackham's overview of social and economic conditions in Edwardian Cambridge. Castigating the failure to join sick clubs, Rackham argued that the working classes simply prolonged periods of ill health by refusing to call upon medical advice. Moreover, by failing to make independent provision for sickness and absence from work, families 'needlessly' took the first step towards pauperism by turning to the relieving officer for medical aid.[60] Such views reflect the anxieties of contemporary philanthropists who feared that charity perpetuated dependency, whilst Rackham's frustration echoes the perception that poorer families encouraged death by failing to call on professional medical help during the early stages of illness. As a sketch in the satirical magazine *Porcupine* observed, the rare appearance of the doctor in late Victorian slums in Liverpool was invariably read as a sign of impending death.[61] Cynically, calling a doctor only in the last stages of illness was perceived as a strategy to avoid an inquest into death. In cases where the deceased was a child, editors of the medical journal *Lancet* called for the prosecution of parents who failed to call for medical assistance in the early stages of illness on the grounds of manslaughter.[62]

Upbraiding the poor for failing to summon medical help assumed that a decision-making process had taken place that excluded this option, yet choices were shaped by circumstance. Healthcare was integral to a pragmatic juggling of priorities. As Mary Chamberlain asserts, when a shilling 'could go a long way', calling upon the 'Shilling Doctor' represented a substantial sacrifice for most. Even after the 1911 Insurance Act, Chamberlain continues, personal medical services remained limited. Instead, family and home-centred care for the sick was 'the usual and obvious resort' for the working classes.[63] Moreover, financial outlay on medical care for the sick was, by its very nature, a gamble. In his memoirs of a late Victorian childhood, George Acorn (born 1885) located the death of his baby brother within the context of a continual struggle with poverty where payments for medicines were only viable as a final and desperate attempt to cheat mortality.[64] Of Edwardian Salford, Robert Roberts (born 1905) suggested that most families not only delayed calling for a physician, but, also, subsequently failed to pay for his services.[65]

[60] C. Rackham, 'Cambridge' in H. D. Bosanquet (ed.), *Social Conditions in Provincial Towns* (London: Garland, [1912] 1985), 32.
[61] *Porcupine*, 5 June 1880, 150–1. See Bell, *At the Works*, 86.
[62] *Lancet*, 8 January 1876, 64, 6 February 1886, 283, and 30 January 1909, 329.
[63] Chamberlain and Richardson, 'Life and Death', 31.
[64] G. Acorn, *One of the Multitude* (London: William Heinemann, 1911), 38.
[65] R. Roberts, *The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century* (London: Penguin, 1990), 124.

Emily Evans, born in Manchester (1900), recalled that her mother helped nurse sick friends and neighbours to save them the expense of calling the doctor.[66]

Reliance on home-based care was also rooted in perceptions of disease, understandings of contagion and the probability of death. Measles, for instance, was notoriously perceived to be a childhood rite of passage rather than a potentially deadly illness. Some practitioners recognised that they were not summoned to the homes of the poor simply because they were not considered necessary; it was 'ignorance' of health and hygiene, not parsimony, that caused 'enormously high' rates of sickness and mortality which were, otherwise, preventable. Indeed, some medical officers of health advocated the introduction of far-reaching education programmes among working-class adults as the best means of combating infectious disease.[67] Such initiatives might also counter working-class prejudice regarding medical professionals and hospitals. High-handedness and an apparent lack of interest in the patient could foster deep-seated bitterness against the medical profession as a whole. As Anthony Wohl notes, the overbearing and pompous attitude of some practitioners did little to endear them to the public.[68] Similarly, public health measures could be interpreted as prejudice against the working classes en masse. In pre-war Cheltenham, some families even objected to the presence of the school medical inspector, keeping children at home for fear of them being 'tampered with', 'exposed' or 'assaulted'.[69] Recounting the story of a baby brother's death in infancy, Joseph Barlow Brooks (born 1874) claimed that medical men in late Victorian Lancashire held the lives of infants and the elderly cheap.[70] Even the 'kind-hearted' and 'humane' might be seen as mysterious and socially superior representatives of 'the powers that be'.[71] Margaret Powell (born c. 1910) dismissed the medical profession from her memoirs of early-twentieth-century Devon, stating that 'nobody bothered about doctors'. Casually waved aside, Powell suggests that doctors offered little that families and friends could not provide.[72] Alternatively, rumour and gossip could attribute medical institutions with far-reaching, if alarming,

[66] Manchester Oral History (Man. OH) Tape, Emily Evans, Tape 1127.

[67] *Public Health*, March 1897, 192–6.

[68] Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 18–19. See also N. Durbach, 'Class, Gender and the Conscientious Objector to Vaccination, 1898–1907', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (2002), 53–83.

[69] Gloucester Record Office (GRO) C6/1/1/6, Sanitary and School Medical Inspector Report for School Children, 1909.

[70] J. Barlow Brooks, *Lancashire Bred: An Autobiography* (Oxford: the author, 1950), 13.

[71] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 80.

[72] M. Powell, *Below Stairs* (London: Pan Books, 1970), 6.

powers. Similarly, Helen Bosanquet noted (and dismissed) a widespread suspicion among the poor of London's East End that hospitals offering cheap or free treatments practised experimental surgery on unwitting patients.[73] Nonetheless, Kathleen Woodward noted that her local hospital was viewed with suspicion since 'Magi Murphy went in to be cut about the ear, and, getting mixed up with the tonsil cases, came out without her tonsils.'[74]

Admittedly, the standard of care in hospitals across Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century varied widely. To begin with, medical practitioners often failed to agree a policy for hospital admission. The Medical Officer of Health for Lambeth in 1895 noted that out of 2,685 notified cases of infectious disease that year, only 816 were admitted to hospital. This was not so much on account of working-class resistance to medical institutions, but, rather, inadequate hospital accommodation and the absence of shared criteria for choosing which cases were fit for removal from home.[75] Moreover, despite attempts to reform medical provision within the workhouse (such as the establishment of the Workhouse Nurses Association in 1879), access to services partly depended on the local administration of the poor law and the resources available for medical care. In rural Wales, for instance, poor law guardians could afford to spend more resources on medical facilities than those in heavily urbanised districts.[76] Some hospitals offered little respite from the crowded and dirty home. The Assistant Medical Officer for Liverpool noted in 1887 that the wards in Netherfield Road Hospital were dirty and bore a 'cheerless and poverty-stricken aspect', the nurses were 'wholly inefficient', and basic sanitary and isolation rules were in abeyance.[77] An overview of conditions in York Workhouse Hospital in January 1901 observed that, despite building improvements and investment in new amenities, only nine nurses cared for three hundred patients. Of those, only a few were actually qualified.[78] Hospitals that were affiliated to the workhouse also carried, however loosely, associations with pauperism and were thus perceived as a 'final resort' by the sick.[79] In June 1884, the Assistant Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, Edward Hope, visited Thomas and Mary Farrington, aged twelve and fourteen, who were both sick with smallpox. Their parents 'strongly desired and urged' the removal of the children to hospital. On application

[73] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 36.   [74] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 144.
[75] *Public Health*, November 1896, 67.   [76] A. Hardy, *Health and Medicine*, 15–20.
[77] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 12 January 1887.   [78] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 427.
[79] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 204, P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 73, M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System, 1834–1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London: Batsford, 1981), 156–90.

to the relieving officer, however, they were informed that 'they would have to pay, also that they would have to go to the workhouse, also that they would be "pauperised", and that they would be on the list of paupers for a year'. They brought their children home. Hope's emphasis that the family were 'clean and respectable' indicates the influence of the practitioners' own values on interactions with the sick (Hope was considerably less sympathetic to those he perceived as 'squalid'). Yet it also illustrates the sense of shame inherent in equating admission to the hospital with the workhouse.[80] The humiliation of applying for parochial medical aid was tenacious. C. B. Hawkins observed that few people in Edwardian Norwich sought the assistance of the poor law doctor or hospital if any alternative could be found.[81]

In light of such problems, it is unsurprising that families might express reluctance to admit sick relatives to hospital. In 1880s Liverpool, Edward Hope lamented that it was 'usual' for families issued with orders for the removal of the sick to hospital to ignore them.[82] Even in cases where the patient wanted to be taken to hospital, some relatives were reluctant to sanction admission. On visiting Mary Carbett in September 1883, Hope noted that a doctor had been in attendance for thirteen days and 'the patient has all along expressed the strongest wish to be taken to hospital'. Yet Mary had remained at home, her typhus becoming steadily worse. By the time Hope saw her, she was too ill to be moved.[83] Medical Officers of Health held powers that both permitted the compulsory removal of the sick to hospital and the closure of any business operating from the home. Such measures could, however, be construed as evidence of the oppressive hand of local government. Indeed, some relatives avoided calling a doctor for fear of incurring a notification of infectious disease, although some practitioners were accused of colluding with the sick in failing to alert the local authorities of disease.[84] In some cases, this was related to fears for household economy, yet the wave of parental opposition to the compulsory removal of children with measles in Glasgow during the 1870s (which severely hampered the local administration's plans to

[80] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 24 June 1884.   [81] Hawkins, *Norwich*, 270.
[82] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 16 October 1883. Hope was assistant to the Medical Officer of Health, Dr Stopford Taylor, in Liverpool from 1883 until 1895 when he succeeded to the post of Medical Officer of Health. Hope became renowned for his work on preventing causes of infant mortality. See Edward Hope, *Health at the Gateway: Problems and International Obligations of a Seaport City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931).
[83] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 21 September 1883.
[84] A. Hardy, *Epidemic Streets*, 273, and *Public Health*, March 1893, 189.

contain known cases) demonstrates that a broader range of issues relating to authority and control also shaped responses to 'public' health.[85]

Prejudice against hospitalisation was particularly virulent with regard to children because it challenged parental authority, restricted access to offspring and ruptured relationships. Moreover, some families thought that the best place for a child to die was in the home surrounded by their parents and siblings. When Edward Hope visited Georgina Nixon (aged five) and her sister Elizabeth (aged four) in their cellar dwelling in April 1886, their mother made clear her objections to the children's removal to hospital: 'It appears she has already lost three children to this disease, the last about seven months ago.'[86] Two fears are implicit here: that two more children should die, but, also, that they should die outside the home and without their mother. In 1905, Alice Foley's father obstructed the removal of her brother to hospital for appendicitis, stating that 'if the boy had to die he should remain with his family'. Following the boy's death, bitter recriminations erupted within the family on account of the 'bigotry' and 'obstinacy' of the father.[87] The apparent fatalism inherent in this attitude should not, however, be read as indifference to the boy's death. Rather, Alice's father acted in what he perceived to be the best interests of the child, namely that the boy should remain within familiar and familial space. His prejudice against surgical skill may have testified to a stubborn personality, yet the conflict which ensued on account of such views suggests the degree to which decision-making about the care of sick relatives could be fraught with tension.

When children were admitted to hospital, parents might object to the bureaucracy that impeded contact with offspring and information about their welfare. Despite portraying her family as hard and unsentimental, Kathleen Dayus (born 1903) noted everyone's disappointment when told no-one was allowed to visit her brother Frankie in the local infirmary. Nonetheless, Dayus's father called into the infirmary every night on his way from work to enquire after his son's health. When Frankie was discharged well, Dayus's parents collected him and held a rare celebration.[88] As the medical officer of health who ordered removals to hospital, Edward Hope was privy to the complaints and dissatisfactions of parents. One mother whose two children had been removed to Netherfield Hospital in November 1885 complained that when one child was dying, she had been refused permission to see him.[89] During the same month,

[85] A. Hardy, *Epidemic Streets*, 49.   [86] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 14 April 1886.
[87] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 38.   [88] K. Dayus, *Her People* (London: Virago, 1982), 63–72.
[89] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 5 November 1885.

Robert Barnett complained that his child had been admitted to hospital some weeks previous but he had since been unable to obtain a satisfactory account of his condition.[90] When Mrs Green's son was admitted to hospital with scarlet fever in November 1886, the prognosis for his recovery was good. Mrs Green made daily enquiries about her boy and was informed that he was 'doing very well'. Having observed other parents talking to their children through hospital windows, however, Mrs Green was distraught to be told that her own son was too sick to appear at the window. In fact, he was dangerously ill. Mrs Green's vehement protestations to medical staff suggest affection and concern for her son. In a broader context, the image of parents calling through hospital windows implies that children were missed, fretted over and that parents and offspring alike found pleasure and comfort in maintaining regular contact.[91] The same parents would, no doubt, grieve bitterly if their child died.

Stories of antagonism towards medical practitioners and institutions indicate the imbalance of power between physician and patient. Yet it is important to note that relationships with medical professionals were varied. Some practitioners expressed despair, sympathy and compassion for their patients, visiting them regularly and listening to the troubles of their carers. In the account of his mother's death, V. W. Garratt implied that summoning professional aid was a last resort for the less well off: the attendance of a doctor signified that 'death was knocking at the door'. Yet despite the distressing implications of his presence, Garratt portrayed the physician at his mother's deathbed as a calming influence; the 'whisperings and soft footsteps [which] told of his approach' implied the practitioner's gentleness whilst anticipating the hush of death.[92] The professional might also represent authority. When his younger sister died, Garratt turned to the doctor to make a complaint about the neglect he and his siblings suffered at the hands of their father.[93] Importantly, however, analysis of the relationship between the sick and medical professionals should not obscure the significance of domestic nursing. As the examples above illustrate, formal and household patterns of care were not mutually exclusive.

Caring for the sick at home

If contemporary stereotypes of working-class reluctance to finance health over death exaggerated fatalistic attitudes towards illness, they have also

[90] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 12 November 1885.
[91] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 13 November 1886.
[92] Garratt, *Man in the Street*, 81.   [93] Ibid., 121.

eclipsed the exhausting and meticulous healthcare provided by relatives and friends. Domestic systems of care were (and are) less visible to the external observer and, therefore, difficult to measure. Importantly, a mindfulness of domestic economy and wariness of medical proficiency need to be weighed against assumptions that poorer families were imprudent or fatalistic concerning the sick. A culture of self-sacrifice and solicitous nursing within the context of 'making ends meet' signified, for some at least, the utmost care they could offer. As Annie Kenney (born 1879) remarked of her Lancashire childhood: 'If there was an illness in the house, everything and everybody has [sic] to be sacrificed for the one who was sick.'[94] Tending to the needs of the sick could be interpreted as an expression of affection, a fear of impending death and a language for coming to terms with potential grief. It is worthwhile, therefore, to assess working-class attitudes towards death and dying less in terms of formal healthcare than in the circumstances and shifting priorities of individual families.

That shared experiences of economic insecurity could foster effective networks of mutual aid among kin and neighbours has been well documented.[95] Informal associations were particularly valuable when caring for the sick and the dying, particularly if it was the principal breadwinner who had fallen ill. Rowntree noted that even among the poorest, neighbours were usually willing to assist with caring for the sick, by sharing domestic chores, nursing or treating the patient to a small delicacy.[96] Florence Bell also emphasised the willingness among the poorer classes to share the emotional and financial burdens of care:

In one case the husband, an ironworker, had been ill with rheumatic fever and pneumonia, the wife with consumption – both hopelessly ill; the husband died first, and the kindly neighbour … offered to take in the dying woman, who shrank from going to hospital. She took the invalid into her house and, when the mother died, adopted the child.[97]

There is, of course, a danger of romanticising neighbourhood networks and concepts of 'community'. As Ellen Ross notes, female networks of mutual assistance were often based on understandings of reciprocity and

[94] A. Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: E. Arnold & Co., 1924), 9.
[95] S. Adams, 'A Gendered History of the Social Management of Death in Foleshill, Coventry, During the Interwar Years' in Clark, *Sociology of Death*, 149–68. See also E. Ross, 'Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London before World War I', *History Workshop Journal*, 15 (1983), 4–27, E. Roberts, 'The Working-Class Extended Family', *Oral History*, 12, 1 (1984), 48–55, and E. Roberts, 'Women's Strategies, 1890–1940' in J. Lewis (ed.), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
[96] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 73.   [97] Bell, *At the Works*, 117.

pragmatism; foolish was the woman who remained aloof from neighbours and found she was isolated in hard times.[98]

Of course, expediency need not eclipse the possibility of forming sincere friendships. Readiness to help the sick often placed neighbours and relatives at risk from illness and some medical officers blamed the culture of house visiting for the spread of infectious diseases.[99] In August 1883, Edward Hope visited the 'clean and respectable' Jordan family in Mann Street. Following the death of their neighbour, Mrs Blackburn, from a suspected liver complaint, William Jordan had allowed the relatives of the dead woman to move into his home pending the funeral. A few days after their arrival, however, the Blackburn children became ill with typhus, which soon spread to the Jordans.[100] Whether Jordan would have housed the Blackburns had he known they were carrying typhus (probably from their mother) is doubtful. Nevertheless, that the arrangement appears to have been conducted between William Jordan and Joe Blackburn suggests that networks of aid were not the preserve of women. It also implies that Joe Blackburn considered that the presence of their mother's corpse in the house might be distressing for his children. In September 1883, Hope noted that a kindly neighbour had nursed Mary Carbett from the onset of her typhus until the patient's mother arrived from the country. Mary's mother, 'a sickly old woman of 73', was herself 'terribly afraid of the fever'. She had good reason to be; she died three weeks after her daughter.[101]

Within improvised frameworks of care and aid, many families were solicitous of the sick. Bell noted that even though illness wrought havoc on a household, it also revealed 'still more the unselfish devotion' of spouses and children.[102] This was not restricted to the women in families. Margaret Loane claimed to have met men who for 'months at a stretch' continued their employment, cared for sick wives, supervised children and spent weekends cleaning.[103] Stories of attentive care and self-sacrifice pervade Edward Hope's reports on the homes of the Liverpool poor, especially among relatives who insisted on nursing the sick at home, even if this necessitated personal hardship. In the autumn of 1883 Hope visited the home of a widow, Mrs Birkett, who was nursing her son, aged fifteen. Despite having to pawn her clothes in order to buy food for the boy, Mrs Birkett contested his admission to hospital for fear 'he might break

[98] Ross, 'Survival Networks', 14.
[99] For instance, Edward Hope tracked visits paid by sick individuals to locate both the origin and the spread of disease. See also A. Hardy, *Epidemic Streets*, 271.
[100] All recovered apart from Joe Blackburn who also contracted typhus and died. LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 10 August 1883.
[101] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 21 September 1883.   [102] Bell, *At the Works*, 174.
[103] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 24–5.

his heart', although this resistance suggests more, perhaps, of the mother's own heartbreak.[104] Some three decades later, Eleanor Rathbone's survey of widows in Liverpool (1913) related a similar story. A widow who earned a meagre living from washing had sold her mangle to cover the expense of nursing her child through illness. Ultimately, she was left with neither child nor livelihood.[105] George Acorn's mother worked 'like one possessed' for sufficient wages to buy beef tea for her sick baby. Recounting how she nursed the babe with 'strange, sweet, soothing invocations', Acorn described the scene as an 'unfolding of great, loving, maternal instinct'. This 'instinct' is as much a 'revelation' to Acorn's readers as it apparently was to the author. Much of Acorn's memoir is a complex mix of invective against neglectful and unloving parents, stories of moments of humanity that offer hope, and petulant resentment that his parents may have been capable of feeling, but that it seemed not to focus on him. In any event, his mother's desperate attempts to nurse the infant brother proved fruitless and the child died.[106]

The insistence on nursing sick relatives within the home suggests a desire to maintain contact and an overriding, if sometimes misplaced, faith in domestic care. Indeed, implicit associations between admission to hospital and death alongside a fear that the sick would not receive constant individual attention could strengthen families' resolve to keep them at home. Maggie Joe Chapman (born 1899) recollected her mother's refusal to permit her eldest son's admission to a tuberculosis sanatorium in Yorkshire: 'they nearly all died with it, you see . . . they died like white mice of TB'. Instead, she worked tirelessly to nurse the boy herself, firmly believing that her own skill and emotional investment would save the child from death.[107] As Ellen Ross notes, home-based nursing, usually overseen by female relatives, was motivated by real concern and belief in the efficacy of traditional remedies.[108] Such was the dedication of some mothers that medical practitioners failed to agree on whether children were best cared for at home or in hospital. Indeed, if shared understandings of good motherhood hinged on self-sacrifice, it was almost inevitable that some women would fail to make provision for their own (ill) health in favour of prioritising the needs of their spouse and

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[104] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 20 September 1883.
[105] E. Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows Under the Poor Law in Liverpool*, presented to the annual meeting of the Liverpool Women's Industrial Council on 11 December 1913 (Liverpool: s.n., 1913), 34.
[106] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 35–6.
[107] Maggie Joe Chapman in C. Kightly (ed.), *Country Voices: Life and Love in Farm and Village* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 113.
[108] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 169–79.

their children.[109] After all, the skills associated with nursing had long been integral to bourgeois conceptions of femininity. Yet dedicated home nursing also permitted carers a degree of surveillance, enabling them to detect improvement or decline and, importantly, to make preparation if death seemed inevitable.

Prolonged deaths and proto-corpses

It is widely acknowledged that the circumstances of death shape the responses of those left behind. Sudden deaths tend to provoke feelings of anger and guilt in the bereaved alongside intense expressions of disbelief and shock. In comparison, prolonged illness and the expectation of death give both the dying and those close to them an opportunity to internalise the knowledge of death before it takes place, enabling the renegotiation of identities and the sorting of financial and domestic affairs.[110] Although the post-Freudian interest in psychotherapy has created sophisticated theories and vocabularies for grief, discernible patterns of response to sudden or prolonged deaths are identifiable in the nineteenth century.[111] Notably, Jalland has identified shared understandings of 'good' and 'bad' deaths in elite Victorian families within a framework of religious belief: 'good' deaths were slow and allowed the dying to make peace with God and face death with contrition and submission.[112] The obscurity surrounding popular patterns of belief renders application of Jalland's model of bereavement to working-class families problematic. Examined in a material paradigm alone, it might be tempting to speculate that models of 'good' and 'bad' death operated in reverse for poorer families for whom prolonged deaths represented a drain on resources. Dichotomised models of death are, however, of limited use: death and grief are rarely so straightforward. Rather, the dying process

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[109] Perhaps the most common example of self-denial was the practice of eating little of nutritional value in order to feed husbands and children. Rowntree, *Poverty*, 71, H. Mitchell, *The Hard Way Up: The Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell – Suffragette and Rebel* (London: Virago, 1977), 46, Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 12–16, and Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 235.

[110] S. Cline, *Lifting the Taboo: Women, Death and Dying* (London: Little, Brown, 1995), Walter, *Revival of Death*, R. Picardie, *Before I Say Goodbye* (London: Penguin, 1998), E. Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Tavistock, 1970), M. Bradbury, 'Contemporary Representations of "Good" and "Bad" Deaths' in D. Dickenson and M. Johnson (eds.), *Death, Dying and Bereavement* (London: Sage & Open University Press, 1993), 68–71, and C. M. Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1986).

[111] For early modern examples, see R. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 183–219.

[112] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 17–38, 59–76.

was, and is, typified by a medley of emotions and frustrations, none of which were fixed or universal for those who were dying or for those they left behind.

Caring for the terminally ill entailed disruption in domestic arrangements and represented a strain on household budgets: the sick became redundant as wage earners; carers might be tied to the home; and medical costs necessitated extraordinary expenditure. Models of palliative care in the late Victorian and Edwardian period emphasised the importance of sanitation, rest, fresh air and nourishment as basic but effective means of soothing the dying. The domestic circumstances of poorer classes, however, often prohibited such luxuries. Although housing standards improved in the latter decades of the century, a substantial percentage of poor families continued to live in overcrowded conditions in concentrated areas of slum housing.[113] Surveying housing in Meltham, Yorkshire, in 1901, the medical officer for health, T. A. Green, bemoaned the inability of poorer families to make sufficient arrangements to contain infectious disease: not only was isolation impossible in smaller homes, it was unreasonable to expect the average working man to 'live in a house a portion of which can be turned into a temporary isolation hospital at a moment's notice'.[114] Edward Hope, a medical officer for Liverpool, witnessed the pitiful conditions in which the poor lived and died. In one sub-let house in 1883, neighbours and children crowded around three tenants who lay ill with typhus.[115] In June that year Hope found Mary Blake, aged fifty, sick with fever in a filthy room almost bare of furniture.[116] The following day, he visited a three-roomed home, described as 'very dirty', which housed eleven people, four of whom had typhus. The inhabitants survived on bread and tea, along with mussels and 'similar marine vermin', whilst sleeping on packs of straw.[117] At a sub-let house in Brick Street, two residents had recently died from typhus. A third tenant, Edward Earley, also contracted the disease. Earley had been unemployed for four months and relied on his wife to support the family of two children, his mother and sister: they were all malnourished and very dirty.[118] Hope's visit to the McCann family in August 1885 revealed that the house was 'full of squalid people', comprising of drunks, women with bruised faces and black eyes, and two relatives who lay bedridden with typhus.[119]

[113] Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 140–87.   [114] *Public Health*, March 1901, 422.
[115] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 18 July 1883.   [116] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 21 June 1883.
[117] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 22 June 1883.   [118] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 17 July 1883.
[119] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 28 August 1885.

Despite inadequate living conditions and the heightened risk of contagion, many families wanted the sick to die at home. Florence Smith recalled how families in Edwardian Durham 'sat up with them you know, when they were dying, they weren't taken off to hospital like they are now'.[120] Implicit in this reflection is the notion that the discipline and rigidity of hospital regulations policed access to the dying, inhibited relatives' displays of emotion and undermined family solidarity, especially if the patient was placed in isolation.[121] Caring for the sick at home enabled relatives to exercise continual surveillance over their condition and detect external signs of deterioration. Wil Edwards's siblings took turns to sit with their dying mother lest she expired during the night.[122] Florence Jones (born 1910) carefully charted her mother's slow death from consumption. As death drew near, each encounter with her mother was marked by an eager search for signs of life: 'I knew I must keep checking that she was still breathing. Every morning I expected to find that she'd died in the night.'[123]

The ability to witness life, and indeed death, possibly fostered a sense of control in an otherwise helpless situation. Aware of the gravity of his mother's illness, V. W. Garratt hoped his fears were 'playing [him] false' and listened attentively to her difficult breathing as confirmation of life. Reluctant to go to work in case she died in his absence, Garratt hung on to a 'desperate conviction' that his mother would wait for death until his return. Presence at the deathbed enabled the bereaved to take comfort in the knowledge that the deceased had not spent their final, possibly fearful, moments alone whilst permitting them to inscribe those moments with sentimental meaning. After witnessing his mother's life 'flickering out', Garratt reconstructed her death as one of 'perfect rest'. Yet bearing witness to expiration, a word resonant of calm release, could also prove harrowing, especially if death throes were excruciating and the person labouring under them a small child. Describing the death of his young sister Constance, Garratt conveyed a sense of utter helplessness as he watched the little girl 'shrieking with pain': 'Pitifully, she cried for me to try and ease her torture, but the most I could do was to comfort her in my arms and let her tears fall over my face, so that her last moments on earth should be as gentle and loving as I could make them.' There is little in this account that is peaceful and expiration, when it finally came, was a 'merciful release'. Garratt seems preoccupied with his own inadequacy in the face of death and the 'torture' of trying to comfort a dying child.

[120] Man. OH Transcript, Florence Smith, Tape 962.
[121] See also A. Hardy, *Epidemic Streets*, 131.   [122] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.
[123] F. Jones, *Memoirs of a Liverpool Stripper* (Liverpool: Pharaoh Press, 1996), 88.

From his description, it seems probable that Garratt either cradled the child on his lap or that he lay or knelt alongside her, suggesting a degree of physical intimacy. As Garratt is aware, this scene is far removed from the conventional image of death as ordered, with the dying arranged in bed and loved ones seated at their side. Moreover, the description of Constance's tears falling over his face enables Garratt to intimate that he shared the little girl's pain whilst striving to fulfil the role of comforter. Garratt reminds his readers that deep personal loss need not find expression in the shedding of one's own tears, but, rather, in the symbolic sharing of others.[124]

Undoubtedly, caring for the terminally ill when few palliatives were available was difficult, even for those who could afford professional medical assistance. Simple gestures such as caressing the sick and keeping lips moistened with water were among the few sources of comfort to those racked with pain and fatigue.[125] Recourse to alcohol as a means of dulling pain and mental faculties may not have been acceptable to advocates of temperance, but such measures were understandable and not dissimilar to doctors' own practice of administering brandy.[126] Less controversially, entertainment and companionship could occupy or soothe the dying even if they did little to relieve pain or discomfort. It is also worth remembering that the lassitude and long periods of bed-rest associated with terminal illness could be intensely boring and isolating for those whose mental faculties remained intact. Florence Jones's dying mother requested that her bed be brought downstairs so that she could 'see what was going on'.[127] Recollecting the death of his father, Joseph Barlow Brooks speculated that the sick man derived satisfaction from sorting and distributing favourite possessions to his children (although these were pawned the day after his funeral).[128] Kathleen Woodward emphasised the simple pleasure the dying Jessica Mourn derived from listening to friends read to her. Acutely aware of her inadequacies as a storyteller, Woodward prioritised obedience to Jessica's 'least desire' in a bid to ease her path to death.[129] Prior to her own demise, the Dickensian-named Jessica Mourn had been a frequent visitor to the homes of the sick, the dying and the bereaved. A firm believer in the palliative properties of religion, Jessica placed great

[124] Garratt, *Man in the Street*, 82.   [125] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.

[126] See Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 58, and Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 34. Jalland notes that medical paradigms supporting the use of opiates to secure a calm death became increasingly popular among the elite after the publication of William Munk's textbook *Euthanasia: Or Medical Treatment in Aid of an Easy Death* (1887). Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 81–6.

[127] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 88.   [128] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 13.

[129] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 144–6.

store by comforting the dying with thoughts of heaven and reassurances about the love of God.[130]

Whether thoughts of heaven echoed the spiritual beliefs of the sick or not, the Christian language of hope, forgiveness and peace could, nevertheless, be heard as words of comfort for both the dying and the bereaved. Annie Kenney considered her dying mother's Christian faith to be like that of a child: 'The only thing she desired was a heaven where she could be at peace; release from a world full of struggle to make ends meet, a world full of anxiety and hard labour.' This was not to disparage her mother's beliefs, but, rather, to appreciate the consolatory value of such uncomplicated assurances.[131] In contrast to the Evangelical convictions of Jalland's early Victorians, the working classes seemed to favour an all-forgiving God of mercy whilst casually overlooking obligations to a God of judgement, thus leaving the deathbed free from last-minute conversions and prayers for the forgiveness of sin. In her analysis of popular religion in Southwark, Sarah Williams has argued for a loose understanding of religious belief as a dynamic process which drew on folklore, superstition, formal belief and occasional or conditional conformity to institutions.[132] In this sense, vague perceptions of heaven were no less valid for being removed from doctrinal precepts. Rather, loose concepts of goodness, neighbourliness and God's mercy could represent powerful sources of succour in preparing the sick for death. It is easy to caricature the well-meaning or sanctimonious Christian philanthropist, yet visits from a clergyman could be welcomed where other professional persons were viewed with suspicion. Lily Smith (born 1894) noted her mother's reluctance to engage formal medical help when her father lay dying from typhoid and pneumonia, yet the local parson called regularly to enquire after the sick man.[133] Similarly, a series of articles in the *Liverpool Daily Post* in 1883 emphasised the ability of the clergy to permeate the homes of the Roman Catholic poor where death and illness were rife. Unable to offer any pain relief, a priest could represent an emotional and spiritual balm in the midst of 'rags and misery' regardless of a family's religious commitment.[134]

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[130] Ibid., 132.   [131] Kenney, *Memories*, 26.

[132] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and S. Williams, 'The Language of Belief: An Alternative Agenda for the Study of Victorian Working-Class Religion', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 1, 2 (1996), 303–17.

[133] Man. OH Transcript, Lily Smith, Tape 644.

[134] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7 November 1883, 5.

Cynics suggested that only the lure of charity motivated the poor to interact with representatives of the church. Nonetheless, ulterior motives worked both ways: charity offered religious persons an opportunity to establish relationships with those at the very margins of society. The chair of the Liverpool Catholic Benevolent Society reflected in 1884 that charity simply enhanced the role of the church 'because, however acceptable the visits of the priest might be to the poor people in his charge, they were more acceptable still when he came with a little towards assuaging the clamour of hunger'.[135] Some twenty years later, the Society continued to insist that the priest retained special access to the homes and the circumstances of the Catholic poor: 'It is the priests, and the priests only, who really know and appreciate the terrible sufferings which the poor endure.'[136] For those who had little contact with the church, however, visits from ministers could be awkward. Recollecting an Anglican cleric reading prayers at the bedside of a dying man, Margaret Loane was struck by the superficiality of the visit and the lack of sympathy between the two men. Notably, when a barber's assistant called on the dying man in the capacity of a friend, his spontaneous, simple prayers signified a heartfelt gesture.[137] Loane's censure of the aloof and impersonal cleric serves as a foil to the unobtrusiveness of friends and reinforces Loane's claim, as a professional but seemingly invisible narrator, to be a friend of the poor.

Narratives of deathbed scenes that were set in a Christian framework could bear testimony to the faith of the dying or bereaved. Recollecting the death of his grandmother, Joseph Barlow Brooks emphasised how the Christian faith had sustained her through the agonies of terminal illness. Offered brandy by her doctor, the elderly woman refused, stating that she was not afraid to die and needed no dulling of her senses.[138] Deborah Smith's autobiography was dedicated to extolling the glory of God. Unsurprisingly, the significance of deathbed repentance featured strongly in her narrative. Describing the death of her first husband, Smith emphasised his regret at a life wasted in drink and indifference and his urgent pleas to his children to lead good, honest lives. Only after seeking forgiveness for his past misdemeanours could he pass away 'peacefully'. This scene of atonement provides a superb foil to the death of Smith's heathen and unremorseful father-in-law whose final throes were characterised by

[135] MRO CAT 2/1. Annual Report of the Catholic Benevolent Society Committee, December 1884, 361.
[136] Ibid., December 1908, 361.   [137] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 33.
[138] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 34.

curses and terror: 'I saw him die. What a death! He was afraid to lie down in bed; he cursed to the last, then fell back on his pillow, dead.'[139]

Communication between the dying and the bereaved held significance for both parties, whether it concerned reconciliation with God, gestures of affection or simply represented a desire to ease the passage into death. Impending death could also counter the self-consciousness of adult relationships. Margaret Loane related one case where the dynamics between a father and his dying son changed as their relationship shifted from one defined by the awkwardness that characterised masculine adolescence to one that mimicked the ease and playfulness of childhood:

An artificer was sitting up at night with his dying son, a manly, intelligent lad of fifteen, suddenly struck down by a mortal disease. As death approached, the relations between the two insensibly slipped back some seven or eight years. Almost the last words uttered by the boy were a refusal to take his medicine: '*You* drink it, dad! Mother won't know the difference.' Twice the father drank it in a fond attempt at coaxing, and at day break the lad died.[140]

Loane's image of father and son sitting into the night is touching. In coaxing the boy to take his medicine the father expressed, albeit in a light-hearted way, a desire for his son not to die. Likewise, in poking fun at the mother, father and son made reference to and reinforced a bond with each other, even if this was not verbalised in a sentimental way.

Slow deaths also created opportunities for the dying and bereaved to reconcile differences. Gissing's character Jane in *The Nether World* is a fragile creature whose life holds little prospect of joy or fulfilment. Having failed to meet the expectations of an idealist grandfather, Jane is filled with a sense of inadequacy. Although her grandfather's death leaves her alone, Gissing grants Jane 'one thought of consolation' in her grief; that she made amends with her grandfather before he expired. Thus, she can look upon his still features and see they 'were unreproachful'.[141] Gissing reminds his reader that the experience and interpretation of loss is shaped not only by the circumstances of death, but, also, by the interpersonal dynamics of those who die and those who mourn. Some deathbed scenes offered little comfort save respite from a tragic life. Patrick MacGill's account of the death of the beautiful Norah Ryan was closely bound with his condemnation, firstly, of the social and economic circumstances that propelled young girls into prostitution and, secondly, the hypocrisy which then condemned and discarded them as outcasts. As Norah Ryan dies, MacGill sits by her bed uttering words of comfort, reassuring her that he

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[139] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 32–3.   [140] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 22.
[141] Gissing, *Nether World*, 348.

had loved her from childhood. In casting himself as the erstwhile sweetheart of the dying Norah, MacGill stakes a claim to minister to, and speak for, the wronged innocent. In a curious and clichéd fudge of spiritual belief, MacGill recasts Norah as a fallen angel waiting to be reclaimed by a heaven that is ruled less by God than an omniscient figure of Death:

> The spirit of the girl I loved had passed away. Without doubt, outside and over the smoke of the large city, a great angel with outspread wings was waiting for her soul . . . Death, the universal comforter, had smoothed out things in a way that was best for the little girl, who knew the deep sorrows of an erring woman when only a child.[142]

Whilst MacGill's bitter denunciation of society's treatment of young prostitutes fell in with his socialist beliefs, it is also plausible that MacGill was afraid to acknowledge his own complicity in Norah's downfall: the championing of his 'sweetheart' was rather late in the day to be of any practical assistance to the falling Norah.

The distress of deathbed scenes might, however, be exacerbated by an inability of either the dying or the onlooker to find words of comfort or solace. Recounting his life in a South Wales mining town, Lewis Jones's fictional autobiography is peppered with scenes of death and disaster. Whilst many pit accidents resulted in the sudden death of miners, Jones reminds his readers that others could precipitate slow and agonising deaths. Describing the scene of a man crushed by a falling roof, Jones highlights the efforts of a fellow workman who stumbles over platitudes and tries to reassure the broken miner that all will be well. His words ring false, however, and the other men present stand silent and helpless, 'their faces full of grief and sadness', aware that death is the only outcome of the accident.[143]

Those who expired slowly occupied an unusual status in being neither fully alive in a social sense nor completely dead.[144] Pat O'Mara, writing of his early life as a 'Slummy' in Edwardian Liverpool, recalled how his Aunt Lizzie's 'gradual' death was written on her body as she turned from a beautiful woman into a 'horrible-looking, boneless hulk'. The aunt having contracted syphilis from an unfaithful husband, O'Mara hints at the cruel irony of beauty being killed by sordid sex whilst emphasising that terminal illness could render people's features unrecognisable and place a strain on bonds of ease and familiarity.[145] Indeed, the problematic state of dying illustrates the complex relationship between attitudes towards

[142] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 298–305.
[143] L. Jones, *Cwmardy: The Story of a Welsh Mining Valley* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1937] 1991), 139.
[144] M. Mulkay, 'Social Death in Britain' in Clark, *Sociology of Death*, 31–49.
[145] P. O'Mara, *The Autobiography of a Liverpool [Irish] Slummy* (Liverpool: Bluecoat Press, [1934] 1994), 18.

the terminally sick and towards death itself: tender care and a reluctance to accept personal loss often fused with an implicit desire for death to make haste. This may have been linked to material circumstance and the wish to relieve the living from the financial burden of supporting the economically unproductive.[146] Less cynically, the wish to hasten death could be motivated by physical and emotional exhaustion and a desire to curtail the suffering of the sick. Woodward characterised the prolonged death of Jessica Mourn as 'Slow-moving days, heavy with sadness; we seemed to live in an unchanging twilight'. Jessica would appear to lose strength only to rally round in a cycle of 'unending nights', forever in a state between sleep and wakefulness.[147] Such accounts suggest an implicit desire for death to complete its task whilst highlighting the strain wrought on those who watched loved ones deteriorate and suffer.

The emotional conflict engendered by witnessing slow and painful deaths could become manifest in a belief that the loving family were prolonging the dying process. Florence Jones noted how her older siblings translated their mother's lapse into protracted unconsciousness as a moral dilemma. Florence's brother suggested that constant surveillance was actually stalling death: 'By going in [to see Mother] all the time, we're keeping her back, keeping her with us.'[148] The family subsequently resolved to maintain their vigil around the kitchen table, with two siblings taking turns to sit with their mother. The gesture was understood as a tacit agreement to 'let go' and permit their mother to die. The idea that death represented a battle of wills also permeates Kathleen Woodward's account of her father's illness and the efforts of her mother, a proud and fearless woman, to nurse him:

I know that [father] is holding on tightly to her as though to save himself from slipping into the arms of Death; and it is very easy to understand that Death itself might be intimidated by mother, who looks unswervingly ahead, with a shut mouth and hard lines in her face; and divides her days between holding father back from the grave – and the wash tub – and the scrubbing brush and occasional excursions . . .[149]

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[146] Andrew Scull makes a similar point with reference to families committing economically unproductive relatives to the asylum. A. Scull, *Museums of Madness: The Social Organisation of Insanity in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), 18 ff. This has been challenged by J. Walton, 'Lunacy in the Industrial Revolution: A Study of Asylum Admission in Lancashire, 1848–1850', *Journal of Social History*, 13, 1 (1979), 1–22, and V. Bailey, *This Rash Act: Suicide Across the Life Cycle in the Victorian City* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 54–6.

[147] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 145.   [148] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 88–9.

[149] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 16.

Death, then, is not simply portrayed as a process but a presence which can be bargained and fought with or, in some cases, outsmarted. Inevitably, perhaps, such reasoning created much scope for bitterness and guilt. In *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones portrays a mother's sobbing despair and self-recrimination at the imminent death of her adult daughter: 'O God, what have I done that you should make my little gel suffer?'[150] When her daughter dies, the mother can only chide: 'And now all her pain have been for nothing.'[151]

Sudden death and the family

Perceptions of whether death was slow or sudden were often arbitrary and dependent upon factors such as the probability of death from disease or the degree to which relatives and friends were prepared for the death. Elsie Oman described her mother as 'ill, dead and buried within a fortnight', the compact statement implying that the death from typhoid fever was rapid, although two weeks can hardly be described as 'sudden' death.[152] In contrast, Edna Thorpe found her mother 'dead in bed' from heart disease, the blunt phrase suggesting the shock of an abrupt and unforeseen death.[153] Henry Hawker's (born c. 1880) sister was already unconscious and dangerously ill (from an apoplectic fit) when she returned home from her position as a domestic servant. She died the following day without regaining her speech. Writing of the event years later, Hawker implied, firstly, that the inability to communicate with the girl lent a sense of abruptness to her death and, secondly, that it left the family in a state of suspended disbelief; it took 'a very long time' to realise the extent of their grief.[154] Hence, whilst perceptions of slow deaths often entailed a sense of bereavement before expiration took place, sudden or quick deaths could provoke feelings of shock, denial and a delayed sense of emotional loss.

That sudden deaths circumscribed suffering may have soothed the bereaved but the circumstances of unexpected deaths could be traumatic in themselves. Wil Edwards's autobiography suggests that even when stories of coalmining disasters formed 'the fabric of our valley's history', accounts of personal tragedy could assume mythical status. One tale of a widow whose eldest son died indicated the power of the coal pit to abruptly destroy a family whilst leaving the bereaved full of recrimination,

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[150] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 56. [151] Ibid., 138.
[152] Man. OH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 602.
[153] Man. OH Transcript, Edna Thorpe, Tape 81.
[154] H. E. Hawker, *Notes of My Life* (Stonehouse: W. G. Davis, 1919), 12.

regret and guilt. This story hinged on the son's desire to take leave from work and his mother's insistence that he should not miss a day's pay. The mother won the battle of wills and 'he went off to the pit shouting "Good Morning, Mam"; and she heard him whistling, as boys like to whistle, going down the street'. Just hours later, the young lad drowned when water broke into the pit where he was working.[155] In emphasising the youth of the lad (his whistle, the disinclination to work contrasted with the bossiness of a mother), Edwards accentuates the sense that this death is a pitiful waste and inscribes the distant and familiar story of pit disaster with individual and tragic meaning.

Violent and accidental deaths were also shocking because they usually disfigured the corpse. J. R. Clynes (born 1869) recollected how the deadly machinery in textile mills could mutilate the unwary.[156] Deaths in mining accidents were similarly gruesome. Jack Martin recalled that bodies brought to the surface of the pit after accidents could be mangled beyond recognition.[157] Even towards the end of the nineteenth century, railway navvies frequently met with gruesome deaths, their limbs being crushed, severed or blown to pieces.[158] In 1908, 1,042 deaths occurred as a result of injury in a factory or workshop (not including deaths from industrial disease) whilst 1,345 men died in coal and metalliferous mining accidents.[159] Yet horrific occupational deaths were not restricted to the industrial workplace. Maggie Chapman's grandfather died after being attacked by a bull on his own farm in North Yorkshire.[160] Mutilated bodies left the bereaved little room for comfort or notions of peace; the dead might be unrecognisable whilst the horrific condition of remains could fill relatives with feelings of revulsion. Indeed, the perceived repugnance of the disfigured corpse was a cornerstone of arguments for abolishing the requirement for coroners' juries to view the body.[161]

Deaths from suicide further exacerbated the difficulties of sudden death by providing enormous scope for self-recrimination and carrying the social stigma of 'self-murder'. Annie Swindells (born 1880) recounted the story of her father's suicide in 1905 within the context of his history of depression. Yet the focus of her account rests upon

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[155] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 35.
[156] J. R. Clynes, *Memoirs 1869–1924* (London: Hutchinson, 1937), 29.
[157] J. Martin, *Ups and Downs: The Life Story of a Working Man* (Bolton: Stephenson, 1973), 85.
[158] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 130. See also T. Coleman, *The Railway Navvies: A History of the Men who Made the Railways* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1965] 1981), 71–9, and D. Brooke, *The Railway Navvy* (London: David & Charles, 1983), 146–69.
[159] Money, *Riches and Poverty*, 125–40.   [160] Kightly, *Country Voices*, 102.
[161] I. Burney, *Bodies of Evidence: Medicine and the Politics of the English Inquest, 1830–1926* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 80–106.

the devastating impact of the death on herself: Swindells developed 'sleeping sickness' and 'every other thing you could mention with nerves'; the narrative of her life in the aftermath of the suicide is shaped in terms of anguish and a 'bitter and uphill fight' to recover from it.[162] Responses to suicide might well be dominated by feelings of remorse and guilt. Yet suicide also complicated the interaction between the bereaved and the community around them. The infrastructure of working-class neighbourhoods along with the localised character of inquests ensured that details emerging from the coroner's investigation became public knowledge, encouraging neighbours to reach independent verdicts regarding culpability and censure the bereaved with 'rough music'.[163] Anxiety concerning the gossip and whisperings of others could propel the bereaved to foolish action. At the inquest into the death of John Murphy in July 1891, the jury were told that Murphy's wife discovered his body hanging from the ceiling with a rope tied around the neck. His body had begun to putrefy and he was black around the mouth. Cutting him down, she laid John on the floor, hid the rope and concealed the bruises around his neck. She then called for assistance. There was little hope of concealing the cause of death: upon examination of the body, the bruised neck was immediately visible to the doctor certifying death and John had left several farewell notes. Asked to explain her actions, Mrs Murphy stated that she wanted to avoid the social disgrace of suicide.[164] Given that Murphy's suicide was bound to be discovered, his wife's actions may be interpreted as an attempt to acknowledge her awareness that the death conferred disgrace without needing others to remind her.

Officially, harsh penalties for the crime of suicide were repealed in the nineteenth century: punitive religious measures relating to the burial of suicides in unconsecrated ground were lifted in 1823 and laws restricting the inheritance rights of families of suicides were revoked in 1870.[165] Nonetheless, suicide continued to be perceived as a controversial and stigmatised death, not least because 'self-murder' remained a common law felony until the 1960s. As Olive Anderson and Pat Jalland observe, the repeal of legal penalties for suicide did not meet with universal approval, especially from Anglican conservatives and medical practitioners who pedalled a fear that leniency would encourage more cases

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[162] Man. OH Transcript, Annie Swindells, Tape 934.
[163] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 72.   [164] *Liverpool Echo*, 3 July 1891, 4.
[165] M. MacDonald and T. Murphy, *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

of self-murder.[166] Jewish cemeteries continued to prohibit customary interment rites for suicides whilst some burial insurance companies refused to pay premiums for those who took their own lives. The social stigma of self-murder certainly persisted. Indeed, coroner's juries were notorious for returning verdicts of temporary insanity rather than *felo de se* to save the reputation of the deceased and soothe the grief of the bereaved.[167] Such was the notoriety of *felo de se* returns that the Report for Commission of Enquiry into Coroners' Inquests in 1910 concluded that the verdict be abolished and the sensational associations of suicide revised: 'suicide' should be stated as a verdict to signify only that the deceased had died by their own hand.[168]

Of course, deaths from suicide left enormous scope for the bereaved to formulate feelings of guilt and culpability which might well surface in the course of inquests into the death. Accusations of culpability often hinged on perceptions of disordered gender roles within the family unit. The coroner overseeing the inquest into the suicide of James Edwards, aged forty-five, in Liverpool in 1906, explicitly charged the deceased's wife with culpability for the death: a supposedly drunken woman who had raised her children in a slovenly fashion, Mary Edwards had, he suggested, probably driven her husband to despair.[169] The inquest into the suicide of fifteen-year-old Emmeline Connelly in September 1897 highlighted a fractious relationship between the girl and her parents. On discovering Emmeline in the street with twelve young men late one Saturday night, her father censured her – 'A nice gang you were with. You disgrace me in these respectable buildings' – and sent her to bed. Going to check on her later that night, Connelly found Emmeline gone from their rooms. Her broken body was later discovered in the yard below; she had thrown herself from the tenement balcony. At the coroner's inquest, both parents related how they had endeavoured to prohibit Emmeline from mixing in bad company. According to her father, the shame of being found in such company impelled Emmeline to end her life. Implicit in the statements of Connelly and his wife was a degree of culpability for the death: they had failed to prevent Emmeline cultivating undesirable friendships only to induce a fatal sense of shame. That the coroner overseeing the case used Emmeline's death as a warning to other 'flighty young girls' can have done little to assuage the Connellys' grief.[170]

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166 O. Anderson, *Suicide in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) and Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 69–76. See also B. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
167 V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 72.   168 PP XXI: 20.
169 *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 4 July 1906, 3.   170 *Liverpool Echo*, 8 September 1897, 3.

The inquest into the death of Thomas Wallace, a labourer from Liverpool (aged forty-two), some months later also suggested the complex role of familial relationships in precipitating suicide. Wallace had been depressed for some time due to unemployment. The day preceding his death, Wallace's wife, the breadwinner of the household, had expressed the wish that he would find work, to which he reportedly replied 'God knows that it is not because I don't look for it.' At ten o'clock the next morning, Thomas was found hanging from the ceiling of the room where he had been sleeping by himself. In this case, it seems likely that Wallace's lack of employment compromised his sense of self, not least because his spouse had adopted the masculine role of breadwinner. That Wallace was sleeping separate from his wife also implies a degree of marital discord that probably accentuated his sense of isolation and further compromised his masculine identity.[171]

Suicide may have become increasingly secularised during the nineteenth century, but the act of self-murder suggested a weak moral character, compounded in some cases at least by the shortcomings of others. It is not surprising, then, that even in cases where the victim was anonymous or known only superficially, accounts of suicide prompted moral reflection. Writing of his childhood in an Edwardian village, Richard Hillyer sketched out the character of a local eccentric, Barky Britnell. Increasingly resentful at his isolation from the village community, Britnell had begun to shout and rave at passers by. When Hillyer recounts that he and his father found Britnell hanging, the story is one of Hillyer's guilt and recrimination for having ignored the mental breakdown of a lonely man. Within Hillyer's life narrative, the story became a milestone on the road to socialism.[172]

Neglect

Stories of suicides, and lonely and bitter deaths draw attention to the plight of those who died without family or friends to nurse or soothe them. Most stories concerning deathbed scenes originate from relatives' reconstructions of the event or the narratives of professionals who participated as observers. Inevitably, perhaps, these accounts overlook the deaths of the friendless. Indeed, the lonely dead enter our histories only rarely, usually in the guise of cadavers found drowned or murdered, or as paupers whom nobody owned. To a point, the pauper is the most accessible

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[171] *Liverpool Echo*, 27 December 1897, 4.
[172] R. Hillyer, *Country Boy: The Autobiography of Richard Hillyer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1966), 186.

example of those who died without the companionship of family and friends or the reassurance that their remains would be cared for. The emphasis on antipathy to the pauper funeral has, however, omitted the stories of individuals who entered the workhouse, quite simply, with the intention of dying there. The Master of Winchcombe Workhouse in Gloucestershire, for instance, kept note of those (usually elderly) persons who came to the workhouse to expire. Of course, the workhouse was notorious for offering little in the way of comfort, yet even the sparsest provided a bed, some nourishment and a dry, relatively warm environment. Moreover, workhouse staff were not always insensitive to the needs of the poor. Indeed, the Master of Winchcombe tried to invest the deaths of the elderly and friendless with a modicum of dignity, ordering a folding screen to be placed around their beds to permit them to die in peace and privacy.[173]

Among those who died with family and friends close by, it is important to remember that not all were cared for. Like those who died alone, accounts of the deathbeds of the neglected are not always accessible. Furthermore, concepts of care and neglect are arbitrary. Within contemporary literature, however, notions of the neglected sick were firmly rooted in negative stereotypes of the poor. A series of newspaper articles on 'Squalid Liverpool' in 1883 emphasised the lack of fellow feeling among slum dwellers in the Liverpool docklands. Arguing that poverty fostered self-interest, the journalist claimed that a widow could sicken and die in complete solitude; even if neighbours learned of her illness, they would be too fearful for their own health to offer her any assistance.[174] More mercenary stories of indifference to the dying suggested that the prospect of a minor windfall, usually in the form of a burial club payment, would eclipse concern for the sick. In Gissing's *The Nether World*, the characters of Mrs Peckover and her daughter Clem are thrown into 'profound delight' at the death of Mrs Peckover's mother-in-law 'partly because they were relieved at length from making a pretence of humanity to a bed-ridden old woman, partly owing to the fact that the deceased had left behind her a sum of seventy-five pounds, exclusive of moneys due from a burial club'.[175] Throughout the novel the Peckovers are cast as calculating, greedy, cruel and wholly self-centred. The Peckovers represent the anxieties of the middle classes who associated the poverty, dark alleys and dank houses of the slum with the brutalisation of feeling and a threat to civility. Yet they are also foils to the benevolent personalities of Gissing's hero and heroine. Hence, the

[173] GRO G/WI 95/20–22.   [174] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 6 November 1883, 5.
[175] Gissing, *Nether World*, 5.

Peckovers' lack of feeling at the death of the old mother-in-law serves to illustrate their place within an amoral culture typical only of some of the lower classes.

The Peckovers are sufficiently disagreeable to ensure that few readers would sympathise with their characters. Yet not all stories of neglect and apparent lack of feeling are so easy to interpret. The report books of Edward Hope are infused with evaluations of im/morality made through sensory perception; the smells, sounds and sights of the slum were repellent to Hope and inextricable from his perception that the poor were desensitised to death. Notably, Hope's criterion for identifying 'neglect' of the sick was highly subjective. Visiting Jenkinson Street in December 1885 to examine the cadaver of Richard Hines (aged thirteen) who had died from smallpox, Hope concluded that the boy had 'doubtless' been neglected: 'the house and inmates were filthy, the mother drunk . . . [and] the dispensary doctor had attended once only'. The corpse was 'fairly nourished' but Hope observed that it bore a 'remarkable appearance' in that the top layer of epidermis was 'everywhere stripped off'. This could have been due to intense inflammation of the skin, consistent with smallpox, or the washing of the body in scalding water. Hope offers no speculation on which possibility was more likely and does not record whether the corpse may have been washed before or after death. Given that the boy had clearly been fed and was reported to have been ill for only three days, Hope's accusation of 'doubtless' neglect appears to rest on disapproval of the Hines's lifestyle and environment and the distressed appearance of the cadaver rather than any discernible sign of mistreatment.[176] Similarly, the *Liverpool Daily Post*'s investigative series on 'Squalid Liverpool' noted that the Scotland Road district was rife with fever and disease and the people 'more dangerous, more ignorant and more drunken than any to be found elsewhere'.[177] Implicit in this commentary was the damning suggestion that fever was fostered by the lack of morality and communality as opposed to environment.

Clearly, some caution needs to be exercised when assessing charges of neglect and indifference to the sick and the dying. For instance, caring for the sick could severely interfere with the household economy. In October 1886 Edward Hope visited Ian Begley, aged eleven, who was sick with scarlatina. The Begley household also served as a 'washing and mangling place'. His mother had suspended work whilst the boy was sick but was anxious that he be removed to hospital so that she could resume work.[178]

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[176] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 29 December 1885.
[177] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 8 November 1883, 5.
[178] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 14 October 1886.

This was not callousness, as Hope conceded, but a practical strategy: a suspension in earnings, however brief, would neither aid recovery from illness nor maintain the nourishment of the healthy.

Similarly, high mortality rates should not eclipse recognition that on a personal level disease and death could be alarming. One woman (born c. 1890) recalled in later life that her childhood relationship with a consumptive mother had never gone beyond a sense of mystery and awkwardness: the pale woman who lay on a horsehair sofa coughing was unknowable, not least because her children were 'afraid' and 'used to avoid her'. Explaining the lack of love for her mother, the woman suggested that 'children work things out' and 'knew it was no good' allowing themselves to form an attachment to the woman they 'always knew' they would 'lose'. Conversely, this memoir was infused with overwhelming affection for a 'beautiful' and 'tender' father.[179] Hope's report on J. R. Gibbon, a man of twenty-four, who had contracted smallpox in November 1885 also highlights how fear of illness could complicate patterns of care. Hope observed that Gibbon's mother and sister were in attendance but that 'the condition of the patient frightens them and they neglect him'. Given the disfigurement occasioned by smallpox, their fright seems understandable (even experienced doctors could be repelled by the sight of infected people who became 'masses of blood and corruption'[180]). At the time of Hope's visit, both women had, for the previous twelve hours, believed that Gibbon was dying. There was no food in the house, Gibbon had received no nourishment and a number of his relatives were seated in the next room waiting for him to expire. With care, nourishment and the vaccination of the two women, however, Hope thought the prognosis for Gibbon's recovery was good.[181] That Gibbon had apparently been left to die appalled Hope. The withdrawal of nourishment might support the charge that Gibbon had been neglected. Yet superficial neglect concealed a degree of trauma on behalf of the man's carers. The belief that death was inevitable suggests pessimism about his recovery. Indeed, Gibbon seems to have acquired the status of protocorpse. In this light, withholding food could be construed as a rational economic decision. That Gibbon's relatives had not left the house to restock on provisions might indicate a reluctance to leave the man entirely. Moreover, the assembly of Gibbon's relatives in anticipation of death suggests the importance attached to familial support at times of bereavement. Thus, material circumstances and apparent fatalism need not negate

[179] Miss Renshaw in J. Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood* (London: Gollancz, 1982), 62–3.
[180] A. Hardy, *Epidemic Streets*, 48.   [181] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 18 November 1885.

or circumscribe a sense of loss. Rather, poverty and fear forced families to deal with death and dying with pragmatism. Indeed, an analysis of attitudes towards the cadaver in the immediate aftermath of death suggests neither indifference to the dead nor superficial displays of grief but, rather, illustrates the significance of the corpse to customs which allowed the bereaved to express grief and accept the finality of death.

Conclusion

Privation often forced families to approach death with pragmatism. Recognition that material circumstances impacted upon responses to death is, however, far removed from the assumption that poverty blunted sensibility. The language of fatalism and reconciliation which many middle-class observers assumed was typical of working-class responses to bereavement represents only one facet of a multidimensional culture. Death and illness provoked a kaleidoscope of feeling: despair, relief, sorrow, pecuniary anxiety, horror, hope, incomprehension and love. In addition, the dying process could be characterised by harrowing fear, agonising pain, reconciliation, humiliation and bitterness. For external observers, it was perhaps inevitable that fatalism and stoicism were the most identifiable responses to bereavement. It seems unlikely that the riot of emotion precipitated by impending death would find coherent expression in communication with professional or philanthropic persons. Many of those who surveyed the working classes approached their subject from the preconceived notion that poverty and high mortality rates dulled the capacity for grief and that the expression of loss was rooted in the purchase of a respectable funeral. Analysis of practices that centred on the care of the sick, however, illustrates that the processes of loss and grief often began before expiration. Similarly, expressions of affection and attachment need not fix upon the material effects of the funeral. Indeed, the subsequent treatment of the corpse was typified by a lack of expenditure.

3 Caring for the corpse

The idea that death became taboo in the twentieth century derives partly from the growth of a sanitised culture which has diminished contact with the corpse. As Lindsey Prior suggests, the cadaver in the latter half of the twentieth century was treated as a thing and talked of in terms of 'it' rather than a personal name.[1] For the Victorian and Edwardian working classes, however, death and the cadaver were inseparable from domestic living space. Scandals in the first half of the nineteenth century concerning the retention of corpses in houses for a week or more subsided with the boom in burial insurance and the increased powers of public health officials. By the 1880s, most working-class families buried their dead within four days of expiration.[2] Nonetheless, the spatial proximity of the living to the corpse alarmed medical practitioners and public health reformers who perceived the putrefying body as a source of contagion. Yet locating the dead in a domestic context was integral to the performance of rites associated with the dignity of the dead and the expression of sentiment. The act of washing and laying out a corpse, for instance, represented a final gesture of intimacy and affection. It also assisted the bereaved in renegotiating the boundaries between themselves and the dead whilst framing visual memories of the deceased at peace. Attempts by external bodies to interfere with the remains of the dead (such as the removal of the corpse to a mortuary or the request for a post-mortem examination) tended to meet with hostility from the bereaved. This may indicate beliefs relating to the metaphysical properties of the cadaver and the need to protect the dead from evil or danger.[3] Yet it is equally plausible that, at the turn of the twentieth century, families were possessive of their dead largely from a desire to claim ownership of the corpse and ensure that it was treated with respect. Perceptions of the spiritual status of the corpse sat alongside a powerful need to fulfil secular obligations which not only

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[1] Prior, *Social Organisation of Death*, 158.   [2] *Lancet*, 12 October 1895, 931.
[3] Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 8–22.

accorded dignity to the dead, but which also provided linguistic and symbolic landscapes for the expression of loss and condolence.

Proximity to the corpse

The putrefaction of the body begins at the moment of death, with soft organs such as the brain, stomach and intestines first succumbing to decay. The process of deterioration can be slowed by refrigeration but warm weather and domestic fires hasten decomposition. Inevitably, the retention of the corpse in working-class homes gave rise to pungent odours and visible signs of festering. In 1895 the *Lancet* estimated that during summer, a fresh corpse would smell rancid twelve hours after death.[4] Even in mortuaries, cadavers decayed rapidly in summer heat, emitting putrid smells to nearby houses and buildings.[5] The notion that the urban poor were impervious to noxious smells needs to be treated with caution; the stink of death is quite distinct, whilst the sight of flies and bluebottles feasting on the flesh of a friend or relative can hardly have been comforting.[6] Despite increased living standards at the turn of the twentieth century, a significant minority of families continued to live in overcrowded and insalubrious homes. The government inquiry into the condition of working-class housing in 1885 highlighted the problems of localised overcrowding. In Liverpool, despite a wave of new housing in the suburbs, there remained approximately 2,500 court dwellings and 14,500 houses in the city centre that were built before the passage of building regulations in 1846. Each court comprised ten houses consisting of a cellar, two rooms and an attic connected by an open staircase. Hugh Farrie, assistant editor on the *Liverpool Daily Post*, stated that in the worst streets, an average of 527 persons crowded into 300 yards of housing. The City Engineer, Clement Dunscombe, added to the sorry picture, arguing that around 70,000 of the 'poorest' classes remained in unhealthy and crowded dwellings.[7] In Leeds in 1897, D. B. Foster stated that, although in decline, a significant number of the poor continued to be housed in cellar dwellings that were entirely devoid of natural light.[8] In 1891, 19 per cent of London, 10 per cent of Liverpool and 8 per cent of Manchester's population lived in overcrowded conditions, defined as two or more persons sharing one room.[9] Charles Booth calculated that in London in

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[4] *Lancet*, 12 October 1895, 931.   [5] *Lancet*, 31 January 1885, 226–7.
[6] See E. Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones* (Manchester: Neil Richardson, 1983), 9.
[7] Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, PP 1885. See also Burnett, *Social History of Housing*, 144–7.
[8] D. B. Foster, *Leeds Slumdom* (Leeds: C. H. Halliday, 1897), 11.
[9] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 207.

1891, over 17,000 people were living in conditions of four or more persons to one room, whilst in 1897 Robert Williams estimated that almost half the London population resided in tenements or sub-let lodgings with only one or two rooms per family.[10] In 1892, the medical officer of health estimated that Coventry had over 3,000 homes with insufficient light and ventilation.[11]

Where space for the living was at a premium, the presence of a cadaver represented an added burden. Surveying the East End poor, Jack London indicated the grim compromises families made to house the corpse: 'During the day [the corpse] lies on the bed; during the night, when the living take the bed, the dead occupies the table, from which, in the morning, when the dead is put back into bed, they eat their breakfast.'[12] One of the most pitiful scenes in Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) told of a widow and three children living in a one-roomed house with the decaying remains of a fourth child who had died thirteen days previously.[13] Written for a comparatively affluent audience, such descriptions were intended to shock; such circumstances were anathema to the sensibilities of middle-class observers who accommodated the dead in clean, airy and separate rooms. For the poorer classes, the immediacy of decay can hardly have been conducive to a sentimental or mystified culture of grief. At an abstract level, the retention of a body could simply be depressing. Describing the room where the remains of a friend – Lil – and her dead baby lie, Kathleen Woodward suggested that whilst the sense of claustrophobia induced by the corpse could be literal, the impression of suffocating confinement also provided a metaphor for the wretchedness of grief:

It was hot, swooning hot in the bedroom, as if every breath of air was oppressed by the coming of death, and suddenly a great change seemed to come over all the room: the walls went grey and dirty; the lace curtains at the window became stringy, lank torn and indescribably miserable looking. The room took on a sordidness that sent a shiver through my soul.[14]

Having described Lil as one who brought 'the sun and the stars of another world, and its laughter' to those who knew her, Woodward's repetition of this phrase when describing the interment of Lil and her baby ('we buried the sun . . . ') emphasises both the bleakness and finality of death.

[10] C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, vol. V (London: Williams & Norgate, [1896] 1902) and R. Williams, *The Face of the Poor; Or, the Crowding of London's Labourers* (London: W. Reeves, 1897), 9.

[11] *Public Health*, April 1893, 206–7.   [12] London, *People of the Abyss*, 304–5.

[13] A. Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, [1883] 1970), 7.

[14] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 78–9.

The presence of a corpse in the house could also hold gruesome possibilities for taunting and bullying those who were fearful of the dead. In the novel *The Nether World* George Gissing introduces the characters of Clem Peckover, the adolescent daughter of a landlady, and the young child who lodges with them, Jane Snowden. Clem is aware that Jane finds the presence of old Mrs Peckover's corpse in the back kitchen 'a ceaseless occasion of dread and misery' and forces Jane to enter the room without any light. The cruel trick fills Jane with a 'sickness of horror' and she cries out to Clem to have mercy on her. Jane is finally rescued from the ordeal by the poor but haughty lodger Clara Hewett. Written in a context where the poor were increasingly classified according to moral worth, the scene establishes the principal 'types' who occupy Gissing's 'Nether World' (the vicious, the innocent victim and the proud) and serves to secure the reader's sympathy for Gissing's heroine, Jane Snowden.[15]

For many families, however, sharing domestic space with a cadaver was a necessity that left little room for squeamishness or fear. The consequences of such arrangements for health and hygiene were dismal: the air shared by the sick, the healthy and the dead was inevitably 'poisoned'.[16] A correspondent to *The Times* in July 1881 went so far as to advocate direct intervention in the burial customs of the working classes in a bid to prevent the retention of the corpse. It was, the author argued, in the interests of middle-class self-preservation to stamp out insanitary customs, whilst the removal of the corpse would alleviate a 'grievous and unnecessary addition' to the 'burden of sorrow and want' experienced by the poor.[17] Certainly, the continued presence of those who had died from infectious disease can have done little to boost the morale of relatives who were sick themselves. The reports of Edward Hope, assistant medical officer for Liverpool, indicate the dire conditions in which families lived alongside the dead. In February 1884, Hope found Mary Harley, aged seven and sick with scarlatina, lying in bed alongside the dead body of her five-year-old sibling.[18] On 9 April 1885, Hope visited a court dwelling where two girls aged sixteen and twelve were sick with typhus. For two days they had been living with the corpse of their mother who had died from the same disease.[19] At a house in Lauds Place, two children with a malignant form of measles lay in a room with another sibling and their dead brother.[20] At an eating house on Sefton Street, seven children were living alongside a child in an advanced state of debility and the cadavers of

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[15] Gissing, *Nether World*, 7.   [16] Mearns, *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, 15.
[17] *The Times*, 7 July 1881, 12.   [18] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 1 February 1884.
[19] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 9 April 1885.   [20] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 10 May 1887.

two more children who had died from scarlet fever. A 'dirty old woman', employed as a nurse, moved regularly between the room housing the sick and dead children and the busy shop.[21]

Contributors to the medical journal, the *Lancet*, frequently bemoaned the lack of adequate public mortuary facilities in towns and cities, drawing especial attention to the problem of cadavers languishing in crowded tenement buildings and common lodging houses. Such circumstances made it difficult to contain disease, but they also threatened to make death itself into a public spectacle rather than a private rite of passage. One contributor to the *Lancet* cited the example of an elderly woman who died in a lodging house on London's Chancery Lane in July 1882 and whose corpse lay amidst other lodgers for five days.[22] The ongoing campaign for more public mortuaries was inextricable from further questions concerning the medicalisation of mortality, notably the increased regulation of death certification and the professionalisation of the coroner. Despite perceptions that the medical profession attempted to colonise death in the later nineteenth century, practitioners were also keen to delegate the less demanding tasks associated with mortality. In May 1890, the *Lancet* suggested that undertakers create storage facilities for the dead. As it was, the removal of corpses to undertakers' premises was a convenient 'privilege' rarely exercised.[23] Indeed, 'chapels of rest' only became popular in the 1930s when undertakers accelerated the serious business of reinventing themselves as professional 'funeral directors'.[24]

Explicit in the debates of medical practitioners and public health officials was the perception of the cadaver as an unwelcome source of contagion. It seems unlikely, however, that bereaved families looked upon the remains of their dead in terms of disease, odour and decay alone. Ruth Richardson has suggested that during the early nineteenth century, working-class concepts of death and resurrection tended to equate the corpse with the personality of the dead. Yet definitions of death and the soul were ambiguous, leaving scope for vague and fluid interpretations of the afterlife. Richardson also points to popular notions, such as sin-eating (whereby the bereaved ate cakes symbolising the wrongdoing of the dead and thus transferred guilt for sin), which cultivated ideas concerning responsibility for the soul in the immediate aftermath of death. Hence, she argues, the object of most customs associated

[21] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 4 January 1887.   [22] *Lancet*, 15 July 1882, 73.
[23] *Lancet*, 31 May 1890, 1191.
[24] S. Adams, 'A Gendered History of the Social Management of Death in Foleshill, Coverty, During the Interwar Years' in Clark, *Sociology of Death*, 149–68 (164), and G. Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry in England, 1700–1960' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 120–34.

with the corpse was to protect the body and soul of the dead from evil or danger.[25] Religious belief is, however, notoriously difficult to measure, whilst the character of individual notions relating to the afterlife is oblique. Moreover, the association of the corpse with the personality of the deceased need not be rooted in spiritual belief alone: concepts relating to the possession and treatment of the cadaver, however putrefied, were inseparable from notions of memory and, significantly, issues of decency, dignity and respect.

Laying out the dead

Laying out the dead minimised the unpleasant effects of putrefaction. The relaxation of bladder and rectal muscles at the moment of death prompted most families to wash the corpse and plug orifices (often with herbs) to mask the stench of decay. Pennies were placed on the eyelids, limbs were straightened and held in place with string, whilst a bandage tied underneath the jaw held the mouth closed. Men were usually shaved, hair was brushed and combed, and fingernails cleaned before the corpse was dressed for burial, usually in a nightgown or a simple shroud.[26] As Richardson states, laying out was not essential for the disposal of the corpse but was 'crucially important for the correct observance of other funeral customs' such as viewing the body. Attendance to the toilet of the dead and packing of the anus also helped prevent bodily fluids seeping from the coffin, especially en route to the cemetery. Such tasks were usually performed with compassion, and perceived as displays of love and respect for the dead.[27]

Despite the practical advantages of laying out, the custom was widely condemned. Much criticism hinged on the popular image of the layer-out as a local 'handywoman' who attended births and deaths and was typified by Dickens's character, Sarah Gamp.[28] A filthy, drunken old woman, Mrs Gamp moved in a twilight world of botched births and disease-ridden deathbeds, treating hygiene with disdain and spreading infection all the while. It is doubtful how far the Gamp stereotype was representative in Dickens's heyday; many midwives prided themselves on their reputation and were at pains to avoid association with diseases such as childbed fever.[29] By the late nineteenth century, handywomen still

[25] Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 7–17.
[26] See Adams, 'Gendered History', 159–60, and Chamberlain and Richardson, 'Life and Death', 37–8.
[27] Chamberlain and Richardson, 'Life and Death', 38.
[28] Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 299 ff., and Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 24–5.
[29] I. Loudon, *The Tragedy of Childbed Fever* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

performed laying out and childbirth services but were more likely to be aware of the risks related to poor hygiene.[30] Midwifery was becoming increasingly professionalised, with formal training and medical exams superseding the lay experience of handywomen. The inclusion of a clause in the Midwives Act (1902) prohibiting midwives from laying out the dead indicates concern about the dual role of untrained handywomen, yet amendments to the Act in 1907 allowed midwives to lay out the dead 'under specified circumstances' having secured the permission of the relevant supervising authority.[31] The alteration to the Act intimates, perhaps, the complex identity of the layer-out: initiatives to raise the skills profile of laying out were often compromised by the persistence of custom and the desire of the bereaved for someone known to them to perform the intimate tasks of washing the dead.

It has been suggested that sanitary objections to the laying out of the dead by women within the home sprang from a male medical imperative to professionalise care of the body, both in life and in death.[32] Indeed, medical practitioners' debates on laying out often hinged on questions of who performed the task and whether they possessed the requisite skills to complete it in a sanitary manner. Writing in *Public Health* in 1894, the medical officer for Carlisle, C. S. Hall, detailed the 'repulsive' and 'noxious' odours emitting from the corpse, arguing that the treatment of the dead required the attention of the careful professional. Advising fellow medical officers how to treat a corpse, Hall recommended washing the cadaver with a disinfectant solution and, in the interim between death and burial, placing the body in a large and well-ventilated room. During the summer months, he suggested keeping blocks of ice in the room housing the corpse to lower temperatures and arrest putrefaction. Where decomposition came on rapidly, he suggested padding the coffin with antiseptic and absorbent wadding and covering the corpse in chloride of lime. With the lids of coffins screwed tightly shut, the smell and sight of the corpse would be contained. Hall framed his proposals in a language of reverence: 'If the living have any respect for the dead, it is their bounden duty to take care that no harm and no unpleasantness is permitted.'[33] Other practitioners, however, argued that theoretical models of hygiene that perceived the corpse only in terms of contagion were complicated in practice by sentiment and notions of custom. Alfred

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[30] Chamberlain and Richardson, 'Life and Death', 39, Ross, *Love and Toil*, 240–1, N. Leap and B. Hunter, *The Midwife's Tale: An Oral History from Handywoman to Professional Midwife* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993) and J. Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (London: Heinemann, 1977).

[31] Adams, 'Gendered History', 152.　　[32] Cline, *Lifting the Taboo*, 76.

[33] *Public Health*, August 1894, 372–6.

Law, contributing to *Public Health* in 1902, agreed that with regard to the handling of cadavers, sanitary issues were 'more important than all the rest'. Nonetheless, he reminded fellow medical officers that for bereaved families and friends, the corpse was not viewed in primary terms as a sanitary problem, but, rather, as an individual with a distinct biography and web of relationships.[34]

Admission that the corpse was the nucleus for personal and sentimental reflection was far from new. In 1886 the prominent public health reformer Frederick Lowndes drew attention to competing perceptions of the corpse and laying out. Given the shortage of mortuary facilities and widespread antipathy to them, Lowndes acknowledged that customs associated with washing and dressing the corpse held a pragmatic function. The problem, he suggested, was located in the identity of the layer-out. When performed by the immediately bereaved, Lowndes considered laying out to be a gesture of affection and a desire to pay one's last respects to the dead. Performed by someone extra to the family circle, however, laying out was 'repulsive', presumably because Lowndes assumed the task was executed for pecuniary gain.[35] In making this distinction, Lowndes suggested that preparation of the corpse could adopt specific nuances in a process of grief that were, however, bound up with notions of privacy. Where domestic intimacy was compromised by the presence of an untrained woman, Lowndes persisted in tying the role of the layer-out to the stereotype of Dickens's handy-woman, Gamp. Even by the late nineteenth century, the Gamp caricature was seen as an insult to the many women who were trained in healthcare and hygiene.[36] Yet even among those who had not received any formal training in healthcare, the identity and role of the layer-out varied greatly.

Undoubtedly, some women lacked any sense of discretion in marketing their services for the dead. George Acorn's autobiography, so much of which is dedicated to distancing himself from the vulgarities of the poor, was openly disparaging about the handywoman in his childhood neighbourhood who advertised with a crude window sign: 'Dead bodies washed here.'[37] Advertising the services of a layer-out did not, however, automatically render the women or their tasks sensational, grubby or boorish; most handywomen were perceived in uncomplicated terms as offering a necessary service. William Blackburn, whose parents both died in Bolton in 1911, recalled the local layer-out as 'generally someone in the neighbourhood' who attended the dead 'for a shilling or two'.[38] One

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[34] *Public Health*, October 1902, 4.   [35] *Lancet*, 6 November 1886, 878.
[36] *British Journal of Nursing*, 8 December 1910, 449–51 and 10 December 1910, 472–3.
[37] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 83–4.
[38] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588.

woman (born 1905) from Farnworth, near Bolton, asserted that her grand-mother used to lay people out and was paid 'about a shilling' for her services.[39] On a more formal footing, Sam Hills (born 1907) claimed that local undertakers commissioned women from the neighbourhood to lay out the dead for a small fee.[40] Often, layers-out were remembered as solemn and respectable women who performed their task with tact and skill. In Kathleen Woodward's *Jipping Street*, 'everyone' sent for Jessica Mourn for whom such 'melancholy tasks' made up her 'daily portion', not least because she wrapped the dead up well and placed great store by 'going decent'.[41] Sheila Adams has suggested that discrepancies in retrospective narratives of laying out may be explained by the encroachment of a profes-sional medical structure on an informal practice. The apparent fluidity of the layer-out's identity was also facilitated by the diverse relations she had with clients. The woman with a local reputation for laying out the dead rarely acquired formal training but was renowned within the neighbour-hood for her cleanliness, efficiency and experience. Her role was not routinised and, within the culture of the street, she probably shared the same socio-economic conditions and networks as the deceased. Hence, her relations with the bereaved were characterised by familiarity and she either refused a fee or accepted payment in kind. Conversely, tasks undertaken on behalf of undertakers or for families unknown to her took the form of a business transaction, with the layer-out acting in the capacity of a skilled worker and expecting remuneration for her services.[42]

Adams overlooks, however, the potential for laying out to adopt a much looser form. In particular, the layer-out could offer her services as a gesture of condolence for the bereaved. Oral history narratives suggest that the tasks associated with preparing a corpse for burial could be shared among friends who wished to intimate their sympathy with the bereaved. Mary Lester recalled that her mother regularly attended to the toilet of the dead for neighbours. According to Lester, the performance of this task in working-class districts of early twentieth-century Manchester was inextricable from a more supportive role of 'look[ing] after' the bereaved female neighbour.[43] Likewise, recollections of mothers participating in laying out dead neigh-bours tend to be framed within broader stories about groups of women who regularly 'helped one another' with the tasks and crises associated with the life cycle.[44] Indeed, the identity of the layer-out is ambiguous when the task

[39] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[40] Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, Samuel Hills, uncatalogued.
[41] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 43–4.   [42] Adams, 'Gendered History', 156–7.
[43] Man. OH Transcript, Mary Lester, Tape 272.
[44] BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/A/016 and Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Seal, Tape 50b.

is interpreted as a communal act of condolence rather than a specific service. One woman born in Burnley in 1908 described how her mother always kept a 'laying out bag' (a pillow slip) ready: it contained a white nightdress, white socks and 'everything for laying somebody out'. Far from casting her mother as fulfilling an exceptional role, however, the respondent noted that 'there were other people like me mother, they'd help one another'.[45] In some rural communities, the sharing of laying out paraphernalia extended to the use of a communal 'stretching board', a plank on which to lay the corpse until it was coffined.[46] Assistance with laying out the corpse was frequently inextricable from a wider female culture of mutual aid where pragmatic support could also be construed as providing emotional succour. It might also be perceived as a form of paying one's respects to the dead. One Bolton man (born 1903) recalled that female neighbours used to visit the homes of the dead in order to admire and wash the corpse.[47] In this sense, laying out the dead adopted a loose definition, signifying a communal act of remembrance as well as a pragmatic function.

In his fictionalised autobiography of a South Wales mining village, *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones indicated that the meanings attached to laying out the dead were inseparable from a female-centred culture of negotiating grief and offering condolence. Recounting the death throes of the protagonist's sister Jane, who expires soon after childbirth, Jones draws attention to the unassuming presence of a neighbour, Mrs Thomas. When Jane dies, Mrs Thomas immediately assumes control of washing and dressing her corpse. Indeed, between Jane's death and her funeral, Mrs Thomas 'seemed to be in complete charge of the household'. At no point, however, does Jones imply that her presence is intrusive. Rather, in adopting responsibility for the tasks associated with death and domesticity, Jones suggests that Mrs Thomas acts as a balm to the turmoil occasioned by bereavement.[48] The ability of a friend or neighbour to oversee the practicalities associated with the life cycle provided comfort on two levels. Recollecting her mother's frequent presence at local births and deaths in turn-of-the-century Wigan, Mrs McIver claimed that neighbours 'always knew they had nothing to worry about if my mother was there'. McIver's mother was experienced in her tasks and, having placed confidence in her, neighbours were free to focus on the emotional implications of birth or death.[49] Describing rituals associated with death in Edwardian Ancoats, Manchester, Mr Brown identified one woman,

[45] BOHT, Tape 34a, Reference: JP/SS/1B/008.
[46] Cissie Elliot in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176.
[47] BOHT, Tape 71b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/006. [48] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 57–9.
[49] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 69.

a Mrs Chadwick, upon whom the entire street would depend 'for all trouble and strife'. An elderly woman, she attended pregnancies and births and would 'do for' bereavements, her tasks ranging from laying out the dead to catering for funeral teas. Although Brown assumed she never accepted payment for her services, he thought that families might 'treat her', perhaps to the pick of the ham or the pickle.[50] Mrs Chadwick's services catered for a community rather than a personal friend, yet her role appears analogous to that of Mrs Thomas in that she took control of the practicalities of death. On one level, this enabled the bereaved to maintain work patterns or prioritise other concerns, yet it could also ease the emotional burden of grief, especially for female relatives of the deceased to whom, like so many tasks associated with nursing and the life cycle, the responsibility of attending to the corpse usually fell. Indeed, laying out the corpse was a matter of pride for some women: narrating the death of a poor woman's husband, a district nurse recounted the silent camaraderie between the widow, the nurse and a neighbour as they undertook the dressing and arrangement of the corpse: 'Not a man, for love or money, could be persuaded to bear the burden for us.'[51]

For the bereaved who washed the dead themselves, however, the task reinforced the finality of death and facilitated the negotiation of new identities. In an age when most families and friends visit the corpse when it has already been arranged in a coffin (a tangible barrier to holding or hugging the deceased) by a funeral director, it is worth remembering that preparing a corpse for burial is not only physically taxing – the cadaver of an adult is heavy and difficult to move – it also demands a degree of intimacy: without embalming or refrigeration, the smell of death is inescapable; the removal of clothes, washing and reclothing the body necessitates touching the flesh of the deceased; and in order to arrange and clothe the body, the deceased must be manoeuvred, grappled with and held. The performance of such tasks by those close to the deceased could represent a final moment of intimacy, be invested with love and respect for the dead and offer space and time to reflect on the relationship lost. Yet handling the cadaver could also be an emotional burden that exacerbated a sense of loss or, conversely, provoked feelings of bitterness. In the short story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', D. H. Lawrence demonstrated how the cadaver could become a landscape for the projection of memories, sentiments and desires. The story begins with the accidental death of a miner, Walt Bates, and the return of his broken body to his widow, Lizzie. Walt's mother arrives at the house to

[50] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[51] *Sunday at Home*, 24 January 1880, 69–72 (72).

attend to Walt's corpse alongside her daughter-in-law. Lawrence refrains from engaging the women in dialogue with each other. Rather, the rivalries between mother and wife are played out in silence around the body of Walt. The ritual of washing the corpse becomes a struggle between the two women: Walt's mother is jealous of Lizzie's supposed intimacy with her son and cannot bear to leave Lizzie to wash her son's body alone. The touch of the dead man's flesh stirs strange and powerful emotions in each woman. Walt's mother weeps and cries in the 'sibilant ecstasy of fear and mother love' as she recalls fond memories of her son's childhood; his body evokes all her maternal longing, hopes and possessiveness for her son. Yet Walt's widow feels only the 'utter isolation of the human soul'. Lizzie is struck by the inviolability of the dead, along with the realisation that her husband is a stranger in death, as he had been in life. For Lizzie, the heavy and inert corpse of her husband brings a degree of horror and knowledge, for which she is ultimately grateful: it affirms her own sense of life although she remains fearful of death itself.[52]

Even when laying out was left to others, the act of gazing upon the corpse could encourage the bereaved to reassess their relationships with the deceased. The stillness and silence of the cadaver invited the onlooker to step outside the business of life and reflect. Of course, death also offered relatives a rare opportunity to articulate their feelings towards the deceased with uninhibited honesty and without having to negotiate a response. Alice Foley's autobiographical representation of her father as a destructive and selfish man culminated in the response of his family to his death: feelings of relief rather than 'intimate loss' or 'personal grief'. Examining the coffined face of her father, however, Foley perceived a 'strange dignity' in his 'marble countenance' that moved her. Although she refrains from elaborating on this feeling, Foley implies that the act of kissing and reflecting on the form of her father's cadaver evoked a conception of a different father from the one she had known. The sadness (or, given Foley's socialism, the point) of such conjecture was that Foley could not know if her imagining was simply wishful thinking or an insight into the potential of a man ground down by poverty and struggle.[53] Similarly, the Evangelical Deborah Smith used the description of gazing on the 'noble brow' of her lifeless husband to contemplate what 'might have been' had he lived his life differently.[54] Patrick MacGill described his parents and siblings grouping around the corpse of a young brother pondering 'the hard way that death has with it

[52] D. H. Lawrence, 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' in J. Worthen (ed.), *The Prussian Officer, and Other Stories by D. H. Lawrence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1911] 1983), 268–85 (283–5).
[53] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 67.   [54] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 33–4.

always', not least when it was sudden and seemingly indiscriminate.[55] Read within the context of socialist writing, such statements intimate more about the inequality and injustice of life.

That laying out the corpse helped minimise the ravages of death was reflected in frequent references to the peaceful appearance of remains and comparisons between death and sleep. Florence Jones's initial impression on seeing her mother's laid-out remains was one of shock. With a bandage around her jaw and a penny on each eyelid, Florence's mother was barely recognisable. When the paraphernalia of death had been removed, however, the corpse looked peaceful.[56] The appearance of peace, usually achieved by the relaxation of the facial muscles at death and the similarity between a shroud and a nightdress, was of particular comfort in cases of violent death, death after a lingering and painful illness and in cases where life had been perceived as a constant battle. Importantly, the visualisation of the deceased at peace placed harmony and contentedness within the reach of all. Tressell's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* focuses on the trials of men working as poorly paid house decorators in London. The character Philpot disparages socialism throughout the novel. He dies after falling from a ladder; a metaphor perhaps for Tressell's belief that the working classes would never climb a ladder to equality and justice whilst they failed to become politicised. The physical damage incurred by the fall is, however, 'softened down by the pallor of death', whilst a 'placid, peaceful expression pervaded his features'. Moreover, the costumery of death lends Philpot the aspect of one in a 'profound and tranquil sleep'. Allowing Philpot to find peace at last, Tressell infers that death is the only alternative to socialism in resolving the perpetual struggle of the casual labourer.[57]

Constructions of the corpse at peace did, however, serve a practical function within the process of bereavement. Fixing the image of serenity in one's imagination enabled the bereaved to draw a veil, real and metaphorical, over the death and achieve a degree of what the modern psychotherapist would call 'closure'. Thus Wil Edwards reflected that once he had seen his mother's lifeless body after expiration, he felt no desire to look at her again.[58] Standing at the bottom of his mother's deathbed, V. W. Garratt (then aged fourteen) thought she looked 'beautiful'. His portrayal of death as 'perfect rest' is maintained the following day when, stealing into his mother's room, he kisses her cold and clammy remains 'as a final token of my affection'.[59]

[55] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 22.   [56] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 89.
[57] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 520.   [58] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.
[59] Garratt, *Man in the Street*, 82.

References to sleep and peace massaged the finality of death. In rendering the corpse as life-like as possible, the bereaved were able to associate the corpse with memory and the known personality of the deceased. It seems unlikely that families who referred to the dead as 'sleeping' actually intended to deny death: even washed corpses smelt of decay and attained a waxy pallor. Moreover, metaphors associated with sleep and rest were often placed on gravestones where they can hardly have denied death, but, rather, offered an imaginary ending which was less distressing than visualising a slow process of putrefaction. Representations of the peaceful and picturesque corpse were, however, only tenable so long as the corpse retained some resemblance to life. In *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones invites his reader to look upon the corpse of the lovely Jane through the eyes of her young brother Len. When Len first visits her remains, he notes that Jane's smooth face seems to smile benignly upon him. Although the stillness and silence of her body are unnerving, Jane is familiar to Len and the vision of her recalls to mind fond memories. Yet the instability of the corpse renders the solace it provides precarious. Len's next sighting of the body five days later is bereft of any familiarity or comfort. Jane's remains have shrivelled into an uncompromising vision of decay that fills the child with horror: 'Jane's beautiful face was gone. In its place was a dirty yellow mask with snarling lips that curled back from shiny white teeth. A blackened penny grinned at him mockingly from each of her eyes … Dark blobs filled the places where her cheeks had been.' The acrid smell and the 'awful face' haunt Len in his sleep as he wrestles to regain the image of his sister in the prime of youthful beauty.[60]

In one sense, therefore, laying out the dead could be perceived as a form of preserving the visual memory of the dead but also of sanitising death. By minimising the external signs of decay, the bereaved could assimilate the loss of a loved one whilst overlooking the inevitability of complete putrefaction. The clean, peaceful corpse also confirmed that obligations to the dead had been fulfilled and due respect shown to the corpse. Families who refrained from laying out their dead tended to reject participation in the social rituals of death, especially displaying the corpse to neighbours and friends. On visiting a destitute family in their cellar dwelling in August 1883, medical officer Edward Hope came upon the 'decomposing and fly-blown' corpse of a child. The flea-bitten body was covered with newspaper, the family having no money to purchase a shirt, and was still smeared with faecal dirt.[61] The tone of Hope's report not

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[60] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 61–2.
[61] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 29 August 1883. Hope removed the body to a mortuary and the family were taken to the workhouse.

only suggests the family's utter indigence but an atmosphere of sordidness, depression and apathy also. Their circumstances are a reminder of the awfulness of physical decay: indeed, Hope was sickened by the scene. Yet they also suggest that for a minority, the rituals of death were deemed irrelevant and insignificant. However, this family is conspicuous by its peculiarity. For the majority of families, possession of the corpse enabled them to take stock of the relationship lost, to play out alternative or imagined lives, to express their grief through touching and caring for the body and to invite the condolence of friends who came to pay their respects to the dead.

Viewing the body

In the same way that laying out the dead could facilitate gestures of condolence, viewing the corpse drew upon notions of communal sympathy. Visiting the home of the bereaved in order to view the corpse formed an integral component of rites associated with death in working-class districts across Britain. As one woman looking back at turn-of-the-century Bolton asserted, 'everybody used to go and look at dead people'.[62] Another (born 1905) recalled that the bereaved 'invited everybody to go and look at [the dead], not just keeping them for their own private thing ... they didn't turn anybody away'.[63] To middle-class sensibilities, the custom was distasteful not only on account of concerns about hygiene, but, also, because it took the intimate dynamics of family mourning and domesticity and repositioned them in the context of public spectacle. To a point, however, this complemented perceptions of the working-class home. As Martin Hewitt notes, most bourgeois writing about the lower classes implied that privacy was impossible, unnecessary or undesired and that the boundaries between domestic and communal spaces were indistinct.[64] Elite observers' assumptions about, and distaste for, working-class habitats also demonstrated the tensions inherent in bourgeois perceptions of intimacy: compared to the idealisation of the home as the epitome of intimacy, family and sanctity, the working-class habitat held little association with feeling or private moments of affection. In this light, displaying the corpse was viewed as an opportunity to indulge in conspicuous consumption and revelry, rather than a sincere gathering for condolence and remembrance.

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[62] BOHT, Tape 89b, Reference: AL/SP/1/015.
[63] BOHT, Tape 103, Reference: JP/SP/1/024.
[64] M. Hewitt, 'Domestic Visiting and the Constitution of Domestic Space in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' in I. Bryden and J. Floyd (eds.), *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-century Interior* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 121–41.

When old Mrs Peckover dies in Gissing's *The Nether World*, her daughter-in-law rejoices at the prospect of a life insurance payment. Prior to the old woman's burial, the younger Mrs Peckover invites neighbours to enjoy a drink over the corpse. Gissing tells us that Mrs Peckover would have buried her mother-in-law's corpse in an orange crate, but, 'with neighbours and relatives to consider', she purchased an expensive coffin which would be the talk of the neighbourhood for weeks to come. The neighbours drink to excess, are irreverently jovial and fail to pay any respects to the dead woman. That Gissing omits any description of the actual interment confirms that, for the Peckovers and their neighbours, the social gathering and competitive consumption are the apogee of the ritual.[65] The scene reinforces the reader's conviction that the Peckovers represent the callous and amoral poor. Yet the brutalised and self-seeking poor are not typical of Gissing's 'Nether World'; they are foils to those who cling onto their self-respect in the face of adversity and for whom funerals were tinged with sadness and loss.

Whilst the Peckovers were not representative of the working classes, it is not unreasonable to suggest that some neighbours engaged in viewing the corpse out of curiosity. Save for the coffin, however, there was very little to see. As far as gestures of display go, viewing the corpse gave neighbours access to the home of the bereaved. This was far more likely to reveal their long-term financial and domestic circumstances than any funeral procession or expensive casket. Furthermore, cynical stereotypes of viewing the corpse overlooked the possibility that rendering private loss a communal rite could fulfil a positive function. Viewing the dead equipped friends and neighbours with a reason to visit the bereaved and rendered logistical attempts to broach the subject of loss less awkward. Florence Jones remarked that when her mother died, neighbours 'kept coming' to see the corpse; the custom provided a platform for friends to offer condolences and share their memories of the older woman.[66] Stories relating to the personality of the deceased may have reinforced a sense of loss, but remembering the dead in a communal context also confirmed and legitimised grief. Visits to see the corpse also provided an opportunity, as Wil Edwards notes, 'quietly to offer help'.[67] Furthermore, the display of the corpse enabled the bereaved to demonstrate, and receive confirmation, that obligations to the care of the deceased had been fulfilled.

Richard Hillyer's grandmother died in a lunatic asylum in Yorkshire. Hillyer described the undignified manner in which his father returned her

[65] Gissing, *Nether World*, 41.   [66] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 89.
[67] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.

corpse to the family home: a borrowed spring cart served as an improvised hearse but the foot end of the coffin hung over the tail board whilst the head end lodged between his father's legs. His father had placed a short piece of black cloth on the coffin lid as a makeshift gesture of respect. As soon as the coffin arrived at the house, it was arranged in the living room of the family home with the lid pushed back displaying the corpse. Hillyer suggests that by the time neighbours 'drop in' to offer their condolences, both the deceased and the bereaved have acquired a subdued 'dignity'.[68] There is little sense here of the 'sham' respectability of Gissing's Peckovers. Rather, Hillyer intimates that concerns about the public display of the corpse hinged on notions of decency. For some commentators, the spectacle they beheld when viewing the corpse was less one of conspicuous consumption than of inconsolable loss. Citing the example of a mother whose ten-year-old son had died during the night, the district nurse Margaret Loane was at pains to illustrate that the display of the corpse operated on a number of levels. Loane explains how she and a fellow nurse visited the boy's home the morning after he had died. Loane tells us that the boy's mother greets them with red and swollen eyes; she informs them of the boy's death and invites Loane and her colleague to view his corpse. The emaciated body is laid out on a small iron bed with 'a few flowers in his thin white hands'. The description of the boy's frailty and the cut blooms infer the insubstantiality of life itself. Yet the mother's grief carries more substance. Although she is described as having a 'dull composure', the sore appearance of her eyes and the attempt to prettify her son's corpse suggest a searing sense of loss that is solitary and, for Loane, 'more distressing than tears'. Loane is not privy to the mother's grief in a verbal way, but, rather, is invited to read and reaffirm a narrative of loss from participating in the spectacle of death.[69]

Hence, the custom of viewing the corpse enabled both the bereaved and those who sympathised with their loss to communicate in a symbolic way. Simply expressing a desire to view the corpse may well have been interpreted as a gesture of condolence. As a small child, Albert Jasper accompanied his father to donate a collection of money to a workmate whose infant had died. Jasper's narrative details little verbal exchange between the men; everything rests on gesture and visual interpretation. The bereaved father opens the door to the Jaspers with 'eyes swollen red', a sign of sleeplessness and sorrow. In presenting the donation, Jasper's father represented the sympathy of workmates, whilst the idea that the gift was a sign of respect for the family avoided any suggestion of charity.

[68] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.   [69] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 168–70.

Accepting the gift, the colleague invited Jasper and his father to look upon the corpse. This was not an unexpected invitation: 'it was the thing everyone did in those days'. As he drew back the lid of the coffin, the bereft man asked Jasper's father what he thought of the child, possibly seeking some confirmation of the beauty of the corpse, and consequently, the extent of his loss. The presence of young Albert on this expedition is not explained, but it seems plausible to suggest that Jasper senior desired to articulate to the bereaved man a shared identity of father and, by implication, an expression of particular sympathy for the loss of a child.[70]

Friends and workmates who came to view the corpse could reassure the bereaved in more explicit ways too. Deborah Smith's autobiography was written as a testimony of the saving grace of Christianity. Unsurprisingly, much is made of her first husband's repentance for drunkenness and neglect in the days before his death. The sincerity of his contrition is supported when Smith recounts a visit from his friends who come to view the corpse and persuade her that, in recent times, her spouse had expressed regret for his shortcomings as a husband and father.[71] Such examples also indicate that whilst laying out was the preserve of women, viewing the dead was part of a communal and occupational culture. If the custom of visiting the corpse were gendered at all, it tended to mirror the sexual division of labour, with women and men approaching the bereaved as representatives of the street or the workplace.

That excursions to view the dead often included children implies that the custom was perceived as a healthy medium for acquainting the young with death. Within a familial context, Joseph Barlow Brooks recalled little of his grandmother's final illness save for the 'solemn hush' of the house. Yet he describes in relative detail being plucked from his bed to 'see the most peaceful, unwrinkled face of threescore years and ten'.[72] As a schoolgirl Alice Foley would 'troop into the house of mourning' in order to gaze at the remains of dead schoolfriends. Aware of the potential squeamishness of her audience (she was writing in the 1970s), Foley argues that the custom was perceived as part of the routine that accompanied mortality, much like praying for the soul of the dead or receiving a piece of funeral currant-bread after the burial.[73] For some children, however, viewing the corpse was a source of entertainment and bravado: 'As children we would go round looking at all these dead children, we thought it were something. When we knew they'd died we used to knock on the door and say – can we have a look at your such-a-body who'd

[70] A. S. Jasper, *A Hoxton Childhood* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1969), 14.
[71] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 34. [72] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 33.
[73] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 38.

died.'[74] Robert Roberts recalled how it was a 'common habit' for children to visit the homes of the bereaved to ask 'reverently' to view the corpse. One friend could even boast of having seen thirty-seven.[75] It is unclear whether such memories indicate the bravado of contemporary children or of adults remembering within a context where such customs had become rare.

For some, however, a childish sense of bravery and mischievous expectation could be swiftly replaced by distaste when actually confronted with the corpse. Gissing's imagining of the child frightened by death echoes through the reflections of adults who were cajoled as children into viewing the dead. Mary Watson (born 1898) reflected on visiting her first corpse: 'and here was this dead girl in the bed. And it was all beautiful white sheets . . . and her hair was beautifully done, and there was big bows of lilac-coloured ribbon on all the [bed] posts . . . and we were terrified, we didn't know how quick to get down the stairs and away.'[76] The prettiness and delicacy of the scene jars with the reality of a 'dead girl' in bed and emphasises the sense of shock expressed on first seeing a cadaver. Some children expressed reluctance to view the deceased but were compelled by adults who believed the custom was good for them. One Bolton mill-worker recalled her horror at being taken as a small child in the early 1900s to view a corpse.[77] Mrs Peters, born in Lancaster in 1898, recalled the death of her younger sister whilst both were still in childhood. She described the loss of her sister as a 'dreadful time' but the recollection was dominated by her fear of death: she was 'scared stiff' of the corpse in the front room. In her agonising death throes, Peters's sister had 'torn at her little face'. The disfigured cadaver rendered her sister unfamiliar: 'I only had one look and I thought well it's not my sister.' When her grandmother made her touch the corpse, Peters's revulsion was accentuated by the alien sensation of the 'stone cold' flesh that made her 'shudder'.[78] Likewise, Margaret Penn suggested that trepidation at viewing the corpse of her grandmother as a young child hinged on the strangeness of the deceased. Approaching her grandmother, Penn was 'both terrified and astonished' to see her 'lying so big and so still in her coffin'. She recoiled from kissing the corpse, which seemed neither young nor old, and shivered at the 'icy coldness' of the body.[79] Paradoxically, in attempting

[74] Anne Bromilow and Jim Power (eds.), *Looking Back: Photographs and Memories of Life in the Bolton Area, 1890–1939* (Bolton: Bolton Museums and Art Gallery, 1985), 35.

[75] R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 124.   [76] Mary Watson in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176.

[77] BOHT, Tape 27b, Reference: AB/CG/2/043.

[78] 'Mrs P1L' in E. Roberts, *A Woman's Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 19–20.

[79] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 35.

to introduce children to mortality, adults seemed to accentuate childish fear of the dead and death as something unknowable. Anne Tibble recalled being told to touch the corpse of a dead classmate. When she expressed reluctance to do so, her mother held her 'reluctant fingers' to the dead flesh. Like Margaret Penn, Tibble inferred disapproval of such customs, suggesting that it did little to demystify death: 'Not to be alive seemed too dismal to contemplate. And no imagined Better Land [heaven] could possibly come up to this one.'[80]

Parental attempts to introduce children to death may seem clumsy to our sensibilities, yet, as Tibble's narrative indicates, such customs were often perpetuated from superstitious beliefs or an assumption that children should not be shielded from death. Surveying customs associated with burial, Bertrum Puckle highlighted a Cornish belief that kissing the corpse would give children strength and longevity.[81] Anne Tibble's mother told her that touching the corpse 'will prevent you being haunted'.[82] Similarly, Florence Jones was told that 'touching a dead person stopped you dreaming about them'.[83] Clearly, popular belief sometimes fused Christian precepts of an afterlife with superstition. Yet such beliefs may tell us more concerning perceptions of bereavement than notions of the paranormal. In particular, they suggest a desire for the dead to rest in peace, thereby allowing the living to grieve in peace. Likewise, distaste for the practice might indicate shifting attitudes to death; retrospective accounts of viewing corpses were overwhelmingly created in a context where few adults visit the dead. Florence Smith, born at the turn of the twentieth century, expressed bewilderment at the custom: 'there was nothing to look at, he was dead ... but see they did those things in those days'.[84] Amy Sharples (born 1887) thought viewing the dead was a 'terrible' way to introduce children to 'the facts of life'.[85] Similarly, a Bolton woman (born 1916) was incredulous that 'even' children were allowed to view corpses well into the twentieth century.[86] That her mother never permitted her to partake in the custom is, perhaps, indicative that it was slowly becoming obsolete as people increasingly died away from home, although Elizabeth Roberts estimates that the custom remained relatively common until the 1940s.[87]

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[80] A. Tibble, *Greenhorn: A Twentieth Century Childhood* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 35.
[81] B. S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development* (Newcastle: Northumberland Press Ltd, 1926), 75.
[82] Tibble, *Greenhorn*, 35–6.   [83] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 2.
[84] Man. OH Transcript, Florence Smith, Tape 962.
[85] Man. OH Transcript, Amy Sharples, Tape 487.
[86] BOHT, Tape 115, Reference: AL/CG/116.   [87] E. Roberts, *Woman's Place*, 20.

Taboos concerning viewing the dead were not, however, specific to late twentieth-century memoirs. Notably, corpses that bore the marks of a horrific or violent death were less likely to be displayed to others. This may have been rooted in notions of viewing the dead at 'peace': mutilated features were unlikely to comfort the bereaved and would, probably, have made visitors feel awkward. Describing the remains of a railway navvy killed by a ballast engine, Patrick MacGill observed: 'I had looked upon two dead people [before] … but they might have been asleep, so quiet did they lie in their eternal repose. This was also death, but death combined with horror.'[88] Similarly, the rapid decay of mutilated corpses could render them unpalatable to the senses of mourners. As Lewis Jones noted, the bodies of pit explosion victims were little more than 'inflated, flame-seared mass[es] of rotten flesh'. Maiming to such an extent rendered public display of the dead problematic, but they also disrupted customs associated with housing the corpse and raised questions over the accurate identity of the deceased. Jones suggests that such was the centrality of the corpse to the mechanics of mourning that, despite the horrific sight of the cadavers, bereaved families claimed bodies they thought might belong to them and returned home with them encased in an 'odour proof shell'. Jones implies that whilst customs of viewing the dead might be foregone, the possession of a corpse, however unrecognisable or unpalatable, was essential for legitimising and verifying loss.[89]

In a more formal context, the custom of viewing the dead tended to be frowned upon by public health officials, regardless of the cause of death or degree of putrefaction. Assistant medical officer of health for Liverpool Edward Hope regularly expressed incredulity at the custom, especially among the poorer classes where space was at a premium. In June 1883 he found the body of William Holmes, aged thirty-two, laid out in a room 'presently occupied by several women and children – visitors and friends'.[90] In July 1884, he visited a house where the foul-smelling corpse of a man, dead from fever, was surrounded by women.[91] Hope's fears for public health often merged with accusations that the custom was an excuse for drunkenness and testimony to ignorance. On visiting the home of the Pattison family, he noted that the house was '*crowded* with neighbours' [his emphasis] owing to the presence of the corpse of a child, who had died from typhus, and that of his father, who broke his neck falling over the banister whilst drunk. The whole court area had 'the appearance of squalid festivity and is crowded with filthy women and children'.[92] Similarly, a

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[88] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 130–3.   [89] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 101.
[90] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 20 June 1883.   [91] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 16 July 1884.
[92] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 29 November 1883.

'gang of women in a shocking state of drunkenness and filth' were 'crowd-ing about the house' where a man had died of smallpox.[93] Much of this criticism lay, however, in the loose associations between visiting the dead and the custom of holding a wake over the corpse.

The wake

Rooted in the belief that constant attendance upon the corpse would ensure its safe passage to the next world, the custom of 'waking the dead' was largely associated with the Roman Catholic faith. It was also inextricable from negative assumptions concerning the Irish immigrant poor. Notably, critics argued that the wake was little more than an excuse for the excessive imbibing of alcohol and general revelry in the presence of the corpse. Visiting the homes of the Irish poor in Liverpool, Edward Hope concluded that the 'plentiful supply of whisky' in a house of death and the visible 'tremor of drink' among the bereaved left little doubt that a wake was in progress.[94] Such was the equation between the wake and alcohol that fatalities and accidents at houses where the Irish poor mourned their dead were automatically attributed to drunkenness. An inquest into the causes of a fatal fight at a wake in Liverpool assumed that debauchery was typical: those who sat with the corpse were drinking 'as usual', whilst claims from witnesses that the injured party had not been drunk were dismissed by the coroner as 'extremely improbable'. The coroner overseeing the case con-cluded that drinking alcohol over the remains of the dead was 'a nasty, drunken, beastly habit', whilst the *Lancet* used the incident to rail against the 'revolting practices' referred to as 'wakes' which were really little more than 'drunken revels by the side of the corpse'.[95] The risk of contagion from the corpse during a wake cemented tirades against the 'evils' of this 'dis-astrous and stupid custom practised by the Irish'.[96] During the 1870s, some medical officers had gone so far as to suggest that those who exposed the bodies of deceased relatives who had died from an infectious disease should be subject to penal measures.[97] Similarly, public health officials were keen to draw attention to cases where guests at a wake had subse-quently fallen ill. Edward Hope, for instance, reported a case in 1887 where fourteen women who attended the same wake in May had subsequently been struck by typhus, presumably contracted from close contact with the corpse.[98]

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[93] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 2 July 1884.   [94] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 7 August 1883.
[95] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 7 July 1888, 7, and 14 July 1888, 6; *Lancet*, 14 July 1888, 89.
[96] *Lancet*, 3 July 1875, 41, and 21 August 1875, 298.
[97] *Lancet*, 28 October 1876, 618–19.   [98] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 22 July 1887.

Undoubtedly, some wakes were accompanied by considerable rabble-rousing. At Westminster police court in 1891, Nelly Walsh was charged with assaulting Annie Shea whilst attending a wake over the body of an eleven-month-old child.[99] Thomas Morgan recalled attending a wake as a child where a guest had inadvertently thrown a lighted cigarette into the coffin and set the corpse on fire.[100] On balance, however, it is unclear how external observers defined 'the wake'. Edward Hope's powers as a medical officer of health entitled him to remove a corpse from household premises if there was sufficient evidence of a wake being held. His criteria for determining whether families were holding wakes and for judging the sobriety of visitors is ambiguous; in many cases, the presence of a corpse, dirt and visitors in an Irish household was sufficient to conclude that a wake was in progress. In March 1884, Hope obtained an order for the removal of a corpse from the Dverthin home as 'a gang of filthy women and a few men are preparing for the wake'.[101] Inspecting a house in February 1885, he noted that both 'house and inmates are very dirty' and seven people were still drunk, 'having been revelling last night at the wake'. As another wake was planned for that night, Hope obtained a magistrate's order for the removal of the body.[102] A visit to the Kerran home on 13 July 1887 revealed a 'dirty and disorderly' place, containing the corpses of two women, Ann and Ellen Kerran, dead from typhus, alongside eight or nine 'half drunken and dirty' men and women. In another room, a sick nine-year-old boy lay in bed 'dirty and helpless', alongside Thomas Patten, a drunken adult. The two corpses were immediately removed to the mortuary whilst the child was taken to hospital.[103] Visiting the Thornlow household on 31 August 1885, Hope reportedly found eleven adults and seven children holding a wake over the body of a child which Hope subsequently removed to the mortuary.[104]

It is difficult to read reports of the wake, formulated overwhelmingly from the English Protestant professional perspective, as anything but an exercise in prejudice against the poor Catholic Irish. Indeed, definitions of the wake were grounded almost exclusively in negative language, whilst reports that commented only on alcohol consumption implied that the custom held little or no meaning outside a culture of drinking. For instance, Hope conjectured that revellers at a 'wake' did not even require the presence of a corpse. Visiting one house in October 1883, he

[99] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 4 April 1891, 1.
[100] Thomas Morgan in T. Thompson (ed.), *Edwardian Childhoods* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 13–35 (24).
[101] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 24 March 1884.   [102] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 19 February 1885.
[103] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 13 July 1887.   [104] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 31 August 1885.

noted: 'all the paraphernalia but without the corpse'.[105] Ostensibly, this lent support to his perception of the wake as a party. Yet if the custom was understood in more complex terms, the absence of a corpse at a 'wake' could be interpreted in alternative forms. Notably, it is possible that the locus of meaning lay not in the drinking of alcohol, but, rather, in the gathering of friends and relatives to commemorate the dead. As Hope conceded, wakes were not exclusive to drunken or filthy families; they were also held by those he considered 'fairly respectable'.[106] That the 'respectable' represented a minority of his cases may reflect the desire for low-key gatherings or that respectable families were more likely to live in better housing, thus avoiding the keen gaze of the local medical officer. Hope's work focused on districts (and families) that were notorious for extreme indigence, crime and violence. To a point, therefore, he approached such homes in the expectation of finding evidence of debauchery. Likewise, Hope's observations were clearly loaded with prejudice against dirt, drink and the Irish, and it is plausible to suggest that he attached the label of 'wake' to gatherings where no such custom was knowingly being observed.

Moving away from negative stereotypes of the Irish poor, the wake can be construed as fulfilling a similar function to the custom of viewing the dead, not least as it permitted neighbours and friends to pay their respects to the deceased and offer condolences to the bereaved. A rare sympathetic account of a wake in Kilrush, Ireland, published in the cheap *Liverpool Weekly Courier* in 1888, highlighted the value of the wake as a forum for grief. The author described how a corpse, surrounded by candles, was laid out on one side of the room. Two aged women sat rocking and moaning quietly, whilst around twenty others sat motionless, speaking only in whispers. In accordance with 'time-honoured custom', whisky was distributed among the guests, but tea given to those who preferred it. All the while, women came and went from the house to view the corpse and say prayers over the dead.[107] In this instance, the wake was a gathering of friends who wished to share memories of the dead and express a sense of condolence. The partaking in whisky was not indulgence but a form of hospitality and toasting the dead. Similarly, the death of Patrick MacGill's younger brother Dan was commemorated by a wake in their village in Donegal. For two consecutive nights, a 'great number' of neighbours and relatives poured through the house to pray beside the corpse, drink whisky and tea, eat and share snuff and tobacco. The expense of such hospitality crippled the family. Nonetheless, the social

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[105] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 29 October 1883.   [106] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 10 August 1886.
[107] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 25 August 1888, 8.

and spiritual significance of waking the dead took precedence and econo-mies were made in other respects. MacGill's father, for instance, made a 'little deal box' for the child's coffin.[108]

For the Irish immigrant, the custom was an essential component of reformulating a national, cultural and religious identity in an alien environ-ment. As Gerdian Jonker notes, the rites associated with the life cycle acquire extra meaning when performed in a migrant context: they permit the expression of a national identity whilst teaching younger generations about the customs and beliefs of the homeland.[109] Primarily, waking the dead was thought to protect the corpse from evil spirits, hence the con-stant attendance upon the corpse and the practice of lighting candles around the body.[110] One woman's recollections of the wakes in her family stressed the importance of 'always having somebody' with the cadaver. Drinking whisky was a tangential gesture of hospitality offered to relatives who partook in watching over the corpse.[111] Sean O'Suilleabhain has argued that the 'horseplay' which characterised so many wakes was, to some extent, instigated to keep mourners awake and help pass the night away.[112] In his survey of the London poor, Charles Booth described the death of a five-year-old boy in his mother's arms. Despite their utter destitution, the boy's family (Irish Catholics) 'borrowed sufficient for the wax candles to burn near the body and light the poor little soul to paradise'.[113] Thus, families could select elements from the 'wake' and apply them to the treatment of their deceased in accordance with their own priorities, resources and confessional beliefs. For critics of the wake, it was the re-creation of a rural Irish Catholic custom in an Anglo-Protestant context that was problematic, especially when interpreted in conjunction with reports on the activities of Fenian supporters and acri-monious debates over Irish Home Rule. Similarly, it is plausible that Catholic priests who campaigned to stamp out such customs among the Irish immigrant poor were working towards assimilation into English culture as much as they were keen to replace superstition with doctrinal uniformity.[114] The gaps in contemporary understandings of the wake indicate not only the fluidity of beliefs and practices across class, ethnic

[108] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 23.
[109] G. Jonker, 'Death, Gender and Memory: Remembering Loss and Burial as a Migrant' in D. Field, J. Hockey and N. Small (eds.), *Death, Gender and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 187–201.
[110] S. O'Suilleabhain, *Irish Wakes Amusements* (Cork: Mercier Press, [1961] 1997), 166–74.
[111] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[112] O'Suilleabhain, *Irish Wakes*, 166–7.   [113] Booth, *Life and Labour*, vol. II (1891), 49.
[114] As one reporter noted, priests in Liverpool had for some time channelled considerable effort into deterring families from holding wakes over the dead. *Lancet*, 14 July 1888, 89.

and doctrinal boundaries but, also, the potential to move analyses of the culture of death beyond the narrow concerns of nineteenth-century funeral reformers and a blinkered historiography.

Post-mortem

If wakes were seen as symptomatic of the deleterious effects of custom, the retention of the deceased body in the home was far more insidious because it was not confined to a relatively small migrant community. As noted above, removal of the cadaver to a public mortuary or chapel of rest was rare in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Like the wake, however, possession of the corpse could be invested with sentimental and abstract meaning, fostering a deep resentment against any attempt by medical or legal professionals to remove or interfere with the body. Notably, attachment to the corpse hindered the performance of post-mortems where the deceased had died from an unknown cause. Medical practitioners and sanitary reformers had long acknowledged the sentimental significance the working classes attached to the corpse, yet tended to devalue such feelings as testimony to the ignorance of the poor.[115]

In January 1906, the *Lancet* published the results of a survey of people who granted permission for post-mortem examination. The authors of the survey concluded that the educational value of the post-mortem was only appreciated by an educated minority of the public. From a sample of 250 requests for post-mortem in a lunatic asylum, 76 families had consented, 28 families had refused, whilst 146 families gave no or an indefinite reply. The commentary accompanying the results suggested that relatives who allowed the pathological examination were motivated by an altruistic belief that scientific research would benefit others. Omitting to identify the criteria on which estimates of intelligence were measured, the article concluded that those who consented to post-mortem were more intelligent and better educated individuals than those who refused. Speculating on reasons for refusal, the authors conjectured that a minority of families thought some mischief was afoot. The nature of such mischief was not expanded upon but, the authors ruminated, might relate to suspicions that the post-mortem examination was purely for experimental purposes. The majority of refusals of permission for post-mortem were, however, thought to be for sentimental reasons. The article failed to elaborate on the character of this sentimentality but the juxtaposition of those who refused permission for post-mortem with those who

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[115] See *Lancet*, 24 November 1877, 784.

acquiesced implied that emotional attachment to the corpse was, self-evidently, unintelligent.[116] The article did not attempt to interpret the reason for 'indefinite' replies nor did it engage with the possibility that the 'unintelligent' were simply confused as to what post-mortem involved or what their legal rights and responsibilities were. The article failed to explore the possibility that a sample of cases taken from a lunatic asylum might be flawed. As David Wright has noted, the admission of a relative to the asylum was often fraught with tensions and only took place after a prolonged process of negotiation.[117] It seems plausible to suggest that relatives asked to grant consent for a post-mortem refused on the grounds that the deceased had been a spectacle and suffered enough in life.

Ten years earlier, an article in the *Lancet* had suggested that many of the working classes perceived the post-mortem as an 'assault on the body'.[118] This may have been linked to spiritual associations between the physical integrity of the corpse and resurrection, yet it is also possible that the high-handed conduct of some professionals in dealing with the bereaved created ill-feeling towards institutional medicine and raised questions over the degree to which the dead would be treated with respect. Moreover, there was some contention concerning definitions of consent. A row erupted amongst poor law guardians in Chorlton, Manchester, in 1909 when a widow complained that she had been intimidated by the workhouse doctor into 'consenting' to a post-mortem on the body of her husband. Condemning the behaviour of the doctor as 'indiscreet' and 'improper', the Chorlton guardians were keen to dispel any suspicion that the bodies of the poor were fodder for the experiments of medical professionals.[119] A meeting of the West Derby Board of Guardians, near Liverpool, in 1909 also highlighted the conduct of a post-mortem on the body of a girl at Mill Road Infirmary against the wishes of her family. On collecting the girl's death certificate, her father had been asked to sign a card consenting to an examination being made of the body. The man signed the card without 'having the slightest idea what it meant'. As one guardian, Mr Cleaver, pointed out, the word 'examination' was misleading and, clearly, very different in meaning to the phrase 'post-mortem'. This case was not the first to come to the attention of the Board and the Infirmary were instructed to alter the wording of consent

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[116] *Lancet*, 13 January 1906, 109.
[117] D. Wright, 'Getting Out of the Asylum: Understanding the Confinement of the Insane in the Nineteenth Century', *Social History of Medicine*, 10, 1 (1997), 137–55. See also M. Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility: Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Later Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[118] *Lancet*, 30 May 1896, 1539.   [119] *Lancet*, 19 June 1909, 1786, and 24 July 1909, 260.

forms.[120] Whilst such examples may well indicate the cavalier attitude of some medical practitioners, they also highlight the sensitivity of parochial guardians to any suggestion of a bygone age when they might stand accused of passing bodies onto medical schools for dissection.

Complaints about the performance of post-mortem examination without consent tended, firstly, to equate the physical integrity of the corpse with treating the dead with respect and, secondly, to imply that respect for the dead was integral to the successful completion of a bereavement process. In July 1880, a Gloucestershire labourer named Cuff sued the house surgeon at the county infirmary for a sum of two pounds on account of a post-mortem examination being made of his wife's body without his consent. He acknowledged that he had not suffered any pecuniary loss from the examination but claimed that portions of the body had been removed and that the affair had injured his feelings.[121] Although the judge presiding over the case ruled in favour of the house surgeon, the example indicates the agency of the working classes in challenging the actions of professionals. Nonetheless, the *Lancet* concluded that the case highlighted the 'dense ignorance' of the working classes and called for public ministers, magistrates and municipal officials to illustrate the important distinction between post-mortem examination conducted for medical research and that for pathological purposes.[122] Over three decades later, a similar case came before Scottish magistrates when a Mrs Hughes sued the surgeon who conducted a post-mortem examination on the remains of her husband, a miner, without her consent. She further alleged that pieces of the corpse had not been replaced for burial. Again, the magistrate supported the surgeon, but did acknowledge that unauthorised post-mortems caused distress to relatives who were within their rights to seek redress for injury to their feelings.[123]

As indicated above, medical and legal practitioners tended to distinguish between post-mortems made in the interests of scientific research (where bodies were donated altruistically for the pursuit of knowledge) and those for pathological diagnosis of the cause of death. This seems a false distinction with reference to working-class concern. Post-mortems were a legal requirement in cases where the precipitating cause of death was obscure, leaving families of all classes little option but to yield possession of the corpse to the relevant authorities. Enforced removal of the cadaver no doubt exacerbated antipathy to the mortuary and

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[120] *Ormskirk Advertiser*, 7 January 1909 in LVRO 353 WES 10/1. Also reported in *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 21 January 1909 in LVRO 353 WES 10/1.
[121] *The Times*, 21 July 1880, 7. The judge ruled in favour of the house surgeon.
[122] *Lancet*, 24 July 1880, 143.   [123] *Lancet*, 10 January 1914, 131–2.

post-mortem. Moreover, the request for a post-mortem in order to establish the cause of death could be construed as a slight on the bereaved. Edna Thorpe, a child in Edwardian Manchester, recollected waking in the family bedroom (six children slept in the room with their parents) one morning to find that her thirty-two-year-old mother had died in her sleep. An inquest was held and the coroner examined the body. According to Thorpe, however, he approached the remains of her mother with pre-conceived assumptions about their family relations: he checked the body for signs of bruising, asked the children whether their parents quarrelled, how much they drank and whether they ever fought. The verdict to the inquest was death from heart failure but the family had already been subject to negative aspersions on their moral character.[124] Post-mortem also removed the deceased from the home (either to the impersonal hospital, the mortuary or, in some cases, the public house) and either curtailed or obliterated rituals of laying out, thus compromising the use of custom as a site for the symbolic expression of loss and condolence.

As an inquest in Liverpool in 1891 highlighted, the removal of the body for post-mortem could be perceived as a deliberate assault on working-class customs of death and disposal. In April, Caroline Benham had been knocked over and killed by a van whilst crossing a road. At the coroner's inquest into the accident, the local priest, Reverend Davis, spoke on behalf of the Benham family. According to Davis, the bereaved had approached him in 'great distress' following the order for removal of Caroline's corpse from the family home; her subsequent post-mortem was conducted 'greatly against the wish of her relations and friends'.[125] Davis concurred with the Benhams in believing the coroner's orders to be a discrimination against poor families. Taking great exception to Davis's interference, the coroner asserted that no distinctions were made between rich and poor in matters of public health and that post-mortems were a legal requirement in cases of death resulting from road accidents. Admittedly, Davis was unaware of the legality of the coroner's actions. Yet the case illustrates the significance attached to ownership of the corpse, whilst the idea that officials discriminated against the remains of the poor highlights a general suspicion that professionals were hostile to the customs of the working classes.

It is, perhaps, worth noting that when inquests were held on the deceased, members of the working classes were unlikely to be represented on the jury. T. E. Sampson, coroner for Liverpool in 1909, selected his juries from tradesmen, shopkeepers, merchants and the 'better class'

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[124] Man. OH Transcript, Edna Thorpe, Tape 81.
[125] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 4 April 1891, 1.

person. He deliberately avoided day labourers. His reason for doing so, he claimed, was not the assumption that the labourer was unintelligent, but that labourers could ill afford the time off work to attend.[126] Such logic may have rung true, yet the middle-class composition of inquest juries was hardly indicative of an egalitarian inquiry system. As Ian Burney notes, the rhetoric of 'public interest' pervading debates over the remit and purpose of the coroner's court was often paradoxical: articulate and influential professionals (especially pathologists) only championed the interests of the public to advance their own claims for the exclusive right to hold the coroner's post.[127]

That medical and public health authorities deliberately cast their campaigns for acceptance of post-mortem and mortuary facilities in a language of respect for the dead indicates an awareness of associations between irreverence and the dispossession of the corpse. Surveying the status of the coroner in the nineteenth century, Ian Burney notes that lobbying for the redesign and expansion of mortuaries was increasingly framed with reference to reverence for the dead (although this was also related to the perceived dignity of the coroner).[128] A feature in the *Lancet* in 1876 urged public health officials to replace colloquial references to the mortuary as the 'deadhouse' with something that conferred more familiar, personalised and respectful associations.[129] Promoting the use and provision of mortuaries in 1896, the *Lancet* noted that post-mortems conducted in public houses or the homes of the dead implied a 'total absence of reverence to the dead' and hurt the feelings of the bereaved, especially when burial had to be indefinitely postponed.[130] Congratulating a matron at St Helen's Cottage Hospital for refusing to attend a post-mortem in a public house in May 1888 (the matron was fined forty shillings but, on appeal, the fine was not enforced), the journal *Nursing Record* called upon the government to stop the 'abuse' of the dead and public health by providing mortuaries in every town.[131] Speaking at the Committee of Inquiry into Coroners in 1909, Rees Jones Rhys, coroner for North Glamorganshire, argued that holding inquests in public houses was indecent, although he had no qualms about holding them in workmen's institutes, finding reading and billiard rooms the most convenient for his purposes.[132]

The provision of formal mortuary facilities was not, however, always welcomed by the bereaved, some preferring the post-mortem to take place in their own home where they retained a sense of control through

[126] PP 1910, XXI: 9031.   [127] Burney, *Bodies of Evidence*, 88–9.   [128] Ibid., 80–106.
[129] *Lancet*, 15 January 1876, 116.   [130] *Lancet*, 4 July 1896, 38–9.
[131] *Nursing Record*, 31 May 1888, 101.   [132] PP 1909 Part 1, XV: 5676.

surveillance. Ernest Gibson, for instance, related to government commissioners that when he began his coronership in Manchester in 1903 post-mortems were, space permitting, conducted in the home of the deceased. Following a ruling that cadavers must be examined at the mortuary, Gibson's officers faced riots in the streets as they attempted to remove bodies from homes. One or two cases even resulted in the friends of the deceased rallying to rescue the corpse and return it to the home of the bereaved. Gibson claimed to have tackled these difficulties with 'tact and persuasion': people still objected to the post-mortem examination, but were beginning to be swayed (although he conceded that persuasion could take days) into understanding that the examination had to be done and that it was better to conduct it in the respectful, light and clean environment of the mortuary. Such hygienic arrangements held emotional advantages too as they spared relatives the distress of hearing the examination under way.[133] C. O. Fowler, surgeon to the Western Division of the Metropolitan Police, argued that most families raised 'every objection' they could to post-mortem. Again, this was related to the conditions under which the examination occurred. In particular, when performed in the home of the deceased, the necessity of sawing bones or hacking off a skull cap made a 'very distressing' noise. Attempts to restore the appearance of the deceased afterwards rarely made any difference to the feelings of relatives.[134]

The Committee of Inquiry into Coroners indicated the degree to which ideals of medical practice had moved towards treating the bereaved with sympathy. Guidelines issued to hospital staff in the 1880s indicate an awareness of the difficulties in broaching the issue of post-mortem: practitioners were advised of the importance of permitting the bereaved to view the corpse prior to the examination, of treating the dead and their friends with respect, and of returning the corpse to mourners in a decent condition.[135] In 1909 the *Lancet* continued to urge practitioners to treat the bereaved with 'tact and good feeling'.[136] For some, the success of coroners' and medical practitioners' sympathetic tactics was reflected in the decline of popular antipathy to post-mortem. Giving evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into Coroners in 1909, G. P. Wyatt (coroner for London and Surrey) compared the 'good deal of difficulty' he experienced in persuading families to surrender their dead at the turn of the century with the current tendency for relatives to accept post-mortem as a 'regular thing'. Implying that antipathy to post-mortem was childish, he stated that the populace had 'grown up to it'. Much of this change

[133] PP 1910 Part 2, XXI: 8318–21.   [134] PP 1909, XV: 973–88, 2476–86.
[135] *Lancet*, 25 March 1882, 493.   [136] *Lancet*, 18 August 1909, 464.

he located in the establishment of specified coroners' mortuaries which conferred more dignity and authority on the procedure than those carried out ad hoc in public houses or old mortuaries in churchyards. Likewise, Charles Rothera, coroner for Nottingham, observed that the difficulties he had experienced in removing bodies from family homes had all but subsided: 'now they see the propriety of it'.[137] Public health propaganda which utilised a language of respect for the dead, a feeling 'shared by all, from the highest to the lowest', tapped into working-class attitudes towards the corpse and recognised the desire to perform rites associated with caring for the dead.[138]

Conclusion

Sanitary reformers ostensibly recognised that the rituals associated with death and burial were significant to a culture of bereavement but they rarely explored the multi-layered meanings invested in these rites, choosing to define the corpse solely in terms of contagion. Yet customs such as laying out the dead were imbued with complex and shifting meanings: they represented a long tradition of coping with the presence of the corpse in one's home and of confronting the finality of mortality; they enabled the bereaved to caress the deceased and to take stock of the relationship lost. Laying out also provided a forum for those who sympathised with the loss of the bereaved to express their condolences and offer assistance. Of course, the corpse decayed and may well have stank. Yet impersonal references to 'the cadaver' and the growing cult of hygiene obscured the interpersonal dynamics that were played out around the deceased. Furthermore, there is a danger of locating the decline of laying out in a model of linear progression from 'ignorant' custom to enlightened sanitation. Laying out had its own logic, based upon ideas of tradition, decency and ownership, which was no less valid for being at odds with the ideals of sanitary reformers.

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[137] PP 1910, XXI: 10, 999.   [138] *Lancet*, 27 October 1888, 829–30.

4   The funeral

As an organised and identifiable set of customs centred on the disposal of the corpse, the funeral has featured prominently in analyses concerning Western attitudes towards death. The Victorian funeral has attracted particular interest on account of its perceived opulence. Indeed, the meanings invested in the Victorian funeral have been explored almost entirely in terms of extravagance. With mutes, plumes, Belgian horses, carriages, yards of black crepe and coffins 'ablaze with flowers', the Victorian funeral procession was 'an extraordinary sight' to behold. According to James Curl, such displays were typical: the 'panoply which once had been the privilege of the aristocracy alone' had filtered down into the burial customs of the middle and working classes. The expenditure necessitated by such displays has been equated with respect and affection for the deceased: 'a cheap funeral with no flowers and a plain box for a coffin would have made it clear to the world that the corpse went unloved and unhonoured to the grave'.[1] For the working classes, however, pursuit of such customs could lead to financial ruin. As one woman recalled of Edwardian Bolton: 'you did the best you possibly could, even to the extent of leaving yourself slightly broke, it was supposed to be respect for the dead, but I think a little bit was to save the neighbours from talking after as well'.[2]

Herein lies what contemporaries and historians alike have perceived as the crux of the working-class culture of death: the blurred distinction between respect for the dead and respectability. At its most sympathetic, this interpretation has located the working-class culture of extravagance in antipathy to the pauper grave and the desire to distance oneself from the stigma of the workhouse. However, 'the respectable burial' has also been used as a tool to portray the working classes as shallow and riddled with snobbery. Notably, Dickens portrayed a culture that was 'sordid' and 'ludicrous' with funeral arrangements closely observed by the

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[1] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 2 and 20–1.
[2] BOHT, Tape 115, Reference: AL/CG/116.

'jealous eyes of neighbours' keen to judge the position of the bereaved within a localised social hierarchy.[3] The perception of the expensive funeral as the goal of the socially ambitious persisted to the end of the nineteenth century. Arthur Morrison's short story 'All That Messuage' satirised the kudos associated with costly funeral attire. The story begins with a married couple celebrating the purchase of tenanted property. In recognition of their new status as landlords, they fantasise about the fancy funerals they will be able to afford and pledge to inter each other in expensive, polished oak coffins replete with brass fittings. Saddled with a house where the tenants refuse to pay the rent, however, the pair gradually descend into poverty. The ultimate symbol of their degradation, Morrison suggests, is not admission to the workhouse but the revelation that each will be buried in a 'common caufin' of plain deal.[4] In juxtaposing the desire for an ostentatious funeral with the sobering prospect of a pauper burial, Morrison exposes the superficiality of conceptions of respectability that rested on conspicuous consumption. Yet Morrison also illustrates the tendency for contemporary critics to depict the working-class funeral in a one-dimensional framework.

This chapter challenges the assumptions inherent in contemporary and historical literature concerning respectability and the working-class culture of death and disposal. Not only have accounts of extravagance been mythologised, the definition of working-class death custom in terms of social status alone is unhelpful. First, it negates the possibility that burial rituals were cathartic. Furthermore, it nullifies the independence of the working classes to invest custom with multiple and individual meanings. This is not to dismiss respectability from the analysis of burial customs, but to recognise that the meanings invested in the funeral were not confined to issues of social status. Indeed, an exploration of working-class burial rites suggests that attitudes towards death and disposal were typified by complex and diverse expressions of loss and bereavement. In approaching the funeral as a series of rituals which rendered private loss a public rite, it is also possible to perceive components of burial custom as communal sites for the creation and expression of condolence and consolation. The consequence of many funeral customs lay in their role as forums for expressing grief and sympathy with the bereaved, whilst reaffirming a sense of social inclusion. Street collections, closing one's curtains and participating in the funeral tea could all enable the bereaved, and those who sympathised with them, to express sorrow and loss.

[3] Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 21–2.
[4] Morrison, 'All That Messuage' in *Tales of Mean Streets*, 224–51.

In shifting the discussion of death and disposal beyond a preoccupation with respectability and funeral extravagance, it is possible to explore a wider culture of death in the context of grief. Moving beyond a concern with the financial cost of the funeral, analysis can turn to the meanings inscribed on the burial service itself. For most, the burial service was inseparable from shared understandings of decent and customary interment. As Jennifer Leaney highlights, the failure of early cremationists to appreciate this relationship might explain why late Victorian and Edwardian cremation propaganda failed to impress upon a wide public. Arguments based on utility, hygiene and economics bore little relevance to a working-class culture of death.[5] Peter Jupp also notes that cremation propaganda was anathema to a conservative working-class perception of the funeral as a means to express identity, affection for the dead and a sense of social status. It also compromised notions of physical resurrection.[6] More importantly, perhaps, cremation called into question the whole social and cultural significance of customs geared towards the grave. It is impossible to separate the secular rituals of the funeral from spiritual significance. For many, the burial service was a custom imbued with meaning extra to religion and spirituality: it signified community membership, expressed identity and was interpreted as a right of citizenship.

The burial service

The preoccupation with respectability and extravagance has encouraged a tendency for contemporary and historical commentaries on the funeral to focus exclusively on secular rituals of mourning as opposed to the burial service and the spiritual beliefs invested in the disposal of the dead. With reference to elite families, Pat Jalland has illustrated that the language of the Christian burial service ameliorated grief by reaffirming belief in heavenly reunion. Conversely, the exclusivity of Christian doctrine could exacerbate loss, especially for agnostic/atheist mourners or Christians who grieved for an unbeliever.[7] The significance of the burial service for a working-class culture of grief has, however, been almost entirely ignored. As Elizabeth Roberts notes, this is reflected in the

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[5] J. Leaney, 'Ashes to Ashes: Cremation and the Celebration of Death in Nineteenth Century Britain' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 118–35.

[6] P. Jupp, 'The Development of Cremation in England, 1820–1990: A Sociological Account', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1993.

[7] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 216–22, and Martha McMackin Garland, 'Victorian Unbelief and Bereavement' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 151–70 (156–61).

tendency for individuals to recall secular rites rather than the burial service, the vicar, or the church where the funeral was held.[8] Similarly, rumination on death, judgement and the afterlife (eschatology) was increasingly common during the Victorian period but debate on this issue has tended to be analysed in terms of an intellectual elite rather than popular belief.[9] Where religion has been considered in relation to working-class burial, it has been in the context of the near-monopoly of the Established Church on burial privileges that prohibited officiating ministers from non-Anglican denominations performing interment rites in the Anglican churchyard. Even this debate, however, is perceived as holding specific interest for a religious and intellectual elite.[10] More generally, orthodox approaches to religion among the working classes have fixed on the religious census and later, more localised, surveys of church attendance which highlighted a gradual decline in working-class patterns of worship, prompting the conclusion that the urban working classes were alienated from a clergy who inhabited a different ideological and cultural world.[11] Alternative interpretations of attitudes towards organised religion emphasise the potential for individuals to mould the church to their needs. James Obelkevich's classic study of rural Lindsey, for instance, emphasised the popular appropriation of formal religious services, such as baptism and burial, to argue for separate plebeian worlds of belief.[12] Revisionist analyses of religion have contested interpretations of falling church attendance figures as evidence of an increasingly secular working class, emphasising instead the distinction between concepts of 'indifference' and 'difference' to religion. Thus, Callum Brown has emphasised the role of church-based voluntary organisations and the tendency for municipal authorities to promote evangelical agendas of

[8] E. Roberts, 'The Lancashire Way of Death' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 188–207 (201).

[9] M. Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), C. McDannell and B. Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Yale: Yale University Press, [1988] 2001) and P. Stanford, *Heaven: A Traveller's Guide to the Undiscovered Country* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

[10] After the Burial Act 1880, services could take the preferred form of relatives and be led by the minister of their choice. See O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2nd edn, vol. II (London: Black, 1970), 202–7.

[11] S. Meacham, 'The Church in the Victorian City', *Victorian Studies*, 11, 3 (1968), 359–78, B. Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 98–125, H. Pelling, 'Religion in the Nineteenth Century British Working Class', *Past and Present*, 27 (1964), 128–33, H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 280–3, Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longmans, 1976).

[12] J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825–1875* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

social reform to argue that few individuals would have been untouched by religion at some point in their lives.[13] Gerald Parsons, meanwhile, has posited the notion of a working-class version of Christianity which prioritised practical deeds and was characterised by a 'consumer-like' selection of what was relevant to individual needs.[14] As Sarah Williams has highlighted, however, the problem with both orthodox and revisionist accounts of popular religion lies in the agenda they set for research, invariably tied to notions of decline, urbanisation and secularisation.[15] Even more nuanced readings of popular culture based upon participant testimony, such as Hugh McLeod's recent *Piety and Poverty*, persist, suggests Williams, in approaching working-class belief through notions of secularisation.[16] Moreover, accounts which juxtapose a popular/folk belief with elite/formal religion limit the possibilities for exploring the fluidity of spirituality.

Lawrence Taylor's analysis of religion as a discourse whose narrator has a wide range of voices and imagery at their disposal has illustrated how religious belief can adopt multiple voices which demand to be heard, not in isolation, but in concert, however disharmonious they may be. Taylor refers to these subcultural diversities as 'fields of religious experience' which coalesce in a 'loosely bounded "interpretative community" with a generally shared understanding of religious meaning'.[17] Williams's study of religious belief in popular culture in Southwark, 1880–1939, expands Taylor's emphasis on the fluidity of religious narrative. Moving away from notions of subcultural diversity, Williams draws attention to the perpetual re-creation and reinterpretation of belief by the individual. Rejecting attempts to define both categories of belief and religious activity (which were probably alien to the experience and perception of the historical actors concerned), Williams argues instead for a loose understanding of belief which prioritises participant criteria.[18] It is, she contends, only by engaging with the language, symbolism and imagery

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[13] C. G. Brown, 'Did Urbanisation Secularise Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook* (1988), 1–13.

[14] G. Parsons, 'A Question of Meaning: Religion and Working-Class Life' in Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 79.

[15] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 1–23.

[16] H. McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996) and H. McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14, 1 (1985), 31–50.

[17] L. Taylor, 'The Languages of Belief: Nineteenth-Century Religious Discourse in Southwest Donegal' in M. Silverman and P. H. Gulliver (eds.), *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 142–75.

[18] See also S. Williams, 'The Problem of Belief: The Place of Oral History in the Study of Popular Religion', *Oral History*, 24, 2 (1996), 27–34.

created and used by historical actors themselves that it becomes possible to explore the multiple roles, uses and concepts relating belief to broader notions of popular culture.

For Williams, then, belief is a dynamic process which draws on folklore, superstition, formal belief and occasional or conditional conformity to institutions. The secular/popular and the spiritual/official languages of belief were not mutually exclusive but inextricable parts of a web of broader cultural meaning. Williams's conclusion that belief was complex and amorphous suggests the potential for the burial service to be appropriated by individuals and perpetually recast and redefined. The supposed secularism of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period need not, therefore, preclude a reading of the meanings invested in the burial service. Indeed, interaction with religion at the interment of the dead was crucial to understandings of the decent and proper funeral. Thomas Kselman's exploration of funeral conflicts in nineteenth-century France goes some way to illustrate this point. Civil burial in early nineteenth-century France was rare, limited to the funerals of freethinkers or to cases where the Catholic clergy refused to officiate. The improvisations made by families forced to organise a burial outside the format provided by the church provides an insight, argues Kselman, into the sentiments and values of people confronting death. In particular, the withholding of burial rites conferred a source of shame and dishonour on the dead and implied that prayers for their soul were futile. Of equal significance, however, it removed customs which were used to establish an individual's place within a community. Where interment rituals were improvised, they tended to emulate the purpose of the Catholic burial: to reaffirm identity, to console the bereaved and to articulate hope. Thus, Kselman warns against crude readings of secularisation and calls, instead, for an appreciation of forms of belief as positive forces for innovation in tandem with wider cultural change.[19]

Working-class radicals had long been critical of the church, yet the burial service was so ingrained in custom, it is doubtful how many families would have considered interment without clerical involvement as a viable option. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, omission of the burial service was perceived to be one of the greatest indignities of the pauper funeral. In particular, recourse to the church or chapel for the disposal of the dead was rooted in a cultural concept of 'God's acre' as the traditional repository for the dead. Even the supposedly secular cemetery usually had a chapel or three at its core, mimicking the layout of the

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[19] T. Kselman, 'Funeral Conflicts in Nineteenth-Century France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), 312–32.

churchyard. For those who lived in rural areas, the absence of a municipal cemetery left little option but to turn to the churchyard unless, of course, they could afford the fee to transport the coffin to a town. For families who regularly attended a place of worship, familiarity both with the clergyman and the formal language of religion could enable the bereaved to impart some personal significance on the burial service by requesting favourite hymns or readings, or by relating memories of the deceased. If we believe that the urbanised working classes were alienated from the clergy, however, it seems unlikely that bereft relatives would have negotiated personalised burial services with officiating ministers. Even so, as a sarcastic article in *Nineteenth Century* in 1897 noted, families could usually derive some comfort from the spiritual implications of the burial service. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory assuaged grief by encouraging mourners to pray for the dead and speed their soul on its way to Heaven. The Anglican service was more democratic: it afforded men and women of 'no special piety' immediate entry into Heaven, a notion supported by the 'nauseous hymns, so commonly sung, proclaiming that the trials and troubles of the deceased are at an end'.[20]

Confessional cultures might be lampooned for offering glib promises, but they could also be criticised for aggravating grief. It is not surprising that in an autobiography that championed socialism and democratic education, Alice Foley gently rebuked the 'kind and sympathetic' nuns at her Catholic school who shook their heads in dismay to learn that her brother had not received mass before his death. The 'ominous implication' of this omission for her brother's soul exacerbated Alice's 'overwrought sensitivity' and she lay sick for weeks.[21] Most commentators, however, noted the flexibility of popular belief. The district nurse Margaret Loane contended that the poor had no real need of formalised religious ceremonies because it was improvised notions of religion that commonly bolstered fortitude in the face of suffering.[22] Kathleen Woodward also highlighted a culture of selective belief, recollecting that whilst mission meetings in Edwardian London made good use of Hell and retribution as tools of moral reform, these were easily overlooked by audiences in favour of the all-encompassing belief that 'God is Love'.[23] Even vague notions of Heaven represented a language of hope against a life of poverty. Robert Tressell explored the allure of Heaven in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Vehemently anti-clerical, Tressell speculated that Christianity was a clever, if absurd, device that distracted the poor from the horror of their lives by promising them eternal joy after

[20] *Nineteenth Century*, January 1897, 38–55.   [21] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 38.
[22] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 44.   [23] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 128–30.

death. For Tressell, this served only to depoliticise the poor: even his radical protagonist Owen 'could not help longing for something to believe, for some hope for the future; something to compensate for the unhappiness of the present'.[24] Aiming to illustrate the emptiness of such promises, Tressell rails against the hypocrisy of the clergy and ridicules Owen's peers who cling to the promises of Christianity despite knowing 'practically nothing about it!'.[25]

Tressell's contemptuous treatment of the 'Christian' populace suggests an assumption that the majority of the working classes held some concept of Heaven, even if they chose to dispense with notions of Hell. Yet the obscurity that surrounds the religious beliefs of the working classes inevitably problematises any analysis of the spiritual significance of the burial service. As Williams highlights, middle-class Christians and clerics frequently despaired that working-class understandings of salvation were vague, inadequate or wholly inaccurate. She disputes, however, the idea that the working classes retained no concept of atonement: popular belief perpetuated a clear set of moral expectations which were neither arbitrary nor divorced from church-based religion. Thus, the fulfilment of subjective moral and ethical criteria was perceived as sufficient to secure entry into the afterlife. In particular, notions of 'sin' and 'goodness' were dependent on points of 'neighbourliness' and 'brotherliness' rather than doctrinal strictures or church attendance.[26] In this sense, the bereaved could derive comfort from the burial service as confirmation of the social worth of the dead and form a tacit understanding that it signified the right of the deceased to an afterlife. That historiography has latched onto the secular rituals of burial is, perhaps, indicative of an assumption that only the secular could be imbued with individual meaning. If we invoke Sarah Williams's model of belief, however, the public discourse of religion and the fixed liturgy of the burial service could, like the secular rituals of mourning, be appropriated and invested with private meaning.

Herein lies the significance of the religious burial service. As an ingrained component of funeral ritual, the burial service was inseparable from the secular customs of death. The liturgical consignment of the corpse back to the earth engendered a sense of finality: throwing soil onto the lid of the lowered coffin signified that 'it was all over'.[27] The solemnity of the ritual encouraged reflection on mortality and the afterlife, but, also, on the personality and mis/fortunes of the deceased. Hence,

[24] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 229–30.   [25] Ibid., 145–6.
[26] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 116–17.
[27] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.

Deborah Smith tied the story of her brother's coffin being lowered into the ground with reflection on his troubled life: 'No more would he have to seek for work, no more to work when he was not well.'[28] Likewise, the fulfilment of interment rites could prompt the bereaved to ruminate on the character of the relationship lost. Considering loss, however, could also provoke bitter mourning for things that never were, notably relationships that had never quite matched hopes or expectations. Recollecting the funeral of his estranged father, Sam Shaw delivered a subtle blow to the dead man's memory: 'I paid him all I ever owed, the tribute of a passing sigh.'[29]

The consignment of the dead back to the earth was integral to a sense of closure: it separated the dead from the bereaved, propelled them towards an afterlife whilst sanctioning the return of the bereaved to the world of the living, and it incorporated both the deceased and the mourner in their respective domain.[30] To omit or deny a fundamental component of burial custom ruptured the cathartic function of the funeral. A widely publicised burial scandal in Stoke, near Coventry, in August 1878, highlights the distress caused when a family were prohibited from interring the dead in their chosen manner. The parents of an unbaptised baby had approached the Anglican minister of their parish, the Reverend Arrowsmith, to conduct the funeral of their child. Arrowsmith refused and informed the family that church law forbade any Anglican clergyman to read the burial service over the grave of an unbaptised babe. Having no money to travel to the municipal cemetery in Coventry, the distressed parents sought the advice of a local 'gentleman'. On his advice, they approached a Nonconformist minister who agreed to assist them in conducting an improvised service: the funeral began in the Stoke Independent Chapel, moved to the turnpike near the graveyard wall, and ended with the interment of the coffin in the Anglican burial ground. That the family chose to improvise rather than omit a burial service suggests the significance they attached to their right to inter the dead with spiritual rites. Moreover, the decision to overlook the implications of Anglican regulations that withheld access to the burial service illustrates a malleable notion of spiritual authority. That Arrowsmith received death threats and hate mail following the publication of this story in *The Times* also points to the significance of the case for a wider debate on burial privileges in Anglican graveyards.[31]

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[28] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 81–2.

[29] S. Shaw, *Guttersnipe* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1946), 161.

[30] J. Littlewood, 'The Denial of Death and Rites of Passage in Contemporary Societies' in Clark, *Sociology of Death*, 69–84.

[31] *The Times*, 9 August 1878, 7; 15 August 1878, 12.

The religious component of the funeral can thus be interpreted as a secular 'right' as well as a spiritual 'rite', the denial of which was read as a denial of dignity and respect. For instance, the refusal of entry into Heaven for unbaptised infants (limbo) was inextricable from the prohibition of traditional burial custom. Anne Tibble described her mother's horror when told she could not expect to see the soul of her unbaptised baby in Heaven. Further to this blow, the child's corpse was to be consigned to the back of the church, underneath the rubbish heap, along with the other 'ungiven'. Despite attempts to quell the grief of his wife with assurances that 'Holy folk can often be grudgers', Anne's father clearly harboured a deep resentment and never returned to church.[32] Kate Taylor, born in 1891, recalled that her sister's death from infectious disease meant that the coffin was forbidden entry into church. Kate's mother, consumed by bitterness, overcame her usual reticence to chide the vicar: 'You have kept her out of church; you can't keep her out of Heaven.'[33]

The conduct of some clergy could also be construed as a denial of dignity. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Tressell suggests that clerics were 'contemptuously indifferent' to the bereaved poor. At the pauper funeral of Philpot, the cleric 'gabbles' the funeral service in a 'rapid and wholly unintelligible manner' which would have 'compelled laughter' in a less tragic context.[34] Such stories were a useful device for railing against the perceived hypocrisy of the clergy, yet this vision of the Christian funeral as a mockery highlights the potential for the bereaved to feel that their dignity, and that of the corpse, had been slighted. Clearly, some clergy were indifferent or high-handed with their parishioners, sometimes turning up late to conduct burial services. Bolton Burial Board admonished Anglican and Nonconformist ministers in 1906 for persistent unpunctuality at funeral services.[35] Yet the potential for antagonism between some clerics and mourners should not eclipse the possibility that many bereaved families found comfort in the burial service, however they chose to interpret it. As the chaplain for Walton workhouse in Liverpool noted, some families 'thanked me very much' for the consideration shown to them, for the attention paid to their dead, and for his ministry.[36] The very personality of an officiating minister could represent calm assurance and belief in an afterlife. As Thomas Jones noted of ministers in Nonconformist South Wales, a melodious and consoling tone of voice could lighten the solemnity of a burial service. Less formally, prayer meetings at the home of the deceased on the eve before the funeral could provide a wealth of emotional

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[32] Tibble, *Greenhorn*, 63, 98.   [33] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 292.
[34] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 524.   [35] BRO ABCF 15/16.
[36] LVRO 353 WES 14/3. See, for instance, 12, 14 and 23 June 1882.

and spiritual succour.[37] Such was the relationship between the liturgical and the secular that it is impossible to analyse the burial service in isolation: for the devout and ambivalent alike, interment with religious rites was a sign that due dignity had been attributed to the dead. Definitions of 'the funeral' extend, however, beyond the burial to include mourning paraphernalia and the rituals which flank the burial service. This not only suggests that secular custom could offer similar mechanisms of support and consolation to those perpetuated by religious belief, but that secular customs held meanings beyond a concern for status and display.

Expense

Historians of death have claimed that Victorian funeral extravagance reached its apex by the 1880s. Yet to contemporaries who continued to campaign for funeral reform at the end of the century, burial customs remained too costly and elaborate.[38] Since Dickens's scathing attacks on the 'black jobmaster', undertakers had shouldered much of the blame for the 'very ugly, dismal and expensive mockeries' associated with the funeral customs of both rich and poor.[39] In particular, the undertaker fell foul of sanitary and health reformers who argued that the time it took families to accumulate resources for a respectable funeral was additional time spent in the presence of a decaying corpse. In 1886 the sanitary reformer Frederick Lowndes accused undertakers of exploiting their 'monopoly' on burial custom deliberately to retard economical and wholesome burial practice.[40] The perception that the undertaker was a parasite, epitomised by Dickens's character Mr Mould, persisted to the turn of the twentieth century. Surveying the East End in Edwardian London, Helen Bosanquet described the typical undertaker as a 'seedy, dolorous, out-at-elbows man' in 'greasy black' who had difficulty remaining sober.[41] The undertaker was an easy figure to caricature, not least because he derived a 'living' from other people's deaths. Yet the business of disposing of the dead was far from uniform and much depended on the personality of the undertaker and, indeed, the status of his clientele. Moreover, by the late Victorian period, undertaking was in a state of flux and moving slowly towards professionalisation.[42]

[37] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories* (Newtown: Welsh Outlook Press, 1938), 67–8.

[38] See *Lancet*, 20 January 1894, 165–6.

[39] Dickens, 'Raven in the Happy Family', 193, and *Lancet*, 16 October 1875, 571–2.

[40] *Lancet*, 12 June 1886, 1141–2.   [41] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 126.

[42] G. Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry in England, 1700–1960' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 120–34 and G. Howarth, *Last Rites: The Work of the Modern Funeral Director* (Baywood: Baywood Publishing Company, 1996).

By the end of the nineteenth century, many undertaking businesses offered a broad range of services priced on a sliding scale. *Cassell's Household Guide* gave readers of its 1870 edition an example of funerals available from a large firm of undertakers in the Metropolis: funerals could be purchased from a modest £3 5s 0d to a staggering £53 0s 0d. At the bottom of the price range, mourners would enjoy use of a simple carriage with coachman and horse, an elm coffin with lining, use of a pall and the services of coffin bearers; effects such as mourning wear or a plate for the coffin were not included in the price but could be bought additionally. One step up the sliding scale, a funeral at £5 5s bought a hearse and one horse, a mourning coach and one horse, an elm coffin covered in black with wadded lining, simple coffin fittings, a pall and funeral attendants. Again, mourning wear was not included in the price. A funeral for a child under the age of two ranged from £1 0s 0d to £2 12s 0d. For those who just wished to purchase a coffin, prices ranged from £2 14s 0d for a plain elm coffin to £15 0s 0d for a solid oak affair with brass fittings.[43] Prices in the provinces tended to be cheaper, especially if funeral paraphernalia were sourced direct from suppliers. As the accounts of Gloucestershire carpenters and undertakers W. B. Wood & Sons illustrate, expenses could range from a few shillings for a child's coffin to seven pounds for a trimmed adult coffin.[44] The Derby Mourning and Funeral Warehouse sold polished elm coffins that ranged from £1 10s 0d to £2 10s 0d, whilst oak coffins started at £3 10s 0d. Funeral packages consisting of coffin, coaches and paraphernalia ranged from £2 14s 0d to £15 0s 0d.[45]

By the end of the century, undertakers increasingly marketed themselves as purveyors of 'funeral reform' and advocates of 'economy'. Even undertakers who catered for local dignitaries and landowners provided economic as well as extravagant funerals.[46] Daniel Davis, a builder, decorator and undertaker in 1890s Cheltenham, offered funerals of 'all classes'. In 1885, Lewis & Co., undertakers in Bristol, advertised 'reform funeral cars' and a sliding scale of charges that began at two pounds for an adult funeral. Charles Billing of Bristol went further, openly declaring his willingness to be directed by the wishes and the pocket of the bereaved: 'funerals conducted in accordance with Funeral Reform or if wished in the old style. No unnecessary ostentation.

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[43] *Cassell's Household Guide* (1869–71), vol. III, 292.

[44] GRO D4375, W. B. Wood & Sons of Frampton-on-Severn, Ledger of Accounts, 1889–1937.

[45] The Derby Mourning & Funeral Warehouse Advertising Booklet (T. Lloyd Proprietor: Derby, c. 1885).

[46] GRO D2265/1/1, J. M. Lewis of Stroud, Ledger of Accounts, 1885–1937.

No useless expenditure.'[47] Implicit in Billing's advertisement was the acknowledgement that the modest funeral was modern. This did not, however, mean that dignity had to be compromised; all the emphasis is placed on the bereaved as the funeral 'director'. As trade directories for the latter part of the century indicate, undertaking was frequently subsumed into larger concerns. J. D. Burnett & Co., for instance, advertising in *Kelly's* in 1894, oversaw a Somerset establishment selling linen, groceries, ironmongery, medicines, fancy goods and funerals.[48] The employees and owners of businesses that managed to traverse the grocery and funeral trade were likely to be known to the bereaved as local personalities and in a capacity other than that of undertaking, rendering the typecasting of the undertaker as a villainous opportunist harder to sustain. Some undertakers even helped the bereaved to cut interment costs by lying about the length of residency in an area to avoid incurring extra charges for the burial of non-parishioners.[49]

Challenging the overwhelming prejudice against the black jobmaster, an article in the *Lancet* in 1893 asserted that the undertaker was what the public made him: extravagant funerals would only persist so long as there was a market demand for them. In this context, however, 'the public' were perceived as an undifferentiated mass that slavishly followed the fashions of the upper classes, spending on funerals that 'which would be much more wisely expended in providing additional comforts and even necessaries for the living'.[50] The responsibility for funeral reform thus lay with the wealthy: if they adopted frugal burial customs, the rest of society would follow. Notably, the Duke of Clarence's funeral, in January 1892, received widespread criticism as a 'high carnival' and 'pomp of obsequies' which set a poor example to the working classes and highlighted a national 'weakness for display'.[51]

Funeral expenditure has often been portrayed as integral to cultures of conspicuous consumption but it is useful to remember that even a basic burial necessitated extraordinary expense. Cemetery fees, an essential component of the funeral, depended upon a number of variable factors: whether families had to purchase a new grave space or simply account for the reopening of an existing plot; how deep the grave had to be dug (a first interment in a grave space was more

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[47] *Kelly's Trade Directory*, Gloucestershire, 1885 and 1894.   [48] Ibid., 1894.

[49] For instance, Cheltenham undertakers had a facility for converting weeks into years for residency in the area. GRO CBR D2/2/1.

[50] *Lancet*, 24 June 1893, 1529. See also *Lancet*, 29 May 1886, 1033 and 12 March 1887, 539.

[51] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 30 January 1892, 4.

expensive simply because digging deeper into the ground cost more in terms of labour);[52] whether the family required a minister to officiate at the burial; and the location of the grave. The fee charged for a burial certificate averaged one shilling.[53] The cost of grave space in municipal cemeteries in 1887 ranged from one to five pounds depending on the 'class' of grave. Like railway carriages, classes of private graves ranged from first to third and were determined according to size and position; first class plots were large and usually located in prominent sites, whilst third class graves were arranged in a tighter formation and set away from pathways.[54] At Bacup Cemetery in 1888, the fee for interment in a third class grave was priced at one pound whilst burial in a 'reserved' grave at the upper end of the market would cost £4 10s 0d.[55] Morecambe Cemetery catered for a broad rural and urban community. Within the year 1884, cemetery fees ranged from ten shillings for the interment of small children and infants to over five pounds for adult burial including the purchase of a grave, interment and minister's fees.[56] Elizabeth Woodhouse, the wife of a farmer, was interred in January 1884 at the cost of £3 12s 0d, of which £1 10s 0d paid for the reopening of the grave, £1 1s 0d for labour and the remainder for interment and minister's fees. This was expensive compared to the costs for Thomas Statter, a labourer, who was buried on 15 February at a cost of £2 19s 4d, which included the purchase of a grave, labour, interment and minister's fees. Burials could be arranged for less expense if the family already owned grave space. Thus, Betty Ellis, wife of a farmer, was interred in a grave bought for a previous bereavement and her family, members of the Free Church, took the unusual step of dispensing with the services of a minister, thus paying only for labour and the interment fee at a total of £1 5s 6d.[57] The class of a grave also influenced the cost of other basic fees. For instance, at Farnworth Cemetery in 1910 the charges for attendance of an officiating minister ranged from five shillings for interment in a third class plot to almost ten shillings for a burial in a first class grave.[58] Overall, cemetery fees remained stable throughout the decades

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[52] LRO MBH/42/1. Haslingden Table of Fees 1901: first interment in a grave priced at £2 5s 0d and decreasing to fifth interment at £1 6s 0d.
[53] LRO UDPa 29/16, Padiham Day Book 1880.
[54] LRO MBH/42/1, Rules and Regulations for Ramsbottom and Great Harwood Cemeteries.
[55] Ibid., Bacup Cemetery Fees.
[56] LRO MBMo 2/2 Cemetery Order Book, e.g. 19 September 1884 and 19 November 1884.
[57] Ibid., 17 January 1884, 15 February 1884, 20 May 1884.   [58] BALS AF/6/134/2.

flanking the turn of the century but were revised upwards during and after the First World War.[59]

The ability to pay for a funeral was, undoubtedly, a source of great anxiety. Indeed, if customs of laying out were female-centred, the ability to finance a funeral provided a practical channel for the grief of a male breadwinner. For those with a financial shortfall, the most immediate way of raising ready money was to turn to the pawnshop. In her study of ironworkers' families in Middlesbrough, Florence Bell related the story of one family who pawned their clock, 'the only thing available left in their bare little house', in order to pay for the funeral of their child.[60] Most families incurred debts to finance a funeral. William Blackburn (born 1895) estimated that 'seventy-five per cent of the families that had a bereavement went into debt ... by the time you'd straightened up for one funeral, probably there was another one shortly after'.[61] Despite being separated from her spouse at the time of his expiration, Joseph Barlow Brooks's mother was still paying the debts incurred by her husband's funeral for years afterwards.[62]

Although some undertakers offered payment by instalments, the most common means of financing a funeral was subscription to a burial club.[63] Even for those with relatively low earnings, burial insurance (also referred to as 'life insurance') was a cheap investment. Violet Butler observed of Oxford that life insurance represented the 'commonest' form of thrift among the 'really poor': they had 'tragic reason for knowing its need' and the larger commercial companies had perfected the organisation and collection of contributions from such investors.[64] Even in rural villages, most weekly budgets accounted for payment into a benefit society.[65] According to Rowntree, 33.6 per cent of the working-class population in York earned between twenty-one and thirty shillings per week whilst 52.6 per cent earned over thirty shillings per week (at an average weekly wage of 41s 9d); approximately 13.8 per cent earned below twenty-one shillings.[66] Among his samples of weekly budgets for those earning under twenty-one shillings per week, Rowntree noted that an average of 3.9 per cent of weekly income was spent on insurance and sick clubs, costs for

[59] See proposals for increased fees, LRO MBH/42/3 September 1919 and BRO ABZ 3/3 c. 1917.
[60] Bell, *At the Works*, 83.
[61] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588. See also BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013, Bell, *At the Works*, 76–7, and Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 69–71.
[62] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 130.   [63] GRO D4375, Accounts for W. B. Wood & Sons.
[64] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 241.   [65] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 250.
[66] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 70–95.

burial insurance ranging from five to six pence per week. Even among higher income groups, weekly costs for life insurance averaged just over eight pence.[67] The budget diaries compiled for Maud Pember Reeves's study of Lambeth families indicate similar rates of investment in burial insurance in 1910. For families earning between twenty and twenty-five shillings per week, Reeves noted that payments to burial clubs ranged between three and ten pence. Most families with regular incomes invested money in burial insurance, but during periods of unemployment payments tended to lapse.[68] The variety in costs was accounted for, firstly, by the different services and rates offered by individual clubs and, secondly, the number of family members insured. The generosity of premiums paid on death differed between clubs and depended on variable factors such as the length of membership. In Oxford in 1911, the expiration of a long-standing male member of the Oddfellows would incur a payment of twelve pounds; six pounds was paid for members' wives who died. Subscribers to the Sons of Temperance were entitled to twenty pounds to cover both spouses' funerals. In comparison, the Foresters Society paid only fifteen pounds between married couples. For a weekly payment of eight pence, members of the Plasterers' Union (for ten years and over) received ten pounds at the death of the male breadwinner and six pounds at the death of their spouse.[69] In turn-of-the-century York, weekly payments with the Prudential Company averaged two pence per person for a median insurance sum of ten pounds. Payments into trade union insurance schemes reflected similar contributions and payments: the most generous payouts averaging fifteen pounds; the vast majority lying somewhere between eight and twelve pounds.[70]

Nevertheless, burial insurance was a gamble. As Maud Pember Reeves noted, one missed payment during a period of illness or unemployment could render years of regular subscription obsolete.[71] Violet Butler thought the weekly payments for some schemes so small that members easily forgot to make them.[72] By the turn of the twentieth century, friendly societies and insurance companies were subject to strict legal controls to ensure against fraud and mismanagement. Nonetheless, some smaller clubs, such as informal, pub-based 'slate clubs', remained unregistered with the government, were badly organised and susceptible to collapse.[73] Warning of the iniquities of *The Nether World*, Gissing

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[67] Ibid., 310–17, 423.   [68] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 137–41, 196–7.
[69] Ibid., 238–9.   [70] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 424 and appendix II.
[71] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 70.   [72] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 242.
[73] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 15. In York in 1901, 1,944 friendly societies were unregistered with the government. Rowntree, *Poverty*, 419–21.

highlighted the vulnerability of the poor who placed faith in the unregu-
lated burial club. In a world of immediate gratification, the burial club
was the only long-term investment most families made and for the seem-
ingly hapless John Hewett, payments into a burial insurance scheme
represent a solitary 'stronghold against fate'. He had contrived to main-
tain payments to the club even through periods of extreme indigence. As
his wife lies on the brink of death, however, Hewett learns that the fifteen-
year-old burial club has collapsed through a combination of carelessness,
mismanagement and fraud. He is devastated. The sense of tragedy is
heightened by the sharp contrast between Hewett's general despondency
in the prelude to the scene and his passionate outpouring of anger when
he learns of the club's demise. Gissing is at pains to emphasise that
Hewett did not aspire to a lavish burial for himself or any of his family.
Rather, he simply wished to protect his kin against the degradation of a
pauper burial.[74]

Paul Johnson notes the paradox inherent in the deep antipathy towards
burial insurance displayed by late Victorian champions of thrift.[75] The
insecurity of unregulated burial clubs explains some of this hostility.
Overwhelmingly, however, it was the perception that burial club pay-
ments encouraged extravagance and, in some cases at least, a fatalistic
acceptance of death that encouraged bourgeois antagonism. A sketch of
'Liverpool in the Rough' in the satirical magazine *Porcupine* in 1880
outlined the perceived uses of burial insurance to both the reprobate
and the respectable working classes. Poorer families, it suggested, were
inclined to insure their elderly kin in a number of burial clubs.[76] At death,
the multiple policies were cashed to fund drinking sprees, whilst the dead
were buried as cheaply as possible. For 'the really honest poor', however,
burial insurance permitted reverential interment of the dead. This acted
as 'a balm' to grief, for 'the "little bit of black" they are able to get "out of
respect" – and love – goes a long way to make their sorrow bearable'.
Although aiming to illustrate the pitfalls of burial insurance, the subtext
to the sketch parodied superficial notions of decent burial. Not only did
such customs occasion a waste of money, the whole concept of respect-
able burial was drawn from the working-class imagination. The bereaved
invited 'all their friends – at least, as many of them as can raise "black"' to
the ceremony and subsequent funeral tea to 'talk over the good deeds of
the past and the bad ones of the present'. This was a natural inclination

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[74] Gissing, *Nether World*, 185.   [75] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 25.
[76] This was because companies generally made no effort to establish whether the insurer
was the person liable for funeral expenses, enabling a dozen grandchildren to insure one
grandparent. Ibid., 21.

and most participants in such occasions meant no harm, even though tempers often got the better of them. The observation that the bereaved had waited patiently for club money, and been 'so poor and hard put to the while', was a familiar justification for indulgence at times of death. Yet it also implied that the so-called respectable funeral was little more than an excuse, subconsciously perhaps, for a 'spree' under the guise of grief and decency.[77] This conception of the funeral is inextricable from one of theatre; mourning is a performance that permits the actors to indulge in drink, cheap philosophy and bawdy merry-making. Helen Bosanquet made a similar comparison in her survey of London's East End: the poor regarded their funeral as the 'most important occasion in their earthly career' as it measured their place in a social hierarchy; and 'every nerve is strained to make it a goodly show'. Women were particularly susceptible to the illusion that funerals cast: 'I have never yet known a woman who did not make a death in the family the occasion for new clothing all round, however desperate their poverty.'[78] Similarly, the district nurse Margaret Loane indicated that there was a 'touch of idealism' in the mourning customs of the poor. Far from criticising the drama of the funeral, however, Loane felt it lent a degree of romanticism, variety and escapism that poorer folk could 'little afford to lose'.[79] Against the drab routine of life, even meagre displays captured the imagination of local people: 'it was really an occasion the funeral, it was like all the street would come out and watch it'.[80]

The extent to which such portrayals were representative of the working-class funeral is, however, uncertain. Even in the early Victorian heyday of lavish funerals, numbers of the working classes remained sceptical as to the benefits of burial insurance.[81] Moreover, the assumption that burial insurance fostered improvidence is questionable. Funerals were indeed perceived as a 'luxury'.[82] Yet definitions of extravagance and decency were also highly subjective. On balance, the respectable burial was defined in opposition to the pauper burial. This was not, however, restricted to the purchase of a private grave but related to a desire on the part of the bereaved to assert the identity of, and claim dignity for, the dead. As Thomas Laqueur notes, even the meanest of funerals tended to have the 'extra' of the coffinplate with the name of the deceased inscribed upon it.[83] The very notion of the 'extra' begs the question: what

[77] *Porcupine*, 7 August 1880, 294.   [78] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 66–7, 126.
[79] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 121.   [80] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.
[81] T. Frost, *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* (London: Ward & Downey, 1886), 94–9.
[82] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[83] T. Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', *Representations*, 1, 1 (1983), 109–31 (114).

constituted a necessity? Despite chastising the working classes for occasional fecklessness, Maud Pember Reeves typified the arbitrary attitude towards funeral economy. Describing the funeral of a six-month-old child in a common grave, Reeves saw no conflict between the parents purchasing flowers for the coffin and a black tie for the father and their status as 'unusually careful people' who buried their child with 'no display and no extravagance'.[84] It is difficult to determine the subjective criteria used to discriminate between excess, decency and necessity, although it seems likely that some customs were so ingrained in the concept of the funeral that to dispense with them would have been unthinkable.

Undoubtedly, there was a sense in which burial was a public rite and the bereaved were expected to fulfil shared norms of what constituted a 'decent funeral'. Reflecting on his Lancashire childhood, Joseph Barlow Brooks observed: 'However poor one might be, public opinion and personal pride forbade that there should be anything shabby about the clothes, coffin, coaches, or meal at the funeral of one's relatives.'[85] Such expectations must be placed within a local economic context however. Many working-class families considered their funerals incomparable to those of the 'pretty affluent' who indulged in hearses, coaches and horses with plumes.[86] As Reeves noted, burial insurance did not always even cover the basic costs of the funeral.[87] Moreover, recollections of grand funerals tend to pertain to the exceptional. Kathleen Woodward, for instance, recalled that lavish funerals 'composed the one interest strongly binding' the inhabitants of Kent Street. A funeral for one of the notorious Roper family was bound to draw crowds of spectators who gasped and muttered numerous 'blimeys' at the number of wreaths. Yet exceptional extravagance was not necessarily equated with respectability. As Woodward's friend observed, if floral tributes helped the dead on their way to Heaven, a Roper would need Covent Garden on their coffin.[88]

On balance, therefore, the element of display inherent in the idea that 'all might be equal before the Lord . . . but there was nothing to be gained in going shabby' must be placed in perspective.[89] Even amongst the middle and upper classes, the extravagant funeral has been somewhat mythologised, stories of excess hinging on the sensational funerals of a minority.[90] Fantastic funerals formed part of a local and cultural

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[84] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 71.   [85] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 170.

[86] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.   [87] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 69.

[88] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 36–8.

[89] R. Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling: Growing Up in the Classic Slum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 133.

[90] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 196.

landscape but were largely perceived as Other; the poor 'didn't have fancy funerals like that, they couldn't afford it, they just didn't have them'.[91] In the 'Tripe Colony' in Miles Platting, a working-class district in Manchester, early twentieth-century funeral processions were typified less by extravagance than by 'walking' processions where the bereaved carried the coffin to the cemetery followed by mourners on foot.[92] Villagers in rural Surrey also found the services of the undertaker superfluous when local men volunteered to carry coffins to the churchyard.[93] In some districts, churches retained a funeral bier that could be pushed from the home of the deceased to the grave or farmers might loan horses to pull a collective hearse.[94] When families did hire a funeral coach, numbers of relatives might be packed tightly into one car to keep costs low.[95] Economies extended to the coffin itself. Some coffins were trussed with ribbons, wadding, webbing, brass furniture and expensive linings; many were fashioned in plain deal wood with nothing attached save for a nameplate.[96] Recalling life in pre-war Rhymney, Thomas Jones observed that the well-off had coffins of polished mahogany studded with brass; 'poorer folk' had coffins of 'common wood covered with black cloth and black studs'.[97] Further examination of the customary components of the funeral suggests that the working-class culture of burial was imbued not just with concerns for status but also with gestures of loss, sympathy and community.

Mourning

In *Death in the Victorian Family*, Pat Jalland illustrates how mourning customs helped assuage the grief of elite families: funerals reinforced the finality of loss; the burial service reaffirmed religious belief; and funeral gatherings prompted the articulation of memories while facilitating famil-ial displays of sympathy.[98] Claims that customs filtered down the social scale need to be treated with caution. With regard to death and bereave-ment, there is much to suggest that the performance of funeral rites as a mode of catharsis is universal across cultures and chronologies: customs associated with interment and mourning separate the deceased from the living in order to bring a liminal period after expiration to a close, allowing

[91] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[92] Man. OH Transcript, Miles Platting, Tape 153.   [93] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20.
[94] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13, and Mary Watson in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176. An excellent example of a bier survives in the parish church in Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales.
[95] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 34.
[96] GRO D4375, W. B. Wood & Sons, Ledger of Accounts.
[97] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories*, 67.   [98] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 210–29.

the deceased and the bereaved to move forward and inhabit their respective worlds. Amongst the working classes in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, mourning customs facilitated the negotiation of identity and created symbolic spaces for the expression of grief and condolence.

The most common form of distinguishing a bereaved family was by their black clothes or, in the case of widows, their 'weeds'. The fashion for mourning dress mushroomed in the 1840s, spawning a whole new industry dedicated to the manufacture of black crepe and jet jewellery.[99] John Morley has argued that wearing black was so crucial to a strict and intricate code of mourning etiquette that any attempts to curtail the custom were fervently resisted, inviting charges of 'indelicacy or worse'.[100] James Curl, meanwhile, has located the origins of this fashion in a 'deeply-rooted fear' of the dead returning (when veiled and cloaked in black, mourners were thought to be invisible to the dead).[101] It is doubtful how far, by the turn of the twentieth century at least, people subscribed to or were aware of this belief. Rather, as Jalland has suggested, mourning clothes helped others to identify the recently bereaved; black reflected the sombre mood of grief; and the wearing of mourning was widely interpreted as a sign of respect for the dead.[102] Catalogues for mourning wear show extensive ranges in everything from mourning evening gowns to wedding dresses, crepe silk hatbands to jet earrings. The expense of crepe and jet placed them beyond the means of many working-class families and they were not even automatically included in wealthy families' funeral customs, many preferring to don modest or second-hand mourning garb.[103]

Nevertheless, among the working classes, the purchase of mourning wear may well have been perceived as a sign of comparative affluence. If neighbours did watch funeral proceedings to gauge the inter-relation between cost and respectability, clothes were one of the most tangible means of estimating expenditure. As one Bolton woman (born 1905) suggested, even neighbours who watched funeral processions to pay their respects to the dead almost invariably made mental notes of what the bereaved were wearing.[104] The two impulses did not necessarily conflict: nosiness compounded a desire to participate in communal acts of condolence. Considered of little therapeutic value, however, the element of conspicuous consumption inherent in mourning dress rendered it a prime

[99] Litten refers to this as 'shroud couture'. Litten, *English Way of Death*, 81–4.
[100] Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 63–79.
[101] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 9.
[102] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 301–2.   [103] Ibid., 300–7.
[104] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.

target for critics of funeral extravagance.[105] James Curl's claim that, 'impossible though it might seem', poorer families always appeared in new black clothing immediately after death hints at the fecklessness historians and contemporaries have associated with mourning dress.[106] Florence Bell was horrified to learn of a widow who had spent a charitable donation on the 'mourning weeds of the stage, including a long black skirt, a deep crape flounce and everything complete'.[107] In her report on widows in Liverpool in 1913, Eleanor Rathbone related the story of one woman who was refused out-relief by the parish guardians because she spent fifteen pounds of her husband's insurance money on his funeral and clothes.[108] Such exasperation from contemporaries and historians alike needs, however, to be treated with caution. Bell's observation that such clothing belonged to the stage suggests that it was an unusual spectacle in the streets. Similarly, Curl's generalisations are hard to sustain when the culture of wearing black is explored in any depth.

Certainly, black clothing at funerals was de rigueur until the early part of the twentieth century.[109] Moreover, recollections relating to the efforts of the poor to acquire dark clothing are widespread. Amy Pownall, an assistant in a pawnbrokers from the age of fourteen, recalled that 'however poor' the bereaved were, 'you were always sure of a good funeral order' as they would invariably want to 'rig' the entire family up in black clothing.[110] Even when the dead were interred in pauper graves, families would strive to acquire suitable mourning garb. Jack Lannigan's mother bought both he and his brother new suits and caps for their father's burial in a pauper grave. Yet the costs incurred were strategically managed. The suits, purchased 'on tick', were pawned immediately following the funeral and the boys never saw them again.[111] Alice Foley recalled that her brothers' dark suits would regularly be loaned to neighbours for weddings or funerals.[112] Describing pauper funerals in Edwardian Liverpool, Andie Clerk noted that despite the poverty of the bereaved, 'a brave effort would be made to wear something black, jackets or skirts being got from the pawnbrokers'.[113] Notably, the emphasis in such narratives rests upon the strategies implemented to acquire suitable clothing and suggests that, far from signifying conspicuous consumption, mourning clothes could be interpreted as a sign of resourcefulness and commitment to observing the dignity of the funeral.

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[105] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 300.   [106] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 9.
[107] Bell, *At the Works*, 78.   [108] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 51.
[109] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 202.
[110] Man. OH Transcript, Amy Pownall, Tape 800.   [111] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 97.
[112] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 15.
[113] A. Clerk, *'Suffer Little Children': The Autobiography of an Early Century Street Arab* (Liverpool: J. E. James, 1978), 11.

Definitions of 'black' fluctuated wildly according to the circumstances of the bereaved. For many poorer families, the aspiration to wear black to funerals was combined with a sense of compromise and pragmatic ingenuity. Margaret Penn described a local funeral where 'The boys wore their Sunday best with black ties – some bought specially for the occasion, some borrowed, some, on the very poorest children, [ties] merely lengths of broad black tape.'[114] Albert Jasper recalled one family funeral where the bereaved 'bought what black they could afford' and, with varying degrees of success, dyed their everyday clothes in dark colours.[115] The shoddiness of such clothes must have been apparent to all. What took precedence was the colour. In this sense, mourning wear was easily perceived as a display of comparative affluence for those who could afford to buy new clothing. For those who could not, the principal purpose of wearing dark clothing was to signify loss and respect for the dead. As a Bolton woman (born 1899) noted: 'Oh they respected the dead in them days and everybody wore black, you would never dream of going to a funeral with anything but black on.'[116] In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Philpot's coffin is carried by four workmates all nominally dressed in black. They bear, however, a 'remarkable dissimilarity' in appearance, their 'black' garments ranging from 'rusty brown to dark blue'.[117] Tressell is keen to emphasise that poverty did not lessen the significance of customs thought to denote respect for the dead; choosing to compromise rather than dispense with those customs served to heighten the meaning vested in them. Indeed, the custom of wearing black was so ingrained in the culture of death that to overlook it was to invite speculation on the gravity of loss: neighbours would 'talk about you if you had a colour on'.[118] As Elizabeth Roberts has argued, expense was not the overriding issue at funerals: most rituals cost very little or were improvised whilst retaining supreme symbolic significance.[119] Moreover, critics who chided the poor for buying clothes with burial insurance money overlooked the possibility that the garments in question were much needed.

If mourning clothes were the most obvious visual sign of bereavement, other customs, such as closing curtains at the house of the deceased during the day, were also effective in announcing that expiration had taken place.[120] As with the colour of funeral clothes, the darkness of drawn blinds cast a sense of gloom, reflecting the mood of grief. In some instances, the

[114] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 162.   [115] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 121.
[116] BOHT, Tape 74, Reference: JP/SP/1/028.
[117] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 523.
[118] BOHT, Tape 155b, Reference: AB/SS/1b/005.
[119] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 191.
[120] See, for instance, BOHT, Tape 71b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/006.

custom even notified relatives of death before they arrived at the scene.[121] Once the knowledge of death was disseminated along the street, neighbours would also close their curtains in sympathy with the bereaved. Lewis Jones's novel *Cwmardy* emphasised the tight-knit communities within mining towns. The comradeship of the miners is echoed in a domestic context when the 'drawn blinds in every house in the street' inform a man of his daughter's death before he reaches his home.[122] This simple act permitted neighbours and friends to articulate a sense of sympathy with the bereaved whilst symbolically expressing respect for the dead:

if there was a death in the house the blinds were always drawn, very often, the neighbours on each side and anyone who had been friendly would also draw theirs for the entire time between the death and the funeral. On the day of the funeral all the blinds in the street would be drawn, men when the funeral was passing always took their hats off, women would stop and bend their heads.[123]

Gestures of communal sympathy reminded the bereaved that they were surrounded by friends. Likewise, the custom operated as a means of displaying local respect and affection for philanthropists or official figures who had worked in the district.[124]

Participation in a funeral procession also represented a non-verbal means of offering condolences to the bereaved and paying one's respects to the dead. Sunday funerals were particularly popular among the working classes.[125] The cynical commentator concluded that this enabled mourning parties to overindulge for a day: 'They go in for a spree, a feed, a guzzle, winding up with long pipes, long yarns, and very often, a row.'[126] Cynicism that Sunday funerals were an excuse for debauchery was, perhaps, best encapsulated in James Greenwood's scathing essay 'At a Public-House of Mourning' (1874). Venturing to watch a funeral procession on a Sunday afternoon, Greenwood describes the rapid transition amongst the funeral party from 'red-eyed' mourners with 'unquenchable' woe to a rowdy and foul-mouthed crowd clamouring to quench their thirst for gin and ale immediately after interment has taken place. Sunday, he concluded, was undoubtedly viewed as a 'day for boozing and drunkenness' for mourners and undertakers alike.[127] A more sympathetic reading, however, allows for the possibility that mourners contrived to organise funerals at times when

[121] 'Death of a Sailor's Wife', *Porcupine*, 5 June 1880, 150–1.   [122] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 57.

[123] Bromilow and Power, *Looking Back*, 35.   [124] *Sunday at Home*, 12 June 1880, 369–74.

[125] Cline, *Lifting the Taboo*, 43, and D. Clark, 'Death in Staithes' in D. Dickenson and M. Johnson (eds.), *Death, Dying and Bereavement* (London: Sage and Open University Press, 1993), 5.

[126] *Porcupine*, 13 June 1863, 84–5.

[127] J. Greenwood, 'At a Public-House of Mourning' in *The Wilds of London* (London: Garland, [1874] 1985), 125–32.

participation would not damage their earnings.[128] Where burial boards prohibited Sunday funerals, workers persisted in striving to arrange burials at times when the maximum number of people could attend without detriment to their income. David Kirkwood recalled the tragic death of a craneman in an accident at a Glasgow forge. His funeral was held at lunchtime to permit workmates to pay their last respects, joining the cortege from the gates of the forge.[129] In July 1890, Alfred Stansfield approached Middleton Burial Board on behalf of a number of Nonconformists to request that the times of funerals in the unconsecrated portion of the cemetery be changed: it was difficult for people 'which [sic] work in spinning mills and people engaged in warehouses in Manchester' to attend funerals as 'it means a whole afternoon off at works and leaving warehouses at the busiest time for to catch the train'.[130] The compromise between attending a funeral and losing earnings demonstrates that whilst financial considerations were important, they did not override the desire to pay one's respects to the dead. As one Bolton textile worker (born 1898) asserted, following a coffin was a simple but effective demonstration of neighbours' sympathy with the bereaved.[131] At Jane's funeral in *Cwmardy*, Jones again emphasises the communality that characterised the mining town: the departure of the coffin from the house is marked by passage through a crowd of miners, her father's workmates; as the cortege edges its way toward the cemetery, miners returning from work stop and doff their caps. Having been seduced and abandoned by the son of an 'overman' at the mines, Jane's death in childbirth seems to imply culpability among the mining bosses who refuse to acknowledge their own or their sons' responsibilities. Juxtaposed with the arrogance of the mining bosses, the display of solidarity among the miners showing respect for Jane, to all intents and purposes a fallen woman, only serves to heighten their humanity.[132] Indeed, Jones's story suggests that in so far as the funeral was a 'display', it was one which drew upon gestures of communal support rather than extravagance.

The culture of neighbours spilling out into the street to watch a funeral procession illustrates the relationship between burial customs and notions of social inclusion.[133] Indeed, Thomas Laqueur has suggested

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[128] In contrast, weekday weddings remained relatively popular. See D. Reid, 'Weddings, Weekdays, Work and Leisure in Urban England 1791–1911: The Decline of Saint Monday Revisited', *Past and Present*, 153 (1996), 135–63.

[129] Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 47.

[130] LRO MBM/3/2 5 July 1890. The board made Nonconformist funerals thirty minutes later.

[131] BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/1a/016.   [132] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 63–5.

[133] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588; BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/ JW/1a/003; and Man. OH Transcript, Florence Smith, Tape 962.

that respectable burial was not rooted in expense alone; the ability to bury the dead decently also drew on notions of community membership. Funerals took up public space with relatives and neighbours, workmates, trade union and friendly society members joining together to pay their respects and give expression to the multifaceted identity of the deceased. Thus, the funeral as a consumer good signified the value of an individual's life and their relationship with society. In contrast, the indecent funeral – notably the pauper burial – denoted personal failure and social exclusion.[134] This reading of the funeral persists today: it represents 'the finished picture of a person', one which reveals the individual's social relations with the wider community.[135] In this sense, neighbours who came to watch funeral processions were not simply indulging their curiosity, they were expressing sympathy and (re)forging an idea of community. Participation in a cortege could also assume vague spiritual significance, the number of participants indicating a measure of the deceased's 'goodness' and, consequently, the speed of their journey to Heaven.[136] On a more literal level, the spatial arrangement of participants could indicate the identity of the deceased. At children's funerals, for instance, schoolmates would often flank the coffin, the girls decked in white sashes or, if parents could afford it, white dresses and the boys wearing white armbands and white ties.[137]

Whilst attendance at a funeral often signified membership of a family group, a locality or a workplace, the procession to the cemetery should not be seen as a free for all. In parts of rural Yorkshire and Northumberland at least, it was expected that a distant relative or neighbour would circulate the neighbourhood on behalf of the bereaved to 'bid' (that is, invite) people to participate in the procession.[138] Some people considered it bad manners for others, even friends, to intrude on the family's grief at the graveside.[139] The attendance of women at funerals varied. Undoubtedly, some families thought it improper for women to follow the funeral into the church.[140] As Jalland has suggested, this was inextricable from perceptions of female emotional vulnerability.[141]

[134] Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', 115–26.
[135] M. Drakeford, 'Last Rights? Funerals, Poverty and Social Exclusion', *Journal of Social Policy*, 27, 4 (1998), 507–24 (522).
[136] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[137] Cissie Elliot and 'George' (born 1896) in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 42.
[138] Maggie Chapman and Cissie Elliot in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176 and 113.
[139] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[140] Maggie Chapman in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 113.
[141] Jalland notes that *Cassell's Household Guide* in 1870 bemoaned the custom of some women from the poorer classes to attend funerals as few could control their emotions. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 221.

On a more practical level, some women would have stayed at home to fulfil a domestic role and prepare the funeral tea.[142] Even so, the desire to participate in burial rites could override subjective perceptions of propriety. One textile worker (born 1895) recalled that when her grandmother died, the ruling by the male head of the family that men only were to attend the funeral service was overturned by his indignant female siblings.[143]

Of course, the presence of friends and family did not necessarily alleviate the emotional trial of the funeral. Describing his mother's funeral, Wil Edwards was accompanied by fellow mourners but his grief placed him in 'utter loneliness'.[144] Moreover, perceptions of the funeral as the climax of mourning rites fostered expectations that interment would prove an emotionally poignant moment. When the bereaved felt only the isolation and anger of loss, it could encourage feelings of guilt and disloyalty. In his memoir of his mother's funeral, V. W. Garratt suggested that his grief was eclipsed by numbness: 'I tried hard to cry but failed. My emotions had become stifled ... Even at the graveside I felt unmoved, and it was not until I was absolutely alone and could reflect on the loss with a tranquil mind that tears flowed and my heart became heavy with sorrow.'[145] In this recollection, the absence of anticipated emotion is interpreted almost as a personal failure whereby 'stifled' feelings create a metaphorical sense of suffocating oppression. It also indicates the extent to which perceptions of funeral were bound to notions of emotional distress.

Some families perceived the funeral as an intimate forum for saying their last goodbyes and deeply resented neighbours and extended kin 'you'd never seen' who turned up to watch, and no doubt judge, the event.[146] People 'with a funeral' acquired a temporary importance in the neighbourhood which could grate by virtue of its superficiality. Joseph Barlow Brooks thought there was something 'intrusive' about the gathering of women in the graveyard to watch the funeral of his father.[147] Likewise, George Acorn condemned those who lined the road to watch funerals as 'vulgar sightseers'.[148] Such feelings suggest a degree of ambiguity in the public character of many funeral rites and, perhaps, our reading of them. Undoubtedly, the practical and emotional support of others was valued

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[142] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 194. See also Cline, *Lifting the Taboo*, 42–4, and C. Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 39–40.
[143] BOHT, Tape 149, Reference: AL/KP/1c/007.   [144] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.
[145] Garratt, *Man in the Street*, 82.   [146] BOHT, Tape 166, Reference: AL/LSS/A/007.
[147] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 13. See also Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[148] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 44.

by many, but locating the funeral in public space also left the bereaved susceptible to prying eyes and the gossip of the less well intentioned.

Far more welcome were the gestures of communal support offered through channels of mutual aid. Street and workplace collections helped defray the expense of burial (especially for families with no burial insurance) or went towards the purchase of a wreath. As with mourning wear, floral tributes were targeted by funeral reformers as superfluous custom. Editors at the *Lancet*, for instance, argued that wreaths simply encouraged equations between the corpse and the personality of the dead.[149] More importantly, they were a waste of money. In his autobiography *There Was a Time*, Walter Greenwood drew attention to the paradox of the poor donating money for flowers. Greenwood tells the story of a local woman, Annie Boarder, condemning collections for funeral flowers in the same breath that she requested neighbours to make donations. As Boarder was apt to note, floral tributes demonstrated the sympathy of the community but would not feed a widow and her children.[150] Margaret Penn recollected a school-based subscription to purchase a wreath for a boy who had died, whereby each child donated 'the utmost its parents could afford'. Some donors may have contributed to avoid charges of parsimony whilst most contributions represented extraordinary expenditure from relatively small incomes. As Penn noted, however, the funeral flowers were 'beautiful', the inscription sent with them a sincere expression of sympathy, and the act of taking the tribute to the house of the bereaved an 'honour'.[151]

In a sense, the cost of making a donation heightened the meanings invested in it. Sam Shaw recalled that among borstal boys, meagre contributions for a funerary wreath represented a powerful statement of respect and solidarity: 'Each of the ten of us subscribed two of our pennies for a little wreath as a last tribute to one who had been a prison mate and who must once have been somebody's darling.'[152] The small bouquet illuminates the contrast between the harsh penal system for children and the suggestion that inmates could retain humanity. Charles Booth also noted the significance of funeral tributes amidst the 'drunkenness and dirt and bad language' of an Irish Catholic slum in London in the 1890s. When one pious young woman died, neighbours 'showed their respect by covering the coffin and almost filling the one room in which these women lived with costly wreaths and quantities of beautiful flowers'.[153] In

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[149] *Lancet*, 14 April 1894, 979.
[150] W. Greenwood, *There Was a Time* (London: Cape, 1967), 16–17.
[151] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 161.   [152] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 84.
[153] Booth, *Life and Labour*, Vol. II, 53–4.

drawing attention to the expense of wreaths, Booth implies disapproval, whilst the juxtaposition between squalor and expenditure on fresh floral displays highlights a sense of disordered priorities. Booth's suggestion that it was the piety of the dead woman that singled her out for such lavish commemoration indicates that the flowers are a metaphor for the individual whose moral integrity remains intact amidst the degradation of poverty. At a more literal level, however, the generous display demonstrates the pervasiveness of customs of condolence across those considered rough and respectable. That there was often a conflict between the wish to donate funeral flowers and the desire to adopt more pragmatic forms of assistance further suggests that floral tributes carried a significance that stretched beyond a shallow concern for display. As one bleacher from Bolton (born 1899) noted, 'they used to always go around collecting and trying to provide well to buy flowers for them and that. Oh they respected the dead in them days.'[154] Yet floral tributes need not be showy or expensive. In rural areas, charges of extravagance might be avoided by picking daffodils and primroses from one's garden.[155] The simplicity of such bouquets again suggests that the custom of laying flowers on a coffin or a grave was invested with meaning beyond mere display.

Commentators such as Booth were quick to make moral evaluations of donations to the bereaved that did not appear to serve a pragmatic function. Yet perceptions of the utility of donations differed widely. Deborah Smith saw little value in funeral flowers and took monetary donations for her husband's death to treat herself to a more 'useful' and recuperative seaside holiday, although it is doubtful whether many philanthropists would have viewed a holiday in quite the same way when there were children to feed.[156] Champions of working-class thrift campaigning to strip the funeral of superfluous custom argued that donations to funeral funds only encouraged unnecessary expenditure. Yet for the bereaved, pecuniary assistance with burial costs represented the pragmatic face of symbolic condolence. Even among poor neighbourhoods, friends and relatives enacted small kindnesses to lighten the financial, and consequently emotional, burden of the bereaved.[157] A sketch in *Porcupine* in 1880 was mildly scornful of such generosity: the poor 'have a system of mutual assistance, a habit of helping each other, which prevents many of them from ever becoming rich in anything but nobleness of character'.[158]

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[154] BOHT, Tape 74, Reference: JP/SP/1/028.   [155] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[156] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 34.
[157] See Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 40, and Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 162.
[158] *Porcupine*, 29 May 1880, 138.

For Florence Bell, the street or workplace collection was indicative of a culture of 'self-sacrificing kindness' borne of hardship.[159] Neither was such generosity confined to the urban and industrial classes. George Bourne observed that it was 'usual' for villagers in rural Surrey to 'help bury a mate' in order to save them from a pauper's grave.[160] As Ellen Ross has noted, however, 'gifts create obligations' and the defining principle of mutual aid was reciprocity.[161] This could, as *Porcupine* hinted, result in a self-defeating circle of obligation. Yet expectations of reciprocity also enabled the bereaved to avoid thinking of donations as charity. Furthermore, the language of respect for the dead helped save the pride of the bereaved whilst, in some cases at least, averting the need to apply to the parish guardians for assistance. Indeed, some commentators suggested that it was the shared antipathy to pauper burial among the working classes that motivated such acts of generosity.[162] As the sketch in *Porcupine* in 1880 highlighted, 'There is no money, no club; but among most poor people there is feeling ... They go round from house to house and from shop to shop all over the neighbourhood until they raise the money to bury the sailor's wife.'[163] The donations for this burial were prompted by the desire that it should never 'be thrown at those children' that their mother had a pauper burial. *Porcupine* appears to sneer at this culture implying, on the one hand, that a pauper burial is the least of the orphans' concerns whilst, on the other, making the more serious point that such networks of assistance would not be necessary if parochial funerals were more humane. There is also, perhaps, a sense in which the taint of parish burial touched not only the bereaved, but, also, those who lived in their locality. In practice, however, it seems plausible to suggest that assistance with burial costs derived from sympathy with the financial and emotional obligations of bereavement. Moreover, that few families appear to have taken offence at receiving donations towards expenses implies that definitions of the respectable funeral were fluid: respectability was dependent on fulfilling the rituals of burial rather than the economic affluence of the bereaved.

Most funerals ended with a funeral or 'wakes' tea, typified by ham for those who could afford it and 'the old currant bread'.[164] As with laying out, a female neighbour or 'buxom, buoyant and managing aunt' oversaw the event, leaving the bereaved free to talk with those who had

[159] Bell, *At the Works*, 76.   [160] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20.
[161] Ross, 'Survival Networks', 4–27, and Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, 34–7.
[162] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 68.   [163] *Porcupine*, 5 June 1880, 150–1.
[164] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588. See also BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/1a/016.

attended the funeral.[165] So ingrained was the culture of the post-burial tea that funerals were sometimes referred to as 'currant bread and slow walking' whilst, as Robert Roberts notes, being ' "buried with 'am" became a comic's cliché'.[166] However, the middle-class perception of funeral feasts often merged with negative stereotypes of wakes, leading to accusations of drunkenness, excess and unseemly behaviour. According to *Porcupine*, the 'wakes tea' was the anticipated highpoint of a death.[167] Gissing also utilised this notion in *The Nether World* to cement his portrayal of the Peckovers as morally fickle: the wakes tea for old Mrs Peckover is 'noisily hilarious' and populated by drunks, whilst no-one expresses any sorrow for the passing of the dead woman.[168] For some, the sombre tones of the funeral and the emotional pain of grief were incompatible with the sociability fostered by the post-burial gathering. George Acorn's memoir of the funeral tea held for his baby brother was suffused with repulsion: 'it was so degrading . . . to convert a funeral procession into a drinking bout'.[169] Many funeral teas did adopt the aspect of a great social occasion: 'they would have a party after, a great big spread of food and all the relatives and neighbours would join in'.[170] The scale of some gatherings can be gauged from families borrowing seats from pubs and cups from neighbours, whilst some undertakers went so far as to hire out cups and saucers along with tea urns.[171]

Not all critics, however, issued blanket condemnation of the practice. Florence Bell despaired at the expense involved but conceded that: 'A funeral is, indeed, one of the principal social opportunities in the class we are describing.'[172] They were especially exciting for children. As a child, Clifford Hills (born 1904) associated death with ginger cakes, jam sandwiches and home-made wine, asserting that he 'enjoyed people dying'.[173] Following the death of a younger sister, Annie Wilson (born 1898) asked her mother if they could have another funeral so that she might have more cake.[174] As Bell was quick to note, the funeral tea offered a rare opportunity for adults to indulge: crowding the house with guests and having an 'open house' party for a day was 'a stimulus and a pleasure', undoubtedly 'tinged with the excitement and anticipation of the entertainer'. Bell

[165] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories*, 68.
[166] BOHT, Tape 166, Reference: AL/LSS/A/007, and R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 104.
[167] *Porcupine*, 7 August 1880, 294.   [168] Gissing, *Nether World*, 44.
[169] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 45.   [170] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.
[171] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133 and Alfred Warhurst, Tape 81. See also Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, Mr Gill, uncatalogued.
[172] Bell, *At the Works*, 77.   [173] T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 50.
[174] Ibid., 81.

lamented that 'these wild outbursts of expenditure generally take place in a crisis of emotion', rendering it difficult 'to preach against them'.[175] Implicit in this observation was an acknowledgement that the funeral tea formed part of a larger set of rituals related to grief: funerals were not simply shows of respectability or excuses for indulgence; they provided an outlet for feelings in a supportive, communal context. This was not necessarily at odds with the suggestion that funerals were a party, but an indication of the multi-layered meanings attributed to such occasions.

On a practical level, funeral teas could be used as a forum for making decisions about the future, whether this was in terms of financial strategies, care for widowed or elderly spouses,[176] or responsibility for orphans.[177] Conversely, the funeral afforded an opportunity for old antagonisms to erupt. Florence Atherton's (born 1898) father had lost all contact with his Protestant family after he married a Catholic. When he was buried in Catholic ground, his family did not attend the burial but later visited his widow and children to inform them that they would not give them any assistance on account of religious differences.[178] On a friendlier note, the funeral tea could also represent a 'thanksgiving' and, poor as the family might be, a gesture of thanks to neighbours and friends for their support.[179] The social aspect of the gathering also gave the bereaved an opportunity to share memories of the deceased, whilst the familiar customs of burial stimulated memories of past funerals.[180] More importantly, the funeral tea marked the closure of public mourning customs and a significant point in the psychology of bereavement: the corpse had been laid to rest, the rituals associated with death were complete, and the bereaved were finally left to resume their daily routines. Lewis Jones illustrated the symbolic role of the funeral tea in *Cwmardy*. Following the burial of Jane, neighbours and friends retire to the home of the bereaved, creating a diversion from solitary dwelling on melancholic thoughts in the immediate aftermath of the burial. As the guests depart from the house, they whisper their condolences, leaving the bereaved family 'alone with their thoughts and their memories'.[181] From this point onwards, grief became a private experience.

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[175] Bell, *At the Works*, 77–8.   [176] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 36.
[177] See, for instance, Man. OH Transcript, Edna Sherran, Tape 1125.
[178] Florence Atherton, born 1898, in T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 115.
[179] Man. OH Tape, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[180] Ivy Troope in M. Chamberlain, *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* (London: Virago, [1975] 1983), 182, Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 193, 205, and L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 103.
[181] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 66.

Conclusion

As will be argued in chapter 6, a degree of ambivalence characterised long-term attitudes towards the resting place of the dead which seems at odds with the importance attached to rituals of interment. This may appear to endorse perceptions of the working-class funeral as an elaborate exercise in revelry. Conversely, it is plausible to suggest that funeral customs provided a shared language of grief, loss and condolence whilst creating a forum in which that language could be expressed; factors that the solitary grave could not sustain. Indeed, some families chose to forego the purchase of a private grave in favour of funding the rites accompanying burial. Again, this demonstrates that concepts of respectable burial were not straitjacketed by expenditure and ownership of grave deeds. Rather, it was 'respect' for the dead that defined the use and perpetuation of secular and spiritual burial custom. Moreover, expressions of grief and condolence were considerably more sophisticated than correlations with material culture alone allow. Burial rites were a public means of negotiating private feelings of loss and sympathy. Thus, it was not the cost of a coffin and attendant mourning paraphernalia but the fulfilment of obligations to the dead which related detailed stories of love, grief, dignity and condolence. As Mark Drakeford argues, the funeral ceremony holds a significance which extends beyond economic or psychological value: monetary expenditure simply represents the most tangible means of expressing the sentiments of the bereaved for the deceased, reaffirming for the bereaved the meaning and purpose of a life.[182] In this context, it is possible to reconcile a funeral culture where rituals of display interrelate with expressions of grief and loss. The two factors were (and are) not mutually exclusive.

[182] Drakeford, 'Last Rights?', 521–3.

5   Only a pauper whom nobody owns: reassessing the pauper burial

The previous chapters have argued that the rites of caring for and disposing of the corpse provided forums for the expression of feeling in the immediate aftermath of death. This chapter explores the implications of burial where those rites were prohibited or curtailed: the pauper burial. Antipathy to the pauper grave is well documented. Indeed, Anne Crowther suggests that it was the most 'familiar' aspect of hostility to the workhouse: it signified abject poverty and stigmatised both the deceased and the bereaved.[1] Yet for contemporaries and historians alike, the pauper burial was not only inseparable from the workhouse, but, also, from consumer culture and the language of respectability. Within the increasingly commercial society of Victorian Britain, suggests Thomas Laqueur, the pauper funeral 'became the final stamp of failure'. In contrast, the private grave signified cultural membership: the procession to the cemetery, the occupation of public space and the participation of family, neighbours and colleagues operated as rituals of inclusion and testified to a community identity. In this sense, the ability to save money for a private grave 'became the locus of enormous anxiety' because the economy of the pauper burial condemned the dead to 'dying bereft of the final signs of communal membership'.[2]

Laqueur's argument hinges on the growth of a capitalist economy, the commercialisation of death and the punitive principles of the New Poor Law of 1834. Prior to poor law reform, it has been suggested that antipathy towards pauper burial was rooted largely in the body-snatching scandals which culminated in the passage of the Anatomy Act 1832. As medicine became increasingly professionalised, the demand for cadavers with which to teach anatomy rose dramatically. The licit market for corpses was limited to bodies taken from the gallows. Alas, felons were hanged in insufficient numbers to satisfy the needs of medical education, so anatomy schools turned to illegal trafficking in cadavers. In principle, all graves were at risk from disturbance by grave robbers. In practice, the flimsiness of

[1] Crowther, *Workhouse System*, 241.
[2] Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', 109–31 (117).

cheap coffins and the presence of ten or more bodies in one pauper grave rendered the burial spaces of the poor particularly vulnerable. Waves of civil disturbance across the country in conjunction with a number of high-profile cases of body-snatching (the most notorious being Burke and Hare's trial for murders committed in order to bypass the need for grave robbery)[3] necessitated parliamentary action. The Anatomy Act, widely anticipated to resolve the crisis and remove the threat to the corpses of the poor, pandered to the demands of anatomists and protected the corpses of the affluent by sanctioning the dissection of unclaimed pauper corpses. As Ruth Richardson notes, 'what had for generations been a feared and hated punishment for murder became one for poverty'. Richardson perceives the Anatomy Act to be inextricable from the New Poor Law which followed two years later, not least because implementation of the Anatomy Act depended on the machinery of the Poor Law whilst both embodied a punitive philosophy towards poverty. As Richardson demonstrates, the gravity of body-snatching fears in the decades flanking the passage of the Anatomy Act through parliament should not be underestimated. By the closing decades of the century, however, the risk of anatomisation had dramatically decreased and Richardson introduces 'respectability' as the guiding principle behind popular antipathy to the pauper grave.[4]

This chapter contests the dichotomy between the pauper and the respectable burial and the rough and respectable poor. It also suggests that historical analysis must move away from a perception of the poor as passive victims of wicked anatomists and poor law guardians. Funerals were far from egalitarian affairs before the rise of respectable society or the growth of consumer markets (not least with reference to the burial of Catholics, Dissenters, suicide victims and/or felons). Pauper and respectable burials were not mutually exclusive and the working classes were not without agency. Undeniably, the pauper grave conferred a degree of disgrace on the dead and those who mourned for them. To a point, this hostility derived from the shame associated with material hardship and the appeal to charity. Importantly, however, the dishonour of pauper burial was inextricable from the anonymity of the grave, the inability to claim ownership of the dead and the denial of mourning rites. Hence, the

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[3] B. Bailey, *Burke and Hare: The Year of the Ghouls* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2002).

[4] Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, xv, 270–1. See also V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770–1868* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 255–8, R. Richardson, 'Why Was Death So Big in Victorian Britain?' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 105–17, M. Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Norman Adams, *Dead and Buried: The Horrible History of Bodysnatching* (Aberdeen: Impulse Books, 1972).

significance attached to burial insurance was not simply related to a desire for display but rooted in an impulse to fulfil obligations to the dead and claim mourning rites associated with the decent disposal of the corpse. Some families went so far as to inter the dead in a pauper grave only to apply for the exhumation of the corpse once they had accumulated sufficient finance to purchase a private grave. This would hardly cancel the initial stigma of the pauper burial, especially as the reinterment of coffins took place in the dead of night. It is suggested, therefore, that applications for reburial were motivated by the desire to claim the ownership and identity of the dead.

An overview of the indignities inflicted on the pauper corpse illustrates the extent to which mourning rites were circumscribed by parish guardians, municipal burial boards and some clerics too. This necessarily compromised the use of burial custom as a language of loss. In this light, the pauper burial is reinterpreted as the contested site for notions of respectable burial. Despite a comprehensive historiography concerning the fluidity of respectability as an identity, accounts of respectable burial have concentrated on the purchase of a private grave. This is not to dismiss respectability from an analysis of attitudes towards burial, but, rather, to recognise that respectability was invested with meaning beyond status. Families could take elements of the respectable burial and apply them, where possible, to the interment of the dead in a pauper grave. Historical analysis must, therefore, redefine the respectable burial as a fluid notion relating to the dignity of the dead. A pragmatic response to material privation need not annul grief or invalidate respectable burial; it simply necessitated a degree of flexibility in perceptions of paying one's respects to the dead. A family forced to inter the cadaver in a pauper grave could still inscribe rudimentary and private gestures of loss with personal sorrow and, in doing so, facilitate their own understandings of respectable burial.

Pauper and public burials

Perceptions of the private and pauper grave represent binary opposites in the cultural landscape of late Victorian and Edwardian England. Stripped of mourning and commemorative paraphernalia, the pauper grave carried the lowly taint of pauperism and suggested insufficient grief. In more concrete terms, it cast aspersions on the financial management of the bereaved to the extent that credit facilities with local shopkeepers might be jeopardised.[5] Conversely, the purchase of a private grave permitted the

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[5] Ross, ' "Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep" ', 46.

bereaved to bury the dead in their chosen manner with all the trappings of mourning. As F. M. L. Thompson notes, the ability to finance this kind of funeral testified to thriftiness and, therefore, assured a family's respectable status within the community: 'The ultimate disgrace for a Victorian worker's family was a pauper burial. Having the means to avoid it and provide for a decent funeral that would preserve the family's standing in the community was the measure of basic respectability.'[6]

In practice, however, these binary opposites were not quite so neat. To begin with, there was, and is, a lack of clarity surrounding the term 'pauper burial'. Equations between the pauper grave and the workhouse are, to a point, misleading. The remains of those who died in the workhouse could be claimed by friends or relatives who undertook to bear the costs of interment. Therefore, death in the workhouse did not automatically condemn the dead to a pauper grave. What distinguished 'pauper' interment was not so much death in the workhouse but, rather, the inability of friends of the deceased to pay for burial, even (and especially) in cases where expiration occurred in the home. Neither was the pauper grave confined to the grounds of the workhouse. In the second half of the nineteenth century, most municipal cemeteries had spaces reserved for pauper graves and, increasingly, workhouse burial grounds were closed in favour of using municipal space. Finally, the term 'pauper grave' tends to be used interchangeably – by contemporaries and historians alike – with references to 'public' and 'common' graves. In a strict sense, 'pauper burial' is a direct reference to interment at the expense of the ratepayers. 'Common' and 'public' graves represented communal (as opposed to family) burial plots owned by the burial board whereby the bereaved could pay the nominal interment fee to bury the body; the grave did not belong to the bereaved and they held no exclusive rights of burial over that space. The common grave thus held bodies whose interment fee had been paid by the parish and those whose burial fee had been paid by relatives. In this sense, the 'pauper's grave' did not exist as a separate entity and it is probably for this reason that most cemetery authorities in the second half of the nineteenth century referred to such graves as 'public', 'common' or 'fourth class' graves. These graves were earthen (as opposed to bricked or vaulted); the families of the deceased were dispossessed of any right to burial in the same grave. Regardless of who paid the burial fee, the grave carried restrictions on memorial ornaments and coffins. In this chapter, public and common grave will be used as a general term; pauper grave will be used only where the parish guardians were directly involved in the payment of interment fees.

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[6] F. M. L. Thompson, *Rise of Respectable Society*, 200.

That the common grave catered for parish burials and poorer members of society raises a number of questions concerning the meaning of 'pauper burial'. The interchangeable use of the terms 'common', 'public' and 'pauper' indicates the insidious stigma attached to all interments in these graves. The terminology of the 'public grave' was, in itself, ambiguous: it could refer to the public purse of the ratepayer whilst simultaneously signifying the communal character of grave space. Importantly, the restrictions placed upon interments in common graves made no distinction between corpses interred at the cost of families and those at the expense of the guardians, thus penalising families who actually paid for interment. In this sense, references to interment in a public grave as a 'pauper' burial may suggest that it was the punitive measures against poverty rather than institutional pauperism that rendered the graves abhorrent. Why, then, would families pay to inter the dead in what was, in the abstract at least, a 'pauper grave'? Crucially, the payment of costs guaranteed that the bereaved could keep the deceased at home in the interim between death and burial without conditions imposed by the workhouse. Moreover, the gesture of having paid for burial rather than turn to the charity of the parish enabled families to retain a modicum of personal pride. Within the public spectacle of the funeral and burial space, however, the common grave retained its association with the pauper burial, not least because by-laws governing interments in common graves dictated the type of coffin used whilst curtailing access to mourning rites. This implies a process of decision making based upon a series of complex needs and desires; a process which cannot be explained through the juxtaposition of the pauper with the private.

The stigma of pauperism

The meagreness of pauper burial was consistent with the treatment of those who claimed indoor and outdoor relief. Families seeking outdoor assistance were forced to sell all possessions of any value before their claims were validated (and even then, some argued that a percentage of claimants were not really destitute) whilst those requesting admission to the workhouse had to surrender independence: married couples were separated, children were removed from the care of their parents, and all were forced to adhere to an institutional routine of life.[7] Describing his childhood in turn-of-the-century Knaresborough, Yorkshire, Philip

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[7] Crowther, *Workhouse System*, 193–221. See also Chinn, *Poverty Amidst Prosperity*, 102–25, A. Digby, *The Poor Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Historical Association, 1982), 14–18, and Rowntree, *Poverty*, 434.

Inman suggested that families would rather starve than apply for parochial relief. Such obstinacy went beyond a fear of social stigma: application to the parish prompted 'a profound sense of shame' and 'degradation' that was exacerbated by feelings of utter 'hopelessness'.[8] Joseph Barlow Brooks reflected that the 'poorhouse poetry' of Thomas Hood was widely derided by the relatively affluent as melodrama. Yet, for Brooks at least, the bitterness of Hood's observations held poignant meaning for those who faced the prospect of pauperism, especially in old age.[9] Jack London, in his survey of the 'abyss' of London poverty, suggested that those who committed suicide rather than enter the workhouse were not temporarily insane, as coroners' juries sympathetic to the stigma of self-murder tended to rule, but, rather, had assessed the grim alternatives between starvation, the 'spike' (workhouse) and death, and made a 'very rational and level-headed' choice.[10] London's observation may seem extreme. As a literary device, however, it illustrates the extent to which 'the Union' was, in every sense, perceived as a last resort. Indeed, Lynn Hollen Lees has suggested that much of the popular antipathy towards the workhouse demonstrated the success of the psychological myth of the 'bastille' which was, after all, created to 'enforce social distance between paupers and the rest of Victorian society'.[11]

The boundary separating security from poverty was fine. Florence Bell estimated that a third of ironworkers in Middlesbrough were 'so near the poverty line that they were constantly passing over it'. Even for those in relative comfort, the spectre of indigence loomed large: 'Most of the people at the ironworks are living under conditions in which the slightest lapse from thrift and forethought is necessarily conspicuous, and brings its immediate consequences.'[12] For Bell, these persons were 'deserving' of any relief or charity they received; they strove to avoid hardship and made efforts to maintain clean and tidy homes throughout periods of destitution. It seems unlikely that many families who fell upon hard times classed themselves as anything other than deserving. As Anne Crowther has observed, much of the stigma attached to the workhouse from the 1880s onwards stemmed not from the public acknowledgement of impoverishment but from being confined with the 'riff-raff' who had been denied outdoor relief. This stigma was far more acute for those who had managed to distance themselves from extreme poverty. In contrast,

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[8] P. A. Inman, *No Going Back* (London: William & Norgate, 1952), 26.
[9] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 17.   [10] London, *People of the Abyss*, 267.
[11] L. H. Lees, *The Solidarities of Strangers: The English Poor Laws and the People, 1700–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 150–1.
[12] Bell, *At the Works*, 47–52.

Crowther suggests, slum dwellers were consistently faced with the threat of the workhouse and could not, therefore, 'afford to be too mindful of social disgrace'.[13]

The degradation inherent in pauperism was tied to the punitive philosophy which informed and shaped the New Poor Law. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the status of the poor was changing. Increasingly, calls were voiced for the classification of paupers into categories according to moral worth, thus enabling union authorities to distinguish 'the moral and well-disposed' pauper from those of 'indifferent or vicious character'.[14] An article in the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1892 distinguished the pauper 'born and bred' (the 'vicious, the incurably lazy, the habitual beggar, the thoroughly degraded') from those who had fallen upon hard times through no fault of their own.[15] William Grisewood, organiser of a survey into the poor of Liverpool by the Liverpool Central Relief Committee and the Charity Organisation Society, seemed to suggest that the language of 'the poor' was too honourable to be applied to those better classified as immoral:

there are many most worthy people amongst the very poorest who are none the less upright, self-respecting, and even happy for being poor; but on the other hand, it is equally a mistake to class others as 'the poor' when their proper classification is 'the indolent', 'the vicious', and even 'the criminal'; persons who are frequently not only destroying every noble quality in themselves, but are bringing upon the young family dependant on them a heritage of penury, sin and shame.[16]

Reflecting on York workhouse in 1901, Seebohm Rowntree regretted that 'owing to want of space' no attempt had been made by the guardians to classify paupers according to their moral worth. Numbers of the poor were forced to turn to the workhouse simply because of old age and infirmity. They were obliged to associate, however, with those whose residence was on account of habitual drunkenness and vice.[17] Notably, the MP Chiozza Money estimated that the elderly represented over half those claiming indoor and outdoor relief between 1890 and 1903, adding that many of those who should have applied to the parish for assistance avoided doing so for fear of shame and lack of independence.[18]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, 'model' workhouses initiated strategies to separate the deserving from the undeserving

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[13] Crowther, *Workhouse System*, 236ff.
[14] Classificatory categories taken from a local government circular distributed in August 1896. LVRO 353 SEL 10/14.
[15] *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 April 1892, 4.   [16] Grisewood, *Poor of Liverpool*, 6.
[17] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 427–8.   [18] Money, *Riches and Poverty*, 272–86.

poor, exercising more leniency towards those inmates they defined as respectable. Nonetheless, some commentators found the partition of inmates purely cosmetic: it did nothing to alleviate the brutalising effects of the workhouse regime. C. B. Hawkins thought the much-acclaimed Norwich workhouse doomed to failure. The entire regime was designed to 'destroy any latent capacity' individuals had: 'Whatever a man may be when he goes into the workhouse, he will have inevitably sunk to the level of the rest when he comes out.'[19] Indeed, after a spell in the workhouse as a child, Sam Shaw declared that it was institutional pauperism not poverty that deadened humanity: 'Family life, however poor, possesses the family ties of love. Pauperism cuts into the human love ties and mercilessly rips them asunder.'[20]

Claiming the dead

In the same way that admission to the workhouse deprived the poor of autonomy and self-respect, parochial and public burial were, almost without exception, undignified interments. Given the significance attached to the 'decent' funeral, it is not surprising that investment in burial insurance was so widespread. For those without the buffer of a burial policy, the services of a pawnbroker might provide the necessary finance to purchase a grave.[21] Alternatively, sympathetic friends might rally in a bid to raise the money for private interment 'even', as Violet Butler noted of the Oxford poor, 'if all other forms of thrift have been neglected' by the bereaved.[22] Burial authorities themselves were aware of antipathy to the public grave whilst retaining an acute sense of the financial straits of many families. Toxteth Burial Board in Liverpool, for instance, operated a scheme whereby a grave could be obtained on hire-purchase, an initial payment of half the cost securing the grave for use.[23] Similarly, Ramsbottom and Bacup Burial Board 'allow[ed] poor people three months credit when buying graves, rather than have public graves'.[24] At St James's Cemetery, Liverpool, graves were available for lease (for fourteen years) after which they reverted to the trustees of the cemetery for use as public graves.[25] This permitted families to claim

[19] Hawkins, *Norwich*, 149.   [20] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 27.
[21] See, for instance, M. Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet: Pawnbroking and Working-Class Credit* (London: Methuen, 1983).
[22] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 187.
[23] LVRO TOX 354/21/2, 14 October 1875. In the event of defaulting on payment, ownership of the grave reverted back to the burial board.
[24] LRO UDCl 60/1, 26 November 1886.
[25] Retrospective on the cemetery in view of closure, 1932, LVRO 352 CEM 3/17/5.

autonomy at the time of burial without necessitating the full expense of a private grave.

A more unorthodox approach to securing burial in a private grave was to inter the corpse in a common grave immediately following expiration whilst family and friends rallied to accumulate resources. Once the necessary finance had been raised, the bereaved could apply to have the cadaver exhumed from the common grave to be reinterred in a newly purchased private grave. Initially, the family would petition the relevant burial authority (rather than the guardians) for the removal of the cadaver. If the board agreed to the exhumation, they would assist the next of kin in making a formal application to the Home Office for permission to disturb the dead. As Joseph Makin, a labourer, explained to Bolton Burial Board in 1886:

> I Joseph Makin not being in circumstances when we buried my son Robert Makin to purches [sic] a new grave but having purched [sic] one since hopes that it lies in your power to get Him removed from common grave to purched [sic] grave ... we will be very thankfull [sic] for your kindness.[26]

Similarly, in October 1889 George Argill requested permission from Bolton Burial Board to move his three children, who had all died within one week, from a common to a private grave. Explaining to the board that 'at the time of the funerals I was sick myself and unable to buy a grave', George had since saved enough money to purchase a private plot.[27] The language employed in the letters is quite formal, both in terminology and in their apparent conformity to notions of responsibility. Joseph Makin's letter began with an assertion of himself, one that implied his accountability for the accumulation of funds to purchase a grave. George Argill's application was, perhaps, more explicit in its attempt to utilise the language of the burial board officials: 'Sir I beg to make application to your committee for permission ...', and, 'I remain your obedient servant.'[28] In addition, both fathers were tentative in expressing hopes for their requests being granted. This not only suggests an awareness of a language separate from the colloquial, it also highlights a willingness to show deference in order to regain ownership of the dead. It seems likely that the two fathers were aware that they were expected to articulate shame in relation to the public grave if they were to be classed amongst the deserving poor. In this sense, 'respectability' provided a shared language for communication between the working classes and municipal officials.

Both letters are significant in that they articulate the hopes, in a very literal sense, of people generally consigned to historical silence. The

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[26] BALS ABZ 3/1, 4 December 1886.   [27] BALS ABZ 3/1, October 1889.
[28] BALS ABZ 3/1, October 1889.

letters are also unusual in that many of the written applications to have a body exhumed from Bolton cemeteries have only survived in the form of the corporation's copy of a formal Home Office document which left little room for personal detail. Other burial boards made only sporadic references to applications for exhumation in minute books (depending on how routine the requests were) whilst little has been retained concerning requests for this kind of exhumation and reburial in Home Office records. The apparent lack of historical record may well indicate the unexceptional character of the requests for exhumation; it may also, however, explain why this approach to the common grave has been so overwhelmingly neglected by historians.

A family had to move swiftly if an application for disinterment was to be successful. Once another body had been interred over the deceased, permission for exhumation would not be granted unless the kin of more recent interment(s) agreed to the disturbance of their dead. Given that common graves frequently held around ten bodies, the more coffins that were interred, the less likely it seemed that all families would grant permission for disinterment. Hence, most families wishing to exhume their dead applied to the corporation within days of the original burial. Elizabeth Jones died of influenza on 5 March 1906 and was interred three days later in a common grave in Heaton Cemetery in Bolton. By 13 March, her sister had written to the town clerk requesting permission to have the body removed to a private grave:

Sir, my Father wishes to have my sisters [sic] body removed to a new grave in the same cemereatry [sic] as she as [sic] already been laid to rest but we want it so as we can have a headstone and then we can claim our own grave and have it to look upon as our own ... we want it removed as soon as possiable [sic].

Jones and her father, Isaac, trusted that their application would be brought forward for consideration 'at once without delay'. The sense of urgency in their application suggests that the public grave had only ever been perceived as a short-term measure. The licence for removal of the body was finally granted on 6 April.[29]

The Matot family were not so fortunate. Josephin and Joseph Matot died at the beginning of 1915 and were interred in a common grave 'to curtail the funeral charges, the parents having no money to defray the expenses'. In the period between burial and application for removal, however, eighteen more coffins had been placed over the two children. Thirteen of the nearest relatives of those interred subsequent to the Matots objected to

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[29] Correspondence between family, board and Home Office in BALS ABCF 15/18, 13 March 1906.

the disturbance of their dead.[30] Some decades earlier, Anfield (Liverpool) Burial Board had resolved to offer families the opportunity of buying the remaining space in the public grave, or the grave immediately next to it, when applications for disinterment were refused on account of subsequent burials. That the resolution made no impact on burial practice suggests that the board had, to a degree, missed the point: partial ownership of a common grave (replete with other unidentified corpses) was not equal to claiming the identity and dignity conferred by the family grave.[31]

In Bolton, applications for exhumation and reburial were made for cadavers of all ages, including very young children, and both immediate and distant relatives. Richard Jackson applied to have his children, Rosanna (died aged fifteen months) and Maud (died aged two years), exhumed for reinterment.[32] Similarly, Sarah Ann Holt asked to have the remains of her twin grandsons, Francis and Edward Grundy, removed from a common grave: both babies had survived only sixteen hours before dying from congenital debility.[33] Elizabeth Hardacre removed her nephew from a common grave whilst James Hilcroft requested permission to disinter his friend, Arthur Warden.[34] Joannah Whittle, a spinster, requested that her 'intended husband' be reburied in a private grave as she did 'not like the idea of the body being intered [sic] in a common grave'.[35] Such concerns were not exclusive to the residents of Bolton. A young couple from East Farleigh, near Maidstone, applied in 1879 to exhume the body of their uncle, Samuel Mills (died aged eighty-six), from the workhouse grounds to a grave in their local churchyard. Before the man's death, they had promised to secure his interment by the side of his wife. The Secretary of State's observation that refusal of this application 'would be very hard, if not a mockery, to both these poor people' implies an appreciation of relatives' reluctance to leave the dead to rot ignominiously.[36]

Manoeuvring between graves should not, however, be seen as a viable option for the poor en masse. Applications for disinterment tended to be refused or deferred for a minimum of nine months in circumstances where the deceased had died from infectious disease. Thus, when Elizabeth Williams sought permission to remove her husband and child from a common grave in December 1905, the Medical Officer of Health for Bolton deemed removal of the bodies 'inadvisable' as both had died

[30] Correspondence in BALS ABCF 15/28, February 1915.
[31] LVRO 353 PAR 6/2/4, 17 January 1878. There was no indication that the families of those already interred in the public grave would be notified of this transaction.
[32] BALS ABZ 3/1/4, 12 November 1892.   [33] BALS ABCF 15/28, 27 January 1914.
[34] BALS ABZ 3/1/4, 19 December 1889 and ABZ 3/1/4, 14 April 1892.
[35] BALS ABZ 3/1/9, 8 May 1902.   [36] PRO HO45/9577/82750, April 1879.

from typhoid fever.[37] More significantly, perhaps, many families and friends found the cost of the private grave beyond their means, even with delaying tactics. It is worth noting that many of the families who approached the Home Office for the exhumation of a body had not actually purchased the grave at the time of their application. Rather, they claimed to have saved enough money to do so, and would purchase the grave if and when permission for exhumation was granted. George Argill is a typical example, claiming 'I intend to purchase [a private grave] if you can grant this request.'[38] Ann Dickens applied to Hampstead Burial Board in June 1885 for the exhumation of her husband Timothy as she was 'about buying a grave'. Timothy had been interred the week before when she was 'much grieved' and 'could not know what was best'.[39] It seems plausible to suggest that, moved by a sense of urgency, some families made an application for removal whilst still accumulating finance. Moreover, for those with scant resources, the expense of a grave was a luxury which only featured in financial calculations if there was a cadaver to place in it. If permission for exhumation were refused, any money saved for the purpose could be used for alternative, equally pressing purposes. Somewhat ironically, application for exhumation and reinterment not only protracted the process of laying the dead to rest, it also proved more expensive. Fees for application to the Home Office and for exhumation of the body were added to the outlay for the new grave and reinterment.[40]

Burial boards appear to have accepted petitions for exhumation as normative. Correspondence between the chair and clerk of Clayton-le-Moors Burial Board in December 1896 concluded that such applications were 'purely formal' and that they could consent to exhumations without calling special meetings of the board.[41] Similarly, members of Toxteth Burial Board agreed in 1895 that they were 'sympathetic' to the relatives who 'frequently' approached them with questions concerning the exhumation of their dead.[42] That the Home Office printed a standardised form of application for the removal of bodies from common graves also suggests that these requests were unexceptional. If the body lay in a grave in consecrated ground, permission for exhumation might alternatively be sought from the bishop of the relevant diocese. The Archbishop of York during the 1880s and '90s was consistently sympathetic to requests for exhumation from common graves in the Anglican portion of York Public

[37] BALS ABCF 15/18, correspondence during December 1905.   [38] BALS ABZ 3/1/4.
[39] PRO HO45/9654/A40146, June 1885.
[40] See, for instance, BALS ABZ 3/1/4, memo dated 8 July 1904.
[41] LRO UDCl 7/5, 7 December 1896.   [42] PRO HO45/9768/B1065, November 1895.

Cemetery, responding hastily and expressing a desire to consult relatives of other bodies interred.[43] The Home Office respected the prerogatives of the established church but could override a bishop's decision. Moreover, as Toxteth Burial Board noted in 1895, a 'faculty' for the exhumation of a corpse from the bishop cost five pounds, whereas applying for a licence from the Secretary of State cost only one penny.[44]

The apparently routine character of applications for exhumations implies that this somewhat unorthodox approach to (re)burial was, in relative terms, widely used. This is interesting for several reasons. First, it suggests a degree of resourcefulness in initiating procedures to alter the fate of the dead. It also implies a network of knowledge relating to the potential for the disinterment of cadavers. This may have operated among neighbours and friends, although some families approached undertakers or monumental masons for advice before contacting the burial authority.[45] Significantly, reburial in a private grave testifies to a desire to reclaim ownership of the corpse. More importantly, however, it is unclear how the reinterment of the dead in a private grave would reinstate respectability. The initial burial in a common grave had advertised to the community the family's lack of finance at the time of the funeral. They would, therefore, already have suffered the stigma associated with the pauper or public grave. In terms of repairing the damage to their reputation, Home Office regulations stipulated that exhumation and reinterment of the corpse had to be executed 'with due care and attention to decency'.[46] This requirement necessitated covering the exhumed coffin ('and any other matter that may be offensive') with ground lime or McDougall's Disinfecting Powder. Furthermore, the exhumation had to take place either at night or very early in the morning with no public witnesses, a specification included for hygienic purposes but also, perhaps, to prevent ghoulish interest.[47] These conditions redefined the exhumed corpse exclusively in terms of contagion. Yet they also meant that reinterment could not be accompanied by any secular or religious ritual: the bereaved were simply informed that reburial had taken place. If 'respectability' was reinstated by this process, it was done so very quietly.

[43] YRO Acc 107 66–75.

[44] PRO HO45/9768/B1065, November 1895. The Home Office did not charge for the licence once it had been granted. See BALS ABZ 3/1/4, memo dated 8 July 1904.

[45] PRO HO45/10311/123811.

[46] BALS ABCF 15/28. Standardised Home Office regulations attached to licence for exhumation.

[47] BALS ABCF 15/28 and PRO HO45/9768/B1065, February 1887.

In undertaking to pay extra costs for reburial and prolonging the process of laying the dead to rest, families articulated a desire to reclaim the corpse as their own. The application made to Bolton Burial Board for the exhumation of Elizabeth Jones explicitly stated a wish to 'claim our own grave', inferring a need to assert kinship beyond death.[48] Indeed, the language of the 'private' or 'family' grave is loaded with connotations of familiarity, identity and spiritual reunion. In contrast, the terminology of the common or pauper grave drew on notions of anonymity, poverty and bodies whom 'nobody owned' (or, by implication, loved). In claiming kinship, the bereaved were affirming the ownership and identity of the dead and ensuring that the cadaver lay in a recognised social space.

The public grave

The exhumation of corpses carries ghoulish connotations, not least because of association with grave robbery and the gothic novel.[49] Moreover, the disturbance of several coffins for the removal of one body was, as the Secretary of State noted in 1888, unpleasant: it created sanitary problems and was an 'annoyance' to the relatives of corpses obstructing exhumation.[50] That families consented to the disturbance of their dead to effect the removal of another corpse is surprising given the sensitivity surrounding accusations concerning the 'desecration' of public graves by cemetery authorities. Yet the sentiments which motivated families to permit the disturbance of their dead were far removed from the outrage occasioned by unsolicited interference with the corpse. The desecration of graves, a loaded phrase associated with improper inter- ference with the dead, evoked disgust whilst emphasising the powerless- ness of the poor. Conversely, those who permitted (and refused) the temporary removal of their corpse were exercising a legal right to claim some authority over the body. Likewise, families who initiated the exhum- ation of their deceased were acting within a conceptual framework which sanctioned the apparently undignified disturbance of the dead for the purpose of reinterment in a dignified grave. Only when the identity and dignity of the corpse had been established could the deceased and the bereaved rest in peace.

A series of articles in the Liverpool magazine *Porcupine* in April 1892, headlined 'Desecration of the Dead at Anfield Cemetery', highlighted both the vulnerability of the pauper/public corpse and the shoddy manner

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[48] BALS ABCF 15/18, correspondence from March and April 1906.
[49] Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 52–72.
[50] PRO HO45/9955/V8622, March 1888.

in which it was interred. The first article made revelations 'so incredible'
the author speculated that readers would be forgiven for thinking them a
'ghastly invention'. The demand for public graves at Anfield Cemetery
had outstripped supply. An area of uncultivated land in the cemetery was
available for the creation of new graves. Nevertheless, cemetery employees
('graveyard churls') were opening old public graves for the purpose of
reusing them. Some of the coffins found in the graves were 'broken up
and trampled down' whilst remnants of bones were deposited in a basket.
Numbers of the exhumed coffins were, however, intact; one exposed
a woman's head 'with the flesh of the face and long hair attached'.
Conceding that 'it makes no difference to the dead' what atrocities were
committed to their graves, the author maintained that such 'ghastly
treatment' of the dead was deeply offensive to working-class people and
made a mockery of the grave as a 'last resting place'.[51] A second article,
published the following week, acknowledged that the burial board were
within their rights to reuse public graves after a minimum of fourteen
years.[52] This did little, however, to assuage the horror of desecration for
bereaved families, especially when coffins and bones had to be smashed in
order to accommodate new interments. Moreover, the author continued,
the very character of public burial was 'simply a scandal to any commu-
nity pretending respect for the dead': in 'frail deal boxes' corpses were
'packed like sardines'. The common graves in Anfield Cemetery
resembled a 'sand pit' without the 'slightest sign' of cultivation or care;
the land was a 'mere waste, an open chasm, in fact, where it would be very
appropriate to place a notice to the effect that "Rubbish may be shot
here"'.[53]

The damning allegations and inflammatory language of the articles
exploited the sensitivity of the poor to the burial of their dead, a device
which did not escape the notice of the superintendent of Anfield
Cemetery, William Wortley, who complained that he was being held up
for 'public odium and contempt'.[54] He 'felt deeply' that the articles
accused him of 'a shameful neglect of duty and a callous disregard of
the feelings and circumstances of the poor'. On the contrary, Wortley
urged, the poor were treated with as much 'tender regard', reverence and
sympathy as 'those in better circumstances'.[55] Undeniably, the public

[51] *Porcupine*, 9 April 1892, 8.   [52] These graves were twenty-eight years old.
[53] *Porcupine*, 16 April 1892, 8–9.
[54] Letter from Wortley's solicitors, 20 April 1892, cited in *Porcupine*, 23 April 1892, 8–9.
    Wortley's solicitors first wrote to the editor on 13 April 1892 offering him the opportunity
    to retract the allegations made before Wortley sued for gross libel. Also reprinted in
    Porcupine, 23 April 1892, 8–9.
[55] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/11, Wortley's Logbook, 28 April 1892.

graves in Anfield Cemetery were being reused. They were, however, old graves and, where remains had been found, they were reburied with due respect.[56] *Porcupine* had, Wortley argued, not only exaggerated and distorted the procedure in 'ghastly sensational assertions', they had caused 'quite unnecessarily, great pain to poor people'.[57] As the editors at *Porcupine* were quick to note, Wortley's defensiveness and his attempts to align himself with the feelings of the poor missed the point. That the desecration of graves was 'legal' rendered it no less distressing to the poor.[58] Moreover, Wortley's acknowledgement that such work was 'disagreeable but necessary' implied that he himself found the reopening of graves and the removal of bones distasteful.[59] That he glossed over the general manner in which bodies were interred further suggested the potential disparity between his egalitarian rhetoric and the undignified conditions of public burial where corpses rested only in temporary peace.

Porcupine's comparison between common graves and rubbish tips was a useful metaphor. Often situated in obscure locations (notably by waste sites or behind 'back boundary walls') and deprived of memorial paraphernalia, the public grave signified the marginalisation of the poor.[60] In 1885 the registrar at Wigan Cemetery objected to the use of the 'best ground' for common graves. A piece of land which had recently been drained and was of little value was, he thought, more appropriate.[61] In October 1895 Joseph Moss, a member of the Liverpool Select Vestry, confronted his fellow guardians concerning the interment of Catholic paupers in common graves located in a stone quarry at the end of Anfield Cemetery. Noting that Protestant paupers were interred in the parish cemetery at Walton, Moss considered the Catholic graves 'inhuman' and loaded with 'unnecessary degradation'.[62] In 1906 a deputation of Anglican, Catholic and Nonconformist ministers petitioned Bolton Burial Board to curtail their shoddy treatment of the pauper cadaver. In particular, they called for an end to the desecration of common graves by the laying of pathways over them.[63] As late as 1925 the Vicar of Bolton protested that placing pathways over public graves, 'where anyone can walk over them', was tantamount to desecration.[64] The very denial of legitimate space implied that the common grave was a dumping ground for those at the margins of society, whilst provocative references to 'desecration' emphasised the lack of civility among municipal officials.

[56] *Porcupine*, 23 April 1892.   [57] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/11, 26 May 1892.
[58] *Porcupine*, 23 April 1892, 8–9.   [59] *Porcupine*, 23 April 1892.
[60] LRO UDCl 58/1, Church and Clayton-le-Moors Cemetery, 18 January 1889.
[61] WRO A 10/1/Z, 19 February 1885.
[62] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 October 1895, 3, and *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 October 1895, 5.
[63] BALS AB 13/1/11, 1 March 1906.   [64] BALS ABCF 15/39, 19 March 1925.

As if to compound the humiliation of interment in wasteland, by-laws for most municipal cemeteries prohibited the installation of a headstone over the public grave. As one Bolton woman (born 1906) noted, the idea that 'no-one would know there was a grave there' reinforced the anonymity and indignity of the public interment.[65] The prohibition of a headstone limited opportunities for commemoration, thus excluding the bereaved from a culture of mourning which utilised the grave as a site for the remembrance of the dead. As Elizabeth Roberts notes, the emotional distress this caused could last for years.[66] In addition, the absence of an identifying headstone made it difficult for descendants of the dead to locate their grave space.[67] As attitudes towards poverty slowly changed towards the end of the nineteenth century, some burial boards made concessions towards the memorialisation of common graves.[68] The superintendent for Cheltenham Burial Board suggested that small tablets of wood, metal or stone be permitted on common graves from the autumn of 1907. The tablets would cost five shillings and be inscribed with the name of the deceased, the date of their death, age and the number of the grave.[69] In 1903, Stretford Burial Board had advised anyone seeking to establish a memorial over a common grave to reinter the body in a private grave.[70] In 1910, however, they invited tenders for the erection of headstones over public graves whereby the family of the deceased could pay (9d per dozen letters in 1913) to have the name of the dead inscribed on a communal stone. The stone remained the property of the cemetery.[71] By 1903, Bolton Burial Board permitted mourners to inscribe the name and age of the dead and the date of death on a flat-stone which lay over the grave.[72] It is interesting to note, however, that in 1917 the board reviewed this resolution, concluding that 'due to lack of interest' inscriptions on public graves would only be available in one of the corporation's three cemeteries. Of 542 interments in common graves in 1920, only four families chose to inscribe the details of the dead on a flat-stone.[73]

[65] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.

[66] E. Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 191.

[67] B. Murphy, 'Remembrance Remembered, Remembrance Observed: An Irishman's Daughter Visits His Grave', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 10, 4 (1997), 345–60.

[68] Although private cemetery companies, such as York, had long permitted inscriptions on a shared stone.

[69] GRO CBR D2/2/1, 27 September 1907.   [70] LRO MBS 2/20, 8 September 1903.

[71] LRO MBH 2/20, 8 February 1910 and MBS 2/21, 8 July 1913. A similar arrangement was in operation at St James's Cemetery in Liverpool. LVRO 352 CEM 3/17/5.

[72] BALS ABCF 15/30, Rules and Regulations and Tables of Fees for Bolton Cemeteries, 1903.

[73] BALS ABCF 15/39, taken from a table of 'Total Number of Interments in the Corporation's Three Cemeteries Over Five Years'.

Between 1880 and 1910, approximately only 15 per cent of those interring bodies in public graves in York Cemetery paid for inscriptions on the stone over the grave.[74] Of course, many families who interred their dead in a common grave would probably have found the cost of an inscription too expensive. Nonetheless, having access to this form of memorialisation was important in itself as the prohibition of remembrance on graves perpetuated the indignity of the public funeral even after burial had taken place.

The pauper funeral

Restrictions on mourning and memorial culture extended to include the manner in which the deceased were interred. Notably, parochial and municipal burial authorities reserved the right to dictate the kind of coffin used for interment. Families who turned to the parish for burial were required to use parochial coffins constructed of plain deal wood in the most rudimentary design. To a point, this was for environmental and economic reasons: flimsy wooden coffins decomposed quicker than those made of thick oak or lined in lead, enabling cemetery authorities to reuse the grave space after fourteen years or so. Yet parish and burial authorities also restricted the ability of the bereaved to inscribe gestures of identity or loss on the coffin. Even the simplest token of commemoration could meet with hostility from Union authorities. An article in *The Times* in 1878 chided guardians who moved pauper corpses from coffins provided by their families to parochial boxes of 'inferior value' and substituted tin name-plates with 'a piece of paper with a name and number'.[75] An article in the *Lancet* in 1884 attacked the 'petty tyranny' of the Cambridge guardians who, it revealed, removed all name-plates and small ornaments attached to parish coffins by the friends of the deceased: 'All those who have worked among the poor know the feelings with which they regard their dead, and how even the very poorest will strive to secure the means sufficient for a decent burial.'[76] For this author, then, even modest gestures of mourning and identity salvaged some decency for the pauper corpse. In denying such simple rites, the guardians exceeded the bounds of known misery and betrayed a lack of humanity.

That parochial coffins tended to be cheap and ineffectual can only have exacerbated the humiliation inherent in surrendering the ownership of the corpse to the Union. As Robert Roberts noted, guardians were notorious for commissioning the cheapest coffins available on the

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[74] YRO Acc. 107 9/4–6.   [75] *The Times*, 28 November 1878, 12.
[76] *Lancet*, 3 May 1884, 812–13.

undertaker's sliding scale: 'The *Esk* casket, last on the list, was just the job for paupers and those amongst our poor who had foolishly backslid on their burial premiums. Fashioned in elm, it tended, like the cheap Macintoshes of the time, to split and let in water.'[77] In 1895, one Salford guardian described the pauper coffins commissioned by that union as a 'perfect disgrace': 'Their quality was so poor that they cracked when a nail was driven in, and unless bodies are carefully handled, they fall out of them.'[78] Liverpool Select Vestry had a history of contracting pauper coffins which were little more than 'rough boxes without handles' with the names of the dead 'written in chalk in a very illegible manner'.[79] In 1884 one guardian remonstrated that coffins with holes large enough to poke an umbrella through were unseemly, not least because they exposed the corpse to view. Indeed, there was not one member of the Vestry who would 'care to bury his dog in one of them'.[80] In 1891, another guardian, Mr Brooks, called for more 'liberality' with regard to expenditure on coffins. As it was, pauper coffins were made from flimsy wood whilst their uniform size meant that larger corpses were 'indecently' crammed in them.[81] Cracks and holes in the coffin were not only a danger to public health; they did little to assist the grieving process. Recalling one pauper burial, the guardian Mr Roberts described a coffin which had cracked to a width of over one inch. The effect was distressing: 'A poor creature put her finger through the crack and felt the body, and the result was a lamentation that was terrible to listen to.'[82] Such poor quality was particularly disappointing as only one month previous, tenders had been invited for a new contractor on account of the shoddy quality of coffins then in use. Indeed, a high turnover of contracts for coffins implies that the 'general character' of those supplied to the workhouse was unsatisfactory.[83] Moreover, such was the flimsiness of the parish coffin that suppliers were usually unable to sell them to anyone else. This not only points to their appalling quality, it implies that, like the workhouse uniform, they were readily identified as belonging to the parish.[84]

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[77] R. Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 134–5.   [78] *Liverpool Echo*, 25 August 1895, 4.

[79] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 October 1895, 3.

[80] [*Liverpool*] *Express*, 7 October 1884, in LVRO 353 SEL 14/5.

[81] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 12 September 1891, 3, and *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 September 1891, 3.

[82] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 October 1895, 3.

[83] See, for instance, LVRO 353 SEL 10/14, 19 September 1895 and BALS GBO 12/13, 8 July 1908.

[84] One firm of joiners complained to the Liverpool Workhouse Committee on losing their contract for coffins that no-one else would purchase the coffins already made for the workhouse. LVRO 353 SEL 10/16, 19 November 1903.

Subjected to such indignities, it is small wonder families wished to claim the corpses of those who died in the workhouse before committing them to the grave. In removing the corpse to the family home, relatives and friends could at least enact customs associated with viewing the dead and ensure that the deceased was treated with care and decorum. Friends could also attempt to ameliorate the ugliness of the parochial box. One of the most striking images in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is that of the dainty, golden haired Fanny Robin 'nailed up in parish boards' with her name scrawled in chalk on the side of the coffin. The rude container provides a stark contrast to the pretty painted wagon, decked in flowers, which is sent to claim her.[85] In cases where the deceased remained in the workhouse, relatives were usually permitted to view the corpse before it was dispatched to the cemetery. This did not, however, guarantee against undignified treatment. An investigation in 1880 by Stow-on-the-Wold Burial Board, Gloucestershire, revealed that the sexton of the cemetery, James Beachem, had been opening parish coffins entrusted to his care and exhibiting the corpses to his family. Further enquiry exposed the slapdash way in which coffins were dispatched from the workhouse: some lids were fastened with only one screw whilst others were merely tied with string. Beachem resigned his post immediately, although it is unclear how far the guardians reviewed the security of coffin lids.[86]

Increasingly, however, the meanness of pauper interments was perceived as indicative of outdated attitudes towards poverty rather than as an acceptable way of treating the abject poor. When the guardians of Preston Union accepted a tender for the supply of cheap but allegedly good quality coffins in 1897, the *Lancet* suggested that any savings made could be expended on upgrading the pauper burial itself:

The Preston Guardians will, we hope, now that a coffin can be purchased for a penny, make the funeral of a pauper somewhat less of a perfunctory ceremony than it is at present and take some care to show that a body should not be huddled into the ground at the cheapest rate and in the most careless manner.[87]

Yet the 'huddling' of paupers into their graves went beyond a question of financial expenditure. Whilst the Christian burial service articulated egalitarianism in death (at least for the believer), entry into cemetery chapels was often barred to both the pauper corpse and mourners prior to interment. In 1891 Canon Carr, the Roman Catholic priest for Anfield

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[85] T. Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Ware: Wordsworth Classic, [1874] 1994), 222–4.
[86] GRO P317a PC31/1, 12 January 1880.   [87] *Lancet*, 9 October 1897, 930.

Cemetery, complained to the Liverpool Select Vestry that prohibiting admission to the chapel was an unjust practice. He qualified his appeal, however, by adding that access should only be encouraged for those paupers 'that were fit – not disagreeable or dangerous'.[88] At Walton Workhouse Cemetery, paupers were permitted into the cemetery chapel by 'special arrangement' and the payment of a small fee. Again, this only applied to those who displayed no 'unpleasant' or 'dangerous' character-istics.[89] Such language is richly suggestive: it points to a vision of the abject poor as unpredictable and perilous guests in the house of God. Moreover, whilst fears concerning the behaviour of paupers were no doubt justified in some cases, the policing of the church served only to reinforce the abasement of the common grave, especially for those who considered themselves 'respectable'.

The acting chaplain of Walton Workhouse (Liverpool) in the early 1880s, Hywel Smith, took a keen interest in mourners who attended parish burials, distinguishing between the reprobate poor and 'respect-able', 'decent folks', some of whom were ratepayers.[90] Friends and rela-tives who thanked him for his ministry, articulated a degree of shame at the manner of interment or expressed anxiety for the soul of the departed all ranked highly in Smith's estimation. That such positive exchange warranted transcription into his logbook suggests, however, that they were the exception rather than the rule. Nonetheless, mourners who approached the chaplain in apparent humility actively distinguished them-selves from 'rough' and 'dangerous' paupers and, inadvertently perhaps, demonstrated their right of access to spiritual rites.

As noted in previous chapters, the spiritual meanings attached to reli-gious rites were inextricable from secular rights. Exclusion from church was offensive to the poor as much on account of the distinctions drawn between the pauper and non-pauper as from injured spiritual sentiments. For those who did seek spiritual balm in religious rites, some comfort could be taken from the reading of the burial service as the corpse was lowered into the grave. Yet even this concession to decency could appear slapdash and half-hearted. Scandals concerning failure or reluctance to read the burial service at paupers' funerals indicate a degree of clerical ambivalence towards the corpse, especially when no mourners were present. As the *Local Government Chronicle and Knight's Advertiser* noted in 1885, some members of the clergy were disinclined to perform the burial service for paupers who died in the workhouse but whose home parish could not be

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[88] LVRO PAR 6/5/1, 15 October 1891.   [89] Ibid.
[90] LVRO 353 WES 14/3. Smith acted as chaplain at the workhouse on a temporary basis during the 1880s whenever the regular chaplain, Reverend Leslie, was ill.

traced.[91] When Stretford Burial Board dismissed plans to have the Anglican portion of the cemetery consecrated, the Bishop of Manchester expressed concern that he would be unable to 'compel' the rector of the parish to officiate at burials of the parish poor.[92] In 1882 the governor of Wigan Workhouse, Mr Lowe, issued a report criticising ministers for non-attendance at pauper funerals, noting that 'things like that are occurring pretty often here lately'. In the space of one week, two bodies from the workhouse had been interred without the appropriate clergy. The body of Julia Bray, a Roman Catholic pauper, was interred on a Monday afternoon yet no burial service was performed until two days after. Later that week, the corpse of Edward Edwards was also taken for burial in the workhouse cemetery. When no minister arrived to officiate at the interment, the sexton (the caretaker of the cemetery) read the burial service himself, despite having no authority to do so. Possibly doubting the wisdom of his actions, he then abandoned the coffin in the chapel for the duration of the night.[93]

The flippancy of the clergy towards the pauper corpse provided an opportunity for guardians to deflect criticism from themselves. On a visit to Walton Workhouse Cemetery in June 1883, Mr Beesley, a member of the West Derby Guardians, near Liverpool, witnessed the interment of a pauper in the absence of the chaplain, Reverend Leslie.[94] Reporting this 'defect' to his fellow guardians, Beesley called for Leslie to be reprimanded. In his defence, Leslie argued that the coffin in question had arrived at the cemetery after the appointed hour for the burial service. He had sanctioned immediate interment for sanitary reasons: the corpse had been found drowned and thus subject to post-mortem. In any case, continued Leslie, he read the burial service over the grave two days following the interment.[95] This rather missed the point. The board requested that, forthwith, Leslie contrive to remain at the cemetery one extra hour each day in order to conduct the burial service over any late arrivals. Leslie refused but, as a gesture of goodwill to the board, offered to read the burial service the day following the interment of any 'casuals'. This concession would, however, occasion 'personal hardship' and was, he considered, 'quite unnecessary'. Leslie then suggested the board remember that his salary had remained static since 1869, despite the steady increase in his workload, much of which was done 'voluntarily

[91] LRO UDCl 60/1.   [92] LRO MBS 2/18, c. July 1885.

[93] WRO A10/1/Z, 27 May 1882.

[94] LVRO 353 WES 14/3, 15 June 1883. Unless stated otherwise, all subsequent quotes derive from this source.

[95] Leslie argued that Home Office regulations demanded safe and speedy burial for bodies 'in all stages of decomposition'.

and unsolicited'.[96] The chaplain's lackadaisical approach towards the burial of 'casuals' encapsulated the humiliation attached to the 'pauper whom nobody owned'. Beesley, the champion of the cause, concluded his admonishment of Leslie, declaring he 'would not like one of his relatives to be put in a hole like a dog'.[97] Beesley thus seemed to imply that the burial service conferred Christian status on the pauper grave and, therefore, distinguished it from the uncivilised and indecent interment of a beast. That even this could be postponed until the day following interment when confronted with an obstinate chaplain indicates that any concern for decency was tenuous.[98]

It is impossible to determine the individual meanings invested in the burial service at a pauper funeral. It is plausible to surmise, however, that the nonchalance of clerics compounded the secular indignities of parochial burial. On Thursday 27 February 1908 a boy named Thomas Roberts died in the workhouse hospital on Brownlow Hill, Liverpool. His father informed workhouse officials that he would make private arrangements for the burial of his son on the following Sunday. When he had not returned to the workhouse offices by Saturday morning, however, the clerk authorised the interment of the body in a pauper grave. When Roberts arrived at the hospital later that day to finalise arrangements for the collection of Thomas's body, he was deeply 'grieved': not only had the burial already taken place, Thomas had been interred 'without so much as a prayer'. Whether Roberts considered confessional rites to be of spiritual significance is unclear. To a point, it was not the issue at stake. As Mr Reay, the guardian responsible for calling the Select Vestry to account for the mistake, succinctly stated: 'The boy should not have been taken away and buried like a dog, with no intimation being sent to his friends.' Reay's evocation of animal imagery referred to the unchristian nature of the burial, seemingly made worse by its taking place in the absence of the bereaved. The censures issued in regard to the mistake hinged, however, on inefficiency and incompetence rather than the wretchedness of the pauper burial itself. Indeed, the governor of the workhouse could only complain about the workload of

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[96] Leslie noted that when the workhouse opened in 1868, it catered for 800 inmates. During the past year, however, the population of the house had reached almost 2,000. Following this confrontation with the board, Leslie received an increase in his annual salary of twenty-five pounds. See LVRO 353 WES, 12 July 1883. Beesley had opposed the increase. See LVRO 353 WES 14/3, 21 June 1883, and *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 June 1883, 7.

[97] LVRO 353 WES 14/3, 15 June 1883.

[98] Indeed, Beesley retracted his charges of neglect of duty. See LVRO 353 WES, 28 June 1883.

his staff: 'the clerks have as much work as they can get through. I am only surprised that there are not more bungles than there are.' The only concession to the feelings of the family was a grudging letter of apology.[99]

Bureaucratic mistakes and oversights inflamed charges that the poor law guardians were 'mean-souled' and a 'board of bigots'.[100] As *Porcupine* noted early in January 1881, ineptitude was, all too often, inseparable from indifference to the feelings of the poor. Reporting that a young girl, Rebecca Scott, had died in Liverpool Workhouse Hospital and was subsequently interred in a parochial grave without any notification of either being sent to her concerned mother, the journal concluded that: 'The blunders, great and small, of our local parish are becoming a byword, and until the contemptuous and unfeeling manner in which the poor are treated is stopped with a firm hand, "mistakes" and "negligence", such as the above, will never cease.'[101] Again, this would suggest that antipathy to the pauper grave was rooted not so much in a preoccupation with economic status but in the concern to claim the ownership and secure the dignity of the dead.

Contesting respectability

If we are to retain the notion of respectability with reference to the working-class culture of death we must posit a more fluid understanding of the 'respectable' funeral. The exhumation of corpses from common graves for the purposes of reinterment indicates that dichotomies between stigma and respectability were not clear cut. The fixation with the pauper/private burial dichotomy has encouraged a tendency to overlook loose and more malleable definitions of 'respectability'. Notably, families who interred their dead in public graves strove to retain, where possible, a degree of dignity, as exemplified by attempts to fix cheap name-plates to pauper coffins. One of the most nuanced contemporary analyses of respectability and antipathy towards the public grave was Maud Pember Reeves's account of thrift and burial expense. Reeves challenged the notion that the money spent on working-class funerals could, with prudence, be halved. This was, she maintained, an 'erroneous idea' based upon ignorance concerning the 'real circumstances' of the poor. Rather, the expense incurred by the 'decent' funeral was a rational form of expenditure when set against an appreciation of the aversion to the pauper funeral. Parochial burial not only lacked dignity and respect

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[99] *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 6 March 1908, 3. See also LVRO 353 SEL 14/5.
[100] See *Liverpool Review*, 3 January 1880, 11, and *Liberal Review*, 12 June 1880, 6.
[101] *Porcupine*, 22 January 1881, 684.

for the dead, it tarnished the entire family with the 'consequent political
and social degradation' attendant on pauper status. Reeves was aware
that antipathy to the common grave might be perceived as 'sheer pre-
judice'. Yet it was, she suggested, a prejudice 'even the most educated
and highly born' of parents would share if their child were to be buried in
the public grave. Reeves's study undoubtedly gestured towards an under-
standing of a working-class culture of death and values of thrift. This
gesture was, however, strictly limited to the 'respectable, hard-working,
independent' poor as defined by Reeves and her fellow surveyors.
Moreover, Reeves's claim to know the 'real circumstances' of the working
classes rested on twice weekly visits to families in Lambeth by members of
the Fabian Women's Group between 1909 and 1913. The study was
hardly representative (only thirty families were involved) and Reeves
glossed over the problems inherent in members of one social group
interviewing another.[102] As Ross McKibbin argues, external observers
of working-class lives represented figures of authority who were unable to
empathise with or rationalise the mentality of the poor.[103]

Nonetheless, Reeves's account posited a relatively sophisticated
perception of the working-class funeral. By setting the impulse for burial
insurance against antipathy to pauper burial, Reeves implied that inter-
ment in a private grave secured the 'decent' (and, therefore, respectable)
burial. Decency in death was, however, flexible. For Reeves, excess
expenditure compromised respectability as much as pauperism and
public burial. Examining the bill for a child's funeral, she concluded
that 'no display and no extravagance' were evident in paying for hearse
attendants, a woman to lay the body out, flowers and a new black tie
for the father of the deceased.[104] Rather, they represented modest and
sincere expressions of loss. The child was interred in a common grave.
Significantly, however, Reeves defined the funeral as 'respectable'. Thus,
an appreciation of the social stigma attached to pauperism and public
graves did not nullify the respectability of a funeral in terms of personal
gestures of mourning. Between the ideal of the private grave and the
shame of pauper burial, there was considerable scope for individuals
to inscribe mourning rites, no matter how rudimentary, with profound
meaning.

For some at least, therefore, interment in a common grave could be
reconciled with notions of decent burial, especially if some autonomy
could be exercised in the manner in which the dead were conveyed to

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[102] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 66–72.   [103] McKibbin, *Ideologies of Class*, 167–96.
[104] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 70–1. Example taken from the burial of a child who died
in August 1911.

the grave. Indeed, it was recognition of the significance invested in independence that increasingly prompted criticisms of guardians with a draconian interpretation of the punitive poor law. It is also worth remembering that despite the boom in burial insurance, interments in common graves accounted for a significant number of burials in most cemeteries. In 1892, Anfield Cemetery authorities had to reuse old public graves to accommodate more common interments. Burton-on-Trent Burial Board created almost 300 new common graves in 1896.[105] A survey of St James's Cemetery, Liverpool, in 1932 indicated that since the ground opened for interments in 1829, 5,789 private graves (holding, on average, five coffins) had been sold, and 1,728 common graves (holding around ten bodies) had been filled.[106] To suppose that the families of corpses interred in common graves were too 'rough' to care about decent interment (or their dead) or were in perpetual thrall to the stigma of pauperism seems simplistic, not least because it overlooks the potential to redefine decency. Indeed, the rudimentary effects of mourning could adopt extra significance as the locus for representations of loss when other rites were circumscribed. This did not cancel the indignity of common burial but, rather, allowed for its amelioration. As Liverpool Workhouse Committee noted in February 1884, bereaved families frequently removed bodies from the workhouse claiming their intention to bury them directly. They then performed mourning customs and organised wakes before returning to the parish authorities to request parochial interment. That burial policies were often drawn but evidently not spent on the purchase of a grave was a 'scandal' which, the committee agreed, required immediate 'suppression'. In future, bodies would only be released to families who undertook to buy a grave immediately.[107]

The guardians were at a loss to understand this seemingly skewed sense of priority, especially when set against the supposed horror of the pauper grave. Yet such cases posed a persistent problem for union authorities. Moses Waddington died in the workhouse at Bolton on 21 October 1905 and was interred in the cemetery there three days later. Yet the guardian's inquiries revealed that Waddington's son had drawn five pounds from one burial club whilst his brother-in-law withdrew eight pounds from a policy with Prudential Assurance. The small fortune had subsequently been spent on clothing for the family, to which several guardians cried 'Shame'. This 'disgraceful (hear, hear)' expenditure moved the guardians

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105 PRO HO45/9921/B23268.   106 LVRO 352 CEM 3/17/5.

107 LVRO 353 SEL 10/11, 7 February 1884. See also *Liverpool Mercury*, 15 February 1884, in LVRO 353 SEL 14/3. The issue was raised again in 1887. See LVRO 353 SEL 10/12, 17 March 1887.

to propose strict measures which would necessitate an investigation into the private finances of any person committed to burial at the expense of the parish.[108] If the family and friends of the deceased had money to fritter away on clothing, food, drink and a hearse or two, they had sufficient means to buy a grave. A similar case arose in 1908 when the family of a woman who had died in the workhouse removed her corpse for burial. They then applied for a parochial burial. On the day of the funeral, however, the woman was 'conveyed to the cemetery in a hearse drawn by four horses, whilst there were three coaches, each drawn by two horses'. Alderman Brooks was furious: 'if anyone went to the workhouse, getting everything at the expense of the ratepayer and yet money was spent so lavishly on the funeral without interring the body in *anything but a common grave*, surely there should be some recompense to the Guardians for what they had done for the woman'. It transpired that the woman's son had insured her for the sum of forty pounds and, after her extravagant transport to the grave, was reportedly 'drinking the rest of the money as fast as he possibly could'.[109]

It may be that the relative extravagance of these burials induced the wrath of the board. Yet it is plausible to suggest that many families buried their dead with more modest mourning rites whilst still turning to the parish for a public grave. The guardians' objections towards the squandering of burial money on mourning paraphernalia hinged partially on a desire to recoup money spent on those who evidently had no need to burden the ratepayer.[110] Yet there was also reluctance among guardians to accept any rationale that permitted expenditure on the effects of mourning whilst committing the dead to the perceived disgrace of a public grave, paid for by the parish. Moreover, guardians made no concession to the possibility that decisions concerning the distribution of burial finance necessitated protracted and potentially antagonistic family discussion or that clothes were necessary items of expenditure. Likewise, the tirade against the 'tyrannical customs' of the poor revealed an absence of shared understandings concerning the meaning of burial ritual outside a fixed definition of 'respectability' which was rooted in antipathy to public burial.[111] As chapters 3 and 4 highlighted, giving the dead a good send off and opening the house to neighbours and relatives expressed immediate grief in a language which, as the next chapter will

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[108] *The [Bolton] Daily Chronicle*, 15 November 1905, in BALS GBO 12/13.

[109] *Bolton Evening Chronicle*, 23 December 1908, in BALS GBO 12/13.

[110] At Liverpool, relatives could only claim the effects of those who died in the workhouse after the guardians had deducted the cost of the keep and interment of the deceased. See, for instance, LVRO 353 SEL 10/14, 353 SEL 10/16, 353 SEL 10/17.

[111] *The Times*, 27 September 1892, 9.

demonstrate, the final rotting place of the dead might fail to supply. It was, therefore, not respectability as defined and understood by the guardians which was at issue for such families, but the articulation of respect for the corpse and the ability to express loss through the familiar rituals of burial.

It must be noted, however, that the common grave did not command universal revulsion. Some paupers died in the workhouse, were interred in a public grave and later found to have saved a small fortune in the bank.[112] The expense incurred by a 'respectable' burial was also thought by some to be money foolishly spent. As Walter Greenwood's father suggested, far better to spend the money on the living:

A pauper grave wouldn't trouble me ... Come to think of it you can let my burial insurance lapse here and now and let's be having the pennies every week. If I sup it away in beer it'll be one in the eye for those insurance robbers [and] the right man will have benefited.[113]

On a more mercenary note, William Morris of Bridgeman Street in Bolton permitted the interment of his friend and distant relative, Jonathan Redford, in the grounds of the workhouse in the full knowledge that the dead man owned a grave space in Tonge Cemetery. Following the burial, Morris applied to Bolton Corporation to have Redford's grave deeds transferred to himself as his friend had given him his belongings prior to death and he was the only living relative of the dead man.[114]

Crucially, some people were unaware of the distinctions between private, pauper and public graves. Some families interred the dead in public graves in ignorance that the plot would not belong to them. Thus, Elizabeth Wright applied to Bolton Burial Board in 1883 to have her husband disinterred from a common grave as she 'was not aware at the time she made arrangements with the undertaker that the grave would not belong to her'.[115] Emily Barley interred her son Frederick Henry in a public plot in 1912 on the advice of the undertaker. Two weeks later, however, she wrote to Bolton Burial Board explaining that this was a mistake and she wished Frederick to be reinterred in a private grave.[116] Correspondence between Farnworth Burial Board and the Home Office in January 1909 further suggests that many relatives were unaware of the restrictions imposed upon public burial plots, giving rise to a significant number of bodies being interred (on the advice of undertakers) in public

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[112] See, for instance, LVRO 353 SEL 10/16, 11 February 1904.
[113] Greenwood, *There Was a Time*, 23.   [114] BALS ABZ 3/1/1, 18 September 1886.
[115] BALS ABZ 3/1/4, 27 January 1914.   [116] BALS ABZ 3/1/4, 17 December 1912.

graves by 'mistake'.[117] Again, this would appear to suggest that it was the implications of the common grave for mourning and commemorative rites rather than a fear of social disgrace that motivated the impulse to claim one's own corpse/grave. That people were oblivious to the ramifications of interment in the public grave may indicate that the stigma associated with common burial has, to some degree at least, been mythologised. It might also, however, imply that popular associations of anonymous and collective interment were so inextricable from pauperism that bereaved families were misled into believing that the payment of burial fees secured a grave for private use. In this light, the neatness of the pauper/respectable burial dichotomy falters. It is only by recognising the fluidity of respectability that we can begin to appreciate attitudes towards the disposal of the dead and the fine distinctions between public and pauper burials.

Conclusion

One of the earliest studies to examine the relationship between consumer culture, funeral costs and social status, *Burial Reform and Funeral Costs* (1938), by Arnold Wilson MP and Professor Herman Levy, noted the importance of the respectable funeral for cementing a sense of social inclusion. In this context, the distinction between the private and public grave extended beyond straightforward notions of economic and social status to consider the wider cultural meanings invested in the interment of the dead. Thus, common burial was not only synonymous with the shame of poverty; it engendered social exclusion and offended the dignity of the dead and the bereaved by denying the assertion of individual identity. Noting the resolution by London County Council in 1930 to improve the standard of 'punctuality, decency and decorum' of pauper funerals, Wilson and Levy argued that antipathy to the common grave would persist so long as the bodies interred in such graves were related to each other only by the fact that all were poor.[118] The indecency of common burial rested on the perceived 'loneliness of the corpse, for whom nobody cares except the Poor Law Authorities'.[119] For those already socially marginalised by poverty, the inability to express attachment and identity in death and grief fostered feelings of guilt and shame which exceeded social jealousy.

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[117] BALS AF 6/40, 19 January 1909. A cynical interpretation of this advice is that it was in the interests of the undertaker that the bereaved inter the dead in a public grave as this left more insurance money to be spent on mourning paraphernalia.
[118] Wilson and Levy, *Burial Reform*, 63.   [119] Ibid., 64.

This is not to suggest that Wilson and Levy ignored the importance of a culture of respectability. The common funeral was, they argued, only the negative side of the 'problem' of working-class funeral culture. Acknowledging that most commentators interpreted working-class funeral expenditure as symbolic of 'vanity and the love for show', Wilson and Levy argued that the 'proper' funeral was a complex expression of notions of self-respect and dignity.[120] In one sense, this was linked to a desire to display the fruits of burial club thrift. Of rather more consequence was the bereaved's wish to treat the dead with respect and the guilt they experienced if the dead were denied this dignity. It was this emotional vulnerability that rendered the funeral so expensive: the bereaved were exploited. According to Wilson and Levy, the canny undertaker capitalised on the fact that 'every human instinct' deterred the grief-stricken from comparing prices and haggling for cheaper burials.[121] Not only did undertakers refuse to print price lists, they issued unitemised bills. Moreover, many applied direct pressure on the bereaved to subscribe to associations between respect, dignity and expense: 'you cannot have anything else but polished oak in a road like this' and 'Your husband's noble figure is just fitted to a rosewood casket, and it is only suitable for him.'[122]

Wilson and Levy's proposed solution to such issues was for the state to assume control of the disposal of the dead, meeting costs from National Insurance. This would not only obliterate the public burial, but would also reduce inflated expenses associated with funerals.[123] Wilson and Levy's analysis highlighted the complexity of notions of the respectable culture of death, portraying the culture of 'extravagance' in a more sympathetic light. More recently, Melanie Tebbutt has asserted that the working-class commitment to saving for funerals can be read as a desire for status, but one which testified to a 'determination to be valued'.[124] In this sense, funeral expenditure was the most visible means of expressing sentiment. As Mark Drakeford argues with reference to late twentieth-century public burials, such visibility is particularly significant to those who feel their position within society to be marginal and threatened:

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[120] Ibid., 71.

[121] Ibid., ix. See also J. Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited* (London: Vintage, 1998), 20–33.

[122] Wilson and Levy, *Burial Reform*, 88. See also Puckle, *Funeral Customs*, 98, and L. Quincey Dowd, *Funeral Management and Costs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921), 14.

[123] Wilson and Levy, *Burial Reform*, 169–79. They favoured cremation but thought the introduction of crematoria throughout Britain would prove inconvenient and expensive, p. vii.

[124] Tebbutt, *Making Ends Meet*, 17.

'People who have not been accorded dignity in life need to seize it with particular urgency at times of death.' Attempts by county councils to market low-cost funerals to poorer families have met with limited success: 'cheap' funerals represent a 'genuine choice' only for those who do not feel their social position to be threatened by other assaults on their citizenship. For the poor, the funeral not only confirms their relationship with the deceased but reaffirms the 'meaning and purpose of a life where such qualities have been called into question'.[125]

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the 'pauper grave' remains a term loaded with connotations of social exclusion and anonymity.[126] That it has been renamed the 'social fund' grave is, perhaps, indicative of a wish to challenge the images associated with the Victorian and Edwardian terminology of impoverished death. The employment of euphemism in an attempt to rob the public grave of its stigma is, however, nothing new. In 1891 Urmston Burial Board described its common graves as 'fourth class' burial plots whilst Chorley burial authority preferred the phrase 'unpurchased graves'.[127] Awareness of the importance of language extended to include the term pauper. A resolution by Bedwellty Union in 1912 that 'in the opinion of this board, the time has arrived when the word "pauper" should not be used when speaking of the chargeable poor of this country' similarly indicates a move away from the early Victorian punitive philosophy of poverty.[128] On 5 March 1912 members of Liverpool Select Vestry voted to adopt the Bedwellty ruling, determining to use the phrase 'Person in receipt of parochial relief' in favour of 'pauper' in future.[129] As one guardian noted, the removal of the 'hateful word' from the language of the Union signified steps towards 'spar[ing] the feelings of the people who sought their aid'.[130]

Despite such changes, the implications of the public grave continued to be overwhelmingly negative. Cremation propaganda from the early decades of the twentieth century drew on the confusion between common and pauper burials by evoking the imagery of the 'pauper's pit' as a means of emphasising the egalitarianism of the crematorium.[131] Likewise, burial board records throughout the 1920s and 1930s highlight the persistence of applications for exhumation from families who 'were not in a position at the time' or who 'had not the means' to purchase a private grave in the

[125] Drakeford, 'Last Rights?', 522–4.
[126] See, for instance, *Guardian*, 15 February 1999, 6–7.
[127] LRO UDUr 2/26, 10 July 1891, and MBCh 29/15, Borough of Chorley Regulations, 1913.
[128] LVRO 353 SEL 1/14.   [129] Ibid.
[130] *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 6 March 1912, in LVRO 353 SEL 14/5.
[131] *The Cremation Society: Council Report 1933*, in LVRO 942 BIC.

immediate aftermath of death.[132] The public grave was, and is, invested with meaning beyond burial space: it condemned the dead to eternal anonymity and an ignoble funeral. The private grave represented the antithesis of this. The social aspirations of the poor may have found expression in the purchase of a grave, yet the private grave also represented the desire to exercise some control and dignity in life, even if, ironically, this be over the dead.

[132] BALS ABCF 15/28, 20 January 1919, and ABCF 15/40, 11 June 1923.

6 Remembering the dead: the cemetery as a landscape for grief

Lowering the dead into the grave represented the climax of the funeral, whilst sprinkling soil onto the coffin lid signified the finality of death and, crucially, burial rites. The subsequent installation of a memorial provided the bereaved with a point of commemoration to which they could repeatedly return. The headstone narrated a biography of the deceased, enabled relatives to reconstruct the family unit in stone and represented a metaphor for loss. This chapter reads burial space as a landscape for the expression of grief and explores the tensions inherent in the appropriation of public space for the articulation of private identity, loss and memory. It also considers ideals relating to the sanctity of burial space, especially in the supposedly secular context of the municipal cemetery. Departing from the romanticism of private enterprise garden cemeteries established at the beginning of the century, the creation of municipal grounds in the latter half of the nineteenth century combined utility and hygiene with commerce. Despite the functional ethos guiding most municipal endeavours, however, cemeteries continued to be shaped by an impulse to civilise, educate and uplift the common visitor. In the secular cemetery, still colloquially known as 'God's acre', sacrosanct ideals of the grave resonated with shared understandings of dignity in death and the ability to articulate the ownership and identity of the corpse. In this sense, the significance attached to the consecration or denominational affiliation of the ground was often inextricable from the importance invested in secular rights of interment. Consequently, the denial or circumvention of interment rites (as in pauper burial) compromised the respect paid to the dead and, therefore, the decency of the funeral.

Like the park, the municipal cemetery was subject to by-laws intended to regulate behaviour within the perimeter walls and shape popular perceptions of the ground. Unlike other public spaces, however, transgression of cemetery rules carried extra meaning in relation to the sanctity of the dead and the melancholy of remembrance. Likewise, municipal conceptions of appropriate commemorative practice allowed

little flexibility in acknowledging alternative interpretations of sacred space or remembrance. In this sense, it is important to engage with the representations of burial space perpetuated by those who used the cemetery in a licit and illicit sense in addition to those of the cemetery regulator. Similarly, municipal guidelines and social expectation concerning mourning behaviour created a cultural script whereby the bereaved were supposed to visit the dead, install memorials and care for their graves. Yet the 'neglected' grave caused endless consternation to burial board authorities across the north-west of England. Likewise, numbers of grave owners sold or loaned the deeds to their grave in the aftermath of interment, creating complex networks of second-hand and borrowed grave space. Typically associated with the forgotten dead, the sale or neglect of the grave might imply that working-class mourning was short-lived, if not superficial, after all. Again, there is a danger of reading such graves in terms of municipal ideals alone. Attitudes towards grave space appear to have been typified by pragmatism. This need not, however, negate the long-term remembrance of the dead. Rather, it testified to the importance vested in the cemetery within the immediate context of the funeral and the flexibility of remembering the dead thereafter.

God's acre: affiliation and identity

It is widely acknowledged that the Victorian burial ground represented a mirror on the urban landscape: prestigious plots with expensive monuments echoed the spatial arrangement of affluent suburbs; common graves were analogous to slum tenements.[1] Burial ground was also a 'sacred space', the design and purpose of which reflected the melancholy of mourning whilst aiming to improve the 'moral sentiments and general taste of all classes and more especially of the great masses of

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[1] Cannadine, 'War and Death', 187–242, J. Walvin, 'Dust to Dust: The Celebration of Death in Victorian England', *Historical Reflections*, 1 (1983), 353–71, Barker and Gay, *Highgate Cemetery*, C. Brooks (ed.), *Mortal Remains: The History and Present State of the Victorian and Edwardian Cemetery* (Exeter: Wheaton, 1989), S. Barnard, *To Prove I'm Not Forgot: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), H. Murray, *This Garden of Death: The History of York Cemetery* (York: Friends of York Cemetery, 1991), M. Wade-Matthews, *Grave Matters: A Walk Through Welford Road Cemetery, Leicester* (Loughborough: Heart of Albion Press, 1992), Rugg, 'Remarks on Modern Sepulture', 111–28. For European and American comparisons, see D. Schuyler, 'The Evolution of the Anglo-American Rural Cemetery: Landscape Architecture as Social and Cultural History', *Journal of Garden History*, 4 (1984), 291–304, T. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Mitford, *American Way of Death*, 81–100.

society'.[2] This ideology of burial space found concrete expression through by-laws regulating conduct within the cemetery walls. The rules for Haslingden Cemetery in 1901, for instance, stipulated that visitors were 'expected to observe perfect decorum in all respects'.[3] Regulations for Chorley Cemetery in 1913 ordered that no person 'shall commit any nuisance', no person could smoke, drink, be 'improperly dressed' or bring orange peel or 'refuse of any kind' into the cemetery; there was to be no singing, no shouting and no persons who behaved in an 'indecorous manner'.[4] Surveillance and guidance on conduct was common to other municipal spaces, most notably the park.[5] In the cemetery, however, it adopted extra significance through association with religious iconography, respect for the dead and reflections on mortality.

Municipal burial grounds often emulated the idyllic symbolism, firstly associated with the rural graveyard and, later, mimicked by joint-stock cemetery companies. In part, this reflected interpretations of cemetery space as an opportunity to create a green open space close to the urban conurbation whilst reflecting the aspirations of local government to design magnificent cemeteries as monuments to civic pride. Yet it also suggests a desire to promote loftier reflections on spirituality. In the latter half of the century, the architecture of the cemetery chapel was comparable to that of the gothic church; serpentine pathways encouraged visitors to amble through the grounds, and the copious planting of shrubs and trees lent a leafy feel to the space.[6] Careful garden design invested the cemetery with added symbolism: the roots of yew trees were thought to 'find and stop the mouths of the dead'; the bowed branches of weeping willow were thought to resemble the mourner and, along with myrtle, were thought to signify resurrection; ash and rowan trees were thought to protect against evil spirits.[7] Inscriptions and motifs on headstones frequently made references to Christian concepts of immortality: graves housed those who were 'Asleep in Jesus' or 'With Christ which is better'.[8] Burial boards might distribute a list of approved epitaphs from which new

[2] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 155–8. See also J. S. Curl, *A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition* (London: Constable, 1980), 245, and Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 48.

[3] LRO MBH 42/1.   [4] Chorley Cemetery Regulations 1913, LRO MBCh 29/15.

[5] LRO MBH 42/1, By-laws for Victorian Park, Haslingden, 1901.

[6] LRO UDCl 60/1, Survey of municipal cemetery design across the north-west by Church and Clayton-le-Moors Burial Board, 1886.

[7] Puckle, *Funeral Customs*, 167–8.

[8] Taken from the list of 'approved inscriptions' for Bolton municipal cemeteries, BALS ABZ 3/3, 19 October 1893.

grave owners could select. Failing that, burial boards insisted upon vet-
ting proposed inscriptions made upon headstones, commonly favouring
direct scriptural quotation.[9]

Euphemistic reference to the cemetery as 'God's acre' alluded to the
presence of those who had, presumably, passed from a temporal to a
celestial incarnation. The presence of 'God's house' (the cemetery chapel
or chapels) further reminded visitors of the Christian significance of
death. In the churchyard, the consecration of the ground was taken
for granted. Indeed, the near monopoly of the Established Church on
consecrated burial space had played a crucial role in prompting the
establishment of many private cemeteries in the first half of the nineteenth
century.[10] Thomas Laqueur has argued that the shift from burial in the
Anglican churchyard to interment in the public cemetery signified that
'the underlying cultural assumptions of capitalism had taken root'.[11] Not
only did the cemetery embody the creation of a language of death which
broke from religious and reverential vocabulary to speak unashamedly in
consumerist terms, it also gave expression to cultural pluralism.[12]
Laqueur's secular, pluralistic vision is optimistic. Separatism in death
continued with burial grounds created for the exclusive use of religious
and ethnic groups. Jewish cemeteries, for instance, were created in
Manchester, Cardiff and London, and areas with large Irish populations,
such as Liverpool, established Catholic cemeteries. Importantly,
Laqueur overlooks the trend for most funerals acted out within the
secular cemetery to remain tied to religion, not least because most
families continued to request confessional burial rites overseen by the
appropriate minister. In addition, cemeteries continued to be organised
into denominational space. This did not quash the 'religious community'
as Laqueur suggests, but, rather, re-created distinct communities of
Nonconformists, Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Notably, the
Nonconformist section of the cemetery operated as an umbrella identity
for any myriad of beliefs but was inseparable from association with the
Nonconformism of chapelgoers. That most cemeteries were divided

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[9] BALS ABZ 3/1/5, 19 June 1901. See also Haslingden Cemetery Rules and Fees 1901,
LRO MBH 42/1, Poulton Burial Board minute book, LRO MBMo 2/1, 23 March 1880,
Chorley Cemetery Regulations 1913, LRO MBCh 29/15 and Stow-on-the-Wold Burial
Board minutes, GRO P317a PC31/1, 31 March 1881.

[10] J. Morgan, 'The Burial Question in Leeds in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in
Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 95–104, Rawnsley and Reynolds,
'Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford', 215–21, P. Jupp, 'Enon Chapel: *No Way for the
Dead*' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 90–104, J. Pinfold, 'The Green
Ground' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 76–89, and Rugg, 'Emergence of
Cemetery Companies', 356.

[11] Laqueur, 'Cemeteries, Religion and the Culture of Capitalism', 185.   [12] Ibid., 200.

between three identities defined in relation to Christianity indicates the continued significance of 'God' for concepts of burial. That confessional communities were granted specific spaces within the cemetery also demonstrates the tenacity of doctrinal difference both within a broad notion of death and spirituality and within a supposedly pluralistic secular space.

Colloquially, divisions between consecrated, unconsecrated and denominational land were referred to in terms of 'church' and 'chapel'.[13] In concrete terms, confessional identity found expression through the separation of space and, in larger cemeteries, distinct entrances and chapels for each denomination. Differences in memorial iconography readily identified particular tombstones with specific denominations. A contemporary caricature of denominational ground in Anfield Cemetery in Liverpool, published in a journal that habitually satirised the city's Anglican civic authorities, depicted the Nonconformist ground as typified by plain, flat slabs; the memorials in the Anglican section had fuller inscriptions, 'mock-sentiment' and 'tawdry symbolism'; whilst Catholic headstones were characterised by crucifixes and invitations to pray for the dead.[14] More abstractly, spiritual leaders encouraged congregations to identify with specific space, not least in the opening ceremonies of new municipal grounds. Celebrations to mark Royton Cemetery's completion in 1879 included a procession from the town hall of the local population, civic dignitaries and the Bishop of Manchester, culminating in the consecration of the Anglican ground by the Bishop.[15] The focus on the Established Church might reflect the population of the town but was more likely to indicate the politico-religious membership of the civic body and a desire to invest the burial space with recognised spiritual authority. Even liberal Nonconformist civic authorities who refrained from consecrating any space in the cemetery were keen to invite prominent religious dignitaries to participate in opening ceremonies. Hence, the Bishop of Manchester attended the opening ceremony of the unconsecrated Church and Clayton-le-Moors Cemetery, near Blackburn, in 1889 and offered his blessing on the ground.[16] Members and clergy of dissenting churches similarly blessed space set aside for the interment of their congregations, although these ceremonies seem less likely to have been included in the pomp and display of civic performance. Immediately following the official opening

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[13] Barnard, *To Prove I'm Not Forgot*, 42. See also Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, vol. II, 202–7.
[14] *Porcupine*, 1 June 1878, 134. [15] LRO UDRo/3/2, 5 September 1879.
[16] LRO UDCl 7/5, 27 June 1889.

ceremony at Haslingden Cemetery in 1902, for instance, the Free Church performed a service of dedication over the Nonconformist ground.[17]

Ostensibly, interment in denominational ground with the relevant burial service and minister intimated a religious identity which stretched beyond the immediacy of the funeral. As with the burial service, however, it is difficult to determine the extent to which individuals invested grave space with spiritual significance. Most attachments to burial grounds were genealogical, the very phrase 'family grave' suggesting a desire to inter the dead with, or near to, their ancestors. This is not to suggest, however, that the working classes were indifferent to confessional identity. As Sarah Williams notes, working-class patterns of belief were typified by 'undenominalisation' but this did not prevent affiliation with particular churches. Thus, an institution could be described as 'our church' on account of 'all my family's been married there'. Identification with a church might also derive from spatial ties, communal customs or a popular clergyman. Moreover, the administration of charitable relief and a 'kind' religious figure were likely to foster associations with the institution they represented.[18] Similarly loose associations probably influenced decision making with regard to the interment of the dead.

For some, however, the choice of burial ground represented a positive expression of spiritual identity and conscious membership of a religious community. Notably, the Burial Act 1880 permitted members of Catholic or Nonconformist churches to be interred in consecrated Anglican ground by the minister of their choice. Even this represented a compromise because it located the dead firmly within the context of the Established Church once the funeral service was over. When John Kelly's Catholic mother died in 1913, there was no denominational burial ground in their local town, Horwich, whilst the cost of a hearse to the Catholic burial ground in the next town was prohibitively expensive. Rather than inter his wife in the local Anglican burial ground, Kelly senior asked his workmates (policemen) to assist in conveying the coffin to the distant Catholic grave. It seems unlikely that his colleagues all shared his Catholicism, yet their compliance with the request suggests compassion and sympathy with his loss. It also implies that they respected the importance the elder Kelly, and his wife, invested in a funeral with the appropriate clergy and interment in a space which intimated membership of a denominational community. In acceding to the Kellys' request, they also made implicit assertions about the community of their occupation: they were 'a close knit body of men' who 'gathered round when you

[17] LRO MBH 42/1, 30 April 1902.
[18] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 97–100, 139–42.

needed it'.[19] Fulfilling obligations to the confessional identity of the deceased confirmed that the dead had been buried with dignity. Mrs Bruce, a Catholic, died in 1887 whilst her husband, a Protestant sailor, was away at sea. On account of her religious persuasion, Mrs Bruce's in-laws refused to pay for her funeral and she was buried in a pauper grave in the Catholic Ford Cemetery at Liverpool. On returning home, her husband applied to the cemetery authorities to have her body exhumed and reinterred in a private grave in the same cemetery as he wished to 'pay credit' to his wife's memory and her religion.[20] Implicit in Bruce's reasoning was not only a desire to honour the religion of his wife, but, also, to acknowledge that Catholicism was integral to her dignity, identity and his memories of her. Of course, as a Protestant, it is questionable whether Bruce expected to be buried with her at a later date.

The interment of family members in different burial space raised practical and abstract questions pertaining to post-interment commemoration and notions of celestial reunion. With reference to a surviving spouse, failure to inter the dead in accordance with their confessional beliefs could prove a formidable source of self-recrimination. On a more abstract level, interment of spouses with different confessional rites not only signified conflicting doctrinal beliefs concerning the last judgement, but it also meant that spouses could not be interred in a 'family' grave. This carried sentimental implications, not least because it militated against all possibility of re-creating the family unit in death and crushed flights of melancholic romance concerning lying together in eternity.[21] Of course, separate burial also necessitated extra expenditure on account of purchasing additional grave space.

Equally important, religious affiliation could provoke bitter argument among the bereaved. Florence Atherton, born in 1898, suggested that her father's death was overshadowed by the resurrection of family antagonism concerning his decision to convert from Anglicanism to marry a Catholic and, subsequently, practise his wife's faith. When he died, his Protestant relations displayed open hostility to his Catholic family, refusing either to assist with or attend his funeral.[22] Conversely, the desire to inter relatives or friends from different religious communities in denominational space could inflame sensitivity to religious privilege. When Miss Burford, a Protestant, died in Barnstaple in March 1900 she was interred in a Catholic grave by her friend Miss Oatway. On

[19] Man. OH Transcript, John Kelly, Tape 82.
[20] Licence refused on account of subsequent interments in the grave. PRO HO45/9955/ V8622, correspondence between October 1887 and March 1888.
[21] McDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 228–75.   [22] T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 114.

discovering the religious affiliation of Miss Burford, the local Catholic priest protested to the burial board and the Home Office that the inter- ments of Anglicans and Nonconformists were 'constantly taking place' in ground set aside for Catholics.[23] When a Catholic widow was found to have buried her Protestant husband in a Catholic grave in Kirkdale Cemetery in Liverpool in December 1900, Catholic cemetery officials similarly complained to the Home Secretary.[24] Despite the legality of multi-faith interments in confessional space, the Home Secretary advised, in both cases, that graves set aside for a particular religion ought to be preserved for exclusive use to avoid rancour.[25]

As with other mourning rites, sensitivity to religious privilege was thrown into relief whenever threatened. Deliberate exclusion of the corpse from consecrated or denominational ground impinged upon the dignity of the dead and inferred marginalisation in life. For instance, the consignment of the hanged felon to an unconsecrated and quick-limed grave emphasised the unchristian crime of the dead.[26] The ignoble burial of suicide victims in unconsecrated ground until 1823 proclaimed their transgression of social mores and the heathen nature of self-murder.[27] In a similar vein, perceived slights on confessional identity through the use and location of burial space challenged positive associations with inter- ment in denominational land. When Joseph Moss, elected representative for St Peter's ward in Liverpool, called his fellow guardians and local Catholic priests to account for the undignified burial of Catholic paupers in a stone quarry, he unwittingly provoked cries of outrage from his Catholic constituents.[28] In the debates that ensued, the issue of pauper burial was almost entirely subsumed to the alleged impropriety of Moss, a Jew, appointing himself the spokesman of the Catholic poor. As one guardian, Mr Roberts, commented, 'Protestants, Jews and other people' had no right to interfere with Catholic burial practice.[29] A letter to the editor of the *Liverpool Daily Courier*, signed somewhat remarkably 'St Peter', declared that a burial ground 'adopted and approved by the respected priests of the Catholic community' would meet the approval of their flock. It would, the letter continued, be 'Jew-dicious' of Moss to withdraw his 'untenable' charges of indignity and inhumanity. Moss was

[23] BALS AF 6/40, 8 May 1900.
[24] As no Protestant ceremony had been held over the grave, the Secretary of State ruled that no violation of Catholic privilege had occurred. PRO HO45/9914/B21512A, December 1900.
[25] BALS AF 6/40, 22 May 1900 and PRO HO45/9914/B21512A.
[26] Gatrell, *Hanging Tree*, 87.   [27] Anderson, *Suicide*, 269–82.
[28] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 October 1895, 3, and *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 October 1895, 5.
[29] *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 October 1895, 3.

not only a false champion of Catholic rights (that his complaints coincided with a forthcoming election fostered claims he was merely seeking votes), a Jew had no right to adopt Catholic issues as his own.[30] The slight on his own religion did not escape Moss who construed it as a 'vindictive' and 'sneering' gesture which was 'beneath the contempt of every honest man'.[31] That no-one canvassed the opinion of Catholic paupers on the matter is not, perhaps, surprising, yet the scandal highlights the potential conflict between loyalty to the burial ground of one's church and the indignities of a grave in a stone quarry. As the previous chapter outlined, pauper burial circumvented the autonomy of the bereaved in articulating care for the dead. In this sense, the ability to inter the dead in a denominational grave, however unconventional or undignified, represented at least one facet of the deceased's identity. Indeed, access to a grave with specific confessional rites and clergy could adopt extra significance when other aspects of identity and autonomy were threatened.

With high numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants, sectarian feelings in cities like Liverpool ran high. Criticism that public bodies were biased against Catholics and failed to recognise non-Anglican religious rights in schools, workhouses and hospitals sat alongside deep-seated rivalries between English Anglican and Irish Catholic communities. Burial privileges were an inevitable extension of this. Despite denominational divisions, the proclamation of religious identity in the shared space of the cemetery could provoke antagonism not only between faiths, but, also, with cemetery officials. Notably, the funerals of Orangemen in Anfield Cemetery in the late 1870s sparked concern among the Select Vestry that large crowds and political speeches at funerals compromised the sanctity of the ground.[32] Although cemetery officials framed their warnings to the Orange order by alluding to the sanctity of the ground, the prospect of large numbers of Orangemen loudly tramping through multi-denominational cemeteries can hardly have been viewed as conducive to the promotion of good feeling between Catholics and Protestants. Nonetheless, the Select Vestry continued to permit funerals with hymns and rites particular to the Orange order (such as bowing thrice over the grave). Cynically, this reflects the Protestant membership of Liverpool's Select Vestry.[33] More optimistically, the leniency towards allowing religious and political bodies openly to

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[30] *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 5 October 1895, 7.
[31] Letter to *Liverpool Daily Courier*, 9 October 1895, 6.
[32] LVRO 353 PAR, 23 March 1876.
[33] In the early 1880s, the Vestry was regularly charged with bigotry on account of their refusal to appoint a Catholic chaplain for the indoor poor: *Liberal Review*, 12 June 1880, 6, and *Liberal Review*, 3 July 1880, 9. Likewise, there was no Catholic member on the

express their identity signifies a willingness to acknowledge the multiple meanings invested in the funeral and in burial space itself.

That many Catholics in Liverpool were of Irish origin also highlights the potential for denominational burial ground to represent a forum for the expression and affirmation of an ethnic identity. Access to full confessional rites within denominational space permitted the expression of religious, national and political identities, not only in the context of the cemetery but in an English anti-Catholic environment also.[34] Similarly, Belgians in Bolton at the beginning of the First World War formed committees to provide graves for fellow refugees.[35] Ostensibly, this represented a desire to facilitate 'decent' (as opposed to pauper) burial, but it also suggested an impulse to affirm a community of nationality within a foreign landscape. The burial of a Muslim man from Cairo in the Liverpool Necropolis in 1891 with full Islamic interment rites (conducted by the Liverpool Muslim Congregation) similarly signified an assertion of an ethnic cultural identity in addition to a religious affiliation.[36] As Gerdian Jonker has suggested, traditional burial rites (secular and spiritual) adopt extra meaning in a migrant culture. In the act of recreating ethnic customs in a new environment, identity is not only confirmed, it is perpetuated. The funeral teaches individuals how to deal with death and burial in a foreign landscape: 'Together, [migrants] might be able to conjure up a picture of the past which suits the present and enables the actors to shape the event.'[37] Thus, burial ground provides a shared space and a history through which individuals can reaffirm and re-create multiple identities.

Public space, private loss

Perimeter walls and by-laws defined the burial ground as a public space for the disposal of the dead; they also represented physical and metaphorical barriers to separate and protect the bereaved from the clamour of life. In turn, the location of the mourner at the resting place of the

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Select Vestry at the time of Moss's claims against the Vestry. Keen to deflect Moss's charges of intolerance, the Vestry pledged to appoint a Catholic member as soon as possible. *Liverpool Daily Post*, 9 October 1895, 3.

[34] J. Smith, 'Class, Skill and Sectarianism in Glasgow and Liverpool 1880–1914' in R. J. Morris (ed.), *Class, Power and Social Structure in British Nineteenth Century Towns* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986), 158–215.

[35] BALS ABCF 15/28, c. February 1915.   [36] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 4 April 1891, 6.

[37] Jonker, 'Death, Gender and Memory', 187–201. See also M. Sodipo, *Cultural Attitudes to Death and Burial* (Liverpool: Liverpool City Council Educational Opportunities Initiative in L8, 1995).

deceased facilitated conceptualisations of a private space where personal languages of loss, identity and remembrance found ready expression. The two functions of the burial ground were inextricable, and when the regulation of the cemetery as a public space was compromised, censure was framed with reference to the significance of burial ground as a private place where death and grief presided. Conversely, personal biographies and individual stories of love and loss were made public via the head-stone, the floral tribute and the visit to the grave. At a more abstract level, burial ground held associations with sanctity and genealogy prompting personal reflection and feelings of tranquillity, whilst the language of the 'family grave' drew on comforting notions of celestial reunion.[38] As Hannah Mitchell reflected, the graveyard was 'the cradle of my race', inseparable from 'a feeling of peace and rest as one who came home after a long absence'.[39]

In prompting thoughts of the dead, burial space encouraged contemplation of life. Indeed, it is significant that Gissing ended his rather bleak novel *The Nether World* in a cemetery. For his heroine Jane, 'all days were sacred' to the memory of her grandfather. Yet on each anniversary of his burial, she finished work early and made the long journey to the cemetery, as did her erstwhile companion, Sidney Kirkwood. Standing at the graveside, Jane reflects on the loss of her grandfather in addition to the loss of Kirkwood's love for her; Jane's mourning is not confined to the dead man, but includes mourning for the past and a vanished future.[40] The poignancy of the image exemplifies the cemetery as the site for commemoration and expressions of hope, disappointment and fortitude. Yet Gissing's ending may not be as desolate as it appears. Undoubtedly, burial space could prompt reflection on love lost, lives not lived and on the struggle for existence. For Lewis Jones, the burial ground signified the past and was depressing: the headstone represented little more than a 'symbol of the corpse, an advertisement of decay' whilst 'withered' floral tributes were as dead as the bodies they commemorated.[41] Yet burial space could represent new beginnings as well as endings or, at least, facilitate new understandings of the past, present and future. At a very literal level, Philip Inman was still an infant when his father died and only became acquainted with the older man's biography when he accidentally stumbled upon his gravestone during a childhood trip to the churchyard.[42] More abstractly, Gissing's references to the cemetery in springtime seem to suggest that burial space can represent renewal as well

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[38] See Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 506.   [39] Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, 60–1.
[40] Gissing, *Nether World*, 391.   [41] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 66.
[42] Inman, *No Going Back*, 12.

as death. Notably, Gissing suggests that in acknowledging that her old life has passed away, Jane must grasp the opportunity of regeneration. In this sense, the cemetery landscape prompts the reader to recognise the danger of inaction and passivity.

In less cerebral terms, the burial ground also provided a superb landscape for recreational pursuits, especially in an urban environment. Richard Hillyer recalled that the churchyard in Edwardian Billington was frequented on Sundays by leisurely walkers who stopped to read headstones. This was not considered a morbid pastime but represented an 'approved occupation', the gates to the ground remaining open until seven in summer.[43] Indeed, most churchyards and cemeteries opened their gates on Sundays and during the long evenings of summer months to allow families to take advantage of leisure time.[44] The popularity of the cemetery as a recreational ground was not, however, always compatible with the perceived sanctity of the space. In May 1881 William Wortley, superintendent at Anfield Cemetery in Liverpool, lamented that people were using the burial ground as a thoroughfare and spoiling the 'quiet and orderliness' of the place.[45] This impinged upon reverence for the dead and impeded the role of the cemetery as a refuge for the bereaved. In 1896 Wortley again complained of the 'especially troublesome' behaviour of youths aged between seventeen and twenty who 'seem to make the cemetery a meeting place' on Sunday afternoons, wandering around in groups, 'talking and laughing in an unseemly manner and lying in the long grass and under the trees and sitting on the memorials'. Children and 'young lads' from neighbourhoods flanking the cemetery were becoming 'very troublesome', 'climbing and swinging on the trees, stealing flowers and throwing stones at the fences, knocking off the paint and marking the walls'. To make matters worse, these 'unruly spirits' merely jeered at those who remonstrated with them, moving Wortley to propose that they be refused entry to the cemetery between three and five on Sunday afternoons. This would, he argued, 'prevent the cemetery becoming a meeting place for lounging youths, whose gossip, fun and silly nonsense, even when moderate, is offensive to people who wish quietly to visit the burial place of their dear ones'. The juxtaposition of 'gangs' and 'crowds' of youths with 'respectable people' who 'wished to visit their graves' indicates Wortley's perception that burial ground could only be used properly when traversed as a landscape for grief, reflection and commemoration. It might also demonstrate Wortley's familiarity with negative

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[43] GRO P317a PC 31/1, Stow-on-the-Wold Burial Board minutes, 6 October 1896 and 23 March 1897.
[44] Ibid., 23 March 1897.   [45] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/1, 3 May 1881.

representations of youth culture generated by a series of moral panics about 'gangs' in the 1890s. Indeed, Wortley claimed he was not alone in his opinions; numerous 'respectable folk' had also complained about the youths' 'very unseemly' behaviour.[46]

Perceived problems relating to inappropriate behaviour stretched beyond Liverpool and the nineties' moral panic about youth gangs. During the spring of 1879 Bacup Burial Board resolved to print notices warning against 'disorderly conduct' within the ground.[47] In the summer of 1887 Farnworth Burial Board contracted a Sunday watchman to monitor behaviour in the cemetery.[48] Officials at Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire, tightened the security of their cemetery by adding new locks to gates in September 1895. In May 1901 they ordered a notice board to be erected in the ground warning that proceedings would be taken against anyone found damaging property. In July 1900 the board had sought the appointment of a constable to the ground. One year later, they again called the attention of the police to disruptive behaviour within the cemetery.[49] Ironically, it was the leafy peacefulness of the cemetery that attracted youths, especially in urban environments, to utilise the ground as a recreational space. Moreover, with rows of headstones and monuments, burial grounds were ideal locations for playing hide and seek.[50] This is not to suggest, however, that energetic youths held no concept of respect for the dead. Despite the supposed irreverence towards the sanctity of the cemetery, youths rarely harmed or 'desecrated' graves, even those who otherwise happily threw stones at cemetery property. Damage to memorials was limited to the theft of flowers from graves, a very mild form of 'grave-robbery' compared to more sensational cases of desecration. In this sense at least, children and adolescents seemed to retain a perception, however vague, that the actual resting place of the dead was special, if not necessarily sacred.

Nevertheless, the 'frequent pilfering' of flowers from graves was distressing for the bereaved.[51] In May 1889 Colne Burial Board ruled that notices would be posted in 'some conspicuous parts' of the cemetery warning persons against 'trespassing' on the grass and destroying or stealing flowers and shrubs from cemetery land.[52] The extent of disorderly conduct and theft prompted some burial authorities to solicit

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[46] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/2, 18 June 1896.   [47] LRO MBBa 3/4, 27 May 1879.

[48] BALS AF 2/16, 29 April 1887.

[49] GRO P317a PC31/1, 17 September 1895, 23 March 1897, 26 July 1900, 2 May 1901 and 11 July 1901.

[50] Inman, *No Going Back*, 12.

[51] BALS AB 13/1/8, 14 July 1898. See also *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 12 September 1891, 6.

[52] LRO MBCo 4/2, 9 May 1889.

extra assistance in maintaining order in the ground. In June 1879 Middleton and Thornham Burial Board resolved to appoint a policeman to patrol the cemetery on Sunday afternoons for the duration of the summer months.[53] In February 1891, they agreed to post placards promising a reward of ten shillings to persons offering information leading to the prosecution of flower thieves.[54] Eighteen months later, they contracted extra watchmen for a trial period in an attempt to catch the thieves at work.[55] By June 1895, the board petitioned local police to supplement their own watchmen in supervising entry and conduct within the ground.[56] Most of those apprehended for stealing flowers were children, prompting some burial boards to prohibit entry to the grounds to children under ten unless accompanied by a parent.[57] Of course, the prevalence of children among flower thieves may mean that adults were more skilful at avoiding detection or were simply unscrupulous in the use of their offspring. Despite having caught children in the act of stealing flowers, the superintendent of Cheltenham Cemetery implied that adults were orchestrating the thefts to obtain materials for decorating their own graves. Instigating plans to check such misdemeanours, the superintendent recommended that visitors to the cemetery be asked to consult with him before being allowed to 'do up a grave' in flowers, ribbons and wreaths.[58] Arguably, this plan would permit warnings of thefts to be issued to apparently respectable mourners whilst persons of a suspicious character could be questioned about the origin of their grave goods.

Despite the distress occasioned by flower theft, however, child culprits tended to be treated with relative leniency. When Mary May appeared before Liverpool magistrates in 1887 for stealing a bouquet of roses from a grave at Anfield Cemetery, her crime was viewed in the light of having 'fallen into bad hands'. Her father promised to reform her and Mary was released with a mild scolding.[59] Edward Billington, a boy called before Bacup Burial Board for stealing flowers in July 1880, was discharged with only an 'admonitory reprimand' on theft and trespass.[60] In 1903, Middleton and Thornham Burial Board experimented with a 'naming and shaming' policy, inducing culprits to make a public apology in the local newspaper.[61] Bolton Burial Board experimented with pressing

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[53] LRO MBM 3/2, 4 June 1879.   [54] LRO MBM 3/2, 5 February 1891.
[55] LRO MBM 3/2, 1 September 1892.   [56] LRO MBM 3/2, 4 July 1895.
[57] LRO MBM 3/3, 4 June 1896 and BALS AF 6/134/2, Farnworth Cemetery Rules and Regulations 1909.
[58] GRO CBR D2/2/1, 26 August 1904, 24 May 1907, 20 August 1909 and 26 July 1911.
[59] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/1, 28 April 1887.   [60] LRO MBBa 3/4, 27 July 1880.
[61] LRO MBM 3/3, 3 September 1903.

thieves to make a donation to the local Infirmary Fund and giving grave owners the opportunity to chastise the culprit. When these schemes failed, the board turned to shaming the thieves publicly; offenders were induced to sign a submission of their crime which was subsequently posted in public.[62] Thus, in July 1887 Alice Cooper signed a declaration stating that she had been detected 'plucking flowers' from a grave in Heaton Cemetery, an offence for which she was liable to a penalty of five pounds. On paying the costs for publication of the notice and expressing 'sorrow' for her offence, the board overlooked legal prosecution. The submission was then posted on notice boards at the gates of the cemetery.[63]

The admonishment of flower thieves was rarely framed in a terminology of 'desecration'. Furthermore, chastisement resembled that meted out to youths who plucked flowers in municipal parks.[64] As with the children who used cemetery space as a leisure facility, it seems unlikely that flower thieves deliberately intended to dishonour the dead, especially as burial plots and headstones were left unharmed. Indeed, as the superintendent of Cheltenham Cemetery suspected, the significance of floral tributes as a symbol of loss could motivate theft. Maggie Freeman, aged seven, attended a meeting of the Middleton and Thornham Burial Board with her mother in June 1905 to answer charges of stealing flower glasses. Far from committing a malicious act, Maggie claimed to have taken the glasses to place on the grave of her brother. According to her mother, the child had simply wished to replicate a gesture of remembrance and was not aware of the consequences of her actions.[65] Alternatively, flowers may have been a rare and lovely sight, prompting an impulse to own them. As a child, the first flowers Sam Shaw ever beheld were planted in a graveyard: 'enthralled' by the flora, Sam was 'overwhelmed with a desire to possess one of the prettiest blooms'.[66] Thus, sensitivity to the cemetery's dual purpose as a public space and as a landscape for grief was pervasive, even for those who apparently transgressed notions of reverence.

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[62] In 1883 they accepted a 'donation' of five shillings to the Bolton Infirmary Fund in lieu of prosecution. BALS AB 13/1/4, 9 August 1883. In 1886 the Board gave the grave owner a say in the punishment of the offender. BALS AB 13/1/5, 5 May 1887.

[63] BALS ABZ 3/7, 4 August 1887.

[64] For instance, Charles Henry Cornwall was required to sign a submission on account of plucking flowers in Heywood Recreation Ground. BALS AB 13/1/4, 4 September 1884. Richard Standish was required to sign a submission when caught trespassing on the strawberries in Bolton Park. AB 13/1/5, 17 May 1890.

[65] LRO MBM 3/3, 1 June 1905.   [66] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 8.

The neglected grave

For some, the emphasis on sanctity and respect for the dead could render the commemorative function of the cemetery maudlin. The satirical journal *Porcupine*, in June 1878, found the cemetery, including the head-stones, mawkish and comical: 'Here we are at the gate. Beside it, embedded in the wall, is a stone tablet, graven with a legend in black letters. Expectation is foiled, however, for the mural tablet commemorates nothing more important than the hours during which the cemetery is open . . . It is in keeping with the spirit of the place.' The message, like the cemetery itself, was 'so sombre' yet 'so commonplace'. Speculation that this oppressive and 'abominable' culture of mourning was driven by commerce consolidated the author's searing criticism of the cemetery as a site for hypocrisy rather than grief.[67]

The cynicism of the article was, perhaps, unfair in its unrelenting negation of the cemetery as a landscape for sincere expressions of loss. Nevertheless, as a space of conspicuous consumption, the only tangible languages of remembrance in the cemetery were those expressed by mourners with sufficient resources to purchase appropriate symbols of loss: the headstone and the floral tribute. This extends beyond recognition that the grand, prominent monuments to death signified a wealthy elite whilst pauper graves represented the marginalised. Many burial plots, notably 'second-' and 'third-class' graves, fell in between these two extremes and were conspicuous only by their uniformity. Moreover, notions of cemeteries as gardens of remembrance were inextricable from an assumption that grave owners would maintain the burial plot and keep headstones in good condition. When graves fell into disrepair, the implication was that the deceased were forgotten. Despite this negative association, burial boards across the north-west repeatedly bemoaned the neglect of graves in their grounds. Some grave owners never even installed a headstone over their burial plot. Others appeared to overlook the sentimentality of the cemetery altogether, selling or loaning the deeds to their grave. The burial plot thus remained a commodity even after interment had taken place. Ostensibly, such apparent indifference may support charges that working-class cultures of death were little more than exercises in revelry and display. Yet it seems reasonable to suppose that, for some at least, material circumstances impeded the ability to purchase a headstone and wreaths of flowers. Rather, financial priorities focused on securing decent interment. Once this obligation was fulfilled,

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[67] *Porcupine*, 1 June 1878, 134.

the bereaved turned to prioritise the needs of the living. This is not to suggest that remembrance of the dead was neglected but, rather, that commemoration adopted flexible, abstract and personal forms, none of which need fix on the cemetery.

The purchase of exclusive rights to a burial plot permitted the interment of several corpses over a period of time and the installation of a headstone. However, a minority of grave owners, almost always of third-class graves, failed to erect any headstone or memorial at all. In March 1899, for instance, Mary Fare explained to Bolton Burial Board that she had not been in a position to 'afford any stone' for the grave of her husband who had died some years earlier.[68] Stroud Burial Board in Gloucestershire maintained a list of purchased graves where no memorial had been installed.[69] The minutes of Stretford Burial Board near Manchester suggest that grave owners were continually called to account for failure to install a headstone. The board had taken the unusual step of stipulating in its regulations that ownership of any private grave which remained without a headstone six months after the first interment would revert back to the board.[70] As the clerk noted in July 1888, 'repeated applications' to the families concerned made little impact when 'extenuating circumstances' prohibited the purchase of memorial paraphernalia.[71] Faced with pleas from between one and fifteen bereaved families attending its monthly meetings, the board resolved to exercise discretion in enforcing the rule, granting the majority of grave owners a further six months in which to install a headstone.[72] Two decades later, the board retained the regulation but continued to treat 'each case on its merits', frequently renewing extensions again and again.[73]

Even with the buffer of burial insurance, funerals left many working-class families in debt. That graves had to be given time to settle before any headstone could be installed meant that memorialisation often fell outside accounts for funeral costs. At Morecambe, near Lancaster, the cost of installing a basic headstone in the 1880s ranged between ten and fifteen shillings depending on the location of the grave.[74] Thus, resources

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[68] BALS ABZ 3/1/7, 24 March 1899.   [69] GRO DA 209/22.

[70] After enquiries to boards across the north-west, Stretford concluded in 1906 that they were the only board to insist on memorial installation. LRO MBS 2/20, 9 January 1906.

[71] LRO MBS 2/18, 16 July 1888.

[72] Ibid. Since the cemetery opened in 1885, almost every monthly board meeting was typified by the consideration of pleas from grave owners to extend the period for the installation of a headstone. See LRO MBS 2/19, 18 September 1900, 12 November and 10 December 1901 and 11 March 1902.

[73] LRO MBS 2/20, 9 January 1906.

[74] MBMo 2/2. See, for instance, 7 February 1884 and 20 May 1884.

accumulated for interment were usually spent long before the bereaved contemplated the additional expense of a headstone, a trend which Stretford Burial Board appear to have accepted as almost inevitable. The installation of a memorial was, therefore, something which bore little relevance to immediate grief and could be postponed indefinitely without necessarily diminishing the loss felt for the deceased. Indeed, the absence of a headstone did not preclude a visit to the cemetery or the commemoration of the dead at their resting place. In 1904 one mother recollected how she had visited the grave of her son (Arthur Jenkins; died aged five) in the third-class ground since his funeral five years previously, 'putting flowers on it from time to time'. Whilst there was no formal memorial marking the spot, a glass jar containing a funeral card proclaimed the identity of her son and distinguished his resting place.[75] The improvisation of memorials suggests that for some families, simply marking the grave carried significance as a form of remembrance, no matter how makeshift. Yet cheap memorials often conflicted with municipal ideals of the cemetery aesthetic. The parents who placed a small makeshift cross over the grave of their child in Cheltenham Cemetery, June 1908, found themselves at odds with the board who insisted that all memorials, regardless of size or permanency, had to be approved against common regulations before they were installed.[76] More arbitrarily, Preston Cemetery went so far as to remove any flowers planted upon graves which they considered 'unsightly'.[77] The desire to regulate individual grave space was inextricable from an impulse to inscribe civic ideals onto public burial space as a whole.

For burial board members, deviation from normative commemorative structures or the neglect of graves represented a direct affront not only to the appearance and safety of the cemetery, but, also, to the ideals of remembrance it was supposed to promote. Cemetery officials responded to apparent disaffection with occasionally heavy-handed measures. In 1890, Bolton Burial Board resolved to remove and store any headstone which appeared in an unsatisfactory condition until the owner or person interested undertook to restore it.[78] A report by the chair of Stretford Burial Board in September 1900 stated that private graves in the cemetery had a 'very neglected appearance' and that grave owners ought to be 'enforce[d]' to keep them 'in a proper condition'.[79] Middleton and Thornham Board noted in the spring of 1910 that most graves were neglected, whilst headstones were in a 'dilapidated and dangerous

[75] PRO HO45/10305/119620, May 1904.   [76] GRO CBR D2/2/1, June 1908.
[77] Preston Cemetery Rules and Regulations 1915, BALS ABCF 15/28.
[78] BALS AB 3/1/5, 11 December 1890.   [79] LRO MBS 2/19, 18 September 1900.

condition'.[80] In 1907 the superintendent of Cheltenham Cemetery bemoaned the appearance of the ground, proposing that the burial board employ several men to overhaul it.[81] Such was the condition of Preston Cemetery in 1906 that the board threatened drastic measures: an advertisement in the local press stated that most private grave and vault spaces were 'untidy, ill-kept and neglected' whilst memorial paraphernalia (such as boundary stones, iron railings, vases) were 'in bad condition and out of repair' and bore a most 'disorderly appearance'. The notice, dated 11 April, gave grave owners and persons interested in such spaces until 30 June to put their graves in 'proper order and good repair and condition'. Failure to do so would result in all items which were unsightly or damaged being removed, whilst all graves which appeared to be neglected would be grassed over.[82] It should be emphasised that such measures were enacted with reference to the general appearance of the cemetery rather than exceptional graves.

From 1896, Bolton Burial Board repeatedly issued postcards to grave owners requesting them to put their graves in order.[83] In May 1898, the superintendent of Bolton cemeteries, William Longworth, suggested that the board deal with neglected graves by grassing over the 2,000 graves at Tonge Cemetery which were full or only had room for one more interment. Any shrubs or memorials on the burial plots could be removed to a spare piece of land to be reclaimed should grave owners wish. Many of the overgrown plots lacked headstones. Reviewing the situation one year later, only seven owners had restored their graves, claimed memorials and paid the board arrears for the upkeep of the plot. Nevertheless, rumours that the board were removing paraphernalia from all burial plots in Bolton's two cemeteries prompted a flood of complaints.[84] In response to the allegations, the board placed a notice in the local press outlining their policy with respect to the neglect of graves: new grave owners were warned that the costs to the Corporation for maintaining burial plots would be passed onto them 'and no grave or vault will be opened upon which any such cost remains unpaid'. This threat implied that as arrears accumulated, it became less likely that grave owners would (or could) pay outstanding charges to the board. Yet the

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[80] LRO MBM 3/3, 7 April 1910.

[81] GRO CBR D2/2/1, 22 February 1907 and 22 March 1907.

[82] LRO UDCl 58/1, c. December 1919.

[83] BALS AB13/1/8, 30 March 1899; taken from a report entitled 'Keeping Graves in Order' by William Longworth, on the Burial Board's policies towards neglected graves.

[84] Ibid. This can, perhaps, be related to the issue of ownership and choice: passive neglect of graves was no doubt construed differently from remaining inactive whilst others destroyed graves.

inclusion of new grave spaces in measures to deal with neglect suggests that ambivalence towards the resting place of the dead began soon after burial. Placing a notice in the local press in March 1899, Longworth notified owners that unless dilapidated graves were put in order within twenty-one days they would be 'soddened down'. Neglected graves with curbs and headstones would be planted with ivy and the cost charged to the owner. Those who wished to intervene in the landscaping of their graves were advised to give the Corporation notice of their intention to put their plots in order. With a few exceptions, the 1,465 respondents to the notice (806 owning graves at Tonge Cemetery, 659 owning graves at Heaton) claimed that they had maintained the upkeep of their burial plot. However, Longworth reported that when owners were taken to the cemetery, they had been unable to locate their grave spaces.[85]

Whilst it is possible that some grave owners deliberately misinformed the board regarding the maintenance of their graves, it also seems plausible to suggest that in the act of remembering the burial plot (and by implication, the dead), grave owners were inclined to invoke a language of maintenance not from a desire to deceive but from a wish to believe that the deceased were cared for. The insistence of burial boards on the installation of headstones and grave maintenance highlights a municipal discourse of appropriate commemorative practice which no doubt permeated many people's experiences of bereavement: caring for a grave fostered associations with respect for the memory of the dead. Conversely, the very term 'neglected grave' was loaded with negative connotations for the physical form of the burial plot and abstract notions of loss and commemoration. Yet equations between the neglected grave and the forgotten dead made no concession to the possibility that the grave's significance for grief and remembrance was temporary. Bereavement was not a fixed state, nor was commemoration restricted to the cemetery. Indeed, the initiatives undertaken by many burial boards to introduce fees for the care of graves in perpetuity rested on the implicit assumption that, with the passage of time, grave owners would be less inclined to tend their graves.[86] In 1906 the superintendent for Cheltenham Cemetery called for the burial board to instigate charges for keeping graves in order as 'Nearly every other burial board does this and has a scale of charges.'[87] Churchyards likewise employed

[85] Ibid.
[86] See, for instance, LRO MBMo 2/1, 23 March 1880, UDRO 3/2, 23 July 1883, Haslingden Cemetery Fees, 1909, MBH 42/2, Chorley Cemetery Fees, 1913, MBCh 29/15, Haslingden Cemetery Fees, 1917, MBH 42/3, and Stroud Cemetery Fees, GRO DA 209/15.
[87] GRO CBR D2/2/1, August 1906.

persons to maintain headstones: 'scouring away to rescue each stone from its long neglect'.[88] A proposal by Birkenhead Council in 1888 to build new greenhouses indicated the success of a scheme whereby the burial committee charged five shillings a year to grave owners for keeping plots in the town's cemetery decorated with fresh flowers throughout the summer months.[89]

Clearly, correlations between memory and the tended grave were tenuous and, sometimes, misleading. To a point, the bereaved were not expected to visit the grave of a loved one as their grief became less keen (the premise on which leasehold graves were founded). On a practical level, grave owners also died or moved away.[90] Moreover, as Bolton Burial Board conceded, 'certain people of the poorer classes' lacked the time, energy and finance to maintain their graves to the cemetery's expectations. For the poorer grave owner, Longworth suggested that the grave be grassed over, retaining a small circular bed of two feet diameter which would entail little labour for the owner.[91] This also implied that the owner of a cheap grave would not pay for the municipality to oversee the upkeep of the plot. Less obviously, perhaps, the inclusion of 'persons interested' in public notices concerning the upkeep of graves suggests a perception of the burial plot as holding significance beyond the immediate grave-owning family. In this sense, the burial plot occupied a flexible position between public and private space, representing the identity of an individual, the location for private remembrance, yet situated in a public place where individuals other than immediate kin or grave owners were free to visit, remember and grieve.

The impetus to maintain the appearance of the cemetery was tied to a desire to sustain the moral purpose and sacred associations of the burial ground. It was also inseparable from public health concerns. From the early nineteenth century, sanitary scandals associated with overcrowded burial grounds, pungent stenches and exposed coffins led to the closure and landscaping of most intramural burial grounds. New cemeteries, situated on the outskirts of towns and cities, were promoted as the hygienic alternative to the churchyard teeming with decay. Most of the old churchyards, meanwhile, were transformed into ornamental gardens. From the late 1870s, Liverpool Corporation acquired several burial grounds with the intention of landscaping them as open

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[88] Inman, *No Going Back*, 16.   [89] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 2 June 1888, 7.

[90] For instance, the low response rate to questionnaires sent to grave owners concerning the closure of St James's Cemetery was attributed to the passage of time and original grave owners having died or moved. Reports and Memoranda, c. 1930s, LVRO 352 CEM 3/14/1–4.

[91] BALS AB 13/1/8, 30 March 1899.

spaces.[92] St Martin-in-the-Fields, for instance, was procured in 1878 and transformed from a 'very unsightly and indecent' site into an ornamental garden with walks, fountains, shrubs and flowers.[93] In all but one of the graveyards acquired by Liverpool Corporation, the remains of the dead were left undisturbed. Nevertheless, most of the conversions necessitated the removal or flattening of headstones and memorials. That the Corporation prefaced each of their proposals for conversion with a promise to make detailed plans of the burial plots and copies of memorial inscriptions, to be made available for public consultation, demonstrates an effort to transpose the commemorative role of the burial ground onto different media, thus retaining some gesture of permanence. The Corporation's proposals for closure were invariably promoted as 'for the public benefit' and 'in the interests of public safety' or 'convenience'. Moreover, they persistently met with the 'unanimous approval' of local residents and, presumably, grave owners.[94] In almost all of the sites landscaped by the Corporation, the ground had been closed for interment some three or four decades previously.[95] Thus, those with an interest in a grave had no doubt resolved their grief or died themselves. More importantly, perhaps, they had little to sacrifice in terms of forfeited burial space. Notably, when Liverpool Corporation advertised its intention to close and landscape the Necropolis Cemetery in 1898, grave owners were far from acquiescent. An estimated 600 owners attended a public meeting with the Corporation on the subject of closure, whilst hundreds more failed to gain admission.[96]

Heralded as a model cemetery when it opened in 1825, the Necropolis was, by the 1890s, associated with disease, vermin and a foul stench.[97] Closure and landscaping of the ground necessitated the removal of most headstones and some physical remains. Where the disturbance of corpses was unavoidable (for instance, if land was to be reused in road improvements), the Corporation undertook to advertise

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[92] See Faculty Book, LVRO 352 CEM 1/18/1, for details of acquisitions of burial ground from February 1878 to September 1902.

[93] Ibid.

[94] See, for instance, details relating to acquisition of St Luke's (1885), St James's (1899) and St Peter's (1902) in LVRO 352 CEM 1/18/1. Public meetings were held to advertise the Corporation's intentions at which residents were given the opportunity to lodge protest or complaint. Residents and grave owners were given a further two to three months in which to approach the Corporation with queries or complaints. There is nothing in the records to suggest that anyone ever did.

[95] Faculty Book, LVRO 352 CEM 1/18/1.

[96] City of Liverpool Necropolis Cemetery Removal of Headstones, Report of the Town Clerk (Pickmere) on Resolution of the Graveowners Association, 8 November 1905, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1, 24.

[97] Ibid., 4–6.

their intentions for three successive days in the local press, stating the conditions of removal. The public were allowed two months following publication of these notices in which to contact the Corporation if they wished to move the remains of their deceased to alternative grave space. In such cases, the Corporation promised to bear the cost of removal (to an upper limit of ten pounds) in order to allay fears that graves were being desecrated. Families who wanted to maintain graves as memorials could transfer the remains of the dead, along with their headstones, to alternative grave space for a nominal fee.[98]

Anticipating public hostility to their plans, the Corporation secured the passage of the 1898 Liverpool Corporation Act, a decree which empowered them to oversee the closure of the ground in the interests of 'public advantage'. Yet few grave owners expressed a wish to move the remains of their dead or the memorials installed to commemorate them. Rather, the majority of correspondence with (and complaint to) the Corporation hinged upon claims for the compensation of unused grave space. Unable to ignore the issue of forfeited grave space, the Corporation purchased 297 empty burial plots in Anfield Cemetery in 1900 (at a cost of 500 pounds) for the purpose of compensating owners of graves in the Necropolis which held no more than two bodies.[99] The interests of grave owners were represented by the Graveowners Association who negotiated with the Corporation on the terms and conditions for the allotment of compensatory grave space.[100] Despite these measures, it took the Corporation almost ten years following the closure of the ground to settle matters of compensation and forfeiture with owners of the graves in the Necropolis.[101]

Repeatedly, the Corporation asserted that the closure of the cemetery was 'for the good of the community at large'. Furthermore, they were not 'compelled to accede to the wishes of owners as graveowners' rights only amounted to a licence to bury so long as the burial ground remained open for interments, and that so soon as the cemetery was closed against interments then this licence was revoked'.[102] The town clerk asserted that each complaint and claim for compensation, from 'rich or poor' alike, had been treated with consideration, 'care and patience'.[103] Even

[98] 'The Liverpool Corporation Act, 1898', LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1.
[99] 'Memorandum of Agreement of Removal of Graves, 1901', LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1.
[100] Papers Relating to Allotment of Graves and Removal of Headstones, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1.
[101] Necropolis Letter Book, 20 April 1907, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/3.
[102] Report of the Town Clerk on Resolution of the Graveowners Association, 8 November 1905, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1.
[103] Necropolis Letter Book, 20 April 1907, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/3.

the most 'boisterous' grave owners had left the town hall 'perfectly satisfied' despite the fact that grave owners could not be expected to approve plans for closure 'at a time when the judgement is clouded by sentiment of sorrow and affection'.[104] Compensation for forfeited grave space had been intended as a conciliatory gesture by the Corporation towards 'certain cases of great hardship'. Yet, the clerk argued, the Graveowners Association had shown 'no consideration' for the owners of plots in the third-class division of the cemetery, exemplified by the fact that a number of poorer grave owners had not claimed the compensatory space to which they were entitled.[105]

The apparent acquiescence of some poorer grave owners in forfeiting grave space is curious. Given the cost and significance of the private grave, it seems unlikely that those entitled to compensatory plots would have knowingly sacrificed alternative grave space. However, not only did the Corporation's publication of notices assume that all grave owners read newspapers, the adverts were couched in obscure legal terminology, even in more accessible newspapers such as the *Liverpool Daily Courier*.[106] To a point, the Corporation recognised that poorer grave owners were probably under- or misinformed concerning compensatory rights and took steps to retrieve plots given to the Graveowners Association in an attempt to encourage those owners to approach the municipality.[107] In addition, however, claims for compensation had to be substantiated by documentary evidence of purchase. As the Corporation noted, numbers of those who did apply for a compensatory grave were unable to support their claims with the appropriate documents. Of course, the less scrupulous may have spied an opportunity for a 'free' grave space. Yet the loss of grave deeds was a common problem, especially for families who moved home regularly and/or who lived in small homes without a culture of filing important papers. Indeed, such was the frequency of lost documentation, some burial boards introduced standard fees (1s 6d) for replacement papers.[108]

Overall, however, the concern for the forfeiture of empty grave space as opposed to the fate of remains or memorials suggests that the pecuniary loss entailed in the closure of the Necropolis took precedence over the use of the grave as a permanent point of commemoration. Ostensibly, this 'neglect' implied an indifference to the dead, especially when juxtaposed

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[104] Ibid. The clerk appears to have overlooked the fact that at the time of his statement, the last interment had taken place seven years previously.
[105] Ibid.
[106] The notice was also published in the *Liverpool Mercury* and *Liverpool Daily Post*.
[107] Necropolis Letter Book, 20 April 1907, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/3.
[108] LRO MBBa 3/4, 24 September 1878.

with the minority of those who, 'purely from sentiment', relocated the dead.[109] Yet despite the Corporation's nominal fees, the transfer of remains and memorials at the grave owner's behest represented an extraordinary expense few working-class families would, or could, have budgeted for. Furthermore, as the following chapter demonstrates, expressions of grief and commemoration after interment tended to be located in domestic space: for many, the cemetery was spatially and conceptually distant. Significantly, however, notions of grave maintenance presupposed single ownership of burial plots. Yet the private grave might be shared between families and friends to defray the costs of burial, rendering the identity of those responsible for maintaining it questionable and blunting the desirability of installing a family headstone. Indeed, the multiple ownership of a single grave space epitomises the ambiguity surrounding attitudes towards the grave. First, the willingness to inter the dead in a second-hand grave suggests that pragmatism was prioritised over the perceived prestige of buying a grave of one's own. Costs for burial in a shared grave were significantly diminished: a small fee was, perhaps, paid to the grave owner along with the Corporation's nominal fee for interment.[110] Secondly, co-operation in sharing or parting with grave deeds (and by implication, the dead buried therein) further casts doubt on the significance of the grave in the post-interment period.

Decent burial and the grave as private property

The perception of grave space as a commodity is far removed from the sentimental associations promoted by municipal authorities. Yet as the boom in burial insurance indicates, those with meagre or fluctuating incomes had to adopt pragmatic measures to ensure burial in a private grave. Thus, some families purchased graves in advance of death during times of economic security. The disputes concerning the closure of the Necropolis highlighted a number of graves that had been purchased prior to need.[111] Likewise, the registrar's report for Haslingden

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[109] The removal of remains still had to be processed via the Home Office. The Secretary of State conjectured that those who moved their loved ones from the graves did so for sentimental reasons, a gesture he sympathised with as the Corporation were probably going to turn the cemetery into a recreational space. PRO HO45/9959/V27484, November 1900.

[110] This enabled those with limited resources to secure burials in private graves rather than turn to the parish. See, for instance, Chorley Register of Burial Grants 1885–91 where the majority of grave transfers were either from or to widows, LRO MBCh 56/4.

[111] Report of the Town Clerk, 1905, LVRO 352 CEM 2/6/1, 14.

Cemetery, 1903, noted the purchase of numerous graves which had subsequently remained empty.[112] Stroud Burial Board kept a list of purchased graves where no interment had taken place.[113] Colne Burial Board near Blackburn resolved in 1889 to prohibit the purchase of more than one grave space at a time.[114] The availability of an empty grave soothed anxieties concerning the possibility of an undignified burial in a pauper's plot. Yet it also represented a piece of 'real estate' which could be resold or loaned out in formal and informal systems of exchange.[115]

The acceptance of grave deeds for pledge at the pawnbrokers testifies to the fiscal value of a burial plot; like the wedding ring, the grave carried meaning beyond its economic worth and was, therefore, likely to be redeemed.[116] However, empty grave space could also be sold formally through the burial board. James Broadhurst applied to Bolton Burial Board in 1888 requesting that the registrar sell the remaining space in his grave for 'a small sacrifice'.[117] William Heaton approached the board in 1897 regarding the potential sale of his grave. He had buried one child in the grave but intended to move to York and had no further use for the remaining space. As the plot was situated in a 'choice' location, William suggested the sale might be lucrative.[118] The abandonment of the grave and, implicitly, the child therein suggests a pragmatic rather than sentimental evaluation of the resting place of the dead. Indeed, measured against cultural perceptions of the grave as a locus for remembrance and family reunion, the sale appears callous. Yet the move to York rendered the prospect of burying other family members in Bolton unlikely whilst removing the possibility of regular visits to the cemetery. In such circumstances, the sale of empty space represented not so much indifference to the dead, but, rather, a realistic assessment of the value of the space.

More often, grave owners approached the board to transfer deeds to a grave to a person known to them. That most burial boards included guidelines for transfer of grave ownership in their regulations and printed standardised application forms suggests that the practice was not

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[112] LRO MBH 42/2.   [113] GRO DA 209/22.

[114] LRO MBCo 4/2, 20 November 1889.

[115] In correspondence between James Meadowcroft, a plumber, and Bury Burial Board regarding the ownership of a grave, Meadowcroft repeatedly referred to his grave space as 'real estate'. PRO HO45/10304/118370, October–December 1904.

[116] BOHT, Tape 18, Reference: AL/LSS/A/023. The extra value invested in the grave deeds was not necessarily tied to sentimental attachments to the dead, but could be related to the security of one's own resting place.

[117] BALS ABZ 3/1/4, 28 March 1889.   [118] BALS ABZ 3/1/7, 5 March 1897.

uncommon.[119] Moreover, despite the common ruling that only immediate family could be interred in a single grave, most burial boards exercised a degree of flexibility in permitting the transfer of deeds to extended kin and friends. Notably, for those buying the second-hand grave, the practice significantly reduced interment fees. In May 1886 Matthew Pilkington, a grocer, sold two grave spaces in Chorley Cemetery to Joshua Worthington, an overlooker, for only ten shillings (against an average cost of two pounds).[120] The ease with which deeds could be transferred also enabled owners to loan grave deeds temporarily. James Marsden, a joiner, applied to Bolton Burial Board in 1878 to transfer the deeds to his grave space in Tonge Cemetery for the use of Joseph Peters, a carter. Peters had already borrowed these deeds on a previous occasion to inter a child. It appears the two men later agreed to transfer the deeds permanently to enable Peters to bury the rest of his family together.[121]

Burial space might also be perceived as a communal resource or form of mutual aid, similar to the collections that took place in streets and workplaces to assist the bereaved, involving friends, and distant and close family. In May 1891 Margaret Smith requested that Bolton Burial Board transfer grave deeds that had belonged to her deceased mother to herself as she wished to inter the child of her second cousin, Maggie Caldiley.[122] Grave deeds might also be given as a gift or bequeathed to friends and relatives in wills. Thus, in 1877 Edward Crock wrote to his brother John, a warehouseman, enclosing the deeds to his burial plot in Tonge Cemetery in Bolton: the deeds were 'a gift to you from your ever loving and affectionate brother'.[123] Mary Rowley of Chorley assigned her grave deeds to her sister-in-law Mary Lynn in 1889 as a gesture of 'natural love and affection'.[124] Thomas Hatton, a joiner from Chorley, also assigned his grave deeds in 1890 'in consideration of natural love and affection' to his brother Richard, a wagon builder.[125] Chorley Burial Board printed standardised forms for the transfer of grave deeds between friends and relatives. That these forms narrated the transfers as acts of 'natural' love and affection implies a municipal discourse of grave sharing that assumed such gestures sprang from generosity and mutuality.

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[119] LRO MBH 42/1, MBH 42/2 and MBCh 56/4. It is possible that cemetery authorities' profits suffered from this practice. Indeed, in February 1918 Whitworth Cemetery authority resolved to refuse consent for grave transfer unless 50 per cent of the original fees were paid to the registrar. LRO UDWh 6/1, 6 February 1918.
[120] LRO, Chorley Burial Board Burial Grants Order Book, 8 May 1886.
[121] BRO, Bolton Burial Board Correspondence, ABZ 3/1/1, 1878.
[122] BALS ABZ 3/1/2, 11 May 1891.   [123] BALS ABZ 3/1/2, 7 April 1877.
[124] LRO, Chorley Burial Board Burial Grants Order Book, 1 January 1889.
[125] Ibid., 8 February 1890.

Some grave donors could afford to be munificent with burial space when they no longer had use for it. A grave space purchased by Hannah Bennison in 1874 housed Hannah's husband but was given to Mary Winstanley, her friend and neighbour, when Hannah moved to Sale some years later.[126] When Mrs MacAllister moved to Blackburn in 1900, she notified Bolton Burial Board of her intention to transfer her grave deeds to Mrs Popplewell, 'an old and dear friend of mine'.[127] Interpreting the burial plot as a token of affection indicates a perception of grave space as a valuable commodity. It also suggests that the principal significance of the grave rested in securing a burial space for oneself and loved ones. Moreover, the willingness to donate the deeds to a burial plot in which relatives had been interred indicates a pragmatism in circumstances where the bereaved were no longer in proximity to their dead. This need not imply that donors were careless as to the fate of their dead but that they prioritised the practical value of grave deeds for others.

Petitions to Bolton Burial Board claiming the right to inheritance of grave deeds illustrate the more complex, and occasionally acrimonious, aspects of informal networks of exchange. Some petitioners stated that they had paid the burial expenses of the grave owner in the expectation that their generosity would be reciprocated with the subsequent transfer of grave deeds to themselves. Samuel Davis, for instance, applied to Bolton Burial Board to have the deeds to a grave owned by his uncle's widow, Alice Davis, transferred to himself following the interment of Alice as there were no surviving children from her marriage. Samuel's additional note that he had 'paid all [Alice's] funeral expenses' may well be interpreted as an implicit justification for his claim to the grave.[128] Likewise, Alfred John Goodman, a turner, petitioned the board to resolve a dispute between himself and his brother. Alfred's brother was in possession of the deeds to a grave in which both their parents were interred. Given that Alfred had organised his mother's funeral on behalf of his ailing father and subsequently paid the expenses for his father's interment, he argued that his claim to ownership of the grave was greater.[129]

Clearly, perceptions of grave deeds as a shared resource could create acrimony amongst family members, particularly if there was limited space within the grave in question.[130] Following the burial of James Fletcher in Bolton, the parents of his first wife retained the deeds to his grave. They

126 BALS ABZ 3/1/9, 21 May 1907.   127 BALS ABZ 3/1/3, 24 March 1900.
128 BALS ABZ 3/1/3, no date – c. 1902.   129 BALS ABZ 3/1/8, 24 November 1893.
130 More practical problems also occurred. When the body of Sarah Ellen Hulme (a four-month-old child) was interred in the wrong grave at Farnworth Cemetery, it transpired that her parents had borrowed the grave from a friend, John Mellor, and were unaware of the location of the grave. BALS AF 6/132/3, 6 June 1917.

may have felt they had a higher claim to the grave given that their daughter and two of their grandchildren were also interred there. However, James's second wife applied to the Corporation to have the deeds formally transferred to herself: as a widow with two dependent children and little income, guaranteed grave space would alleviate some financial worry. She made no reference to a desire to be laid to rest with her husband.[131] Lenora Howard applied to Bolton Burial Board in November 1890 requesting intervention in a family dispute concerning deeds to a grave bought by her mother, Mary Ann Howarth, which already held Lenora's father and three of Lenora's children. Prior to her own death, Mary had given the deeds to the grave to her son-in-law, Joseph Lord. Since Mary's burial, however, Lenora's five-year-old child had died and Lenora now requested that she be permitted to inter the child in the grave. Her brother and sister consented to the request but Joseph Lord refused.[132] The desire to bury the child with his siblings may have influenced Lenora's application for the deeds. Yet it is more probable that the availability of space in an existing grave was especially attractive when set against the cost of purchasing a new grave or pauper burial.

Fears for one's own resting place often hindered generosity with grave deeds. In 1890, Ann Gradwell inherited the deeds to her sister's grave in Heaton Cemetery in Bolton which had two spaces available for interment. In accordance with her sister's wishes, Ann loaned the deeds to Mary Nicholson who was to be interred in one of the remaining spaces. A dispute arose between the women when Mary stated her intention to keep the grave deeds to secure burial for herself and her child. Ann's efforts to contest this derived not so much from a desire to be buried with her sister but from the fact that she no longer had an assured resting place.[133] In this sense, the language of the family grave not only drew on claims to ownership of the dead and rotting reunions, it also made wider reference to rights of access, inheritance and anxieties concerning one's own resting place. In 1886 Mary Haslam purchased a grave in Heaton Cemetery in which she was interred in February 1887. Prior to her death, Mary agreed that her sister Sophia Whiteside, a widow with two children, could purchase the remaining space in the grave. Two other sisters consented to the arrangement. Sophia paid Mary four shillings and undertook to

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[131] BALS ABZ 3/1/8, no date – c. 1886.

[132] BALS ABZ 3/1/8, 28 November 1890. In this case, the town clerk stipulated that if Lenora could obtain the signatures of consenting siblings, the grave space would be transferred to her.

[133] BALS ABZ 3/1/8, 17 March 1890.

care for her funeral arrangements. When Mary died, Sophia took the club money (three pounds) and the grave deeds to the undertaker, Dewhurst. Sophia then became ill herself and was 'confined to my bed at the time of the funeral'. Consequently, the undertaker returned the grave deeds to Sophia's brother who then refused to give them to Sophia unless she paid him ten shillings. Sophia had paid one instalment of two shillings and sixpence when her brother stated his intention to keep the grave for his son; he refused to 'give up the grant for anyone'.[134] Clearly, ideals of mutuality and verbal agreements between relatives held little meaning when set against self-interest in the acquisition of guaranteed grave space.

The transfer of grave deeds on both formal and informal levels of exchange illustrates the complexity of attitudes towards the cemetery and cultures of grief and remembrance. The use of grave space as a movable resource also demonstrates that the cultural ideal of the family grave was rather precarious. Reunions within the grave were symbolic, both of kinship ties in life and, as memorial inscriptions were keen to promote, hopes for renewed relationships in the afterlife. Yet the exchange of deeds highlights that for some, the ideal of the family grave was overshadowed by the desire to guarantee burial in a private grave space, even if this necessitated interment in a grave owned by neighbours or distant relatives. Moreover, the squabbles between family members concerning ownership of deeds were the very antithesis of the idealised family grave. This is not to suggest that the desire for reunions with decaying relatives was overlooked, but that such ideals had to be managed in tandem with a pragmatic approach to interment. Furthermore, the shared ownership of grave deeds supports the notion that the funeral took priority in the financial management of burial resources: families were willing to sacrifice the long-term implications of exclusive grave owner- ship provided that sacrifice facilitated the burial of the dead with due dignity and respect.

Conclusion

For some, burial space represented a locus for expressions of grief and commemoration through the installation of headstones, gifts of flowers and visits to the grave. Yet in so far as a working-class culture of post- interment grief and remembrance can be written with regard to the cemetery, it was a culture typified by ambivalence and informed by pragmatism. Narratives of grief which used the cemetery as their principal

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[134] BALS ABZ 3/1/8, c. 1887.

point of reference tended to hinge upon the rituals of interment rather than long-term commemoration. Moreover, the fusion between notions of custom, identity, grief and memory renders isolated analysis of perceptions of the cemetery as a landscape for grief problematic. Rather, a multiplicity of meanings concerning cemetery space tended to fall within a loose language of sanctity and reverence for the dead. A private grave space ensured that the bereaved were entitled to claim the identity and dignity of the dead and enact their grief through participation in mourning rituals which used the grave as a focal point. Within the context of memory, therefore, the grave was associated with the funeral and burying the dead with decency. The dead (and their grave) could be remembered in the aftermath of interment without necessitating a visit to the cemetery. 'Neglect' in this sense is a misnomer: memories of the dead were not so much discarded after burial as remembered in different contexts and through different media. As the following chapter illustrates, languages of loss adopted a multitude of linguistic and symbolic forms, often expressed in domestic and personal space, which were not always recognisable to others. Thus, the pragmatism inherent in the working-class culture of bereavement was not, necessarily, incompatible with profound sorrow. It did, however, testify to the need to manipulate responses to loss in order to meet the demands, and constraints, of life.

7   Loss, memory and the management of feeling

The preceding chapters have explored responses to bereavement that centred on the principal artefacts of death: the corpse, the funeral and the grave. It remains, therefore, to examine how normative grief was defined by the working classes; how loss found verbal and symbolic expression outside burial rites; and the ways in which the dead were remembered once they had been laid to rest. Little research has been conducted since David Vincent concluded, in the early 1980s, that working-class responses to bereavement were shaped by material circumstance. There are, however, several problems with the assumption that poverty precluded 'pure' grief. First, it is not inevitable that the relationship between poverty and death should limit grief. The two could operate together to create an overriding sense of desolation and despair. Likewise, the reverse was sometimes true: poverty might exacerbate the anguish of loss. Secondly, Vincent's use of the phrase 'pure grief' is evasive: he fails to clarify his definition of this term and, moreover, omits to identify those who did register this experience. Implicit in Vincent's narrative is an assumption that unfettered emotion was an ideal and privileged form of bereavement. That the working classes had not the 'luxury' to develop or indulge this heightened sensibility intimates that they were denied access to models of good grief available to those in wealthier circumstances.[1]

This chapter advances a more flexible understanding of responses to bereavement. Grief was manifest in diverse ways, at different times and was tempered by a multitude of factors, including – but extending beyond – material privation. Given the significance attached to the relationship between death and poverty, however, the chapter begins with an exploration of the impact of material circumstance upon responses to bereavement. In particular, the death of a breadwinner almost invariably plunged the bereaved into economic uncertainty, if not destitution. Yet the effects of death went beyond the material; bereavement created multiple

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[1] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 39–61.

tragedies which did not diminish, but intensified the distress of loss. Hence, this chapter emphasises the sheer impossibility of disentangling financial anxiety from wider issues, such as sorrow for a lost relationship, crushed dreams, shattered homes and families, and broken routines and identities.

As in earlier chapters, this discussion reiterates the argument that expressions of bereavement did not depend upon verbal fluency. Grief could be articulated through a multitude of signs: through physical symptoms (such as weight loss or nightmares); acts of commemoration; attempts to contact the dead; through fractured speech; and, significantly, in silence. Remembrance could adopt a timelessness which not only enabled the bereaved to maintain some form of relationship with the memory of the dead, but which could also represent healthy adaptation to loss.[2] An acknowledgement of the diversity of bereavement experience should not, however, detract from recognition that many mourners shared a general consensus relating to normative grief and the desirability of resolution. This is not to suggest a reversion to proscriptive models of good grief but to suggest that most families expected the bereaved to achieve a degree of restitution. Within these shared understandings of normative grief, individual perceptions of timescales and forms of expression differed widely. An analysis of experiences defined as extreme or chronic grief facilitates a reading of the subjective criteria for recovery and reintegration into the sphere of the living.[3] In conclusion, therefore, this chapter demonstrates that material privation cannot be equated with the containment of feeling; grief was rarely set aside so easily. Rather, individuals developed strategies to accommodate the tumult of bereavement and all its consequences.

Poverty, grief and the family unit

It is, perhaps, inevitable that the material impact of bereavement has preoccupied contemporary and historical commentators given the extraordinary expenditure necessitated by funerals. Yet the death of a wage-earner, especially a breadwinner, also dealt a critical blow to family resources. In such circumstances, news of a death was inseparable from calculations regarding burial costs, loss of income and material security.

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[2] S. Shuchter and S. Zisook, 'The Course of Normal Grief' in Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement*, 25.

[3] Jalland uses the terms 'chronic' and 'abnormal' grief to describe bereavement experience in elite families where resolution was not reached within approximately two years of death. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 318.

Narratives of bereavement were often framed against references to finance. As Kathleen Woodward observed, a mother might be 'beside herself with grief' when a 'good' child died; all the more, however, if they were also her principal means of support.[4] When Deborah Smith's older sister died it dealt a 'great blow' to her parents who 'were looking forward to the help they would get through their children'.[5] Taken at face value, such comments confirm that the working-class family was an economical rather than emotional unit.

Bereavement and material tragedy were most commonly associated with widowhood.[6] Jack London asserted that the death of the male breadwinner was the worst disaster that could befall a family: 'The thing happens, the father is struck down, and what then? A mother with three children can do little or nothing . . . There is no guarding against it. It is fortuitous. A family stands so many chances of escaping the bottom of the Abyss, and so many chances of falling plump down to it.'[7] Implicit in London's claim was the sense that life and death were a lottery and that few widows were poverty stricken through any fault of their own. There is little doubt that widows, especially those with dependent children, were concentrated in poor housing and often engaged in low income, low status employment. Fictional portrayals of the widow characterised her as gaunt, overworked and exhausted.[8] Booth's survey of London's working-class districts highlighted a preponderance of widows residing in cramped rooms in the worst slums. An overview of a district typified by 'almost solid' poverty illustrated the diverse but overwhelmingly poorly paid occupations pursued by widows: hawker, brush drawer, paper kite maker, watercress seller, coster, washerwoman and mangler, 'odd jobber', charwoman, ironer, factory employee, matchbox maker and prostitute. In a similar area, a 'barely clad' and 'dejected' widow lived as best she could from needlework, yet she was often 'without fire or food'. At their most abject, widows survived by 'begging or picking up odds and ends in the street'. One widow was reputed to be 'one of the best beggars in the district'. Another, almost blind, 'struggle[d] hard for her children'.[9] Similarly, Rowntree's survey of York indicated that almost two-thirds of those in the lowest income group (under eighteen shillings per week) were families whose immediate cause of poverty was the death or illness of the male breadwinner. Over 15 per cent of those in Rowntree's 'primary

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[4] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 131.   [5] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 18–19.
[6] The classic study of widows' bereavement experience is P. Marris's *Widows and Their Families* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).
[7] London, *People of the Abyss*, 251–2.   [8] Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets*, xxi–xxii.
[9] Booth, *Life and Labour*, vol. II, 94ff, 69, 49, 178, 179.

poverty' class were thus situated due to the death of the principal wage earner.[10] Appraising social conditions in Oxford in 1912, Violet Butler concluded that it was impossible for widows to survive without some form of assistance, either from charitable agencies, kin, the parish guardians or former employers.[11]

Retrospective accounts of the death of a breadwinner father tend to support the parallel between widowhood and poverty. For Mildred Metcalfe (born 1891), recollection of her father's death at the age of fifty-seven was inextricable from the observation that her mother had a 'hard life'.[12] Despite having a wealthy and successful husband, Philip Inman's mother was left with little from the estate when he died; she took in washing and cleaned the gravestones in the local churchyard to keep the family afloat.[13] When Joseph Stevens's father (a joiner) died in 1907, he bequeathed a 'tidy sum'. Yet the legacy rapidly disappeared and, before long, the family piano was sold and his mother turned to the pawnbroker.[14] Jack Lannigan (born 1890) associated his father's death with he and his sibling becoming 'very hungry kids'. Lannigan begged for bread whilst his brother became a lather boy in a local barber's in order to contribute to the family wage.[15]

It is hardly surprising that many widows with dependent children were forced to turn to the poor law. Application for parochial assistance was galling for the proud widow and exacerbated the sorrow of a spouse's death. The substitution of the state for a husband turned on perceptions of the male role as rooted in financial provision and authority with no recognition of the friendship lost. Moreover, unless a woman remarried, her social identity ('widow') remained tied to the death of her spouse, long after the bereavement took place. Parochial authorities' records for the distribution of relief indicate a high percentage of widows among persons in receipt of relief. Pauper classification books for Cheltenham and Cirencester in the 1890s highlight that only the infirm outnumbered widows in receipt of indoor relief.[16] This trend was replicated in heavily urbanised areas. An article in the *Liverpool Review* in November 1890 observed that widows were strongly represented among the 'motley lot' who regularly queued for outdoor relief: 'The poor struggling self-respecting widow can hold out no longer. The parish – that fated and hated name! – must be appealed to, and thus the terrible descent is made from the happy, self-supporting home down through weakening efforts

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[10] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 69–73, 154.   [11] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 73–5.
[12] Man. OH Tape, Mildred Metcalfe, Tape 723.   [13] Inman, *No Going Back*, 16.
[14] Man. OH Transcript, Joseph Stevens, Tape 101.
[15] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 97.   [16] GRO G/CI 141/1 and G/CH 25.

and narrowing opportunities to the parish and the grave.'[17] Hence, the article implied, widowhood made a fall from respectability cruelly inevitable, if only through association with pauperism.

Some parish guardians recognised the particular hardships of widows. In 1909 West Derby (Liverpool) parish guardians commissioned the first of a series of special reports into the living standards of widows with young children who claimed outdoor relief. Investigating a random sample of thirty-four widows with dependants in each relief district, the guardians concluded that although individual circumstances varied, the amount of relief given was inadequate to provide sufficient nutrition for growing children. As a group, widows were considered a 'very respectable, striving, and worthy class', yet the majority bore a 'weak and ill-nourished' appearance and the hardship they endured was 'appalling'. Indeed, it was 'not to be wondered at' that such women lived in squalid surroundings or that their children were sent to work at the earliest opportunity. The report urged the parish guardians to increase the basic amount of relief given to widows, although it expressed an expectation that the women would, perforce, continue to exercise 'great economy' and engage in some form of paid employment.[18] Of course, parochial definitions of adequate relief were arbitrary and continued to attract accusations of meanness. In 1913 Eleanor Rathbone, self-professed champion of the widow's cause, castigated the Liverpool guardians' perceptions of the poverty line. Despite an overall increase in working-class living standards since the end of the nineteenth century, parochial guardians were 'so accustomed' to associating poverty with widowhood they assumed that widows could 'reasonably be expected' to live on the margins of subsistence.[19]

The fundamental obstacle to the widow achieving economic autonomy was her children. Gissing outlined this predicament in *The Nether World* in 1889. Pennyloaf Candy is a fragile character who has adored her husband Bob despite his cavalier treatment of her. When Bob dies suddenly, Pennyloaf is 'all but crazy with grief'. Her emotional distress is exacerbated by the unexpected removal of the family's chief source of income (albeit an irregular one). Pennyloaf knows she must find employment, yet the need to care for her young children circumscribes the opportunities available to her. It is only by chance that Pennyloaf is able to combine resources with another widow to share a home, childcare and employment.[20] Some widows were fortunate in that adult children could

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[17] *Liverpool Review*, 1 November 1890, 1–2.
[18] LVRO 353 WES 1/42, 30 October 1909. Reports were also conducted in 1912 and 1914.
[19] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 16.   [20] Gissing, *Nether World*, 356–7.

make significant contributions to the household purse.[21] Schemes to send younger offspring to boarding schools or children's homes, with the help of the parochial authorities, were occasionally used as a means to alleviating financial worry. Yet this disrupted the family unit further. As one Liverpool widow observed to Eleanor Rathbone: 'It is bad enough missing the father, without missing them.'[22] For Helen Bosanquet, however, reluctance to send children away had to be treated with caution. Mothers were largely apathetic, speculated Bosanquet, and indifferent to the absence of children; they just wanted charity in the form of monetary handouts.[23]

Of course, some widowed mothers were able to work, by conferring childcare responsibilities onto either older offspring or nearby neighbours.[24] Overall, however, the employment of mothers outside the home tended to invite charges of neglect. Philanthropists and child protection agencies were far more supportive of home-based employment schemes that facilitated financial independence without compromising maternal responsibilities.[25] Many widows recognised this anyway, expressing reluctance to seek employment outside the home or pursuing work, such as charring, where they could take young children with them. In turn-of-the-century York, most widows cleaned, took in laundry or catered for lodgers.[26] Arthur Thierens's mother struggled to eke a living from taking in lodgers in Trafford Park, Manchester, when his father died in 1914. The family were, however, 'always in debt'.[27] Frank Marsden's father died in 1910, leaving his mother destitute with four young children and three elderly relatives to care for. She supported her dependants by providing accommodation for members of a local theatre company.[28] One Bolton man noted that his mother supported eight children, including a baby (the respondent), by taking in laundry when his father died in 1907.[29] Laundry work was notoriously strenuous and a woman had to work long, hard hours to make a reasonable living from it. The physical exhaustion of such work combined with the emotional strain of financial

[21] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 190, and Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 31.

[22] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 42.   [23] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 26.

[24] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Peacock, Tape 652. Born in 1895, Mr Peacock recalled that parents frequently left children to play on the streets in faith that neighbours would look out for them.

[25] See, for instance, Mrs Tudhope, 'Suggestions on Helping Widows With Dependent Children' in Grisewood, *Poor of Liverpool*, 1–6 (paper read at Annual Conference of Friendly Visitors, 16 October 1900).

[26] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 37.   [27] Man. OH Tape, Arthur Thierens, Tape 821.

[28] Man. OH Transcript, Frank Marsden, Tape 717.

[29] BOHT, Tape 79b, Reference: AB/LSS/A/021.

insecurity and supporting a young family alone were inseparable from any feelings of loss precipitated by bereavement of a spouse. Moreover, children were sensitive to adult distress. Mrs Petts was seven years old when her father died in 1911. Two months later, her pregnant mother gave birth and subsequently contracted scarlet fever. Still weak when discharged from hospital, her mother appealed to the poor law guardians for assistance only to be told she must sell her furniture before qualifying for outdoor relief. As the eldest child, Mrs Petts earned what she could from running errands whilst her mother began to take in washing. In adulthood, Petts's memories of her mother were of a frail, exhausted and desolate woman who wept for months following the death of her husband.[30]

Yet if widows were especially vulnerable to the material implications of death, they were also adept at stretching scant resources to 'make ends meet' and could call upon neighbourhood networks of mutual support. A minority of women even began successful businesses during widowhood.[31] The flipside of this culture meant that the death of a wife and mother often precipitated the breakdown of domestic economy and the splintering of the family unit. As Carl Chinn has noted, 'a family might survive without its father; it was rarer it did so without its mother'.[32] Tellingly, perhaps, older men (aged over forty-five) were also more likely to commit suicide after the death of their spouse than women of the same age.[33] Widowers with young families might send children to live with neighbours or extended family. Older children might find independence from employment that also provided accommodation and food. When Edith Jennings's mother died, two siblings entered orphanages, Edith trained for domestic service and her brother, aged fourteen, became an apprentice joiner.[34] Others like Alice Rushmer (born c. 1895) married at the earliest opportunity. Romance aside, having 'no home nor nothing' rendered marriage an attractive prospect.[35]

Such abrupt changes in lifestyle and environment exacerbated the shock of bereavement. Yet some fathers strove to maintain home and family in a bid to limit the upheavals occasioned by death. Edna Thorpe's father, a packer in a Manchester factory, placed one infant daughter with his sister whilst he and five other children stayed in the family home. Edna, aged nine, took two half-days off school every week to attend to

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[30] Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Petts, Tape 76.
[31] See, for instance, Maggie Chapman in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 98.
[32] Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, 17   [33] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 213.
[34] Man. OH Transcript, Edith Jennings, Tape 14.
[35] Chamberlain, *Fenwomen*, 78–81.

housework and the four remaining siblings whilst their father was at work. When it became clear that Edna could not cope with school, housewifery and childcare, she and another sibling moved in with the aunt whilst their father and three brothers took lodgings. Despite the ostensible disintegration of the home, her father visited his daughters regularly, contriving to maintain a loose sense of the nuclear family.[36] When Winnifred Jay's mother died in 1910, the family 'just had to make the best of it': Winnifred's father assumed responsibility for cooking meals after work whilst Winnifred regularly missed school to do the laundry and pay the rent and club money.[37] This was far from ideal. Nonetheless, Jay's account of struggle and compromise only heightened the significance attached to the family unit. Jim Walsh's mother died in 1908 when he was eight years old. One sister was already 'skivvying' in domestic service whilst his eldest brother lived with an uncle. For the four children who remained at home, Jim's father 'struggled along' to provide 'the best he could'. A labourer, his father worked during the week and spent his weekends attending to domestic chores: washing on Saturday afternoons and baking bread and broth on Sundays. Jim's overriding recollection of his father was that 'life was really hard for him'. Indeed, one year following the death of their mother, his father 'must have got to the bottom of his patience' and escorted the family to the workhouse. When they arrived at the gates, however, 'he thought better of it'. This is not to suggest that his father was a model of virtue and fortitude: every so often, he 'went on the spree'. Yet this account of 'hard times' and the father's sense of conflict implied by the excursion to the workhouse suggests a quiet determination to preserve a home and family, even with sporadic lapses into heavy drinking.[38] In shifting analysis to the widower, it is possible to move away from the fixation with the poverty of widowhood. Stories of widowed men striving to maintain home and family alert us to the multiple tragedies occasioned by death. Moreover, such accounts provide a rare insight into domestic and emotional aspects of masculinity. The impetus to sustain a home for one's children highlights the importance attached to filial relationships whilst illustrating how seemingly pragmatic priorities could be imbued with personal significance: the struggle to remain 'a family' implicitly told of love, loyalty and selflessness.

For those whose homes and families did disintegrate in the aftermath of death, bereavement was aggravated by the loss of a familiar environment and lifestyle. Some parents laboured through fatal sickness hoping for

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[36] Man. OH Transcript, Edna Thorpe, Tape 81.
[37] Man. OH Transcript, Winnifred Jay, Tape 43.
[38] Man. OH Transcript, Jim Walsh, Tape 458.

recovery but knowing that death would orphan offspring. When parents died within days of each other, there may have been little time to make firm arrangements for the care of children. George Price, a Liverpool fireman, died in June 1883. His wife, Margaret, died two days later of apoplexy. For their five children, the double bereavement resulted in the fragmentation of the home: two brothers went to live with an uncle, one sister moved in with a family friend, whilst two younger children entered the Liverpool Orphan Asylum.[39] Similarly, Joseph Quinn, a mariner, and his wife Sarah died from typhus within two days of each other. One surviving set of grandparents cared for their five children for four months, before applying for admission to the Liverpool orphanage for three-year-old William.[40] Samuel Bushel, a blacksmith, died of pneumonia on 7 June 1894. His wife died the following day of influenza. They left seven children orphaned.[41] Hannah Yates died of bronchitis in 1883, four days after the death of her husband, a painter, from the same illness; they left a six-month-old baby and two young daughters.[42]

For the children concerned, the death of a parent fractured a familiar world. Elsie Oman's recollection of her mother's death was inseparable from the memory of a world that 'fell apart'. With a father in the navy, Elsie (aged seven) was sent to live with an aunt whilst her brother (aged three) was cared for by a neighbour. One year later, both children were 'dumped on' a different aunt, so that they could grow up together.[43] Retrospectively, the bereavement became synonymous with the destruction of a home in both a literal and abstract sense. Rose Mutch (born 1905) recalled that her 'hard life' began at the age of seven when her father died. Her mother, a sick woman, was unable to care for the family and their 'home got broken up': several older children found work and lodging with relatives whilst two younger sisters entered a Dr Barnado's home.[44] Eight-year-old James Marlow's parents both died in tragic circumstances: his mother was 'found drowned' in the River Mersey in 1884; his father, a boiler maker, was accidentally killed when he fell in a graving dock. Four of his older siblings already had work and lodgings: his sisters in service and his brothers in Laird's shipyard. James entered Liverpool Orphan Asylum.[45] Even when all siblings entered the same orphanage, rules concerning segregation according to sex and age often meant that brothers and sisters were separated. Peter Robinson's father, a brass moulder, died of acute rheumatism in 1886. His stepmother

[39] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 4 July 1883.   [40] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 5 December 1883.
[41] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/4, 4 July 1894.   [42] MRO 362 SAL 3/1/4, 8 March 1883.
[43] Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, 13.   [44] Man. OH Transcript, Rose Mutch, Tape 5.
[45] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 2 March 1886.

applied for the admission of Peter and his two brothers into the Liverpool Orphan Asylum: his older brothers entered the Boys Asylum whilst Peter was admitted to the Infant Asylum, not only located in a separate build-ing, but in a different street altogether.[46]

For many offspring, bereavement of one or both parents brought child-hood to an abrupt end. Following the death of her father in a mining accident in 1910, a nine-year-old girl fretted about family income and, after the subsequent birth of a baby brother, became the principal carer for both the baby and younger siblings.[47] When both parents died, children as young as thirteen undertook to care and provide for younger siblings rather than dismantle the family unit.[48] One Blackburn man (born c. 1906) whose parents died leaving five children behind remem-bered his childhood in terms of sibling solidarity headed by the eldest child, Maud. The idea that 'we all contributed' and 'stuck close' indicates not only the survival strategies of bereft children, but the significance attached to familial ties.[49] The stories cited here also imply that female children were particularly susceptible to the effects of bereavement. Many girls stepped into the role of household manager and surrogate mother whilst adopting a sense of responsibility for widowed parents, often at the cost of their education.[50] David Vincent suggested that young children's emotional frameworks were not sufficiently sophisticated to register the impact of death or imbue bereavement with personal signifi-cance.[51] To a point, this may be true. Yet given Vincent's emphasis on the relationship between the emotional and the material, it is curious that he fails to explore bereavement in childhood in the context of its practical repercussions. Children may not have understood or been able to express the changes wrought by death, yet few would have been insensitive to the upheavals occasioned by bereavement.

Poverty and grief: the complexity of feeling

Anxiety about material security represented just one facet of bereavement experience; grief was, by its very nature, intensely personal and its public manifestation took many forms. Florence Bell's study of ironworkers' families in Middlesbrough repeatedly highlights the complex relationship

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[46] MRO 362 SAL 3/3/3, 1 September 1886.
[47] BOHT, Tape 96, Reference: AB/KP/1c/009.
[48] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 24.   [49] Ibid., 35.
[50] See, for instance, Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Seal, Tape 50b. Mrs Seal (born 1913) thought her mother's illiteracy stemmed from staying at home to care for her younger siblings after her own mother died.
[51] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 56.

between poverty, bereavement and the wider implications of loss. Bell portrayed many of the marriages and kinship relationships she encountered as typified by devotion. Against this backdrop, she catalogued numerous examples of families bereaved of a male breadwinner. Indeed, the tenacity and resourcefulness of ironworkers' widows contributed to her overall perception of women in this class as resolute and competent household managers. At one house, Bell met a woman, recently widowed, who sat in 'blank misery' and spoke only in 'little disjointed sentences'. The death of her spouse had left the woman 'bewildered and rudderless'; the focus of her life was gone and there no longer seemed any reason to 'have anything done at the appointed time'. Her eldest daughter, meanwhile, sat with a 'face of hopeless misery'. Their house, which had been neat and comfortable, 'looked strangely transformed'. Bell implied that this was due, in part, to the uncertainty of their future and the probability that they would lose their home. Yet far from suggesting that the emotional was subsumed to the material, Bell took the inarticulacy of widow and daughter and reframed them as the face of multifaceted loss, characterised by multiple sorrows and anxieties. Notably, Bell gave the impression that the breadwinner had also been the locus around which family life revolved. Hence, if destitution preyed heavily on the minds of widows, it was impossible to disentangle such worries from the wider tragedies effected by death. Bell also cited the case of a widow whose eldest son had died at the age of twenty-two. Her grief at the loss of 'an excellent son' was not superseded by financial anxiety; it was compounded by it because the son had supported her. The mother's notion of excellence may have been rooted in the son's willingness to provide for her, yet this undertaking in itself hinted at qualities of self-lessness, loyalty and pride – attributes which would be mourned. Another widow who mourned the death of her eldest son sat 'wringing her hands' whilst her younger son 'cried forlornly'. Bell imagined that the woman's grief was aggravated by financial worries. However, her grief told of crushed hopes and ambitions too. Indeed, the efforts of the younger son to emulate his dead brother and adopt his role suggested, to Bell at least, that the boy had not only lost a sibling but his hero also.[52] Ostensibly concerned to illuminate the circumstances in which ironworkers' families lived, Bell's observations are invariably inscribed with her own sensibilities. To a point, Bell expected death to be met with feelings of sorrow and loss. Yet her implicit surprise and discomfort with the suffering of bereaved ironworkers' families also suggests an expectation that grief was largely a

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[52] Bell, *At the Works*, 104–5, 114–15, 173–4.

sentiment associated with relative economic security. Her accounts of widowed families indicate not only the financial stress of bereavement, but, also, prompt her readers to acknowledge that poverty need not constrict bereavement. Rather, grief encompassed the loss of a specific individual whilst triggering changes in the mourner's identity and role.

Historical emphasis on the sexual division of labour in working-class families has encouraged us to see the bereavement of a partner in terms of practical repercussions. Yet the death of a spouse could also create intense feelings of loneliness and added responsibility. Deborah Smith's memoir of her husband's death emphasised how the expectation of death did little to lessen the impact of bereavement when it finally came: '[I] scarcely dared to look into the future. My health was shattered by the long strain [of caring for the sick], and there were children depending on me.' After years of distance and acrimony, Smith recounts that she and her spouse rediscovered companionship during his final illness. The reconciliation and routine of caring for her husband frame the last days of their marriage in a positive light, yet they also heighten the sense of loss when Smith describes the early days of widowhood: 'how lonely the house felt. There was nobody to give us a welcome. No one can understand this who has not had an experience like it . . . I made [my children] sad when I looked into their faces and wept.'[53] Smith's narrative highlights the impossibility of the remote spectator (like Bell) being able to empathise with her personal experience whilst, implicitly, suggesting that expressions of loss took place within the private space of the home and were witnessed only by immediate family.

The death of a spouse threw the marital relationship into sharp relief. Comfort might be derived from late reconciliation and contrition for past misdemeanours, but death could also usher in bitter regret, especially if the marriage had fallen short of youthful hope. The death of Mrs Hewett in Gissing's *The Nether World* is particularly affecting because it represents individual loss and the defeat of the poor in the battle against Providence. John Hewett is consumed by remorse, regret and bitterness as he sits by the bed of his dead wife. The prospect that he must bury her in a public grave compounds his grief, not on account of any slur on respectability, but because the parochial burial is a symbol of crushed dreams: 'Do you remember what hopes I used to have when we were first married? See the end of 'em – look at this underground hole – look at this bed she lays on!' When an old friend offers to pay for the burial of his wife, Hewett expresses 'sobbing gratitude'. Exhausted, he falls 'Nerveless,

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[53] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 34–6.

voiceless . . . upon the chair and let his head lie by that of the dead woman'.[54] The image is simple yet poignant. Gissing suggests that grief is manifest not only in relation to the present and the future, but also to the past; John Hewett must grieve for the passing of his spouse and all his disappointed ambition. In this sense, Gissing also draws attention to the ways in which the status of breadwinner could be emotionally charged: striving to provide for one's family represented a language of love, hope and commitment; when provision fell short, it opened a chasm of guilt and feelings of failure.

The sheer complexity of bereavement experience necessitates that we reject notions of contained grief, replete with their connotations of suppressed and unacknowledged emotion. There is little room for manoeuvre in terms that create a dichotomy between pure and restrained bereavement. Rather, grief was managed: individuals developed strategies for accepting death and grief that allowed them to complete the practical tasks associated with bereavement but which also provided scope for reflection, sorrow and anger in isolated moments and spaces. In the short story 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', D. H. Lawrence explores the tense dynamics of marriage, maternal ties and grief through the character of Lizzie Bates. Trapped in an unsatisfactory marriage, Lizzie learns that her spouse Walt, a miner, has had an accident. Her thoughts immediately turn to material security: 'If he was killed – would she be able to manage on the little pension and what could she earn? – she counted up rapidly.' Soon, however, 'sentimental luxury' intervenes with her calculations. Ignorant of the extent of his injuries, she ponders the possibilities of weaning Walt from drink whilst he recuperates and the potential for a reconciliation of their relationship. Lawrence's suggestion that these thoughts are 'sentimental' and 'luxurious' implies to the reader that Lizzie should not raise her hopes for reform, reconciliation or recovery. Yet he also infers that responses to news of accidents and potential death were far from ordered or rational. Rather, they must be sorted and prioritised according to circumstance. Thus, when Lizzie allows her mind to wander, it raises a wealth of difficult and emotive issues. To cope effectively with the return of Walt to the home, she must refocus her thoughts on less complex matters: she concentrates on the practical problem of providing for her children. This does not, however, annul Lizzie's scope for ruminating on the personal tragedy of loss: pragmatic and emotional responses to death need not conflict but can co-exist in a broad framework of feeling. Hence, Lizzie focuses on the pragmatics of

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[54] Gissing, *Nether World*, 190–1.

death and survival in the first instance, and only later, when washing her husband's corpse, does she take stock of her emotions and the character of the relationship lost. Of course, at the heart of Lizzie's tragedy is the contemplation of her failed relationship with Walt. Had it been otherwise, the luxury of sentiment may well have been harder to postpone.[55]

The concept of developing strategies for managing grief acknowledges that some mourners possessed a capacity to rationalise death and attribute bereavement with apparently unsentimental meaning. One Wigan woman in Jeremy Seabrook's narratives of working-class childhood recounted the death of her brother in a mining accident in the early 1900s. The recollection is dominated by her grandmother's response to the bereavement: relief that a weakly grandson had died rather than one of his stronger brothers. This sentiment, seemingly harsh, was interpreted by the respondent as a bargaining with the economics of death: 'if one of them had been killed, it was better it should be him, because he wasn't as strong as the others'.[56] Such stories indicate, firstly, the discomfort of broaching stoical responses to death in a cultural context where grief is expected to be manifest in a sentimental fashion and, secondly, the potential for a language of stoicism to represent more than blind fatalism. In her memoirs of Edwardian Liverpool, Elsie Pettigrew reflected on the death of her stepsister Alice who left the family home to work in domestic service. Recalling that 'in those days you were used to people dying so young in life', Pettigrew perceived no contradiction with her parallel assertion that Alice was 'sadly missed by our whole family'. Again, this may illustrate a retrospective obligation to explain apparent resignation. Yet Pettigrew's story also suggests the potential for stoicism to temper responses to death without, necessarily, reducing the sadness or significance of loss.[57] Maud Pember Reeves similarly drew attention to the manner in which stolidity could be confused with apathy. Citing the case of Mrs S, Reeves noted that when any of her children died, the woman 'cried a very little, but went about much as usual'. As far as Mrs S was concerned, she had done all she could for the child within her means. Reeves concluded this account by noting that Mrs S 'loved her family in a patient, suffering, loyal sort of way which cannot have been very exhilarating for them'.[58] Within the context of daily survival, therefore, women such

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[55] D. H. Lawrence, 'Odour of Chrysanthemums', 278.

[56] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 68.

[57] E. Pettigrew, *Time to Remember: Growing up in Liverpool from 1912 Onwards* (Liverpool: Toulouse, 1989), 15.

[58] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 91.

as Mrs S were not devoid of emotion. Rather, their circumstances blunted its expression: love and grief were like life – unextravagant.

Expressions of loss

For poorer families, focus on pragmatic concerns in the aftermath of death was necessary. Yet it could also prove a useful strategy in assuaging grief, not least because confronting the practicalities of bereavement provided mourners with a relatively impersonal language of loss. In contrast, explicit displays of emotional anguish were intensely distressing for others to witness. In his memoirs, Jack Martin noted that the job of informing bereaved relatives of a fatality in the pit was dreaded by miners. Recollecting the first time he carried such news to a mother whose son had died, Martin described a woman literally felled by grief: 'every drop of blood appeared to leave her face and she seemed to realise that there was something seriously wrong. She partly stumbled … and I could see she was on the point of collapse. She said to me, "It's our Billy", and then she fell in a dead faint in the middle of the street.' Martin seems to imply that the woman's status as a 'noble and hardworking' mother should have exempted her from the 'mental torture and agony' of bereavement. That he found her pain unbearable to witness cements Martin's sense of the injustice of accidental and untimely death.[59] Of course, the striking images of the bereft also served a political purpose in highlighting the far-reaching consequences of pit owners who skimped on safety in pursuit of profit. In Lewis Jones's semi-autobiography, *Cwmardy*, the young Len is sent to acquaint a woman with the death of her husband in the pit, the 'most unpleasant job' for a miner to undertake. As the widow guessed the purpose of Len's visit, 'her face went white as a death mask with blue streaks and black shadows painted across it'. The insight, Jones suggests, strikes her 'like a physical blow', she bursts into 'hysterical sobs'. Even before Jones tells us of her cries ('Bill is dead. I can see it in your eyes. Oh, Bill, Bill! Oh, my little babies!'), the reader has interpreted the grief written on her face and form.[60] Indeed, the body language and actions of the bereaved could intimate powerful emotion without the need for words. When one man recollected the death of his father, a miner, in the Pretoria Pit (near Bolton) explosion in December 1910, the story was dominated by the memory of his mother standing resolute by the pit head until the remains of her husband were brought to the surface.[61] This striking image conveys hope, despair, fear and courage in all their

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[59] Martin, *Ups and Downs*, 85.   [60] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 140–1.
[61] Bromilow and Power, *Looking Back*, 42.

magnitude; words are rendered superfluous in the bid to locate the emotional and mental turmoil of waiting for the body of the miner.

Clearly, expressions of grief adopted a variety of visual and symbolic forms. Visiting houses where a death had occurred, Florence Bell was struck by the number of people who came to offer their condolences to the bereaved. Homes that were 'full, quite full, of visitors', however, were not filled by the noise of guests: 'All round the walls, on three sides of the room, wherever there is available space, people are seated, tightly wedged together, sitting sometimes in silence, sometimes bringing out simple inarticulate sentences of attempted consolation ... The men who sit round will smoke in silence.'[62] This did not illustrate a class-barrier to sentimental discourse but, rather, that overwhelming feelings of grief were, simply, inexpressible. In such circumstances, words were super-fluous: condolence and loss found adequate expression through the gathering of friends in a simple gesture of sympathy.

The manifestation of grief could also adopt extraordinary and unex-pected forms. The sudden disappearance of Elsie Oman's mother was never explained to her. Only by hiding underneath a dining table and eavesdropping on the conversations of adults did Oman learn of her mother's death. Oman's description of her hiding place as 'warm, snug and private' provides a sharp contrast to the devastating truth of her mother's death and, in many ways, serves as a metaphor for the ignorance and comfort of childhood. The shock of knowledge and grief is further conveyed through Oman's subsequent refusal to eat. In denying herself the necessity and comfort of food, Oman was, perhaps, expressing her hunger for her mother.[63] Florence Jones experienced persistent night-mares following the death of her mother: 'I dreamed I was riding in the funeral coach again, sometimes on top of it, throwing soil onto the coffin with mother looking on. Terrible nightmares. Poor Mother.' The confu-sion of the dreams reinforces the sense of disorder inherent in Jones's suggestion that 'the family seemed to go to pieces' in the aftermath of their mother's death.[64] Somewhat differently, Margaret Penn illustrated how grief could be expressed in subdued statements. When her paternal grandmother died, Penn observed that her father did not 'seem to be very upset', not least because the woman was elderly and 'had lived her time'. After looking upon the corpse, however, her father betrayed his compo-sure by uttering his customary farewell: 'Ah'm away now mother.' For Penn, the 'choking' words represented her father's simple but 'deep, warm affection'. In contrast, Penn's grandfather talked openly about

[62] Bell, *At the Works*, 103–4.   [63] Man. OH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 12.
[64] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 90.

the death of his wife, musing that it 'winna be long' before he would join her. This blunt premonition of his own death implied that his life had lost its focus and, moreover, that the elderly man would welcome death.[65]

If the bereaved were inarticulate concerning personal loss, it was partly because coherent and detailed expressions were at odds with sentiment: short, fractured sentences reflect the bewilderment, sorrow and heartache of grief. As a forlorn carpenter revealed to the commentator Jack London, the affection of his wife and three daughters had brought 'bliss' to his life. His happiness ended abruptly, however, with their deaths (his daughters all died within a fortnight).[66] The succinct manner in which the carpenter expressed his loss conveyed the impact of sudden death; words failed to express his sorrow. Sometimes, grief was most poignant when articulated through silence. Ralph Finn could not recall his mother saying anything at the death of his baby brother; she simply pushed him away from the cot, the gesture representing the hopelessness of bereavement.[67] In D. H. Lawrence's novel *Sons and Lovers*, the domineering character of Mrs Morel represents the suffocation of mother love. When her son William dies, Mrs Morel is crushed; the only words she can utter in relation to her sorrow – 'Oh my son, my son' – indicate the gravity and possessiveness of maternal grief. Yet it is through her silence that Lawrence captures the desolation of loss, especially when set against her articulacy in the rest of the novel. Bereavement diminishes the mother; she becomes 'small, white and mute'. Long after William is laid to rest, Mrs Morel 'remained shut off'. Lawrence implies that the silence which falls on the Morel household does not resonate with the peace of the grave. Rather, it is heavy, oppressive and ominous.[68]

Silence could, of course, be ambiguous. Aged two when his father died, Philip Inman consistently questioned his mother about the personality of the dead man. In adulthood, he reflected that this 'continual catechism' may have been painful for his mother who, he noted, always spoke of the dead man as a father rather than a husband. In linking the two revelations together, it is possible that Inman also wondered at the character of his parents' relationship.[69] Reticence could, however, represent a code of propriety where intimate relations were concerned. Describing the working people of late Victorian London, H. M. Burton suggested that reluctance to discuss private affairs and feelings in public was common.[70]

[65] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 35.   [66] London, *People of the Abyss*, 88.
[67] R. L. Finn, *Time Remembered: The Tale of an East End Jewish Boyhood* (London: Hale, 1963), 11.
[68] D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1913] 1975), 168–74.
[69] Inman, *No Going Back*, 11.   [70] Burton, *There was a Young Man*, 11.

Indeed, if housing and spatial arrangements compromised privacy, verbal reserve represented a premium form of discretion. In her autobiography *Below Stairs*, Margaret Powell outlined her sense of shock when her mother, anxious for the safety of a husband fighting in the early months of the Great War, described her spouse as deeply passionate. Considered to be an 'austere man outwardly', the revelation allowed Margaret a rare insight into her parents' marriage and her father's character.[71]

For some, however, talking about despair or anxieties exacerbated matters. Reflecting on the lack of conversation between his parents, George Acorn sourly commented that all they had to discuss in any case was 'trouble'.[72] Surveying villagers in rural Surrey, George Bourne observed the reluctance of the poor to discuss misfortune. An elderly widow, whose breadwinning son had died, gave no indication of her ills until a chance word from Bourne prompted her to admit her fears for the future. Even then, she rapidly dismissed the hopelessness of her situation, returning swiftly to a cheerful and flippant disposition. For Bourne, the brevity and smoothness of her speech patterns revealed the despair her manner attempted to conceal.[73] Margaret Loane, district nurse, interpreted such reserve as indicative of a strong character. Relating a meeting with an elderly woman whose granddaughter had died of consumption, Loane presumed that the girl's mother would sorely miss her: she was beautiful, intelligent, the only female child, and just at an age when she was becoming useful. The grandmother, however, was succinct: 'Her sole comment at the end, and I thought it a beautiful one in its courageous resignation, was: "Ah, her mother has all she can do to *keep herself above it.*"'[74] In equating stoicism with courage, Loane suggests that the bereaved had to work hard to overcome their grief and that this, in itself, operated as a coping mechanism. In a similar vein, Wil Edwards reflected after the death of his mother that 'life is a continuous process of adjustment'; one must 'learn' how to deal with personal tragedy.[75]

Tears were perhaps the most obvious indication of emotional upset. Yet even these might be considered taboo. When Jack Lawson's young brother died, his mother was 'dry eyed, apparently stone hard'; she was 'a picture of inarticulate suffering, defying description'. For Lawson, his mother's identity was rooted in struggle and survival. To weep, therefore, was a sign of failure and weakness.[76] When men broke

[71] Powell, *Below Stairs*, 7.   [72] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 34.
[73] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20, 40.   [74] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 44.
[75] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 74.
[76] Jack Lawson, *A Man's Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 240.

down and wept, it was often described as shocking and unmanly, despite taking place within the domestic interior, a place usually associated with feeling and intimacy. Patrick MacGill recalled that neither of his parents was particularly demonstrative. When his infant brother died, his mother turned her face to the wall and wept. To a point, this was expected: a strong character, she was, nonetheless, a woman and a mother. What was shocking to MacGill and his siblings, however, was the sight of their apparently stolid father crying.[77]

Narratives of fathers who wept emphasise their exceptionality within perceptions of gendered behaviour. Yet it is not the unmanliness of such examples that is striking, but, rather, the depth of feeling displayed by men whose emotional articulacy was usually confined to providing for their family. In *Cwmardy*, Lewis Jones illustrates the inadequacy of words to express loss within a gendered context. At the death of their daughter Jane, neither Shane nor Jim can articulate linguistically the depth of their loss. Shane wails and sobs, rocks and moans. Later, at the funeral, tears 'overflowed and streamed down her face'. Jim, meanwhile, is 'speechless with grief' and at the funeral, hides his face while other men present swallow hard, look awkward, and generally try 'to appear unconcerned'. Immediately after the burial, Jim resumes 'the usual routine of his life'. Months later, he has cause to wear his suit, prompting Shane to recall that the last time he wore the clothes was at Jane's funeral. Jim's response, 'it be no good worrying 'bout it now', sounds almost dismissive.[78] However, at no point does Jones suggest that Jim does not share the grief or memories of Shane. Rather, Jim's grief is 'resigned'; it is quiet and solitary in comparison to Shane's tearfulness. Resignation in this account suggests the inarticulacy of grief, not so much from a conscious wish to control grief as from an unconscious adherence to gendered cultures of emotional expression. Repeatedly, Jones emphasises the cultural distinctions between the miners and their wives and the differing social, political and occupational worlds they inhabit. Both are attributed with characteristics of fortitude and resilience, yet those traits are manifest in different ways. The miners cling to a stereotype of masculine emotional strength whilst their wives are permitted to sob and wail in accordance with notions of feminine susceptibility to emotional excitement. In light of this, it is unsurprising that most of the retrospective accounts of grief cited here derive from female authors.

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[77] MacGill, *Children of the Dead End*, 21.
[78] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 64–8, 92, N. Thompson, 'Masculinity and Loss' in D. Field et al. (eds.), *Death, Gender and Ethnicity* (London: Routledge, 1997), 76–87.

Memory and commemoration

Acknowledgement that grief could be profound without being public supports a concept of bereavement as a mutable state with no fixed criteria or timescale. Indeed, a robust analysis of bereavement must explore not only the immediate aftermath of death but, also, post-burial remembrance and commemoration. The degree to which the cemetery was utilised as a landscape for grief is uncertain. Rather, commemoration tended to be rooted in mementoes which were interwoven with domestic space and infused with intimate meaning. Memorialising the deceased in private sustained a lucrative industry: items manufactured specifically for the purposes of mourning (such as clothing and jewellery) were intended to be kept as personal souvenirs of the deceased. Likewise, letters of condolence and notes of sympathy represented a lasting source of comfort to the bereaved whilst testifying to the qualities of the deceased. Less popular, written memorials to the dead and lengthy accounts of their life and demise (a notorious example is Leslie Stephen's 'Mausoleum Book') operated simultaneously as biography and testimony of grief.[79] Such practices are typically perceived as the preserve of the middle and upper classes, not least because they required disposable income and a reasonable degree of literacy. Yet the memento could adopt a variety of guises, many of which (the lock of hair for instance) required little or no expense. Alice Foley recalled that a shabby picture adorning one of her many childhood homes was made of 'two black-rimmed fretwork cards behind the glass with slender angel forms blowing trumpets and small printed verses underneath them'. The picture also bore the epitaphs of both Foley's grandparents.[80] The picture was an endless source of fascination for Foley's childish imagination, yet it also testified to the resourcefulness of poorer families in commemorating the dead cheaply. As Foley's grandparents were interred in Ireland, the memorial also highlighted the flexibility of commemoration within a migrant culture.

For some, the home provided a ready-made memorial to the dead. Indeed, after the death of their child, Albert S. Jasper's sister and her husband felt impelled to move to new accommodation as 'the place they had gave too many memories of the baby'.[81] Following the death of his mother, Wil Edwards found that the family home was infused with his mother's identity. Edwards consistently confused his older sister Liza,

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[79] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 300–17. For details of Stephen and his 'Mausoleum Book' see H. Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), 50–95.

[80] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 5.   [81] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 49.

who stepped into the maternal role, with his mother. In adulthood, he described the longing for his mother's presence as selfish and his ignorance of Liza's difficulties in combining the roles of surrogate mother and bereaved daughter as naive.[82] For those whose homes were relatively impermanent, possessions might be retained for their association with the personality of the deceased. Elsie Oman recalled that her 'mother's belongings was divided in the family' after her death. Of particular value was a collection of glass dishes, of little monetary worth (most had been bought 'cheap' and 'second-hand') but 'beautiful', perhaps as much in memory of a mother's 'mania' for glass as for their aesthetic qualities.[83] Recollecting his experiences on the assizes jury, James Dellow told of a 'decrepit poor chap' who sought legal redress for damage to his most treasured possession, a pillow on which his wife had expired. For Dellow, the pillow as a priceless item was absurd and the story is told in jocular tones.[84] Despite this, the narrative makes the more serious point that seemingly worthless objects could adopt extra meaning for those who clung to them as mementoes. More tenuous links with the dead could be maintained through abstract association. Elsie Pettigrew recalled that when the last of her father's offspring from a previous marriage expired, it dealt him a 'hard blow': not only had all the children from his first marriage died, whilst they were alive they embodied living links with his dead wife.[85] The cheapest form of commemoration, however, was verbal: reminiscing about the deceased gave vent to feelings of loss whilst simultaneously drawing the memory of the dead into the context of the living.[86]

A more unusual trend in domestic commemoration was post-mortem photography. Commonly, the corpse was featured recumbent on a bed or sofa with sheets and pillows in an arrangement suggesting sleep. Assessing the impetus to commission such portraits, Audrey Linkman has drawn a distinction between the portrait as memento mori, intended to encourage contemplation of one's own mortality, and as a 'palliative'. In essence, the soothing qualities of the post-mortem photograph hinged on the denial of death: photographers 'consciously attempted to ameliorate the finality of death by suggesting a kinder, gentler, more familiar state of being'. Far from being macabre, post-mortem photographs were 'tokens of the deepest love and affection' that permitted the bereaved to capture the serenity of death. As Linkman acknowledges, this practice was limited to a minority of late Victorian elite families, thus

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[82] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.   [83] Man. OH Transcript, Elsie Oman, Tape 12.
[84] J. Dellow, *Memoirs of an Old Stager* (Newcastle: Andrew Reid & Co., 1928), 23.
[85] Pettigrew, *Time to Remember*, 16.
[86] E. Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 205.

rendering generalisations about the practice problematic, especially as many of the surviving portraits are divorced from their original context.[87] Photographic portraits were still a luxury for most working-class families at the turn of the twentieth century. The extra cost of requesting the photographer to attend the family home further prohibited indulgence in this practice. One contributor to the *British Journal of Photography* expressed horror at receiving a commission from a shopkeeper. Not only did the deceased lie in a room in daily use as a living, eating and sleeping area, the photographer was incredulous that the house was so cramped 'yet the occupiers could afford to have the child photographed'.[88]

Children were the most common subjects for post-mortem photography. According to the *British Journal of Photography*, most adults had been portrayed in life, whereas children were 'cut off' before families had the opportunity to commission a portrait.[89] The notion that the photograph of the dead child represented a relic of a life which had not divested itself in other forms demonstrates the significance of the personal memento. For working-class families, the material effects of an infant would probably be recycled for the next child. The photograph, therefore, represented a tangible artefact of a life and personality. Moreover, the cost of an infant portrait was significantly reduced as corpses could easily (and inconspicuously) be taken to the photographer's premises. A tinker whose grandfather ran a small photography shop in a poor, Irish Catholic district of Edwardian Liverpool recalled that portraits of deceased infants provided a principal source of revenue. The pictures were cheap to produce but provided material representation of a short life: the image of the child would be mounted onto a matchbox with 'lovely little scrolls', sometimes accompanied by a memento, such as a piece of hair.[90] It is impossible to estimate how widespread this practice was. Nonetheless, the photographs offer a corrective to the impression that the lives (and deaths) of infants were held cheap.

Grief and commemoration might also be made manifest through reference to the pain and horror of one's own suffering. Far from fostering indifference or apathy, a degree of familiarity with death encouraged the capacity for sympathy and empathy. Elsie Pettigrew recounted that as

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[87] A. Linkman, 'Not Dead But Sleeping: Post-Mortem Photography in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *Proceedings of the Conference of the European Society for the History of Photography* (Udine, 1999), 2, 16. See also A. Linkman, 'Passing Trade: Death and the Family Album in Britain, 1860–1900', *The Photohistorian*, 123 (1998), 18–28, Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 288–91.

[88] *British Journal of Photography*, 3 August 1883, 449–50 (C. Brangwin Barnes). Thanks to Audrey Linkman for drawing this article to my attention.

[89] Ibid.   [90] Man. OH Tape, Mr Wallis, Tape 919.

a child she often lay awake in bed, imagining her own death and the grief of her family on discovering it. Such apparently morbid fantasies were, however, the route by which Pettigrew negotiated grief for the very real death of her sister, Margaret.[91] Some individuals merged personal feelings of grief with intense sympathy for other bereaved relatives. Elizabeth Flint noted that the powerful sense of loss she and her siblings articulated when their brother Ted died was inextricable from empathetic grief for their father who loved Ted passionately and mourned his death with overwhelming intensity.[92] Kathleen Woodward suggested that her mother's reminiscences concerning the birth of a stillborn child were grounded in a context of personal struggle whereby the story became a signifier of the older woman's 'flinty endurance'. That it was only after imbibing alcohol that Woodward's mother 'would relent and talk of the Past' implies a conscious management of sorrow behind an apparently impassive exterior. Woodward's use of a capital 'P' indicates the stature of the past in giving shape and meaning to the present. The account also indicates the child's sensitivity to bereavement. Woodward recalls that she absorbed her mother's story to the point where she 'used to think of that dead child in bed at night, before I went to sleep'. The narrative filled her with 'horror and suffocating fear' whilst simultaneously fostering a surge of passion towards her mother. In many ways, the significance the story adopted in Woodward's own narrative embodies the ambiguity of her relationship with her mother, characterised as both oppressive and loving.[93] This memory is richly suggestive of the complexity and ambivalence of familial relationships defined, to external observers at least, by poverty. It also illustrates that we cannot interpret 'grief' as a fixed emotion with prescribed roles and responses.

There is a danger, however, of creating a vision of bereavement as invariably typified by emotional trauma; memories of the deceased could be comforting and pleasant. Furthermore, bereavement might occasion a new sense of freedom. In particular, the death of a mother – the symbolic glue of family life – might create new obligations for family (especially female) members, yet it could also dissolve them. Sam Shaw's mother died whilst he was serving a sentence in a boy's borstal. Feeling lonely but unable to bear the cost of attending her funeral, Shaw imagined returning to his family and visiting her grave at the end of his servitude. Ruminating on the phrase 'What is Home without a Mother?' deterred him from this fantasy; instead, he focused on building a new life and

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[91] Pettigrew, *Time to Remember*, 21.
[92] E. Flint, *Hot Bread and Chips* (London: Museum Press, 1963), 102.
[93] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 6–8.

placing the difficult relationship with his father and his criminal history behind him.[94] For Annie Kenney, the death of her mother enabled her to pursue her ideals and devote all her energies to suffrage campaigning rather than to her family: 'With my mother's death the cement of love that kept the home life together disappeared. We felt more like individuals in a big world than a family group and each planned his life according to his or her ideals.'[95] Grief could also lose its initial meaning with the passage of time. When Ralph Finn's father died, he described his mother as 'heart-broken'. Yet the bereavement became integral to her sense of self; she gloried in having survived misfortune whilst suffering endowed her with a social kudos.[96]

It is equally significant to note that some deaths were met with relief or indifference. This could adopt a variety of guises: gratitude for deliverance of the dead from pain and illness; respite from unpleasant relationships; and, perhaps, thankfulness for the alleviation of a financial burden. Kathleen Woodward recalled that 'one of the few pictures which lightened our walls at Jipping Street was a framed certificate of [my Grandfather's] death, on which was also recorded the fact that his body was washed up at Mortlake. This solitary memorial held for me a most fearful interest.'[97] Far from symbolising sadness, the certificate testified to her grandmother's satisfaction at the death of a tyrannical husband. Likewise, it would be naïve to assume that the material effects of the dead were always retained as keepsakes. The Vestry records for Brownlow Hill Workhouse in Liverpool indicate numerous families making applications to claim the effects of relatives who had died in the workhouse.[98] Yet many families recycled or pawned the deceased's belongings. As one pawnshop employee recalled, the effects of the dead, including wedding rings, could be turned into 'ready cash', especially for families with no intention of redeeming the goods.[99] Whilst this may well have been necessitated by privation, it seems equally plausible to suggest that, for some at least, remembering the dead was undesirable.

In a similar vein, some widow/ers remarried with apparent haste. Pat O'Mara detailed the slow and painful death of his once beautiful aunt. The seemingly compassionate observation that her husband (who had given her syphilis) was 'prostrated, and carried on desperately at the funeral' is, however, cancelled by the curt note that 'ten months later' he married Bridgett Kelly.[100] Rapid remarriage could prompt bitter

[94] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 115.   [95] Kenney, *Memories*, 26.   [96] Finn, *Time Remembered*, 16.
[97] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 5.   [98] LVRO 353 SEL 10/11–17, 1882–1911.
[99] Man. OH Transcript, Mrs Holtby, Tape 791.
[100] O'Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, 18–19.

recrimination in families who thought the dead deserved to be mourned a little longer. We should be wary, however, of accepting new unions as signs of indifference. Margaret Loane cited the case of a pensioner who was devotedly nursed by his wife. When he died, the widow appeared heartbroken and depressed for some weeks. Loane met the woman some six months later to find her wearing violets in her hat and telling of her forthcoming marriage to a widower. Yet the woman's jollity did not, according to Loane, erase the memory of her deceased husband. Rather, it represented a pragmatic and optimistic approach to life. As the widow suggested, 'You cannot live by the dead.' In this sense, then, making the most of one's opportunities need not be incompatible with grief or maintaining memories of the dead.[101]

Talking to the dead

To a point, strategies for managing grief indicate a belief in life after death, for the bereaved if not the deceased. Nonetheless, attempts by bereft friends and family to communicate with the dead highlight a desire to remember and maintain a relationship beyond the grave. In an organised context, contact with the dead was sought through the psychic powers of the medium. Less formally, individuals could 'feel the presence' of the dead. Although widely perceived as unorthodox, a belief in spirits could bring comfort to the bereaved. Indeed, notions of a spirit world were actually promoted in popular ideas relating to the physical integrity of the dead in the afterlife and visions of Heaven as a home. Likewise, references to the cemetery as 'God's acre' concealed the 'horrible reality' of decay with 'beautiful sentiment'.[102] Overall, therefore, concepts of the pervasive presence of the dead represented a continuum of broader cultural frameworks which sanitised death and ameliorated grief by promising reunion.

The popularity of spiritualism surged in the latter half of the nineteenth century, despite accusations that it was wholly unscientific, irreligious and completely devoid of 'common sense'.[103] Recognition that spiritualism was a forum for the expression and management of loss tended to be subsumed to concerns that the vulnerability of the bereaved left them open to exploitation. As endless investigations (notably by the Society for Psychical Research) into the authenticity of spiritualism illustrated, questions of 'truth' were highly subjective, often controversial and risked crushing the hope, trust and belief of grief-stricken

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[101] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 309.   [102] *Lancet*, 12 December 1896, 1716–17.
[103] Ibid., 23 September 1876, 431–3.

individuals.[104] Similarly, historical analysis of spiritualism in the nineteenth century has acknowledged, firstly, that loss was the principal motive for individuals turning to spiritualism and, secondly, that searing grief created an overwhelming desire to believe. Nonetheless, critical analysis of spiritualism has focused largely on the politics of spiritualists. Logie Barrow, for instance, concedes that fears relating to death were important but argues that the plebeian appeal of spiritualism in the 1820s lay in its promotion of a democracy and egalitarian learning.[105] Ruth Brandon and Janet Oppenheim have focused on the debates between science, religion and spiritualism.[106] Conversely, Alex Owen states that questions relating to the legitimacy of spiritualist phenomena have dominated historical research with the effect of closing discussion on the significance of a spiritualist discourse.[107] Owen's own analysis concentrates on the gendered implications of spiritualism. In particular, the role of 'medium' presented women with a supreme opportunity to subvert conventional gender roles.[108]

Analyses that take grief as the pivotal point of interpretation have tended to focus on the boom in spiritualism during and immediately after the First World War.[109] The most authoritative work in this field is Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*. Concerned with the cultural commemoration of the dead in the aftermath of the First World War, Winter perceives the surge in spiritualism's popularity as indicative of a pan-cultural need to remember and acknowledge the sacrifices of both the war-dead and the bereaved. Shifting the focus away from the medium, Winter offers a twofold definition of spiritualism. First, spiritualism was perceived as a secular phenomenon grounded in a psychical and psychological quest to communicate with the dead. Secondly, it was interpreted as

[104] For history of Society for Psychical Research see F. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism*, vols. I and II (London: Methuen & Co., 1902).

[105] L. Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians, 1850–1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1989).

[106] R. Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Random House, 1983) and J. Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[107] A. Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), viii. See also J. J. Schwieso, '"Religious Fanaticism" and Wrongful Confinement in Victorian England: The Affair of Louisa Nottidge', *Social History of Medicine*, 9, 2 (1996), 157–74.

[108] Owen, *Darkened Room*, 1–17.

[109] See, for instance, Cannadine, 'War and Death', J. Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 10, 4 (1999), 404–30, and J. Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). See also O. Lodge, *Raymond: Life and Death with Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection After Death* (London: Methuen, 1916).

a religious perception of angels, apocalypse, and divine presences in daily life. Common to both definitions, however, was the willingness to surpass conventional materialism and theology. Whilst some individuals engaged in spiritualism as part of wider research on the paranormal, Winter acknowledges that many 'simply wanted to converse with the dead'.[110] Winter's analysis of spiritualism can be extended to include conversations with the dead in informal and individualised contexts. Such conversations may well have been, and were expected to be, monologues. Indeed, whether the dead heard, understood and/or responded was not really at issue: the bereaved could talk to the dead – silently or aloud – from a simple desire to remember and maintain a relationship. In this sense, what David Cannadine has called a 'private denial of death' can be redefined as a personal gesture of commemoration.[111]

Such examples are, by their very nature, difficult to ascertain: contemporaries and historians alike tend to be disparaging about spirits and ghosts. In a story concerning the fear instilled among the residents of a female lodging house on account of a 'ghost', Charles Booth distanced himself from 'the superstition of these people' by recounting the success of a placebo-effect exorcism.[112] Belief in the supernatural also attracted ridicule at a popular level. In his autobiography *Shop Boy*, John Thomas suggested that even those who professed to believe in 'signs' from another world (namely his grandmother and her friends) treated them as a source of amusement rather than profound meaning.[113] Likewise, Florence Jones's recollection of a séance in early twentieth-century Liverpool was characterised by memories of stifled giggles and an overriding assumption that the medium was a fake. Furthermore, understandings of the séance converged with notions of clairvoyance: Florence and her friends had no intention of contacting the dead; they simply wanted to know whether or not they would marry.[114] Thus, not only could the séance be appropriated for different purposes, disparagement was not always in conflict with an element, however slight, of hope.

Robert Roberts also adopted a pejorative tone when relating accounts of belief in ghosts in the Salford neighbourhood of his childhood. With a mix of humour and incredulity, Roberts assumes a tone of childish ridicule towards those who believed in the paranormal. Indeed, 'Ladies susceptible to night noises roused a cruel streak in us boys.' Jocular

[110] J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54–5.
[111] Cannadine, 'War and Death', 227.   [112] Booth, *Life and Labour*, vol. II, 72–3.
[113] J. Thomas, *Shop Boy: An Autobiography* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 26–7.
[114] F. Jones, *Memoirs*, 83–4.

references to 'illiterate elders' who related stories of the supernatural, and of quack doctors who ran 'sidelines' in mediumship, suggest Roberts's desire to distance himself from the irrational. Yet despite his derisory tone, Roberts hints that such beliefs could mitigate the grief of the bereaved. Relating the story of a local family who lived in fear of their dead mother returning to haunt them, Roberts recalled that he and his peers failed to comprehend their anxiety. As his sister Ellie observed, the family cannot have loved their mother very much: 'When [our] Mother passed away in the unthinkable future, Ellie asked, would she, without fail, come back and haunt us – at any time, just at her own convenience? Because there was nothing any of us would want more!'[115] Similarly, Hannah Mitchell implied that talking to the dead was a palliative to loss. Mitchell described her grandmother as a woman not given to fancy. Yet '[She] would sit talking to her husband who had died many years before, and would seem surprised if I said I couldn't see him. A few minutes later she would be talking about everyday things like washing and baking.'[116]

In this sense, the deceased continued to pervade a domestic and personal landscape in a metaphorical if not literal sense, slipping in and out of conscious interaction. John Dugdale (born 1906) recollected finding his grandfather dead in bed one morning. Retrospectively, Dugdale suggested that he could feel the old man's presence 'for weeks after'.[117] Whether the elderly man was 'with' John or not did not matter: the sense of his nearness was a balm to the boy's grief. Thus, individuals did not need to believe that the dead accompanied them or responded to appeals made to them. Rather, loosely defined notions of dia/monologues with, and the presence of, the dead indicated a desire to remember the deceased in a personal context. The desire to feel the presence of the dead required little proof of an afterlife when it allowed the bereaved to feel that death had not severed the relationship with the deceased, but, rather, repositioned it within a new context. It must also be remembered that feeling the presence of, and talking to, the dead was usually inextricable from feelings of intimacy and could, for some at least, offer comfort by affirming the value of the relationship lost.[118]

Extreme responses to bereavement

As illustrated above, responses to death were far from uniform. Recognition of the diversity of bereavement experience calls into question

[115] R. Roberts, *Ragged Schooling*, 131–3.   [116] Mitchell, *Hard Way Up*, 48.
[117] Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, John Dugdale, uncatalogued.
[118] Shuchter and Zisook, 'Course of Normal Grief', 34.

assumptions concerning recovery and restitution from loss. The limits of tolerance towards relatives who failed to resolve grief indicate broad concepts of normative grief; those who 'lost all sympathy' for the grief-stricken were implicitly invoking a notion of the acceptable boundaries of mourning.[119] Drawing on the case notes of patients admitted to Lancaster Moor and Prestwich Asylums in the north-west of England, this section explores narratives of mental illness where grief was situated as the cause of madness. On admission to an asylum, patients were usually accompanied by relatives who, in most instances, gave an account of the patient's illness and completed questionnaires distributed by asylum staff to 'direct the treatment of the patient to the best possible advantage'. Containing an average of thirty-four questions, questionnaires addressed the patient's family history and previous experiences of illness, distress and poverty.[120] The use of medical records as a text on extreme bereavement is problematic. Given the marginal status of the lunatic asylum patient, their stories of loss are hardly representative. To a point, they are not supposed to be: their very situation demonstrates the perceived atypicality of chronic grief. It is impossible to assess retrospectively the diagnoses of medical practitioners or next of kin. Furthermore, the stories that case records relate were refracted through asylum staff who transcribed the information they perceived to be relevant or true and, necessarily, coloured it with their own opinions.[121] Asylum staff sometimes rejected relations' narratives. When Margaret Hamen entered Prestwich Asylum in January 1890, the admissions officer dismissed suggestion that bereavement had precipitated Hamen's decline, emphasising instead 'heredity, puerperal fever, lactation and disappointment'. Admissions staff interpreted stories of illness through a framework of norms and values. The officer overseeing the case of Mary Hewitt agreed that bereavement was integral to her illness, yet it was not the emotional impact of loss but, rather, Hewitt's unwise choices in the aftermath of loss, notably her co-habitation with the 'unsteady' Tom Taylor, that precipitated mental decline.[122]

Nevertheless, case records provide a rare snapshot of familial relationships whilst illustrating the imagery and language used to describe and conceptualise grief. Moreover, the case histories cited here demonstrate a vast range of criteria for the successful resolution of a bereavement process. It should also be noted that whilst a number of men were

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[119] Jane Ann Smith, admitted to Prestwich Asylum in April 1890, claimed her sister had lost sympathy for her. LRO QAM 6/5/33.
[120] LRO HRL 3/14.   [121] LRO QAM 6/5/33, LRO QAM 6/5/25.
[122] LRO QAM 6/5/25.

admitted to the asylum on account of chronic grief, bereavement tends to feature in a greater number of female case records. This is not to suggest that men grieved less, or that they were more adept at resolving bereavement. Rather, such discrepancies point to the gendering of grief and madness. To a point, women were expected to feel emotional upset more keenly and manifest it in socially visible ways. Men, however, were more likely to be admitted to asylums on account of unemployment and drink.[123] This is supported by Victor Bailey's exploration of coroner's inquests into suicide deaths in Victorian Kingston-upon-Hull. Bailey indicates that statistically, male suicides were caused by economic uncertainty (especially unemployment), drink and illness. In comparison, female suicides (apart from in late old age) were frequently precipitated by problems or disturbances in personal relationships.[124]

Admission to the asylum carried a stigma. It was, therefore, in the interests of a family to locate a social rather than hereditary cause for insanity. Moreover, locating madness in the context of bereavement may have encouraged sympathy rather than disparagement from others. If grief was supposed to evoke compassion, it must also be assumed that personal loss was understood to represent a potentially devastating experience. John Walton has suggested that most asylum admissions were initiated by next of kin after a lengthy decision-making process. Contesting Andrew Scull's conclusion that relations were admitted to asylums when they were economically unproductive, Walton's analysis highlights the willingness of families to stretch definitions of unacceptable behaviour before turning to the asylum.[125] Victor Bailey also suggests that labels of madness tended to originate in familial contexts. Nevertheless, most families resisted committal to the asylum until all other possibilities had been exhausted.[126] Some relatives in this sample appear to have had little patience at all. For instance, Margaret Barrow, admitted to Prestwich Asylum in June 1880, was 'troublesome to her son'.[127] Most accompanying relatives, however, expressed detailed perceptions of their relatives' well-being in a language of concern and compassion.

[123] For gendering of lunacy see E. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture* (London: Virago, 1987), J. Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) and K. Davies, '"Sexing the Mind?" Women, Gender and Madness in Nineteenth Century Welsh Asylums', *Llafur: The Journal of Welsh Labour History*, 7 (1996), 29–40.

[124] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 165–252.

[125] Walton, 'Lunacy in the Industrial Revolution', 1–22.

[126] V. Bailey, *This Rash Act*, 54–6. See also Wright, 'Getting Out of the Asylum', 137–55 and D. Wright, *Mental Disability in Victorian England: The Earlswood Asylum, 1847–1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[127] LRO QAM 6/6/7.

When providing a retrospective biography of madness, relatives probably fixed on the extraordinary events in lives rather than the grinding problems of daily survival. Indeed, this may explain why bereavement could be identified as the cause of insanity long after the death in question had occurred. Eliza Elastee's daughter stated that the onset of her mother's mania in 1885 was rooted in the death of a child some five years previously.[128] Thomas Parker, a labourer, had displayed signs of mental illness for four weeks when he entered Lancaster Moor Asylum in January 1881. The cause of his despair, however, was assigned to the death of his daughter two years before.[129] Thomas Gough, a labourer from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in June 1880. According to his sister, the death of their father eighteen months previously had deeply affected Thomas, and he had been 'getting worse for the last six or seven months'. He had twice attempted suicide, once by hanging and once by slitting his throat.[130]

Despite the methodological problems, it is possible to read, albeit tentatively, asylum narratives of bereavement for insights into conceptualisations of normative grief and resolution. Margaret Riley, a young servant from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in January 1880. Her brother described her as industrious, regular and temperate. He noted, however, that 'she would grieve greatly for any family trouble'. In particular, 'she grieved greatly after a sudden death of one of her brothers or if any of her people died she would cry greatly'.[131] It is difficult to discern what Riley defined as 'great' grief. Yet the phrase is richly suggestive: it implies profound distress and indicates that Riley was deploying a concept of normative grief against one of chronic loss. Similarly, Richard Leighton gave a vivid description of his wife's 'furies' in the two weeks preceding her admission to Lancaster Moor Asylum in June 1880. Frances Leighton had become 'ill in mind' a few days after the death of their daughter and had 'got rougher and rougher every day since and fearful last night, throwing herself about'. That Richard had waited two weeks before escorting Frances to the asylum suggests an initial tolerance of her 'furies', possibly in the belief that the behaviour was related to the shock of bereavement and would subside.[132] Grief thus had recognised forms and limits; when individuals transgressed those boundaries it prompted discomfort and difficulties for others. Indeed,

[128] LRO QAM 6/5/25. Admitted Prestwich 7 January 1885. Last entry 1 July 1885.
[129] LRO HRL 2/10. Discharged recovered 5 April 1881.
[130] LRO HRL 2/10. Discharged recovered 7 December 1880.
[131] LRO HRL 3/8. Discharged to workhouse 14 September 1880.
[132] LRO HRL 3/8. Discharged recovered June 1882.

conflicting interpretations of acceptable grief had the potential to create discord between family members. Rebecca Ninnis, a thirty-four-year-old weaver, was admitted to Lancaster Moor in August 1895 on account of being violent, abusive and 'unmanageable'. The admissions officer suggested that a recent confinement combined with excessive alcohol consumption had precipitated the attack of mania. Rejecting this diagnosis, Rebecca's husband William asserted that she had 'troubled a trifle' at the deaths of her mother, two sisters and brother, and had taken to attending spiritualist meetings in an attempt to establish contact with them. His emphasis that spiritualism was the 'one thing' which had affected his wife indicates the extent of his disapproval; Rebecca had 'never been the same woman' since participating in such pursuits.[133] In rejecting spiritualism as an unacceptable gesture of mourning, William incorporated Rebecca's attempt to contact the dead into a concept of chronic grief. He was also, perhaps, sensitive to the aspersions cast on Rebecca's (and by extension, his own) moral character by the suggestion that she drank heavily.

Clearly, concepts of chronic grief were highly subjective. Margaret Dobie (aged thirty-seven), an unmarried shopwoman from Bolton, was admitted to Prestwich Asylum in January 1880 having attempted to cut her throat. The uncle who accompanied her on admission disputed the medical officer's suggestion that the attack was sudden and occasioned by ill health. Margaret had, he claimed, experienced a previous attack of insanity some nine months earlier, after the death of her father. Although she had improved since that time, she had remained 'nervous' and 'timid' and, having no other immediate family, was 'very lonely'.[134] Whether or not Margaret's uncle was accurate in his diagnosis is, to a point, irrelevant. What is striking is his confident belief that bereavement could effect such devastation on an individual life. Similarly, Emma Grindrod, a dressmaker from Rochdale, attempted to commit suicide in February 1880 by driving a needle into her chest. The aunt who accompanied her to Prestwich Asylum informed the medical officer that Emma's mother had died some years previously of phthisis. Emma had always 'lived poorly' and 'worked rather hard', being a melancholy woman and never sleeping too well. The recent death of her father had, however, 'greatly upset her'.[135]

In these accounts bereavement was framed in terms of emotional distress. The implicit juxtaposition between the bereavement of solitary individuals and the experience of those who maintained other close

[133] LRO HRL 3/19. Died of retro-peritoneal sarcoma 1 March 1905.
[134] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Died of phthisis 20 March 1880.
[135] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Discharged recovered 20 August 1880.

relationships suggests, however, a conception that loneliness could exacerbate grief. These stories also illustrate how the death of a relative shattered homes and routines. Rachel Hodson, a cotton winder aged thirty-three from Bolton, was admitted to Prestwich in February 1885 after stabbing herself in the throat with a pair of scissors. According to her sister: 'Father died last November and not right since – gone worse. Not slept well for long time, eats little yet went to Mill till two days ago.' Rachel had nursed her father during his final illness. The detail that she had to lift him in and out of bed suggests the extent of his infirmity. As the medical officer noted, his subsequent death was 'evidently a great trouble' to her. In the days following her admission, Rachel fluctuated between upbraiding herself for neglecting her father's home and asking asylum nurses for something 'to sleep her to wake no more'. Rachel was a spinster and her notes suggest that she lived alone with her father (her mother had died some years previously from a stroke). His death, therefore, meant the loss of a relationship, a routine, an identity as daughter/carer and, perhaps, a home.[136] Similarly, Robert Bell (aged fifty-seven), a bachelor labourer from Ulverston, was admitted to Lancaster Moor Asylum in March 1890. His brother John located the onset of Robert's symptoms (indifference to his surroundings and restlessness in the night) in the death of their mother two years previously: Robert had begun to 'ail' whilst 'living by himself in a lonely cottage'. John reiterated that since their mother's death, Robert had lived 'all alone by himself'. He had threatened to drown himself and said spirits told him to 'make away' with himself.[137] Again, the emphasis on loneliness suggests that the hardest adjustment after bereavement was the loss of companionship, routine and the renegotiation of one's identity.

Whilst it is difficult to generalise from small samples, Robert Bell is exceptional among these sources. Overall, asylum records suggest a preponderance of single women whose breakdown was rooted in grief and loneliness at the death of a parent. This may illustrate nothing more than a high ratio of unmarried women who depended on their parents. However, it also implies the social and economic isolation of bereaved spinsters. Whilst the widow often had children for comfort and distraction, the grief-stricken spinster was thrown back on her own resources. Accompanied by her friend Sarah Radcliffe, Alice Weston entered Lancaster Moor Asylum on 3 March 1895. An unmarried woman, aged forty-six, Alice had moved from London to Burnley to work as a machinist. All her relatives had died except an aunt to whom she 'was much

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[136] LRO QAM 6/5/25. Last entry 1 July 1885 states 'much same but generally busy'.
[137] LRO HRL 2/16. Died 27 November 1890 with fluid on his lungs.

devoted'. Since the death of this aunt six years previously, however, she had been completely alone and suffered much poverty. Sarah Radcliffe was also unmarried and alone in the world – 'having no parents'. When Alice returned to health, they resolved to make a 'comfortable home' and live together 'as sisters'.[138]

The case histories of the chronically bereaved tell stories of love, familiarity, and the perceived influence of external factors on an individual's experience of grief. In particular, they indicate that the death of a spouse was construed as a tragedy, not simply from the loss of a breadwinner or household manager, but from the devastation occasioned by losing one's partner and companion.[139] Following the sudden death of her husband in July 1885, Phoebe Entwhistle had become increasingly low-spirited: she resigned her post as a weaver, sacrificed her home and went to live with her brother. In October, she was admitted to Prestwich Asylum where she was described as suffering from mania.[140] Notably, male patients thought to be suffering from chronic grief tended to have lost their wife, a reflection perhaps that without a woman at its core, domestic life lost its comfort and meaning, especially in old age. Robert Holt, a cotton bleacher from Bolton, entered Prestwich Asylum in October 1880 in an emaciated and 'demented' state. According to his records, he 'never appeared to get over the shock' of his wife's death two years previously.[141] Similarly, Philip King, a tailor from Liverpool, was admitted to Lancaster Moor Asylum in February 1880. He dated his depression from the death of his wife the previous July.[142] Hamilton Cunningham, a hawker, entered Lancaster Moor in February 1885. His sister Elizabeth Walton stated that: 'he has never been happy or cheerful since he lost his wife and we all think that has preyed on his mind for he was always thinking about his wife'.[143] In losing their spouse, the bereaved often forfeited a core component of their identity and lifestyle. Samuel Goldsmith (aged seventy-two), a warehouseman from Chorlton, was admitted to Prestwich Asylum in November 1886. The onset of his dementia was attributed to the death of his wife whom he had nursed through illness for the previous four years.[144] The narrative suggests that

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[138] LRO HRL 3/19. Admitted 3 March 1895. Discharged recovered 3 March 1896.

[139] Current psychotherapy recognises 'broken-heart syndrome'. See M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe and R. Hansson, 'Bereavement, Research and Theory: An Introduction to the Handbook' in Stroebe et al., *Handbook of Bereavement*, 10–11.

[140] LRO QAM 6/5/26. Last entry 30 October 1885 suggests no improvement in Phoebe's condition.

[141] LRO QAM 6/6/17. Discharged to workhouse 26 May 1880.

[142] LRO HRL 2/10. Died of phthisis pulmonatis 26 February 1881.

[143] LRO HRL 2/15. Died of senile decay 17 January 1889.

[144] LRO QAM 6/6/26. Died from old age 1 January 1887.

grief, combined with the absence of a familiar structure and role, pre-
cipitated dementia. Likewise, John Glasford, admitted to Lancaster
Moor in July 1890, was said to have been 'troubling' ever since he buried
his wife fifteen months previously: he had 'broke up his home and he
never seemed satisfied since'.[145] The image of the deliberately dismantled
home not only reinforces a sense of loss, it also seems symbolic of the
passing of a familiar life that was rooted in a relationship and particular
environment.

The despair of some individuals at the death of their spouse was
thought to be sufficiently powerful to precipitate drastic action. On the
night of his suicide in March 1898, John Drummond, a clogger from
Caernarfon, had told neighbours that he was 'a lost man since his wife
died'.[146] An inquest in May 1889 into the suicide of Ann Richardson, a
sixty-three-year-old woman from Liverpool, concluded that the death
was motivated by the recent loss of her husband, since when she had
been 'in very low spirits'.[147] Joseph Hartley, a coke burner, was found
hanging 'within an hour' of his wife's death. The coroner's inquest
reported that 'when the breath had left his wife's body he kissed her,
and in the greatest grief left the room, and it is surmised, immediately
hanged himself'. He left several young children behind.[148] Whilst it is
impossible to determine the character of such marriages, the acknow-
ledgement that the death of a spouse could facilitate such profound
personal sorrow should warn against reading the working-class marriage
exclusively as an economic contract devoid of friendship and emotion.[149]

Conclusion

Previous chapters have focused on the artefacts of death and the public
rites of mourning as forums for negotiating grief. This chapter developed
that analysis to examine the ways in which bereavement was understood
and made manifest outside shared cultural representations of loss. The
management of personal feeling enabled the bereaved to confront the
multiple losses and problems precipitated by death. Yet it also facilitated
private opportunities for giving way to anguish and distress. The only
'suppression' of feeling evident in this analysis was temporary. In man-
aging grief, working-class families did not negate loss, they formulated

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[145] LRO HRL 2/16. Died of carcimona of prostrate gland 3 May 1901.
[146] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 26 March 1898, 5.
[147] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 25 May 1889, 1.   [148] Ibid., 5 March 1898, 8.
[149] Vincent suggests that the romantic love of courtship was blunted during marriage by the
    hardships of poverty. He does, however, concede that spouses could retain some form of
    'bond' on the basis of shared experience. Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 54–5.

positive, constructive and malleable means for its expression. Moreover, whilst most individuals held some notion of resolution and restitution, this did not conflict with holding a treasury of memories or with maintaining abstract relationships with the dead. That these were not always visible to external observers does not cancel their significance for the individual mourner. As the following chapter highlights, languages of resignation, poverty and fatalism – so often mistaken for indifference or a lack of humanity – frequently concealed a wealth of emotion which was no less harrowing for being intensely private.

8 Grieving for dead children

Despite a gradual decline in the death rate at the end of the nineteenth century, infant mortality remained disproportionately high until the First World War.[1] Concentrated in poor and overcrowded urban districts, infant mortality (the deaths of children under twelve months old) occurred with such frequency (220 deaths per 1,000 live births in the worst cities between 1891 and 1900) that working-class parents were thought to have acquired a degree of immunity towards these deaths, especially as high birth rates replaced lost lives with startling rapidity.[2] The statistics were used to sensational effect in campaigns for the greater protection of infant life. It is unsurprising, perhaps, that alongside fears about white slavery, infanticide was one of the most recurrent moral panics of the nineteenth century. The common theme permeating anxieties about infant life was the supposed brutality of poorer parents; despite increasing awareness of social and environmental influences on life expectancy, reports on high infant mortality rates were consistently suffused with allegations of baby-farming, infanticide and wilful neglect. Much of this cynicism was rooted in perceptions of financial interest: the

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[1] In the decade 1891–1900, the general mortality rate was 18.2 deaths per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate was 153 deaths per 1,000 live births. See, for instance, Woods and Shelton, *Atlas of Victorian Mortality*, Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 1–10, G. Mooney, 'Stillbirths and the Measurement of Infant Mortality Rates c. 1890–1930', *Local Population Studies*, 53 (1994), 42–52. For improvement in infant welfare during and after the First World War see D. Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England 1898–1918* (London: Tavistock, 1987).

[2] Between 1891 and 1900, Birmingham, Blackburn, Leicester, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Preston and Salford had the highest rates of infant mortality in England, at 220 or more infant deaths per 1,000 live births. See Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 10. The correlation between high mortality rates and emotional immunity to death has been applied mainly to pre-industrial society. See L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), 70. Ellen Ross and Angus McLaren argue that this position is becoming increasingly untenable. See Ross, *Love and Toil*, 190, and A. McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1984), 10.

diminution of family size alleviated household expenditure whilst child life insurance policies heralded a minor windfall. At best, working-class parents were fatalistic and ignorant; at worst, they were mercenaries who perceived the lives of their offspring exclusively in material terms.[3] Of course, in this model, older children who provided vital household assistance or were engaged in paid employment would be mourned in the event of their death on account of the loss of their labour.

Calculations of the extent of infanticide are problematic. One correspondent to *The Times* observed in 1891 that the death of a child required no elaborate planning and was easily concealed with mock-sentiment: 'how little is needed to let a child die! A single draught of air may dispose of a baby'; and how easy to pretend sorrow, '"Poor little fellow, he will be happier elsewhere" is said with a tear as the five pounds burial money is pocketed.'[4] Historians have echoed this concern. The supposed leniency of judges and coroners towards parents charged with infanticide has fostered claims that official statistics grossly underestimated the real number of cases.[5] More controversially, Howard Taylor has argued that prosecutions for infanticide were deliberately kept to a minimum in line with the crime quotas set by the Home Office.[6] Conversely, Ann Higginbotham and Anthony Wohl have suggested that the sensationalism (contemporary and historical) surrounding infanticide has encouraged exaggerated calculations.[7] Certainly, there is a danger that negative stereotypes inherent in infanticide literature can be applied almost indiscriminately to working-class attitudes to young children. In particular, charges of fatalism, ignorance and privation are easily confused with accusations of neglect.

Historical analysis in the 1980s tended to reiterate the Victorian moral panic concerning infant death. At its most melodramatic, Lionel Rose's *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1986) argued that 'the value of infant life was determined by the forces of supply and demand'.[8] Asserting that

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[3] See *Lancet*, 2 June 1883, 963; 5 April 1884, 633; 13 July 1889, 83; 25 November 1899, 1470; 16 June 1906, 1710. See also G. Behlmer, *Child Abuse and Moral Reform in England, 1870–1908* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) and H. Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[4] *The Times*, 4 August 1891, 7.

[5] R. Sauer, 'Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Population Studies*, 32, 1 (1978), 81–94, and L. Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 57–69.

[6] H. Taylor, 'Rationing Crime: The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics since the 1850s', *Economic History Review*, 51, 3 (1998), 569–90.

[7] A. Higginbotham, '"Sin of the Age": Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 32, 3 (1989), 319–37, and Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 34.

[8] Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents*, 5.

human relationships were governed by 'elementally animal' instincts, Rose endorsed the notion that poverty was synonymous with the neglect of children.[9] This is a complex and controversial issue, the intricacies of which Rose declined to explore. There is also a problem concerning definition of the working classes in question. Of course, there were some horrific instances of child neglect and outright murder. Nonetheless, there is a danger in assuming that a minority of high-profile scandals were representative of a wider population. Clearly, some parents were cruel and/or abusive towards their children whilst others were not overly sorry when their offspring died. Some children expressed open antipathy to their parents in adulthood: Jack Martin berated his drunken and cruel father; Alice Foley described her father as a vicious, 'open-mouthed braggart of an Irishman'; Pat O'Mara portrayed his father as a terrifying presence who would turn violent with alarming unpredictability; and George Acorn's entire autobiography is a bitter denunciation of both his parents.[10] How far these examples can be applied beyond the confines of a single family unit, let alone the broader category of 'the poor', is highly questionable. Even within individual biographies, contradiction and conflict is rife: notably, George Acorn's narrative often represents a painful attempt to reconcile himself to his parents' shortcomings and is not entirely devoid of flashes of affection. As Eleanor Rathbone noted in 1913, one could not judge the poorer classes from extreme examples of 'really bad' parents. The vast majority were 'good in intention': they tried their best in circumstances which were, arguably, stacked against them.[11]

Since Rose's sensational *Massacre of the Innocents*, historical analysis of high infant mortality rates has increasingly shifted away from perpetuating moral panics to explore the narrativity of infanticide and the cultural values implicit in notions of bad parenting. It is not my intention in this chapter to dwell on this body of work or on issues of demography, epidemiology, the extent of infanticide, or the campaigns for legislative reform to protect infant life. These have been well documented by others whilst a comprehensive body of research has flourished, examining the complex interplay of environment, education and material wealth in causing or preventing infant death.[12] Rather, this chapter draws attention to a persistent gap in the historical literature: the bereavement of working-class

[9] Ibid., 187.

[10] Martin, *Ups and Downs*, 15; Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 3, 8; O'Mara, *Autobiography of a Liverpool Slummy*, 42.

[11] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 24.

[12] R. Cooter, *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare 1880–1940* (London: Routledge, 1992), A. Hardy, 'Rickets and the Rest: Child-Care, Diet and the Infectious Children's Diseases, 1850–1914', *Social History of Medicine*, 5, 3 (1992), 389–412, J. Lewis, 'The

parents who lost an infant or a small child to death. To begin, the demographic focus on infant mortality has discouraged an analysis of responses to the deaths of older children who were still dependent upon their parents (children under thirteen still had to attend school). Secondly, with the exception of Ellen Ross's excellent *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London*, scholarly interest in infanticide and child-rearing practice has largely ignored the potential of the poor to form emotional bonds with very young offspring. This is not to suggest that poorer families were happy models of humanity, but, rather, that the dynamics of interpersonal relationships were more ambiguous than has previously been allowed. This chapter aims to redress the negative stereotypes of the working-class parent by examining responses to child death as the epitome of a pragmatic culture of bereavement which did not suppress grief but enabled parents to manage sorrow and loss. As Anthony Wohl has commented, it would 'doubtless be comforting' for us to concur with contemporary social reformers who argued that infant deaths were less distressing to the poor: they were 'so common, so *expected* – parents accepted them stoically and passively, without much pain or remorse'. Yet, continues Wohl, stoicism was often, like respectability, an adopted front and easily mistaken for callous indifference.[13]

Poverty, insurance and ignorance

Few contemporary commentators would have disputed that the superior housing, relative security and perceived respectability of families headed by skilled workers exempted them from the worst charges of wilful infant and child neglect. In this sense, it was poverty itself that was supposed to foster apathy towards offspring. Giving voice to the 'bitter cry' of outcast London, Andrew Mearns claimed that the children of the poor were neglected and subjected to cruelty from birth.[14] Describing Edwardian Liverpool, Andie Clerk stated that the 'sins' of poor parents were visited upon their children: it had 'nothing to do with God, it's inevitable and couldn't be otherwise'.[15] Surveying the poverty-stricken metropolis, Jack

Working-Class Mother and State Intervention' in J. Lewis (ed.), *Labour and Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family, 1850–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 99–120, I. Loudon, 'On Maternal and Infant Mortality, 1900–1960', *Social History of Medicine*, 4, 1 (1991), 29–73, and N. Williams, 'Death in its Season: Class, Environment and the Mortality of Infants in Nineteenth-Century Sheffield', *Social History of Medicine*, 5, 1 (1992), 71–94.

[13] Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 41.   [14] Mearns, *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, 16.
[15] Clerk, *Autobiography of a Street Arab*, 7.

London asserted that children 'die like flies'. The links between poverty and moral degradation were explicit: 'In the dens and lairs in which they live they are exposed to all that is obscene and indecent. And as their minds are made rotten, so are their bodies made rotten by bad sanitation, overcrowding, and underfeeding.'[16] Noting that over 50 per cent of children in the East End died before the age of five, London invoked a lurid image of mass infanticide: 'Slaughter! Herod did not do quite so badly.'[17]

Dramatic depictions of degradation and apathy dovetailed with allegations that the deaths of the young were welcome. In the novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896) Arthur Morrison explored the attempts of a philanthropist cleric to rescue individuals and their families from succumbing to the moral inertia fostered by poverty. Morrison charts the descent of the Perrott family from relative respectability to slum apathy as their financial fortunes decline. Their assimilation into a culture of moral squalor is signified by the death of the infant, Looey Perrott. The child is sick but her mother, Hannah, allows 'native inertness' to supersede a sense of responsibility and she leaves the infant alone whilst she goes drinking. When the child dies in her absence, Morrison suggests that Hannah stares 'blankly', looks bemused and feels only 'listless relief'; her husband Josh feels 'nothing in particular' and suggests a return to the pub; their neighbours, meanwhile, congratulate them on a prospective insurance claim.[18] Morrison portrays such attitudes as inseparable from a particular social environment. This did not excuse slum dwellers' disaffection, but, rather, condemned the poverty that bred passivity and trapped the lower classes from ever leaving the slum. While Hannah and Josh Perrott are supping ale in the pub, their son Dicky, the protagonist of the novel, and a prostitute, Pigeony Poll, try to soothe the sick infant Looey. Set in juxtaposition to the married mother, the prostitute embodies Morrison's philanthropic hope that the fallen are not beyond redemption. An outcast even among the slums, Pigeony Poll nurses the child tenderly and, when she dies, breaks into an 'odd croaking noise' and hides her face in her arm. The character of Dicky, meanwhile, represents the struggle of some of the poor to be good citizens. Left alone with the corpse of Looey after his parents return to the pub, Dicky lies alongside his sister 'exhausted with sobbing, a soak of muddy tears: O Looey, Looey! Can't you 'ear? Won't you never come to me no more?' That Dicky also dies later in the novel renders *A Child of the Jago* particularly pessimistic in its outlook on the prospects of the poor. Similarly, George Gissing's *The Nether World* used the infant death scene as a tool for ruminating on the morality of the poor.

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[16] London, *People of the Abyss*, 276.   [17] Ibid., 254.
[18] A. Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (London: Panther, [1896] 1971), 101–4.

Drawing attention to the financial privation of the Hewett family, Gissing implies that it is impossible to escape the financial advantages of infant death: 'For two years things had gone miserably for them, their only piece of good fortune being the death of the youngest child.'[19] Like Morrison, Gissing is keen to suggest that callous responses to infant mortality were neither universal nor inevitable. The bitterness of Bob Hewett when told he is to become a father again is matched by his gratitude when the child is stillborn: 'Thank goodness for that, any way!' Gissing contrasts this, however, with the more complex reaction of the expectant mother, Pennyloaf. Gissing places her sorrow at the stillbirth (she is 'very low') within a pragmatic context: the family's extreme poverty provides a framework in which Pennyloaf can temper her loss and avoid being 'over sorry' that the child is dead.[20]

Correlations between mortality and material relief among the rough and the respectable undoubtedly fuelled the moral panic concerning infant mortality, especially in cases where infant lives had been insured. According to *Public Health*, approximately 80 per cent of children were insured in the early 1890s.[21] Identified as an incentive to infanticide, campaigns to ban infant insurance persisted well into the early decades of the twentieth century.[22] A correspondent to *The Times* in 1884 likened the burial club collector to the grim reaper, claiming that life insurance was 'an abominable system' which 'unquestionably [set] a premium upon infanticide'.[23] The notion that infant insurance represented a child's death warrant and guaranteed a profitable return rested on the assumption that poorer parents had little affection for their offspring.[24] Even defences of infant life insurance made negative assumptions about the poorer classes. According to contemporary insurance companies, those most likely to insure their offspring were the provident and respectable classes whilst the intemperate and idle rarely took out insurance at all.[25]

At the forefront of campaigns to regulate life insurance legislation, the editors of the medical journal, *Lancet*, avoided blanket condemnation of the working classes; parents were 'probably' fond of their offspring but, all too often, 'let their children die'.[26] One of the few arguments published in the *Lancet* in favour of infant insurance conjectured that its

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[19] Gissing, *Nether World*, 141.
[20] Ibid., 313–14. See also Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 45.
[21] *Public Health*, VII, 82 (1895), 164.
[22] Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents*, 136–58.   [23] *The Times*, 29 September 1884, 12.
[24] See, for instance, *Lancet*, 7 July 1877, 36; 13 July 1889, 83; 14 November 1896, 1398; 30 July 1904, 330–1; and 25 September 1909, 962.
[25] Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 34.
[26] *Lancet*, 1 September 1877, 331. See also *Lancet*, 24 January 1885, 167.

abolition would prove counterproductive: burial expenses would exacerbate financial burdens and propel parents to further disaffection.[27] The much-publicised scheme to reduce infant mortality in Huddersfield, introduced in 1906, also rested on a series of misgivings concerning working-class morality. Parents were offered a reward of one shilling for the early registration of newborn babies (within forty-eight hours of birth) and issued with a promissory note for one sovereign which would be honoured on the infant reaching its first birthday: the underlying assumption that parents would exercise greater care of offspring if offered remuneration for their efforts highlights the insidiousness of stereotypes that equated poverty with apathy.[28]

The suspicion that life insurance motivated neglect was pervasive and influenced relationships between professionals and poorer parents. Expectant mothers were often cautious when expressing anxieties about pregnancy and financial welfare for fear of being accused of neglect should the child subsequently die.[29] Social surveyor Maud Pember Reeves noted that even 'respectable' mothers attached great importance to securing proof of stillbirth in order to deflect allegations that they had murdered a newborn child.[30] In late-Victorian Liverpool, medical practitioner and public health official Edward Hope included burial insurance in his criteria for assessing suspected cases of infant and child neglect. In February 1884 he visited a house where three children had recently died. The family appeared destitute. Hope reported that an eight-month-old infant lay sick in its mother's arms whilst a 'very ill, very dirty, very much neglected' seven-year-old lay close by. Insurance policies had been purchased for each child.[31] Hope avoided making explicit allegations against the parents, but, in noting that the lives of the children were insured, he raised the possibility that parents were little inclined to mend their ways if the neglect of offspring brought some real financial relief. Likewise, in January 1895 Hope visited two small girls who lay sick with scarlatina. Two other siblings had recently died. Their parents were 'very poor people' but, Hope observed, had managed to insure each child's life for thirty shillings.[32] Explicit parental interest in the insurance of sick children further cemented negative stereotypes. When Hope noted that the mother of James Hervey, aged six and sick with scarlatina, was 'anxious to get him in a club on hearing a bad prognosis', he implied that her

[27] *Lancet*, 6 October 1888, 680–1.
[28] H. Marland, 'A Pioneer in Infant Welfare: The Huddersfield Scheme, 1903–1920', *Social History of Medicine*, 6, 1 (1993), 25–50.
[29] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 98.   [30] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 70.
[31] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 1 February 1884.   [32] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 2 March 1887.

principal concern lay with finance rather than the welfare of her son.[33] On calling at the Rooney household in October 1887, Hope was incredulous to find a three-year-old, evidently dying, in the care of a woman who 'is useless as a nurse'. The child's mother had gone 'down to a club'. Two children had already died at this address and Hope ordered the removal of a fourth who displayed symptoms of scarlatina rather than leave it in a 'house of this character'.[34] Implicit in Hope's denunciation of the household was a perception of a hard-hearted mother who thought more of insurance money than of her child. Moreover, the disparity between making provision for life insurance whilst dwelling in 'abominable hovels' suggested to Hope a disordering of priorities.[35]

The libel against working-class parents who insured the lives of young offspring did not, however, go unchallenged. In a 'vindication' of 'slum mothers' published in 1891, the radical physician Edward Berdoe argued that allegations concerning profiteering from death clubs were 'unpleasantly suggestive' about the character of working-class parents. Importantly, they overlooked the necessity of burial clubs: 'When a working man … [who] has to support himself, his wife, and three or four children, loses one of the latter after a more or less expensive illness, it very rarely happens … that he has a fund saved up out of which he can pay three or four pounds for a funeral.' In his professional capacity, Berdoe witnessed the 'tender regard' and self-sacrifice most mothers displayed towards sick children. Utilising the grasping imagery invoked by critics of the poor, Berdoe claimed that few parents, even the most destitute, appeared 'anxious to finger the gold promised by the death-club'. The significance attached to burial policy premiums was, Berdoe suggested, rooted in the cultural, political and emotional importance the working classes attached to burial rites.[36] Despite legislative measures regulating infant insurance from the 1870s, the correlation between infant mortality and burial insurance remained topical some three decades later. Giving evidence to the Select Committee of Inquiry into Coroners in 1909, Ernest Gibson, Coroner for Manchester, refuted the Chairman's suggestions that parents insured offspring for sinister purposes: burial insurance was so universal and the payouts so 'paltry', it was absurd to suggest that parents were scheming en masse to murder their babes.[37] Maud Pember Reeves reiterated this point, arguing that life

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[33] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 21 March 1884.   [34] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 28 October 1887.
[35] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 6 May 1887.
[36] E. Berdoe, 'Slum Mothers and Death Clubs: A Vindication', *The Nineteenth Century* (April 1891), 560–3.
[37] PP 1910, XXI: 8206–11.

insurance was a necessary feature of a culture of poverty and pragmatism: 'Shall they run the risk of burial by the parish, or shall they take Time by the forelock and insure each child as it is born, at the rate of a penny a week?'[38] Maud Davies thought burial insurance a good thing in that it provided working-class parents with models for saving. Indeed, the numbers of children insured in burial clubs in the rural Wiltshire parish of Corsley had declined since the opening of the Corsley School Savings Bank.[39]

Burial costs

In a culture where long-term planning was almost unknown, burial insurance represented a strategy for guarding against financial crisis and its attendant consequences, particularly pauperism. Notably, contagious disease could claim the lives of several children within one household within days or weeks of each other, necessitating considerable outlay in funeral expenses. A ringspinner from Farnworth (born 1907) recalled that her father was 'very bitter for a long time' when, having contrived to inter six children in private graves, his financial resources were finally exhausted. When the seventh child succumbed to mortal sickness, he simply could not afford another interment and had to turn to the parish.[40] Little wonder he was bitter; public burial was even more undignified for young children as 'any amount of little coffins' could be crammed into a single grave space.[41] J. Birley (born c. 1880s) suggested that the death of her baby brother whilst their father was away at sea was a 'harrowing experience': grief was exacerbated by the lack of an insurance policy which made it 'almost impossible' to buy a grave. Birley's distraught mother immediately purchased insurance policies for her other children to guarantee them a dignified resting place should they die.[42] The cramped conditions of the children's common grave represented less the disaffection of poor parents, but, rather, the assumptions and economies of parish authorities. Indeed, many parents who turned to the parish for the interment of their children adopted the same customary mourning gestures (such as wearing black) utilised for adults to express their loss and confirm that the child, however young, had an identity that would be mourned.[43]

[38] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 67.   [39] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 154–5.
[40] BOHT, Tape 158a, Reference: AL/JJ/1a/014.
[41] BOHT, Tape 15b, Reference: AL/LSS/A/010. See also LVRO 353 PAR 6/2/4 for a plan of children's public graves.
[42] I. Strickland (ed.), *The Voices of Children, 1700–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 182.
[43] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 71.

This is not to suggest, however, that where parents improvised burial rites for children, loss was any less painful. Again, attitudes towards interment must be placed within a pragmatic context. Robert Roberts recalled that in the Edwardian Salford slum of his childhood, parents bereft of a newborn baby would call on his shopkeeper mother to request a box 'so they could take their young to the burial without the expense [of a coffin]'.[44] Likewise, Elsie Oman recounted that 'stillborn or young babies that died were put in empty wooden soap boxes and carried to the cemetery'.[45] Hence, parents who utilised the soap box as a makeshift coffin were not dispensing with funeral custom or notions of what was decent. Rather, they used cheap materials to replicate the funeral of an older child or adult. The tiny corpse of a babe or infant lent itself to improvisation. In particular, there was little call for a hearse with which to transport the coffin. One Bolton woman (born 1906) noted that her parents carried the coffin of her two-year-old brother from their house to the cemetery.[46] Alternatively, the small coffin could be accommodated within transport provided for parents. Elsie Oman noted that for older children (around three years old), families 'would have one coach and the coffin would go in a box with glass sides under the driver's seat. If it would not fit, the mourners would have it on their knees in the coach.'[47] Oman qualifies this statement by adding that these arrangements were restricted to families who could 'afford' a funeral in the first place. There is, perhaps, a sense that improvised funerals did not take up social space in the way that adult burials were apt to do, especially if one adopts Laqueur's notion of the funeral as a final picture of the deceased's communal, occupational and political networks. Yet if children's funerals were socially less visible, there is little to suggest they were less meaningful to the bereaved. Indeed, the image of parents carrying a tiny coffin to the grave is poignant in its intimacy and simplicity.

Nonetheless, improvised burial rites gave ballast to claims that parents invested little emotion in infant offspring. Negative assumptions particularly focused on practices whereby parents passed the bodies of babes to a third party, usually an undertaker or midwife, for cheap disposal. More controversially, some parents conspired with midwives to falsify certification of their babe's birth and death in order to classify a dead newborn child as a stillbirth. Legally, a child who breathed at birth, however briefly, was classed as live-born; conversely, the stillborn child was a babe who had stopped breathing before passing out of the birth canal. As a measure against foul play, a stillbirth had to be certified by a midwife

[44] R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 85.   [45] Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, 9.
[46] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.   [47] Oman, *Salford Stepping Stones*, 9.

or physician. Of course, the distinction between still- and live-born was significant for keeping accurate official statistics and for deterring parents from fraud, but it was also important for determining the cost of disposing of the corpse. The average cost of interring a stillborn corpse at the turn of the century was one to two shillings. The cost of burying a live-born baby of similar size to a full-term stillbirth was, however, significantly higher as few cemeteries operated a sliding scale of charges for children. Hence, the interment of a live-born child incurred the same charges as the interment of a much older child: in the north-west, Ramsbottom Cemetery in 1887 charged ten shillings for the interment of all children under ten; Colne Cemetery in 1890 charged nine shillings and sixpence for the burial of children under eight; Haslingden Cemetery in 1901 charged eight shillings for all children under fourteen.[48] To a point, the common charge for all children's burials suggests that cemetery authorities recognised the significance parents might invest in the funerals of infants, granting parents full access to a language of sanctity and commemoration. Nonetheless, given the high rates of infant death, especially in the first days and weeks of life, the levy also had considerable profit potential.

Differential burial costs for still- and live-born children incurred a harsh pecuniary penalty on parents whose offspring died soon after birth and, certainly, before any insurance policy could be purchased or validated. Even the charges incurred for burial of a stillbirth could be galling. The transient identity of the still- and newborn baby called into question the importance attached to its formal burial: many had not been named before death and were not accorded the full status of person. Likewise, a stillbirth or dead newborn infant could leave parents, especially the mother, feeling bitterly cheated. In this sense, it is hardly surprising if some parents contrived to avoid interment costs. The corpses of newborn babes might be discovered in any array of spaces: remains were found hidden in chimneys, washed up by the sea, left in fields, back alleys and in packages at railway stations.[49] Some parents were openly ambivalent about the fate of the corpse. One destitute woman, questioned by the coroner at Newington in 1895, stated that she had given the corpse of her twelve-day-old infant to a midwife, assuming that she would 'throw it over the railings and give it a cheap funeral'.[50] It was easy to infer some sinister purpose from unorthodox or illicit disposal of babies' remains. If parents were not suspected of murder or manslaughter, the 'dropping of

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[48] LRO MBH 42/1.

[49] See, for instance, *Liverpool Mercury*, 11 June 1886, 6, *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 19 March 1892, 6, and *Liverpool Echo*, 28 December 1897, 3.

[50] *Lancet*, 5 January 1895, 75.

dead infants to save funeral expenses' was inextricable from perceptions of the poor as mercenaries who construed their offspring purely in material terms.[51] Clearly, some parents had dubious motives in attempting to conceal their dead offspring, especially when the only identifiable parent was an unmarried mother, and some parents probably were, quite simply, callous.

Cynicism should not, however, overshadow the possibility that some parents contrived to do little more than dodge the expense of burial. Notably, sympathetic gravediggers were thought to collaborate with parents, placing the remains of dead babes in the graves of unrelated adults. As one Bolton weaver suggested: 'you took it to the cemetery gatehouse and it was buried in somebody else's grave after the mourners had gone'.[52] An investigation into interments in Strood village, Rochester, in 1892 found that the gravedigger had been illicitly interring babies' remains in the adult graves.[53] One Barrow woman recollected taking the boxed corpse of a stillborn sibling with a letter from her mother to the local gravedigger; he accepted the parcel without question and assured the twelve-year-old 'it'll be alright'.[54] Undertakers were also thought to offer assistance, slipping tiny cadavers into the coffins of unrelated adults. Giving evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into Coroners in 1909, A. J. Pepper inferred that it was common knowledge that the poor gave the remains of stillborn babies to undertakers.[55] Turning to a third party for assistance with disposal was not without risk, however, not least because the final fate of the corpse was not guaranteed. In 1875, the *Lancet* reported a case where investigation into an undertaker's office (probably on account of the putrid smell) uncovered numbers of infant corpses putrefying on the premises.[56] In 1891, public health officials discovered the decomposing remains of thirty-one stillbirths, newborn babies and infants concealed in the house of Emma Knowles, an undertaker in Birmingham.[57] In South Wales in 1911, a number of infant coffins were found to have been buried in the garden attached to a house formerly occupied by an undertaker.[58]

It was not illegal to dispose of the corpse of a stillborn child outside the cemetery, providing the birth/death had been certified and the disposal did not present a public nuisance. The problem with many of these burials, however, was the lack of evidence showing how and when these babes had died. Crucially, informal burials concealed numbers of babies

[51] *Lancet*, 5 April 1884, 633.   [52] BOHT, Tape 120, Reference: AB/MS/1A/003.
[53] *Lancet*, 7 May 1892, 1040.   [54] E. Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 192–3.
[55] PP 1909, XV: 4741–2.   [56] *Lancet*, 30 October 1875, 640.
[57] *Lancet*, 17 August 1901, 457.   [58] *Lancet*, 17 June 1911, 1675.

whose births had never even been registered and who, consequently, never existed within an official context. Concern that newborn babies could be passed off as stillbirths to mask infanticide was reflected in the legal requirements for burial; families had to present medical certificates of stillbirth to the cemetery superintendent or churchyard sexton before interment could take place. Some cemeteries maintained full accounts of stillbirth burials in co-operation with medical officers of health, noting the parental address, date of birth/death and the midwife or physician in attendance. Any discrepancies in information could result in the exhumation of the corpse for a post-mortem inquest.[59] The number of bodies interred outside the formal arrangements of cemetery officials is unknown. At an inquest in 1888, the registrar for Mile End Cemetery, Portsmouth, revealed that he had buried between 100 and 200 'so-called' stillbirths every year without seeing any certification.[60] An inquiry into All Saints church ground, Birmingham, in 1881 revealed that a local midwife was issuing false certificates of stillbirth for newborn infants for the purposes of illicit burial. She also passed the tiny corpses onto the sextoness at the cemetery for interment.[61] Midwives were especially well placed to assist poor mothers in the disposal of their dead babies and their complicity in faking stillbirths was integral to calls for the regulation of the nursing profession. Medical practitioners persistently voiced concern that midwives were apt to interpret 'stillbirth' loosely, not only confusing 'stillbirths' with 'miscarriage' but also defining babies who lived for several hours as stillborn.[62] In 1888, a midwife from West Derby, Liverpool, told an inquest that she believed any child who lived up to forty-eight hours after birth could be classed as stillborn.[63] Mary Shelton, a midwife from Hanley in Staffordshire, was fined six pounds in 1894 for falsely certifying a child as stillborn. In this case, not only had Shelton been absent from the birth, she was fully aware that the child had lived long enough to be baptised.[64] In 1896, Hannah Bossons, also from Hanley, was tried for the fraudulent burial of an eighteen-hour-old male baby who had been overlain. Bossons wrote a certificate of stillbirth and took the body in a box to the local gravedigger for him to inter in the

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[59] See, for instance, YRO Acc. 239 5/1, Counterfoils of Stillbirth Certificates 1907–9 and Acc. 107: 74.

[60] *Lancet*, 15 September 1888, 530–1. The problem of illicit burial was exacerbated by the lack of means to test the validity of stillbirth certificates and the ignorance of registrars concerning the 1874 Births and Deaths Registrations Act. See *Lancet*, 3 September 1882, 430–1.

[61] *Lancet*, 3 September 1882, 430–1.

[62] The Select Committee on the Registration of Stillbirths in 1893 recommended that the distinction between miscarriage and stillbirth be drawn at seven months' gestation. *Lancet*, 25 March 1899, 848–9.

[63] *Lancet*, 16 June 1888, 1222.   [64] *Lancet*, 16 June 1894, 1541.

churchyard. On further questioning, Bossons conceded that she regularly signed stillbirth certificates for babies who had lived up to four days and that many other midwives did the same. Not surprisingly, the coroner was incredulous that infants could so easily be 'removed' from life and statistics.[65]

We should, however, be wary of assuming that all parents who engaged in the illicit disposal of their infants had murdered them (or done nothing to keep them alive) or that midwives acted as willing accomplices to malevolent designs. Professional men and women were inclined to view the plight of poorer families in relation to the burial of babies with sympathy. Reporting on the prosecution of a doctor in Lambeth in 1882 for the false certification of a child who had lived thirty-four hours (thus facilitating false burial), the *Lancet* speculated that doctors frequently permitted compassion for the poor to impede adherence to legality.[66] At Tipton in 1893, a coroner examined a case concerning the death and burial of two twin children, born in the absence of a doctor or a midwife, but baptised. The inquest revealed that the babies were already dead when the minister arrived but that the mother could not collect any insurance money unless the babies had been baptised.[67] Maud Pember Reeves also represented the undertaker who accepted babies' bodies for disposal as performing a favour on behalf of the poor.[68] Similarly, passing the corpse onto a third party was not necessarily indicative of ambivalence, but, rather, could be perceived as strategic: parents may have been too distressed, disappointed or exhausted to arrange burial; they may not have operated within the legal distinctions between still- and dead newborn babies; neither is it clear how many parents were aware of the bureaucratic procedures for the disposal of still- and newly born babies. Moreover, whether the child had been allowed to die or not, seeking someone else's help in disposing of a body cheaply possibly encouraged parents to believe that they would deflect suspicion of malevolent design.

That many of the illicit burials of babies' corpses took place, or were believed to take place, inside the cemetery implies a general perception of burial ground as the right and proper place for interment, even if the 'burial' fell outside formal definitions of interment practice. In 1876, for instance, workmen at Anfield Cemetery discovered the body of a child in a fishbasket which had been dropped over the wall.[69] In February 1889,

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[65] *Lancet*, 10 October 1896, 1024.   [66] *Lancet*, 25 February 1882, 322.
[67] *Lancet*, 7 October 1893, 886.
[68] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 70. See also *Lancet*, 23 January 1891, 207, *Daily Post*, 22 October 1896, 6, and *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 10 September 1898, 5.
[69] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/1, 23 March 1876.

a stonemason's labourer discovered a box hidden among the shrubs at Anfield in which the 'honeycombed' remains of a babe wrapped in cotton wool lay.[70] Two months later, the body of a newborn child in a wooden box was found beneath the surface of the soil in the same cemetery.[71] On 9 September 1891, cemetery employees at Anfield noted three women ('worse for liquor') loitering in the Roman Catholic portion of the ground. The sexton also spied the women hiding amongst the shrubbery. Suspecting 'all was not right', he went to investigate and discovered the body of a 'small foetus' in a cardboard box buried beneath the earth. The women were then detained whilst the police and a doctor were summoned. According to the doctor, the corpse was that of a stillborn babe. On questioning, it transpired that one of the women had borne the child and, with two neighbours, had undertaken to conceal the corpse in the grounds of the cemetery. Once the facts of the case were established, nothing further was done and the women went home.[72] There is a problem here with the language used by the cemetery staff and it is unclear whether the babe was a stillborn or a miscarried foetus although the babe must have developed to some degree to be distinguishable.

Nonetheless, the example highlights the resourcefulness displayed by poorer families with regard to burial and suggests the sympathy of neighbours and friends with regard to securing interment inside cemetery space. The reluctance to pay even nominal costs for a burial may suggest that the birth of a stillborn or death of a newborn occasioned little sorrow. Yet the very act of depositing a body illicitly in the cemetery implies the opposite, a possibility reinforced by the Dutch courage of the three women involved in the case above. This suggests that, contrary to the alleged ambivalence of the poor towards their small offspring, some significance was vested in the resting place of newborn and stillborn babies. What is particularly striking is the implication that the defined space of the cemetery held some kind of special meaning. This is not to suggest that the women necessarily associated the ground with Christian notions of resurrection or consecration, but, rather, that it represented the customary and proper place for the dead to go, even if this meant an improvised interment. It is also possible that in hiding the box in the Roman Catholic portion of the ground, the collaborators attached a degree of significance to denominational space. Furthermore, implicit in such rudimentary burials is an attachment to the finality embodied in the funeral: laying the dead to rest in the appropriate repository, however

[70] *Liverpool Weekly Courier*, 9 February 1889, 7.
[71] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 20 April 1889, 1.
[72] LVRO 353 PAR 6/5/1, 19 September 1891.

makeshift, enabled the bereaved to return to the sphere of the living. It is also worth remembering that whilst illicit burials were the newsworthy stuff of moral panics, numbers of working-class parents did inter their dead newborn and stillborn babes within the formal procedures of the cemetery.

Love, ignorance and childcare

It is ironic, perhaps, that skimping on burial costs invoked the wrath of commentators who wagged a frustrated finger at the unnecessary expense of the working-class funeral. Indeed, towards the end of the century, assumptions about the relationship between infant mortality and burial insurance was increasingly qualified. In an award-winning essay on the perils of infant life (1894), Hugh Jones, physician at the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool, concluded that burial insurance had been 'accorded an importance far beyond its merits'. The 'evidence' purporting to reveal a causal relationship between burial clubs and infant mortality was largely based 'upon surmise, hearsay, or general impression'. For most, life insurance was a judicious investment: mothers were aware of high mortality rates and insured their offspring to secure 'what they called a decent funeral'. That the working-class culture of death was 'shocking' to others amounted to little more than a failure to recognise a different language for death, borne of familiarity and pragmatism. Far more pernicious, suggested Jones, was the ignorance of the poor.[73] Jones's essay is typical of a subtle shift in the latter quarter of the century away from explicit accusations of malicious intent to the inference that parents killed off their children by clinging to outdated and ignorant child-rearing practices. For most commentators, ignorance amounted to inadequate education concerning hygiene, feeding and child-rearing. Yet ignorance was a nebulous concept. Misguided ideas about childcare could be framed in a language of passivity which, all too often, merged with notions of wilful neglect.

Much of the campaigning to reduce deaths among infants and young children fixed on the perceived responsibilities of the mother: child mortality was, 'too often', the result of 'the mother's delinquencies'.[74] Such perceptions were internalised by women; a 'good' mother worked hard for her children and when children died, it inevitably implied her failure.[75] Some men explicitly blamed their wives for the death of young

[73] H. Jones, 'The Perils and Protection of Infant Life (Howard Medal Prize Essay)', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 57 (March 1894), 1–103.
[74] *Lancet*, 16 June 1906, 1710.   [75] See Ross, *Love and Toil*, 128.

children. The suffocation of an infant in its drunken mother's arms filled one father with disgust. Despite his wife's cries and protestations ('Oh my baby'), he refused to admit her into their house.[76] The daughter of two Manchester millworkers (born 1896) related the story of a younger sibling's suffocation in bed in her mother's arms: '[mother] got a clobbering [off father] for that'.[77] Similarly, Teresa Turner (born 1903) claimed that her twelve-month-old sister died of a 'broken heart' when their mother returned to work and placed the child in a neighbour's care. That the cause of death assigned by the doctor (overfeeding and blocked bowels) was dismissed by the family as an 'excuse' provided enormous scope for guilt on the mother's part, compounded no doubt by the reaction of her husband: he 'went off the deep end, of course he worshipped her'.[78]

Overlaying, that is, the suffocation of babies in bed with their parents, is, perhaps, the best example of the ambiguity surrounding charges of neglect and ignorance. The causes of overlaying were notoriously difficult to determine, not least because locating evidence of intent to harm was so problematic.[79] Undeniably, overlaying afforded considerable scope for criminal design. Kathleen Woodward noted the cynical assumption that 'turning over' on an unwanted baby could save parents a 'lot of trouble'.[80] That incidents of overlaying peaked at the weekend supported claims that reckless and drunken parents cared little for their offspring.[81] According to Robert Roberts, deaths from overlaying were the cause of much 'searching gossip': 'Did it happen in the small hours of Sunday morning after the mother had been out drinking? Was the child illegitimate? Had it been insured, and for how much? Had it been ailing, or was another baby on its way?' Having painted a rather sordid picture, Roberts concedes that 'Most folk, though, talked kindly of it all – poor little soul! A tragic accident.'[82] Roberts seems to imply that neighbours' willingness to veil their suspicious tittle-tattle with 'kindness' was less from an underlying belief in the innocence of parents than from a knowing complicity. It is not, however, implausible that 'searching' for sensational detail in the mundane was a regular pastime in working-class communities. Indeed, it

[76] *Liverpool Mercury*, 18 October 1886, 6, and 20 October 1886, 8.
[77] Man. OH Tape, Miss Entwhistle, Tape 824.
[78] Man. OH Tape, Teresa Turner, Tape 668.
[79] For critical reviews on coroners' inquests into overlaying see *Lancet*, 2 June 1883, 963; 29 July 1905, 307; and 5 February 1910, 379.
[80] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 96.
[81] For breakdown of statistics relating alcohol to overlaying see H. Jones, 'Perils of Infant Life', 41, and *Lancet*, 11 March 1905, 660; 20 January 1906, 189; 16 June 1906, 1710.
[82] R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 85.

was the function of gossip. That suspicion fixed so easily upon cases of overlaying rested on the lack of alternative explanations for cause of death. Moreover, the very term 'overlaying' is suggestive of an active and deliberate action. As Ellen Ross notes, however, most incidents were probably accidental and would, today, be classed in less inflammatory terms as 'crib deaths'.[83] The difficulty of defining both the cause of death and parental responsibility did not escape contemporaries. In 1909 Charles Rothera, the coroner for Nottingham, rejected claims that over-laying represented an act of wilful murder; the majority of babies died as a result of being breast-fed at night and the mother falling asleep with the child on her arm. The child then suffocated. It was impossible to gauge the parents' state of sobriety at the time of death. Nonetheless, he sug-gested, most mothers should have been aware of the risk involved in taking babies to bed and refrained from doing so. In that sense, overlaying could be categorised as deliberate negligence.[84]

The pitfalls of assuming malevolent intent were highlighted during a debate at the Midwives Institute in 1908 which concluded, firstly, that women did not go to bed drunk but were exhausted from overwork and, secondly, that many women put their babies in bed with them, especially during winter, because the warmth of a mother's body was vital to a child's survival (particularly when the quality and quantity of bed cloth-ing was inadequate).[85] Maud Pember Reeves supported this notion, arguing that mothers derided the idea that babies would be warm outside of the parental bed: 'when one looks at the cotton cot blankets, about thirty inches long, which are all their wildest dreams aspire to, one under-stands their disbelief'.[86] To assume that wilful cruelty precipitated the placing of babes in beds was perverse. Purporting to represent the opin-ions of the Edwardian Devonshire working class, Stephen Reynolds raged: 'I should like to see the likes o' they work hard all day and then have a kid squalling in a cradle all night, an' hae to keep on getting out of bed to 'en, for to gie 'en the breast, and taking o'en out into the cold. Babies sleeps quieter 'long wi' their mothers, an' they thrives better, too, I believe.'[87] Some adults certainly reconstructed the childish experience of sharing the parental bed as literally and metaphorically warm and comforting. Albert Jasper described being forced to surrender a place in his mother's bed to make room for a new baby as a milestone in

[83] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 189.   [84] PP 1910, XXI: 11,069–77.
[85] *Lancet*, 23 May 1908, 1507–8.   [86] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 51.
[87] S. Reynolds, B. Woolley and T. Woolley, *Seems So! A Working-Class View of Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 31–2.

growing up, but one that was not reached without a sense of pique or disappointment.[88]

Like overlaying, the employment of mothers outside the home occupied an ambiguous role in the causes of infant mortality: children suffered 'perils due to their neglect by their mothers' and were susceptible to 'the ignorance [and ambivalence] of those to whose care they are entrusted'.[89] Yet the wages earned by working mothers were often crucial to family living standards. In Lancashire, female mill-workers could earn more than their husbands.[90] Negative assumptions concerning childminding recalled the baby-farming scandals of the mid-century. As Poplar MP Will Crooks, the embodiment of working-class upward mobility, argued in 1896, such associations assumed that parents selected carers indiscriminately. On the contrary, he found that most working parents were anxious to place their offspring with 'respectable' and kindly persons.[91] Crooks's observation hit upon a key theme in the debates concerning infant welfare: the gap between middle-class understanding and working-class practice. Notably, bourgeois notions of ignorance easily merged into more accusatory charges of neglect. Even when making distinctions between passive and wilful neglect, the term held connotations of apathy and indifference towards one's children. Yet middle-class definitions of ignorance could be interpreted as attentive care within the working-class home; this hardly signified 'neglect' or indifference, but, rather, different understandings of child-rearing practice.

As Florence Bell noted, the biggest liability to infant life was not want of affection, but a lack of knowledge pertaining to nutrition, sanitation and healthcare.[92] Notably, parents often turned to folk remedies for the treatment of illnesses. Describing East End Londoners, Helen Bosanquet lamented the popularity of administering stewed tea to sickly babies; of giving orange, brandy and sulphur as a medicine for measles; and of feeding infants the wrong foodstuffs.[93] Robert Tressell illustrated

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[88] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 12.

[89] H. Jones, 'Perils of Infant Life', 56. Under the Factory Act 1891, mothers' jobs were to be kept available for one month after confinement, after which time they had to return to work or forfeit their job.

[90] *The Times*, 15 November 1894, 7. See also *Lancet*, 28 March 1898, 878. For studies on the effects of mill work on infant welfare see *Lancet*, 7 July 1906, 51; 8 April 1911, 969; and 26 April 1913, 1202; C. E. Collet, 'The Collection and Utilisation of Official Statistics Bearing on the Extent and Effects of the Industrial Employment of Women', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 61 (April 1898), 219–60. *Lancet*, 8 April 1911, 969, and *Lancet*, 26 April 1913, 1202.

[91] Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Select Committee on Infant Life Protection and Safety of Nurse Children Bills, PP 1896 (343) X: 225.

[92] Bell, *At the Works*, 197–8, 213.   [93] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 91–2.

the tension between conflicting definitions of care and ignorance in his polemical novel, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Emphasising the pride the Eastons take in their 'very beautiful child' and the anxiety they express at his weight loss, both parents are oblivious to the fact that the solids with which they feed the child (at the expense of their own appetites) are the root of the babe's discomfort and vomiting.[94] This was not 'neglect' but a mistaken concept of good infant feeding. The advent of the health visitor, initiatives to vaccinate children against disease, to popularise new paradigms of hygiene and to supply milk for infants were, undoubtedly, invaluable in reducing infant mortality figures. Nonetheless, the task of selling new scientific constructs of motherhood and disseminating information to poorer families was difficult. The implication that parents, especially mothers, neglected their children by adhering to customary child-rearing practice could cause deep resentment.[95] Violet Butler wryly observed the shock registered by newly married young women when they discovered how many well-meaning strangers wished to visit and advise them.[96] Some visitors (often affiliated to district voluntary ladies' associations) exercised tact and discretion; others came across as patronising. Andie Clerk stated that the 'narrow-minded bigoted interference' of 'do-gooders' was as damaging to children as parental ignorance.[97] Stephen Reynolds turned the tables of ignorance on the middle classes, claiming that legal measures designed to protect poorer children were undemocratic; a 'gross and stupid insult, the outcome of sentimentality and ignorance, engineered by well-meaning busybodies'. Measures intended to help did little more than 'insult' and 'harass' the poor.[98] Annie Buckley (born 1902) recalled her mother's outrage when a young, unmarried visitor from Oldham Health Clinic called to offer childcare advice after the birth of a younger sibling: 'When you've brought up as many children as me, you can come and tell me how to bring them up.'[99] Again, such defiance in the face of 'lady visitors' suggests not so much an indifference to children as sensitivity to the slur on the parenting skills of poor families.

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[94] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 57–60.
[95] See F. B. Smith, *The People's Health*, 65–135, C. Dyhouse, 'Working-Class Mothers and Infant Mortality in England, 1895–1914', *Journal of Social History*, 12, 2 (1978), 248–66, A. Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, 5 (1978), 9–65, R. Apple, 'Constructing Mothers: Scientific Motherhood in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Social History of Medicine*, 8, 2 (1995), 161–78, and R. Hawes, 'The Development of Municipal Infant Welfare Services in St Helens, 1868–1914', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 143 (1993), 165–92.
[96] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 182.
[97] Clerk, *Autobiography of a Street Arab*, 10–11.   [98] Reynolds et al., *Seems So!*, 39.
[99] Man. OH Tape, Annie Buckley, Tape 594.

Birth, death and bonds of affection

The publication of *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* by the Women's Co-operative Guild in 1915 provided a forum for literate working-class women to express their fears and struggles with pregnancy and childbirth. The letters were hardly representative: contributors came from a self-selecting cohort who had become involved with the women's co-operative movement. The final collection of letters was edited by the middle-class activist Margaret Llewelyn Davies and an introduction was added by the feminist writer Virginia Woolf. The political thrust of the collection was to encourage women to triumph over adversity through self-improvement, thrift and co-operation. Despite the limits of the sample, the women represented came from a variety of backgrounds and their stories of motherhood provide an insight into models of pregnancy framed within the context of economic insecurity and high infant mortality rates. Notably, most of the women described pregnancy at the turn of the twentieth century in a language of personal anxiety, despondency and financial apprehension. The majority of children were unplanned, births endangered the lives of their mothers and they represented a costly addition to the family unit.[100] If pregnancy was discussed in a seemingly negative narrative frame in the respectable biography, pessimism was exacerbated for the unmarried or deserted woman by social isolation and increased economic insecurity. That these women figure large in histories of abortion and infanticide is, perhaps, unsurprising.[101]

If mother and child survived pregnancy, the first year of infant life, especially up to three months, represented a period of acute vulnerability to deadly infection.[102] As Ellen Ross notes, it is not surprising that parents were often wary of forming strong emotional bonds to newborn babies, especially those infants who seemed 'sickly' or 'delicate', or that

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[100] M. L. Davies (ed.), *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (London: Virago, [1915] 1989). See also Ross, *Love and Toil*, 91–127.

[101] A. McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), A. Oakley, *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), J. Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 196–218, Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents*, 170–4, M. Stopes, *Contraception (Birth Control): Its Theory, History and Practice, A Manual for the Medical and Legal Professions* (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1923), J. Keown, *Abortion, Doctors and the Law: Some Aspects of the Legal Regulation of Abortion in England from 1803–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), P. Knight, 'Women and Abortion in Victorian and Edwardian England', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), 57–69, A. McLaren, 'Abortion in England', *Victorian Studies*, 20, 4 (1977), 379–400, and B. Brookes, *Abortion in England, 1900–1967* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

[102] Woods and Shelton, *Atlas of Victorian Mortality*, 47–92.

mothers made implicit distinctions between bearing and rearing children.[103] Unplanned pregnancies, hesitant attachments to newborns and 'ignorance' concerning child-rearing practice were, however, markedly different from wilful neglect and murder. Indeed, some parents' relationships with their offspring were openly affectionate. Margaret Loane claimed that there was 'scarcely' a home she visited where the family was so poor that 'no one in it rejoices over the birth of a child'. Even in the most poverty-stricken households, children were indulged in some small way on their birthday. Loane further reflected that the sight of working-class fathers picking up their 'grimy, howling' children never ceased to surprise her: men would walk about with the child in their arms, 'pressing kisses in its cheeks, and crooning lovingly'.[104] Whether it was affection for a grubby child or masculine displays of explicit affection that startled Loane is unclear. Whilst Loane's enthusiasm needs to be treated with caution – a self-proclaimed friend of the poor, some of her representations risk falling into sentimental 'honest but poor' type-casting – her accounts of family dynamics offer a counter to images of unremitting gloom and disaffection. Importantly, Loane's surprise at witnessing scenes of affection between fathers and dirty children is suggestive of the prejudices about class, gender, hygiene and parenting held by both Loane and her audience. In acknowledging her surprise at masculine affection, however, Loane pre-empts the disbelief of the reader and lends authenticity to her claims.

The dynamics of working-class interpersonal relationships were not widely perceived to be typified by demonstrative gestures. Rather, many relationships were characterised by oblique signs of attachment and affection. Alice Foley's reconstruction of her childhood demonstrates the ambiguity of some kinship ties. Foley's vision of her parents' young family casts each newborn baby as 'another unwanted addition to an already harassed household yell[ing] its way into existence'.[105] Yet despite an ostensible indifference to her children, Foley's Catholic mother insisted that each babe be baptised immediately in case of death. The 'christening' was not a cultural or social rite of passage (Foley was carried to the priest in the dead of night by her sister) but, rather, important in terms of guaranteeing an afterlife for the babe and burial: Catholic liturgy dictated that unbaptised babies were consigned to limbo and baptism permitted the interment of the corpse in consecrated ground. The disparity between maternal indifference and baptismal

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[103] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 131, 179–86. See also Michael Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 310–22.
[104] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 21–2.   [105] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 3–4.

significance suggests a complexity which is echoed throughout Foley's biography. Crucially, the vision of a bleak infancy untouched by displays of affection does not conflict with notions of emotional attachment. Rather, it works as a device to emphasise the hardship which characterised most working-class families and the perpetual exhaustion of mothers. Significantly, there is no doubting Foley's feelings towards her 'kindly, undemonstrative' mother: 'I loved her passionately.'[106] Foley's account suggests that concepts of love were complicated and subject to individual criteria which were not always identifiable to observers. It is in this light that we must re-read responses to infant and child death.

Negative stereotypes and allegations of neglect ('They don't wish any better result than death, but only that they should be screened from an inquest'[107]) conceal the extent to which many parents fought to save a child's life. As Margaret Loane commented, 'in ordinary family life among the poor nearly every child in arms that I have seen die has died because no amount of care would keep it alive'.[108] Assistant Medical Officer of Health in Liverpool in the 1880s, Edward Hope, traversed the slum homes of the city in an attempt to quarantine infectious disease. Like many of his contemporaries, Hope often made implicit associations between poverty, dirt and immorality. Nonetheless, his home-visit reports indicate that destitution did not always preclude parental affection. They also highlight the ambiguous use of the term 'neglect'. Visiting a family of ten in Liverpool in December 1886, Hope found both a five-year-old and an infant severely ill. The older child, Emily, was in a 'very dirty and neglected condition'. Having made such a loaded observation, Hope then noted that the sick baby 'occupies all the mother's time'.[109] The apparent 'neglect' of Emily could signify lack of nutrition and sanitation rather than wilful neglect. Notably, babies required more attention by virtue of their dependency on others and, in the context of sickness, mothers could weigh up respective chances of survival and focus their attention on those considered most vulnerable. Parents were often reluctant to part with their offspring. In October 1885, Edward Hope reported that Rose Mooney, aged five, was sick from scarlatina and ought to be removed to hospital 'but the mother declines to part with the child'.[110] On visiting the Farrington family in 1886, Hope noted that 'the mother was totally unable to continue to wait upon' her child who was sick with smallpox. Hope's note that one child had already been nursed to health and that the family were striving to avoid pauperism implied that Mrs Farrington

[106] Ibid., 8.   [107] Lancet, 23 October 1875, 616.   [108] Loane, Queen's Poor, 137.
[109] LVRO 353 HEA 2/2, 6 December 1886.   [110] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 15 October 1885.

was exhausted and anxious about finance.[111] Hope urged admission to hospital for three children (aged between three and seven) sick with scarlet fever in Henderson Street in December 1886. Despite her advanced state of pregnancy, however, their mother objected to their removal from the home.[112] Highlighting the potential involvement of fathers in decision-making processes about childcare, Hope reported that Kate Westman, aged five, had scarlet fever but her mother refused to grant permission for admission to hospital, claiming that her husband would assault her if Kate left home.[113] Hope clearly perceived childcare and sanitation as a female concern. This may derive from his assumptions about gender roles within the family, although the very poverty of these people implied the failure of the father to fulfil a breadwinning role and, perhaps in Hope's eyes, destabilised his claim to represent authority within the family.

Nonetheless, Hope's assumptions do reflect the division of labour in many working-class households, with nursing and childcare falling largely to women. Some mothers devoted themselves to the care of sick children at the expense of other duties. Indeed, Ellen Ross suggests that maternal skill provided children with their best chance of surviving life-threatening illness.[114] One Bolton mill-worker, born 1899, recalled an outbreak of measles which affected all the children in his family. Three siblings recovered and one sister died. A fifth child, the baby Frederick, lingered between life and death. His mother 'did her best' to fight for the babe's life, an effort lauded (and legitimised) by the family doctor. When Frederick finally expired, it was a harrowing 'tragedy'.[115] Some women appeared to stake their identity as good mothers on their ability to cheat death. One contributor to the Women's Co-operative Guild collection of maternity letters explicitly stated that 'adoration' of her 'treasures' had sustained them in their fight for life.[116] Another mother recounted the apparently fatal illness of an infant daughter. Caring for the child exacted a 'fearful' toll on the woman's own health, yet she maintained her vigil and the child recovered. The implication in this account was that selfless devotion, epitomised in the phrase 'but I loved', proved a formidable weapon in the battle against death.[117] It could also, however, represent a dreadful source of guilt if that battle were lost.

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[111] LVRO 352 HEA 2/1, 24 June 1886.   [112] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 18 November 1886.
[113] LVRO 352 HEA 2/2, 15 October 1886.
[114] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 167. Indeed, 'ex-babies' were expected to attain a degree of independence when a new baby arrived in the family. Ibid., 38.
[115] BOHT, Tape 121b, Reference: JP/LSS/A/015.   [116] M. L. Davies, *Maternity*, 32.
[117] Ibid., 45.

The fatalism permeating some stories of child bereavement may, in this sense, reflect little more than a desire to rationalise death and deflect feelings of responsibility: parents had done all within their means to prevent death but were powerless when pitted against Providence.[118] Ellen Ross refers to this as the 'emotional paradox' which characterised maternal affections: fatalism, reluctant pregnancies and tentative attachments to newborn babies must be set against the fights women waged for the survival of their offspring.[119] Nonetheless, expressions of resignation glossed over the self-sacrifice and solicitous care mothers typically exercised towards their children, whilst the apparent composure of parents was often interpreted by external observers as evidence of apathy. As with responses to adult deaths, however, linguistic inarticulacy often reflected the incoherence, incomprehension and frustration of grief. Hospital nurses were reportedly fascinated by mothers who kept a constant vigil by the bedside of sick children yet said so little; their reserve was incongruous with such devoted and watchful care.[120] When children died, frugal expressions typically concealed the agony of grief. Maud Pember Reeves cited the case of a mother who nursed her sick baby with unstinting devotion. When the infant died, she was distraught. Yet the doctor who arrived to certify the death simply beheld a composed woman whose only reference to bereavement was the dispassionate comment that it was 'better' now that the child was dead.[121] One Lancashire woman nursed her youngest and most 'favourite' child Billy, sick with diphtheria, for three days and nights. Breaking the news of his death to other family members, however, she was inexpressive and concise: 'He's better now, he's with Grandma and Auntie Hetty.'[122] A curious child, Jane Hampson (born 1898) quizzed her mother over whether she was 'heart-broken' at losing five of her children to death. The reply was succinct and unsentimental: 'I was but I hadn't time to be because there was always another coming.' Conceding the apparent harshness of the statement, Hampson juxtaposed it with her mother's fondness for telling the story of her eldest child's death, asserting that the girl was 'the prettiest [child] she ever had'.[123] For Hampson, all the distress of maternal bereavement was encapsulated in the story of one child. That her mother focused on this story is not to suggest that her other children were any less meaningful, but, rather, that a first bereavement remained vivid in memory because it required the development of strategies for coping. For Hampson's

[118] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 192.   [119] Ibid., 181.   [120] Ibid., 168–9.
[121] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 90–1.   [122] Seabrook, *Working-Class Childhood*, 25.
[123] Man. OH Transcript, Jane Hampson, Tape 692.

mother and many like her, pragmatism and economy with words reflected a desire to make grief manageable and to look forward.

Nursing a sick child could unravel previously untapped, or unseen, sources of parental affection. Throughout his autobiography, George Acorn expressed resentment towards his parents whom he characterised as rough, violent and incapable of affection. Recollecting the death of his baby brother, however, Acorn described how his mother worked 'like one possessed' to save the child, nursing it lovingly with 'sweet, soothing invocations'. When the child died, she 'braced herself' and emitted a 'piercing scream'. Acorn describes being hemmed in with his mother in their squalid room by an oppressive atmosphere of utter hopelessness. By the time Acorn's father returns home, his mother has composed herself: she speaks 'mechanically', her white face is 'set', and her eyes seem lifeless. Against this impassiveness, Acorn recounts his father, 'unemotional man as he was', breaking down into 'heartrending sobs'. This scene sits somewhat uneasily with Acorn's later assertion that slum life 'is simply animal against animal, via conventional routes'. Distaste and despair at the poor pervade Acorn's writing and he appears unsure of how to interpret the outburst of emotion occasioned by his brother's death. Observing that the death lightened the financial burden of his family, Acorn is repulsed that the burial insurance pays for new clothes and a drinking spree and implies that the sympathy of relatives and neighbours is superficial. In portraying himself as a 'love-starved, unresponsive, slum child', Acorn bitterly laments that his mother never demonstrated any tender love for him. He is, nonetheless, proud of the constant struggle she waged against poverty for her family.[124] Such inconsistencies angered and perplexed Acorn. Indeed, they demonstrate the difficulties of seeking to categorise and define interpersonal relationships among the poor. In raging against a lack of open, verbal, physical and sentimental affection, Acorn acknowledged the misery of poverty. Yet it is possible to locate within Acorn's story of struggle and sacrifice an implicit and consistent belief in the family as a unit, not merely of economic ties, but of abstract bonds of loyalty and identity also.

Within the private space of the home and individual reflection, feelings of loss adopted various guises, some of which were shared with family and friends, others of which remained personal and tied to multiple anxieties and sorrows. Gissing captured the mutability of parental grief in the pitiful character of Pennyloaf Candy. Pennyloaf's youngest child resembles 'a wax doll that has gone through much ill-usage'; it testifies to

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[124] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 35–45, 65.

Pennyloaf's poverty and her ignorance in matters of nutrition and child-care. As the child's health visibly deteriorates, Pennyloaf's anxieties accrue. Finally, she determines to undertake the laborious journey to the hospital to seek advice. In the instant she meets the doctor, however, the child dies. Pennyloaf stares at the babe in 'a sort of astonishment', repeatedly asking 'Is she really dead?' Gissing implies that her 'stupid' questioning and 'dazed, heavy, tongue-tied state' embodies a state of shock and wonder. Far from a passionate outburst of grief, Pennyloaf's first instinct is to seek her old friend, Jane Snowden. A sense of desolation and despair only become manifest when Pennyloaf realises that she has left her umbrella at the hospital and must walk in the rain in wet shoes. It is this relatively mundane disappointment that tips Pennyloaf into a need to 'overcome all obstacles' and speak to Jane.[125] Gissing not only illustrates the disparity between apparently subdued public responses to bereavement and private emotion, he also suggests the potential for individual grief to kaleidoscope through a medley of sorrows, concerns and needs, none of which need fix on the identity of the deceased. This riot of feeling did not annul a sense of grief, but, rather, represented the complexity of loss and the inextricability of death from wider anxieties.

Like Gissing, Florence Bell recognised that grief rarely operated in isolation and that relationships between parents and offspring were ambiguous. Nevertheless, she frequently lapsed into simplistic equations between poverty, high mortality rates and immunity to grief. According to Bell, the 'majority of parents, it is needless to say, love their children, in spite of all the trouble and anxiety they entail': children were an occupation, a reason for prudence, and a bond between spouses. When children died, it could occasion great sadness, especially for the mother whose core identity hinged upon domesticity and childcare. One woman who withstood the deaths of four of her seven children was a 'sickly-looking creature' who had 'never picked up since their death'. Another, Mrs S, failed to recover from the successive deaths of nine children. Bell was also struck by women who struggled to sustain the lives of children whose survival was, 'frankly [of] no gain to the country'. Mrs D, a worn and weary woman, had given birth to sickly twins. Despite their frailty, their mother 'beamed with exultation' and looked down on them with 'tenderness and rejoicing'. At great cost to her own health, Mrs D fought to keep the babies alive until, 'to her intense grief', one of them died.

It would be easy to criticise Bell for expressing dubious views on the value of 'sickly' infant life, but stories of mothers who adored the babe

[125] Gissing, *Nether World*, 267–8.

apparently doomed to illness and death serve to emphasise the purely sentimental bonds between parent and child. Moreover, assertions of desolation and despair in response to child death were comprehensible to Bell's sensibilities. The comparative rarity of child mortality in middle-class families rendered the impact of multiple bereavements a 'dread story': 'A woman among the well-to-do who should have had seventeen children and lost twelve, would be marked out as she went about the world for the wonder and compassion of her fellows.' The death of a child among the working classes was, however, 'cruelly frequent' and 'accepted' as a possible 'destiny' for each child born. Bell's comparison implied a conceptual framework for different degrees of grief in relation to material security. Indeed, she speculated that 'easygoing, good-natured and cheery' mothers who lost children to death had achieved a 'comparative immunity' from bereavement. Bell also noted the significance that poorer parents attached to the material implications of infant and child death. For some at least, she conjectured, death 'lessen[ed] the burden of life' and was construed as a 'positive benefit instead of a misfortune'. In this sense, she thought mothers were tempted to practise passive neglect, 'allowing' their children to die. Bell cited the example of a woman who expressed bitter regret that her child died only a week prior to the validation of its insurance policy. Another stated that it was 'better' that all her children had died as they were all insured. Bell placed such attitudes within the context of financial realism.[126] What she overlooked was that anxieties about finance represented a public language of loss which expressed bitterness and desolation, yet was sufficiently impersonal to articulate to others, especially the bourgeois wife of their husband's employer. Bell failed to acknowledge the possibility that in making conceptual links between material circumstance and death, parents were invoking a language which they thought Bell expected to hear or, at least, which represented a form of anguish she could comprehend. Finally, anxieties about finance need not signify the profiteering potential of infant death, but, rather, the cruel irony of circumstances which aided and abetted early death.

In the same way that languages of resignation could be confused with apathy, the rationale of some parents was apt to be interpreted as flippancy by external observers. Florence Bell was struck by one woman's candid assertion that 'I lost all my children when they were babies, but it was better they should go when they were young, for now I know they are little saints in heaven.' Another claimed that her child of six had been 'too

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[126] Bell, *At the Works*, 191–200.

clean to live'. Bell found such reconciliation incredible and could only suggest that the children who died were those with fastidious and timid personalities.[127] Yet such conceptual frameworks carried psychological value, not least because they promised bereaved parents that children had been saved from a life of privation and toil. Whether parents referred to sophisticated spiritual beliefs is not important. Rather, such perceptions suggest a rhetorical device which provided consolation merely by comparing 'peace' in death with the negatives of life.[128]

Weighing death against the possibilities and opportunities in a child's future could be invoked as a deliberate strategy for accepting bereavement. This is not to suggest that such reasoning was without conflict. Deborah Smith recalled the agony of watching her youngest child suffer from prolonged inflammation of the lungs and the advice of a neighbour to pray for his death. Whilst seeing the boy in discomfort pained her, she found it difficult to reconcile this advice with her will for him to survive and the pleasure she derived from his company. Finally, Smith resolved her dilemma by creating a notion that the child was borrowed from God and must be allowed to return:

I kissed his face and thought of all we had shared together. It was better so; his little heart would ache no more; no more would that cough rack his frame. His spirit had gone to God who gave it to us for just a little while. We laid him to rest on his fourth birthday. Gone but not forgotten.

Lest her reader find her reconciliation perverse, Smith affirmed her rationale exclaiming 'What a lovely child he was! People sometimes told me he was too fair for this world.'[129]

When children did expire, notions of innocence and frailty also invested their remains with extra significance: small corpses represented the fragility of life, innocence and the consolation of spiritual belief. This is most explicit in the use of white coffins for children, a visual metaphor for the purity of the young.[130] Kathleen Woodward described one baby's coffin as a 'little white box, trimmed with fancy paper'. The paper, usually used to line wedding cakes at the pastry shop, suggests hope, delicacy and sweetness.[131] That the prettified coffin holds the rotting corpse of a child

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[127] Ibid., 191–2.

[128] Abstract associations with angels and cherubs could render the visual (and pungent) presence of a disfigured corpse palatable.

[129] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 40–2.

[130] See Man. OH Tape, Florence Smith, Tape 962, GRO D4375, Accounts of W. B. Wood & Sons, carpenters and builders, and Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 14. Coffins could also be covered in white material. See M. Chamberlain, *Growing Up in Lambeth* (London: Virago, 1989), 85–7.

[131] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 78–81.

demonstrates the use of symbolism in attempts to ameliorate the horror of death and decay. Albert Jasper's association between a baby's corpse and his 'first glimpse of peace' similarly draws on notions of innocence. That the image is contextualised within a vermin-infested tenement flat emphasises the incorruptibility of the dead infant and, implicitly, draws attention to the awfulness, not of death, but of life.[132]

That some of the mechanisms for managing grief were shocking to middle-class sensibilities highlights a gap in experience; it also reminds us of our own perceptions of infant death. Recalling her grandmother, a skilled midwife, Maggie Chapman described her as 'hard as iron'. In particular, Chapman expressed horror at the older woman's imperviousness to the grief of a woman whose baby was stillborn; it was a 'repairable loss'. Chapman's shock probably says more about her own sensibilities and the cultural context in which she articulated the memory than those of her grandmother.[133] Indeed, it could be argued that the saying was intended to be consoling. Significantly, the grandmother's phrase did not imply that babies were a burden or unwanted, but, rather, that the distress of their deaths would fade and other children would ameliorate the loss. Anne Tibble's recollection of her parents' desperate wish for a baby son goes some way to support this. Tibble read their desire as indicative of searing bitterness that their first child had died. Another boy would not replace the dead child in a literal sense, but, rather, would assuage the intensity of loss.[134] In a similar vein, the reuse of babies' names is sometimes interpreted as expectation of death and the failure of parents to invest emotion or individuality in children. This seems rather cynical. Surely, the persistent attachment to a particular name indicates the extra meanings vested in it, not least as a living memorial to its forebears and an inclination to perpetuate associations with that identity.

Clearly, grief became manifest in numerous ways, many of which were invisible or incomprehensible to the external observer. As Ellen Ross noted, mothers tended to express grief through their bodies: they stumbled, raged, took to drink or simply became silent and still.[135] One mother, writing to the Women's Co-operative Guild, related that she had nursed her 'sweet little girl' (aged four) day and night for two weeks. When the child died, she was 'so done up' with exhaustion and grief that she miscarried a baby and almost lost her own life.[136] Tears were, perhaps, the most tangible articulation of loss. Margaret Penn recalled the

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[132] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 14.   [133] Maggie Chapman in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 101.
[134] Tibble, *Greenhorn*, 63. This was particularly painful for Anne as she imagined her birth was a disappointment to them.
[135] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 191.   [136] M. L. Davies, *Maternity*, 158.

funeral of a schoolmate whose mother, 'sobbing loudly', 'made as if to jump onto the coffin'.[137] Albert Jasper recalled the visible sorrow of a bereft father whose 'eyes were red with crying'.[138] Relating the death of his niece, Jasper painted an image of weeping, despair, sleeplessness and dependency on his mother: 'Mum pulled everyone together.'[139] One Bolton man (born 1896) recollected the death of his baby sister when he was three years old. Hearing a 'horrible bustle' in the house one morning, the boy went to the kitchen: 'I saw a crowd there, mother's crying in the middle of the crowd, me aunts round her.'[140] The scene of a child watching his distraught mother surrounded by sympathetic relatives is striking: in all its simplicity, it conveys a profound sense of anguish. James Hardman (born 1905) recalled that a 'terrible lot of trouble' erupted when his eighteen-month-old brother died whilst in hospital. The story of his father's bitter conviction that medical negligence had precipitated the boy's death was repeatedly told by the family who had difficulty in accepting that the child had died.[141]

Of course, the most conventional means of expressing loss was through the rites associated with burial. In cases where children and babes received formal burial, customs surrounding the care and disposal of the corpse were often significant as landscapes for the expression of grief in similar ways to those of funerals for adults. Such practices facilitated a verbal and symbolic language of loss and condolence. Moreover, as most rituals concerning the care of the corpse centred on women, workplace collections provided a practical forum for men to express a language of condolence.[142] It is also plausible to suggest that the ability to finance a funeral represented a language in which fathers could both affirm their status as 'provider' and use it to express commitment to their family. Responses to the death of a child also extended beyond the rituals of interment; a grieving process might begin with the illness of a child and persist long after its funeral. Common to most, however, was the management of feeling, enabling parents to attend to the pragmatics of life without nullifying their sense of loss. David Vincent suggested that consideration of material relief could 'cushion the blow' of a child's early death.[143] An alleviation of household expenditure seems a particular hard cushion. Parents may have referred to child death in languages of pragmatism and resignation. Such expressions were easily mistaken for

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[137] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 160–2.   [138] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 14.
[139] Ibid., 49.   [140] BOHT, Tape 41a, Reference: LSS/A/005.
[141] Man. OH Tape, James Henry Hardman, Tape 927.
[142] Ross, *Love and Toil*, 193–4, and Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 14 and 49.
[143] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 58.

flippancy or hard-heartedness. However, as with responses to adult bereavement, parents adopted malleable, symbolic and abstract gestures as their principal forums for articulating sorrow. Furthermore, the material impact of a child's death was inescapable; it was rarely, however, the only factor taken into consideration when a parent became bereaved.

Conclusion

Infanticide, child neglect and the falsification of birth certificates featured prominently in Victorian and Edwardian debates concerning working-class parenting. Clearly, some parents were indifferent and callous towards their offspring. Yet as theories linking death with disease, poverty and environmental conditions gained credence at the end of the nineteenth century, perceptions of the causes of infant mortality shifted away from an emphasis on child murder towards medical and public health issues. The panic concerning infanticide stemmed, as Wohl suggests, from a tendency among 'comfortable' Victorians to 'believe the very worst of the masses'.[144] That parents often expressed a language of fatalism in response to child death cemented negative perceptions of the relationship between poverty and sensibility. It followed that a class which could 'stoop to infanticide' and be resigned to infant death would not experience any great sorrow at the death of their offspring.[145]

In Britain at the beginning of the twenty-first century, child death is rare and overwhelmingly perceived as a tragedy. As Vincent suggested in the early 1980s, death on a similar scale to Victorian mortality rates 'would have a shattering effect on the personality and family life of anyone so afflicted in our own society'.[146] Much like Florence Bell observing the working classes from a middle-class perspective, we struggle to make the imaginative leap in comprehending how individuals coped with recurrent death. It is beyond our capacity to empathise with such bereavements. In this sense, the notion that poverty and familiarity with death dulled the sorrow of repeated deaths, to the point of indifference in some cases, horrifies us whilst rendering our definitions of grief (and by implication, our inability to empathise) inappropriate. Yet there is a crucial difference between acknowledging that there are different experiences of bereavement and assuming that one is more distressing than another.

This chapter has shifted analysis away from indifference, resignation and poverty as evidence of immunity to profound sorrow: child death provoked intense distress, heartache, misery, wretchedness, pain and

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[144] See Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, 34.   [145] Ibid., 41.
[146] Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom*, 56.

desolation. High infant mortality rates did not annul the hope that one's children would live. Indeed, it is worth remembering that whilst infant death was common, a great many children survived, even in the cities with the worst infant mortality rates, to reach adulthood. The language of resignation was part of a common vocabulary in which people aimed to make sense of life and death; the fatalism commonly associated with bereavement could express many things, not least a sense of exhaustion and weariness. Material circumstances were not irrelevant to responses to death. They often necessitated pragmatism in the face of grief. This was not, however, tantamount to indifference. Care of the corpse, a dignified funeral, sobs, silence and memory all formed part of a culture of bereavement which was defined not by poverty, but by diversity. Individual parents experienced grief to different degrees and expressed their loss in a variety of ways which, crucially, were not always apparent to those who expected sentimental statements of loss or displays of unfettered emotion. Yet there is little reason to suppose that diverse and pragmatic responses to death were any less meaningful.

When Jane Nixon, a housewife from Ulverston, was admitted to Lancaster Asylum in July 1880, she related to medical staff a story of exhaustion, privation and desolation. Described as 'low' and 'desponding', Jane had been 'wish[ing] she were dead' for the past ten days. Her health was delicate and she appeared weak and fretful. The cause of her distress was, she said, bereavement. Several of her children had died within the past month, the last only two weeks previously, 'leaving her two out of seven'. Jane explained that during this time, she had been 'overworked', caring for her 'brother, cousin, children, husband and herself'; she had 'been sitting up nursing [the child], lost her appetite and felt ill for a fortnight before its death'.[147] It may, of course, be coincidental that Jane's collapse occurred in the aftermath of the child's death. However, this story represents a useful parable. It is plausible to suggest that the will to nurse the child sustained a mother through her own exhaustion. The expiration of the child not only precipitated grief and frustration that efforts had been in vain, but, also, provided parents with the space to surrender to weariness and heartache. That many parents displayed an apparent capacity to survive bereavement did not mean that they felt less sorrow. Rather, grief reflected the ambiguity and complexity of familial relationships; people appeared to live in mute resignation not from blunted sensibility but because they grieved in personal ways and imbued the seemingly ordinary with private meaning.

[147] LRO HRL 3/8.

9 Epilogue: death, grief and the Great War

Much has been written concerning the impact of the Great War on cultures of death and grief. For many historians, the volume and horror of young men's deaths in foreign fields rendered the Victorian display of mourning inappropriate. In its place grew a subdued, silent and privatised culture of grief that persisted throughout most of the twentieth century. David Cannadine argued that this shift was for the better: responses to grief during the First World War overwhelmingly minimised national, material and religious difference to emphasise the universality of human experiences of loss, giving rise to a sincere and egalitarian culture of death.[1] Others, notably Gorer and Ariès, interpreted the shift negatively, arguing that death was increasingly hidden from public view: people died in hospitals, funeral directors removed corpses to chapels of rest, and a decline in religious belief denied the bereaved a language of hope and reunion. Cultures of death were reduced to the embarrassed and speedy dispatch of the corpse whilst friends avoided mention of the death, preferring to send a mass-produced 'With Sympathy' card which required no personal input beyond a signature.[2]

Contesting the status of the war as a hiatus in cultures of death, other commentators have emphasised the continuities between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In working-class burial custom, much remained the same until at least the Second World War. As Wilson and Levy noted in their call for burial reform in the 1930s, cultural habits were slow to change.[3] Thus, corpses still remained at home until interment; funeral teas persisted, as did the wearing of black; floral tributes intimated sympathy and respect; the working classes continued to prefer burial over cremation; and, even with the decline of the workhouse, the pauper or

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[1] Cannadine, 'War and Death', 187–242.
[2] Gorer, *Death, Grief and Mourning*, 169–75, and Ariès, *Hour of Our Death*, 559–60.
[3] Wilson and Levy, *Burial Reform*, 71.

common grave remained an ignoble and hated burial.[4] Somewhat differently, Pat Jalland emphasises the extent to which a 'twentieth-century' culture of death had taken root by the end of the nineteenth. First, she points to the Victorian crisis of faith that took hold from the middle of the Victorian period with Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* and increasing biblical criticism. Jalland sees the consequences of this increasing shift towards secularism in the craze for spiritualism in the latter half of the century and the growing interest in cremation. Finally, Jalland points to the demographic shifts that meant that, by the outbreak of the Great War, death was increasingly associated with the elderly. The Great War 'reinforced and accelerated' these motors of change whilst the movement for funeral reform, born in the days of Dickens, received an unexpected boost as families of civilian and soldier deaths were urged to embrace simplified rites of mourning for the sake of the nation's morale. In this sense, the war 'shattered what remained' of Victorian cultures of grief. Observing that the Evangelical 'good' death had represented an unrealistic model in peacetime, Jalland concludes that death in the Great War 'was a world away from the Victorian ideal of a good Christian death'.[5]

Writing in 1999, Tony Walter and Peter Jupp also questioned the tendency to separate the twentieth century from previous chronologies of death. In particular, they dismissed perceptions of death as the 'ultimate' modern taboo as little more than 'popular journalistic cliché'. Estimating the influence of the Great War on cultures of death was, they argued, notoriously difficult when there had yet to be written a detailed history of grief in the twentieth century in peacetime. Rather, most analyses of the impact of war focused not on the shifting cultures of civilian deaths, but, rather, on mourning and commemorative ritual in relation to soldiers' deaths. Given the exceptionality of these deaths, Jupp and Walter called for a reconsideration of the relationship between the military and the civilian death in the twentieth century.[6]

The historiography of commemoration and remembrance associated with the Great War is phenomenal. It is not my intention to revisit or dwell on this literature here; there are plenty of books that do that very

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[4] E. Roberts, *Woman's Place*, 20, and B. Raphael, 'Is there a British Way of Death?' in K. Charmaz, G. Howarth and A. Kellehear (eds.), *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain and the USA* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 84–97.

[5] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 358–81, and P. Jalland, 'Victorian Death and its Decline, 1850–1918' in P. Jupp and C. Gittings (eds.), *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 230–55.

[6] P. Jupp and T. Walter, 'The Healthy Society, 1918–98' in Jupp and Gittings, *Death in England*, 256–82 (256–7).

well already.[7] Rather, this epilogue aims to place working-class responses to the deaths of soldiers in the context of what came before, rather than what came after, the Great War. Agreeing with Jupp and Walter that the complexities between civilian deaths in peacetime and military deaths in war have not been sufficiently explored, I find it curious that claims for the impact of war have been made largely on the basis of the culture of a pre-war social elite. As noted in the introduction, the attitudes and responses to bereavement of the working classes and the poor before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe has, by and large, remained obscure. Without wishing to detract from the exceptional and harrowing experience of war bereavement, this final chapter draws comparisons between attitudes to, and experiences of, loss before and during the war. In particular, it suggests that whilst there remained a strong sense of Otherness in how different social groups responded to death in war,[8] the experience of mass bereavement also facilitated greater understanding between different social groups concerning what grief looked and sounded like. Of course, there were similarities between elite and working-class responses to grief prior to the war: a desire to soothe the suffering of the sick; emotional and physical exhaustion from waiting for death; feelings of fear and trauma as death approached; the utilisation of mourning custom to ameliorate grief; and the importance of memory within a

[7] From among the many: A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), D. W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada 1919–1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), D. Boorman, *At the Going Down of the Sun: British First World War Memorials* (York: Ebor Press, 1988), A. Borg, *War Memorials from Antiquity to Present* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991), B. Bushaway, 'Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance' in R. Porter (ed.), *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The Great War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, Maxwell Macmillan International, 1991), K. Inglis, 'The Home-Coming: The War Memorial Movement in Cambridge', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992), 583–606, N. C. Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War and the Geography of Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), J. M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape* (London: Praeger, 1988), G. L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21 (1986), 491–513, J. Tatum, *The Mourner's Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), A. Wilkinson, 'Changing English Attitudes to Death in Two World Wars' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 149–63.
[8] For instance, Joy Damousi examines how war mourning was gendered whilst Jay Winter, unwittingly perhaps, draws attention to the differences in experience between the affluent and the poor in trying to travel to France to be at the bedside of dying soldiers. J. Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–2, and J. Winter, 'Communities in Mourning' in F. Coetzee and M. Shevin-Coetzee (eds.), *Authority, Identity and the Social History of the Great War* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 325–51 (329–31) and Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 32–4.

post-interment context. The emphasis on the expansion of shared under-
standings of grief is not, however, to suggest that the habits of the affluent
trickled down to civilise the poor. Rather, war bereavement challenged
the assumptions of the elite about what grief might look like when words
failed to describe loss. Likewise, the war questioned certainties concerning
ownership of the corpse. Previously the concern of those who surrendered
their dead to the public grave, the circumstances of war meant that families
across Britain were confronted with the dispossession of the dead.

There are a number of parallels that can be drawn between working-
class cultures of death before the war and the rituals developed in wartime
to deal with the circumstances of large numbers of deaths in brutal
contexts and in foreign spaces: the networks of support and notions of
'adoptive kinship', the improvisation of commemorative ritual, and the
development of psychological strategies to manage grief where symbolic
or verbal forums for expression were compromised. The most striking
parallel between bereavement before and during the war, however, is with
reference to the pauper or common grave.

In her book *Dismembering the Male*, Joanna Bourke made comparisons
between the treatment of corpses of men who died in battle and those of
the civilian poor who died in the workhouse. Both groups were buried,
effectively, by the state; the guiding principles of burial were economy,
efficiency and hygiene; notions of decency were highly flexible. Bourke
also highlights how religious identities became confused on the battlefield
and men of different faiths might be mixed up in one grave whilst burial
services were read with haste.[9] Of course, these were familiar criticisms of
the pauper burial too. Given the focus of her book, it is unsurprising that
Bourke develops the discussion of the 'anonymous, mutilated corpse' on
the battlefield through comparison with the body of the unclaimed pau-
per which was passed onto anatomy schools for dissection. In the context
of widespread popular antipathy to post-mortem, the analogy is fruitful
for thinking about the psychological trauma endured by families whose
relatives were dismembered on battlefields. In practice, as Bourke notes,
the risk of being dissected following death in the workhouse had dramat-
ically declined since the passage of the Anatomy Act in 1832. At the
beginning of the twentieth century, fewer people than ever died in the
workhouse and fewer still were 'unclaimed'. Furthermore, boards of
guardians had long expressed reluctance to comply with the demands of
anatomists and, in the isolated cases where post-mortem was carried out

[9] J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996), 215.

without relatives' consent, guardians were quick to censure the surgeons at fault.[10]

It is possible, however, to pursue the comparison between the pauper and the soldier's grave in more detail, especially with reference to the way in which pauper burial shaped opportunities for mourning. First, parochial guidelines prohibiting the return of the corpse to the relatives of the deceased in the interim between death and burial denied families the opportunity to perform customs and rituals of mourning that focused on the corpse. Where entire families were housed in the workhouse, rules concerning hygiene meant that wives, husbands, parents or children were unable to partake in the preparation of the body for burial. As demonstrated in chapter 5, this ruptured the catharsis of the funeral by denying access to customs that were pivotal to expressions of loss and the renegotiation of the identity. Even in circumstances where relatives died at home but were then interred in a common or pauper grave, families surrendered ownership of the body to the parish guardians or the burial board. Moreover, without headstones or commemorative paraphernalia to mark the plot, the common grave soon became indistinct from its surroundings. The language of the 'family' grave conferred notions of a collective and genealogical identity and made reference to sentimental conceptions of intimacy, affection and reunion. The common/pauper grave denied claims to individual or familial identity, sanctioning only the collective representation of poverty. Interment in common grave spaces also shaped the identities of mourners, the prohibitions on burial and commemorative custom acting as reminders of the anonymity and shame of the poor. As was illustrated in chapter 5, some families rejected this identity by attempting to reclaim ownership of the corpse at a later date; others ameliorated it by investing improvised and alternative gestures with meaning; others still looked forward and endeavoured to ensure that such shame never fell on their family again.

The parallels between this and the responses of families who lost soldiers in the war are striking. Prior to the war, ownership of the corpse was, for all but the poor, taken for granted. In a bizarre form of egalitarianism, the war rendered dispossession of the dead the norm. The deaths of soldiers were distressing because they ruptured the life cycle and men died in unimaginably brutal ways. Yet what made bereavement so hard to bear in the Great War was the absence of a body onto which feelings of loss could be projected. Even for families who had employed others to deal with the toilet of the dead, possession of the corpse was crucial for

[10] Ibid., 216–17.

legitimising loss: it confirmed that death was real and enabled the bereaved to construct a narrative of the dead at peace. Crucially, the corpse provided a silent landscape onto which life stories could be projected and identities renegotiated. Moreover, without interment, it was difficult for relatives to achieve closure. As Damousi argues, the absence of the corpse made it difficult for families to forge new identities that were not shaped by the war.[11] Instead of conquering bereavement, they remained perpetually defined in relation to it.

Clearly, war memorials and Remembrance Day rituals parodied the funeral and were used by the bereaved as foci for grief. Indeed, Damousi contends that war memorials have been privileged as 'the' sites of remembrance in explorations of war mourning.[12] In Britain, the ceremonial burial of the unknown warrior at Westminster Abbey provided the opportunity for bereaved families of all classes and creeds to appropriate the anonymous soldier as their own, channelling feelings of loss, despair, anger and bitterness onto the solitary coffin. Likewise, careful deployment of a symbolism and language that held universal resonance enabled the bereaved to project personal meaning onto the many memorials that were established in the metropolis and across villages, towns and cities. In the same way that the pauper burial could evoke lasting bitterness against a system that penalised people for being poor, war memorials and rituals of remembrance could also prompt feelings of resentment against those who made war.[13]

As Jay Winter has demonstrated, however, commemorative practice extended beyond, and indeed thrived, outside state-controlled initiatives.[14] Again, like the relatives of those interred in a pauper grave, families of soldiers tended to improvise in creating their own rituals of sorrow and memory which would invest loss with meaning beyond the absence of the body. The resurgence of spiritualism in the inter-war period has been interpreted as a desire to communicate with the dead soldier for reassurance of their well-being in an afterlife and, perhaps, to recreate a pseudo-deathbed scene where meaningful last words and assurances of everlasting fidelity and love could be made.[15] Joy Damousi's study of war mourning in Australia emphasises the things people did: the personal rituals developed in response to loss; the visits to places associated with the dead; the investment of belongings with

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[11] Damousi, *Labour of Loss*, 1–3.   [12] Ibid.
[13] Wilkinson, 'Changing English Attitudes to Death', 156.
[14] J. Winter, 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War' in J. Winter and E. Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40–60 (41).
[15] Hazelgrove, 'Spiritualism after the Great War'.

extra meaning.[16] Advancing the notion of 'adoptive kinship', Winter explored the networks of support that were established between bereaved relatives, organisations such as the Red Cross, and dead soldiers' comrades. Such networks frequently took the form of letter writing, with correspondents remembering the dead, sharing experiences of grief and, in some cases, offering support to those who lacked certain knowledge that their loved one was dead.[17] Pivotal to this culture of adoptive kinship was the idea that talking about the dead was good for grief. As Winter notes, however, among communities of mourning there operated a strange paradox between families needing to know the detail of their loved ones' last moments and a tendency to talk about death in 'euphemistic' and 'elevated' language.[18]

This is echoed in the broader context of public acts of commemoration; Armistice Day remembrance services clearly centred on death yet the act which was supposed to unite the nation in one moment of grief, and which has persisted, was the two-minute silence. As Adrian Gregory notes, the capitalisation of 'Silence' in official documents after the war signified the importance of creating a soundlessness into which ideological meanings could be poured, certainly, but also the personal memories and sadness of individuals from a broad political, social and economic spectrum.[19] Beyond the official Silence, however, Gregory also points to the silence that signified the inexpressibility of experience: silence 'signified everything and nothing'.[20] Gregory posits this in relation to those who occupied the borderlands of madness after their experiences fighting at the Front. Yet silence, in its official and personal guise, has a broader significance here. Notably, the absence of bodies and the inability to conduct funerals raised questions for contemporaries and historians alike concerning the forms mourning took when common conceptions of 'rites of passage' were compromised.

This leads us to consider a second way in which the war minimised difference in cultures of grief. This book has argued that grief could be articulated through a medley of gestures, none of which needed to fix upon verbal expressions of feeling. The apparent reticence of the working-class bereaved prior to the war represented a strategy for coping with loss in a context where death was unpredictable and, despite falling mortality rates, continued to disrupt the life cycle. Within the context of war, the tragedy of mass bereavement alongside the awfulness of violent

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[16] Damousi, *Labour of Loss*, 59.   [17] Winter, 'Communities in Mourning', 325–53.
[18] Ibid., 331.
[19] A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919–1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 13.
[20] Ibid., 9.

death and the absence of the body rendered a dominant vocabulary of grief clichéd and inappropriate: the funeral was impossible, it was difficult to express condolences without resorting to platitudes and, given the numbers of working-class men dying in France, it would have been tactless and unpatriotic to suggest that poorer families who mourned soldiers were immune or resigned to grief. Of course, words remained important in the context of comprehending loss during and after the war: the outpouring of literature, poetry, memoir and correspondence testifies to the significance of trying to grapple textually with what the war meant. Yet as the case study below demonstrates, taciturnity also became recognised as a powerful language of loss in its own right.

Jack Lawson published his autobiography in 1932. A Labour MP, he was fifty-one years old at the time of writing his memoir. Lawson's father had been a miner and Lawson himself started work in a Durham colliery at the age of twelve. Brought up in the context of poverty, Lawson's narrative represents the strong autodidactic culture researched so superbly by Jonathan Rose.[21] The life story he tells, like so many cited throughout this book, is shaped around triumph over adversity, the journey to political consciousness and a call for greater representation and rights among the working classes. Throughout the memoir, Lawson describes his father with love and admiration: he undertook 'killing work … fir [sic] his children'; he was a cultured though uneducated man; and his presence was associated with warmth, comfort and security.[22] In comparison, Lawson's mother was an 'uncultured', bad-tempered, illiterate and domineering woman who could fight, literally and metaphorically, like a man. Lawson notes that 'she never fondled or kissed any of us that I remember, for she clearly regarded these things as weakness'.[23] Nonetheless, it is his mother's emotion that pervades the memoir.

By the outbreak of war, Lawson had stood for the local council, was married and had one daughter; another little girl was born in the first year of hostilities. His youngest brother, Willie, joined the army in 1915. Lawson was not in his parents' house when the telegram arrived in February 1916 notifying them that Willie was dead. Lawson did not know about his brother's death until he next visited his parents with his six-year-old daughter. As his daughter chatted gaily to her grandmother about the recent arrival of her new baby sister, Lawson's mother began searching through a drawer. Finding what she was looking for, she handed a child's toy to her granddaughter: ' "Take that home for your

[21] J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[22] Lawson, *Man's Life*, 10.   [23] Ibid., 18–19.

babby, hinny. My babby's gone." Gone! The words came like the dull-
ness of the first clay on a coffin. There was no sign of emotion, but there
was a far away look in her eyes and a tensing of the mouth as she repeated
"Gone".' Lawson's comparison of the word 'gone' to the sound of clay
hitting a coffin lid is telling. The thud of clay, as opposed to the sprinkling
of soil, intimates the impact that the simple word 'gone' makes on those
listening to it; the 'dullness' implies an inevitability that makes it unex-
ceptional yet the implied echoes of falling clay, like the repetition of the
word 'gone', remind us of the gravity and lasting consequences of death.
Likewise, as Lawson's exclamation implies, the significance of his
mother's revelation jars with the subdued way in which it is delivered.

This short sentence was, according to Lawson, the most explicit refer-
ence to Willie's death his mother made: 'Tears there were none. It was not
her way. There was no word showing that she felt deeply. She would let
no-one know of these things.' Her silence formed a formidable barrier to
anyone who tried to engage with her about her son's death: 'Words of
consolation died on the lips, for they seemed not to be heard. No-one ever
saw her weep. Dry-eyed, apparently stone hard, she sat there, a picture of
inarticulate suffering, defying description.' Instead, she retreated into her
bedroom and refused to see or speak to anyone. She stayed there for
weeks, 'resenting the intrusion of even those who took her food'. In her
silence, Lawson's mother becomes a monumental figure of grief. Despite
her sentimental shortcomings, Lawson's narrative positions his mother
within the powerful visual discourse of the sacrificial mother that emerged
during and after the war.[24] In particular, the reconception of the dead
soldier as her 'babby' permitted Lawson's mother to express affection and
loss by evoking notions of the infant's dependency upon, and close
physical contact with, its mother. As Lawson notes, 'She saw him only
as he had crooned in her arms or slept in his cradle. All the pent-up
affection which had been stifled by the battle for bread, all the glory
of motherhood, had burst its bonds and ran to him. And now, not
the soldier, but the babby had gone.' Unable to give verbal or tearful
expression to her feeling, Lawson's mother could not even give symbolic
expression to her status as mother by washing and dressing her son's
body. Lawson does not suggest that she lacked feeling before the death of
Willie, but, rather, that her energies were focused on a domestic and
maternal role as household manager. Like the breadwinner male who
used the notion of 'providing' as a language of love, making ends meet
could be read as a sign of maternal devotion and familial affection. When

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[24] Damousi, *Labour of Loss*, 26–45, Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, 91 and
108–13.

Willie dies, his mother's struggle to protect and fight for her children suffers a terrible defeat, a notion reinforced by her reversion to a conception of the soldier as a baby. In the months and years after Willie's death, she never spoke directly of her loss. Rather, she kept Willie's clothes. Lawson describes how, in 'a shy way', she would often gather up some article of clothing which had belonged to her dead son 'and talk about it, and him'. In this simple gesture, Lawson's mother found all the articulacy she needed. As Lawson observes, 'Always he was with her.'[25]

Pivotal to the tragedy of Lawson's narrative is the realisation that such stories of suffering were not exceptional in the war. There is a sense, however, in which the story has wider significance. For Lawson, the location of feeling among the poor before the war was rooted in the struggle for bread. In one sense, the sacrifice of soldiers during the war, for whom mothers had struggled, unleashed the 'apparently stone hard' parents' emotional life. This is not to suggest, however, that such feeling came from nowhere; indeed, in old age Lawson's mother told him that although she had been ignorant and unsentimental towards her children, she had always fought for them and never did anything to bring shame on them. In Lawson's narrative, this 'fight' was a tacit acknowledgement of an obscure but meaningful emotional investment. Yet the story also acts as a metaphor for the release of the bourgeois commentator, which of course Lawson had become. Prior to the war, the obliqueness of emotion and familial feeling to the external commentator had fostered notions of apathy and fatalism. The common experience and the circumstances of bereavement through the war (in many ways Lady Bell's 'dread story') facilitated a renegotiation of what grief and mourning looked like beyond a privileged narrative of 'pure' grief to facilitate shared understanding of languages of loss that operated outside funeral custom. Of course, difference continued to be inscribed in the internal and external representations of the working classes and the poor, but the evaluation and negotiation of difference became, for a short time at least, more flexible.

Historians have suggested that the Great War facilitated the end of the Victorian culture of death partly because mourning for the war dead was shaved of commercial excess. In stripping bereavement bare, the war highlighted the universalism of grief whilst creating new understandings of the ways in which universalism would always be tempered by the limits of empathy and individualism. The difficulties of responding to bereavement during the war underline the arguments posited throughout this book for understanding pre-war responses to death, especially among the

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[25] Lawson, *Man's Life*, 240–1.

poor. The absence of a corpse rendered customary rites of mourning obsolete. Hence, families were forced to improvise. That they did so indicates the significance attached to the ownership of the dead and cultural representations of loss as personal forums for negotiating and, ultimately, resolving grief. The desire to secure some form of memorialisation to the deceased emphasised the need to claim an identity for the dead. This not only signified a gesture of respect towards the deceased, social rites also enabled mourners to move towards the sphere of the living once those obligations were fulfilled. Beyond the public rites of mourning, verbal silence could, indeed, signify everything.

The sheer scale of bereavement in the war and, notably, the volume of historical interest in what people did in response to it, made such practices visible and legitimised them as languages of loss. The war did not usher in a culture of privatised grief; the public spectacle of death was appropriated and invested with personal meaning before the war. Moreover, symbolic languages of loss that operated in intimate and domestic space, in unseen and unheard gestures, thrived within working-class culture; the war created an unhappy forum for augmenting this culture within a narrative of national mourning. The war did not foster humanity and refine the sensibilities of those in insecure material circumstances. Rather, it prompted – in the context of war at least – external observers to look for it in different ways.

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