

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

# more to death

fourth edition 2014

## DEATH, DIVORCE & DEBT

Who picks  
up the tab?

## BILLY CONNOLLY'S BIG SEND OFF



## SAYING GOODBYE TO HAYLEY



UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS  
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

# Content



06 - Never Say Die



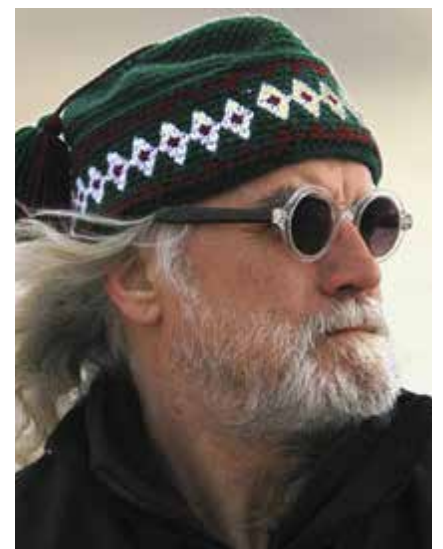
34 - Death, Divorce & Debt



12 - Saying  
Goodbye to Hayley



48 - Go Your Own  
Way



22 - Billy Connolly's  
Big Send Off





66 - Whose Fault is Funeral Poverty?



28 - What Exactly are Professional Services?



38 - Funeral Poverty - Can I Get Help?



54 - Love at the End



16 - NDC 2014 Awards



tell your friends and colleagues about us



tell your friends and colleagues about us



there is no other magazine quite like More to Death





Looking at this edition and back at the previous three, I am increasingly proud and surprised at the quality and variety of articles that we have explored. M2D is turning into a wealth of information and fascination.

Can we keep it up? I worry about this at the start of every new edition but so far they have fallen into place. That said, if you have something to reveal, gripe about or debate let me know.

There is nothing else like this mag anywhere, IT IS UTTERLY UNIQUE.

If you are a new reader, welcome - please feel free to flick through any of our previous editions by clicking on the opposite page. If you would like to reproduce any of our articles or print them off, please get in touch and I can send you pdf versions.

My appeal in the last edition for readers to register to receive future editions worked well. You see, as a free e-zine there is no way of knowing who you are.

So, as I said before if you don't want to miss the next edition please click here, now. This will quickly take you to a blank email form. Simply type "send mag" into the subject box and click send. We will then get future editions to you - no other junk I promise. Then you can return to see what we have assembled in this, our fourth edition.

Lastly, would you ALL please send this mag to your colleagues, friends and contacts. Things will never change for the better if individuals are still in the dark. Help spread the love! This is really important.

Have a great Summer, enjoy those roses.

*Rosie Inman-Cook*  
Editor



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# NEVER SAY DIE

In our last edition, Ru Callender left us with the thought about a time needed for “disentanglement of body and soul” at the time of death. [Click to read](#)

Here our regular feature writer Charles Cowling examines our definition of death; thereby touching on the same potential.

**Fact:** In the UK there is, at present, no legal definition of death.

Once upon a time dead meant dead. We knew where we stood then. His heart has stopped beating, he's not breathing: he's dead. End of.

Cardio-pulmonary death, they called it. Heart and lungs. But when technology made it possible sometimes to restore cardio-pulmonary function and bring people back from the dead, but not restore their consciousness, a redefinition of death was called for.

It's called brain stem death. In nautical terms, the bridge has been wiped out but the engine room is still humming.

Brain stem death describes not loss of consciousness but the end of consciousness. Brain stem death is the point at which living organs can legally be harvested — and give a new lease of life to dying people. So how dead actually are you after you've done that?

How dead are you when your heart, literally, goes on? A brain-dead pregnant mother nourished a foetus for 107 days and gave birth to a healthy child.

Which is why some people deny that brain stem death is death.

Twenty years ago an MRI scan of a stroke patient might have shown them to be totally dead. Today, tissue plasminogen activator can restore them to unimpaired health.

**What price, then, the irreversibility of death?**

How would you define death in the as-yet hypothetical case of someone's brain being transplanted from their dead — in a cardio - pulmonary sense — body into a de-brained but otherwise healthy body?





## Take it a stage further: if death is the cessation of life, what is life?

Some people propose that death should be defined as the irreversible loss of personhood — the point at which you can declare that Elvis has left the building and ain't coming back. Okay then, if you want to go with that, when do you call time of death on a demented person? And how do you address the matter of the still-beating heart?

## And yes, while we think about it, what, actually, constitutes “a person”?

Over in America, Dr Sam Parnia is now reviving people who have died of a heart attack several hours after they have died. He reckons that in 10-20 years' time it'll be possible to resurrect dead people after 24 hours. Parnia even proposes allowing a person who has died of, say, pneumonia, to remain dead while an antibiotic goes on working to kill the disease, and then, when they're 'well' again, bringing them back to life.

Understand this: brain death is nowhere near an event. It's a process that takes longer than anyone thought. The brain goes on dying for hours after the heart has stopped beating.

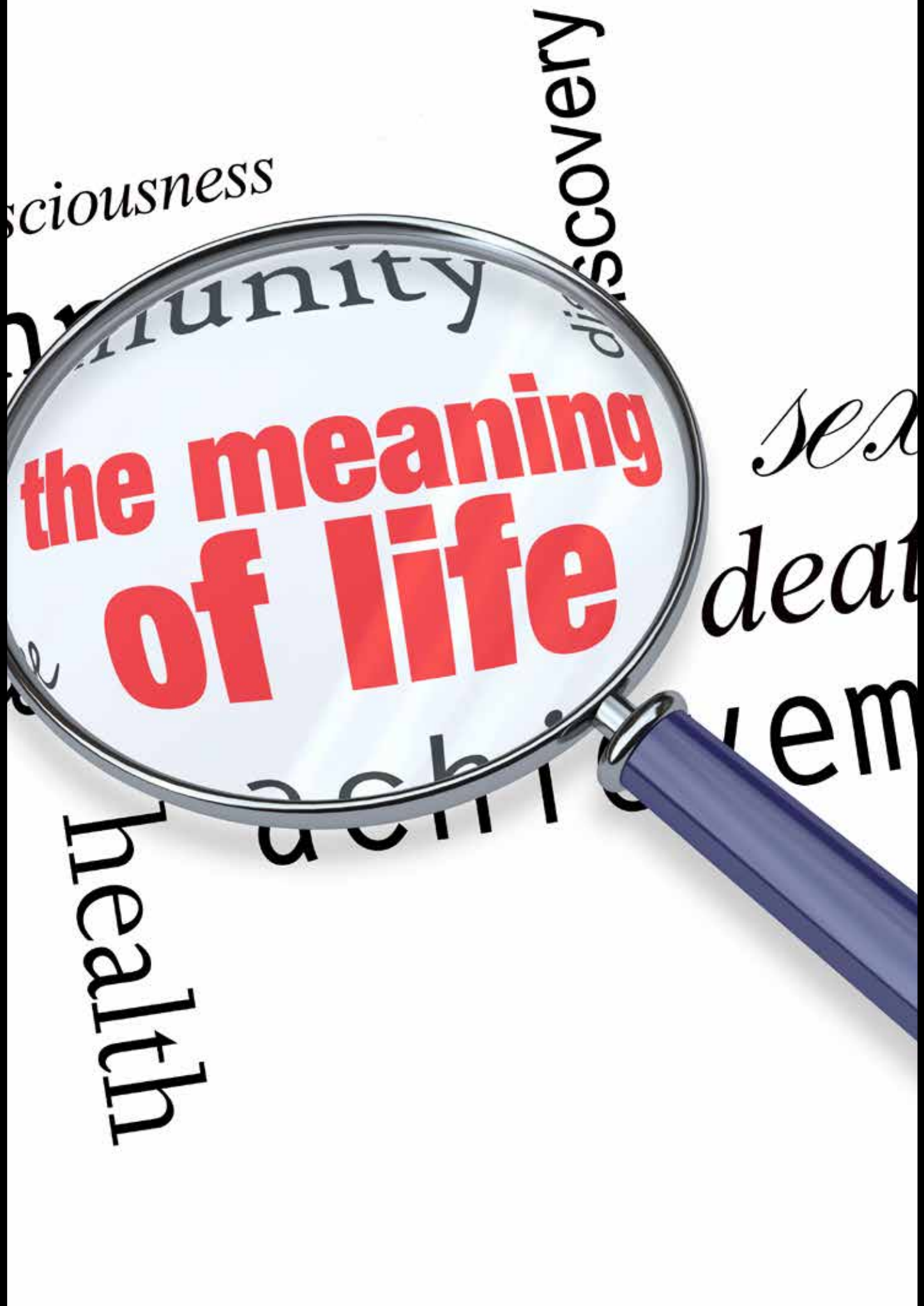
## So – spooky thought - what levels of awareness do we retain after our death, and for how long?

It's science that's altering the definition of death in the modern age. Many religions have, for centuries, thought of death, not as a full and final event, but as a time of transition. Science has by no means ruled out the possibility that consciousness continues after death. Sam Parnia, who has for years collected the recollections of the out-of-body experiences of those of his patients who have died for a short time, offers this caveat to those who think that the seat of selfhood is the brain:

“We always assume that all scientists believe the brain produces the mind, but in fact there are plenty who are not certain of that. Even prominent neuroscientists, such as Sir John Eccles, a Nobel prize-winner, believe that we are never going to understand mind through neuronal activity. All I can say is what I have observed from my work.

It seems that when consciousness shuts down in death, psyche, or soul – by which I don't mean ghosts, I mean your individual self – persists for at least those hours before you are resuscitated. From which we might justifiably begin to conclude that the brain is acting as an intermediary to manifest your idea of soul or self but it may not be the source or originator of it... I think that the evidence is beginning to suggest that we should keep open our minds to the possibility that memory, while obviously a scientific entity of some kind – I'm not saying it is magic or anything like that – is not neuronal.”





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## SUMMER FLORAL CASKET



# Saying Goodbye to Hayley

**Greenfield Creations were honoured to supply one of their “Garden” coffins for the filming of Hayley Cropper’s funeral on Coronation Street.** On the 31st January, an estimated 20 million viewers watched as Hayley was given a beautiful funeral that reflected all aspects of her life.

When asked about this wonderful media opportunity, William reflects that he had to submit three designs and wait some months before knowing which programme it was for and why...and then keep a lid on it, so to speak. Though pleased to be approached, he wasn't surprised the Coronation Street Design team chose this type of coffin. It's a reflection of the increasing amount of customer awareness, involvement and demand for alternative funerals and burials. People really can choose a coffin to reflect exactly what they wish for, be it for themselves or a loved one. As William points out, 'People are as different in death as they are in life and a personalised coffin can pay such a fitting tribute to the one who has passed.' Just as Hayley's did!

The “Garden” coffin was designed about 10 years ago by one of the company's founders, Jacky Hunneybel, and depicts a glorious English garden in full bloom. Jacky was inspired by all things bright and beautiful, and the coffin design was a result of her attention to authentic detail. Unfortunately, Jacky was also quite unexpectedly diagnosed with cancer, sadly losing her battle not long ago.

William explains that Jacky would have been greatly moved to see this choice of coffin for Hayley and deeply touched by the storyline. It had always been a desire of Jacky's that these inexpensive, eco-friendly, bespoke coffins be readily available to people, and with this major television event, more people will be able to see them than she could have ever dreamt possible.

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William Wordsworth 1888

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# WHAT A SPECIAL GROUP OF PEOPLE



A Huge THANK YOU!! to everyone



## The annual NDC People's Awards for the best Natural Burial Grounds have taken place.

As usual, the trustees spent hours scrutinising hundreds of feedback forms that had been sent directly to the charity, by members of the public, since the last awards, Spring 2013. When these had been put in order, the area winners were sent off to the charity's patrons for final scrutiny.

These awards are unique, being driven by the families who have used the burial sites. They describe the efforts the managers made: those finishing touches, the warmth and support clients received, the personal input that made a difficult time more bearable.

These awards are not necessarily about fancy facilities and great views, they are the peoples' awards, for the people by the people.

This year's overall winner is a newcomer to the arena, a site that has totally absorbed all the best practice that is going on around the country and really hit the ground running. It is really heartening to hear from so many families in such a short space of time that these people have got it just right.

Congratulations go to Simon Ferrar, his wife Ailean and the wonderful team at Clandon Wood Natural Burial Reserve near Guildford.

In second place was Jo Vassie from Higher Ground Meadow, winner of the South West region.

Third place went to Chris and Jenny Scroby at the Willows in Leicestershire.

Many of these regions were closely contested and we wish to thank all members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds for the continuing and fantastic job they are doing from the north of Scotland right down to Cornwall. Congratulations to all of you.

If you are a member of the public who would like to let us know of your experience using a natural burial ground there is a [downloadable form](#) on our website.

# NDC PEOPLES AWARDS

# 2014 WINNERS

## Clandon Wood Natural Burial Site



who voted





# Runners Up HIGHER GROUND MEADOW



Joanna Vassie, at Higher Ground Meadow, Dorchester, Devon was a close runner up and richly deserves this award. Well done to Joanna and her team.

[www.highergroundmeadow.co.uk](http://www.highergroundmeadow.co.uk)

# Third Place THE WILLOWS

A tranquil location in the picturesque Leicestershire countryside is where you will find Chris and Jenny Scroby who came third in the UK - no mean achievement. Well done to both of you.

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Burial Ground Managers from across the UK



## **SOUTH & EAST**

**Winners - CLANDON WOOD NATURAL BURIAL RESERVE**  
Runners Up - South Downs Natural Burial Site

## **SOUTH WEST**

**Winners - HIGHER GROUND MEADOW**  
Runners Up - Joint Award to  
Westmill Natural Burial Ground  
& Great Bradley Cottage

## **SCOTLAND**

**Winners - CLOVERLY WOODS OF REST**  
Runners Up - Binning Memorial Woodland

## **EAST MIDLANDS**

**Winners - WILLOWS NATURAL BURIAL GROUND**  
Runners Up - Longholt Wood

## **WEST MIDLANDS**

**Winners - WESTALL PARK NATURAL BURIAL GROUND**  
Runners Up - Westhope Green Burial Ground

## **YORKSHIRE**

**Winners - BROCKLANDS NATURAL BURIAL SITE**  
Runners Up - South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground

## **THE NORTH**

**Winners - DALTON WOODLAND BURIAL GROUND**  
Runners Up - Swanlow Park Cemetery

## **WALES**

**Winners - GREEN LANE BURIAL FIELD & NATURE RESERVE**  
Runners Up - Boduan Sanctuary Wood



# Regional Winners and close seconds



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## [Death Salon London](#)

This video will give you a taster of the excellent death salon that took place at Bart's pathology museum this spring.

## [James - Moving On](#)

I never thought that I would be reduced to tears by a ball of string, incredible music video.



# you must watch

Rosie and the team strongly recommend you watch these informative, emotive videos.



## [Say Their Name](#)

A very special video made by the compassionate friends charity who support families who have lost a child.

## [Jon Underwood Death Cafe](#)

Here Jon Underwood talks to the BBC about the rise of the death cafe movement.



# and some more..

be warned - they will make you cry

## [Billy Connolly's](#) ['Big Send Off'](#)

After being told he had cancer and Parkinson's disease on the same day, Billy Connolly investigated death with his very own, unique brand of humour.

## [Channel4](#) [Documentary](#)

Here is a link to the powerful series that channel 4 have produced which follows a group of terminally ill people.





# Ian George

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# Philip Scott Celebrant

*‘What is my  
life if I am  
not useful  
to others?’*

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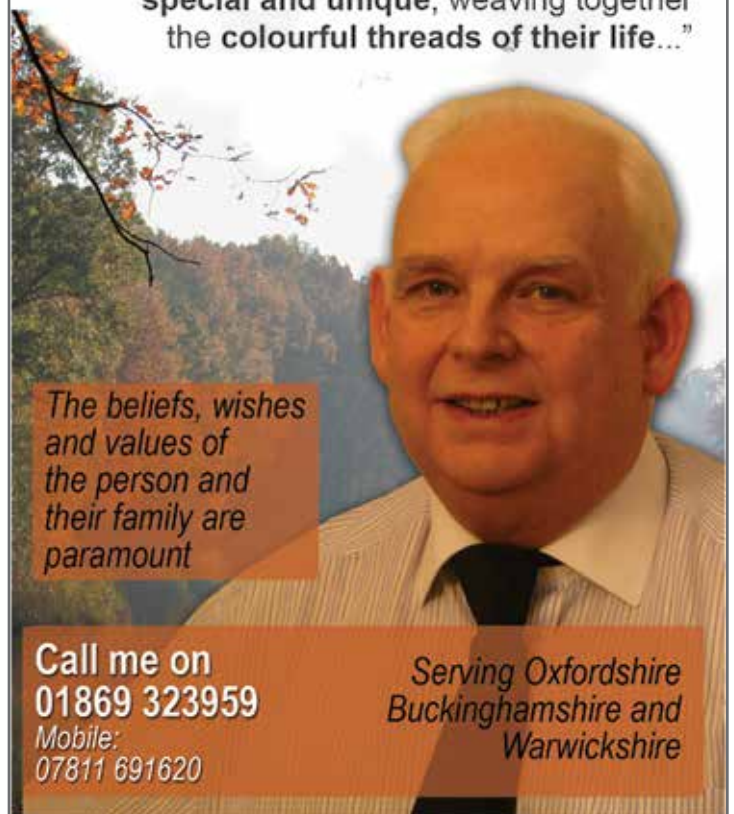
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People's Awards for  
the Best Natural  
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Yorkshire 2013



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# What exactly are ‘Professional Services’?

So the funeral was last week, the flowers sent by loved ones are starting to fade, you know it is time to take the sympathy cards down and the phone doesn't seem to be ringing quite as much.

As the clock ticks in a silent room, you start to accept that life has to go on; that there are things to sort out. All the official stuff (letters to write, places to present the death certificate to – not to mention clearing out drawers, emptying boxes. You hear the sound of the mail dropping through the letterbox and there, amongst the letters from people who don't yet know your loved one is no longer with us, is the invoice from the funeral director exquisitely presented in a crisp, white, classy envelope. You knew it was coming and yet somehow it all seems so impersonal, to see such a personal day itemised – coffin, flowers, internment fees and ‘professional services’.

Having planned our mum's funeral some years ago, I remember wondering what ‘professional services’ actually meant. The funeral directors picked her up, took her away for a few days, ‘prepared’ her body to come back home in a coffin that was far too big for her little body and then came back a week later to ‘deliver’ her first to the local church and then on the crematorium. They dropped us off at her church hall for drinks and food with friends and family. Nothing out of the ordinary, or so I thought.



**The team at Levertons**



by Jayne Lea



**Speaking to so many funeral directors whilst helping to put this magazine together for Rosie and the Natural Death Centre, I thought it would be useful to do a days work experience with a funeral director and asked if I could spend the day with Levertons in London. Nothing could have prepared me for that day.**

Levertons is a very old, established family run firm in Camden, North London with generations of experience and a history of funerals of the rich and famous – from robbers to royalty, quite literally!

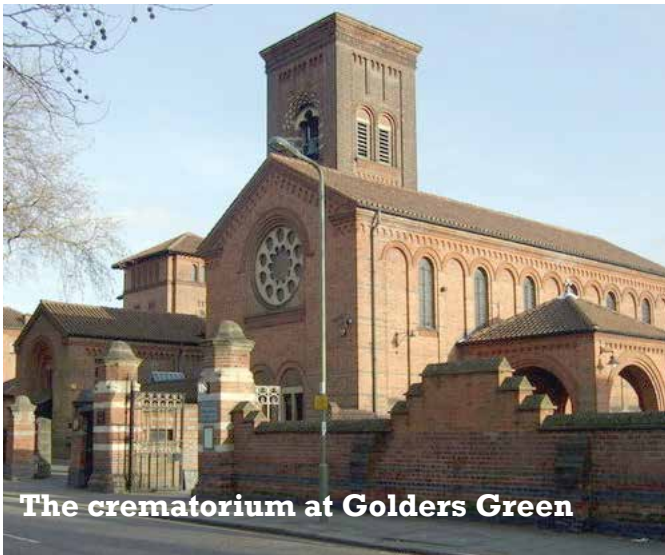
I was under the direction of Richard Putt and at 1pm would attend the funeral of a gentleman who had passed away from cancer a couple of weeks earlier.

The morning was spent being given a guided tour by Lori MacKellar: the mortuary, the chapel, the prayer room, the flower room, the office – the mechanics of the company.

The care and attention to detail spent on each funeral helped me understand the complexity of organising such a detailed ceremony (with no room for a rehearsal) and making sure all the pieces of the jigsaw are flawlessly in place. Some people are cremated, some buried, some families want flowers, some donations. Sometimes the families are at war and diplomatic skills are crucial. Some are deeply religious, others not at all.

continued>>





**The crematorium at Golders Green**

**Richard Putt - Director at Levertons**



continued>> Funerals can take place in churches, public places, natural burial grounds, some prefer the traditional hearse, others want a horse drawn cart, some a Harley Davidson with a side car.

Having an address book with all the right contacts, knowing who to call and what to ask for is imperative. The variations are endless and with five funerals a day to be organised, I was very impressed at how every single client was spoken to as if there was no other funeral arranged that week, leaving them feeling important, valued and respected. Details are entered into a large ledger rather than let the client hear the clicking of a computer keyboard – old school, and it worked.

At 12.45pm Richard put on his suit jacket and his funeral director's overcoat and hat, quickly polished his shoes (a long established habit, I guessed) and picked up his top hat and cane. It was almost like when a clown puts on his red nose (sorry Richard!) and is ready for his performance and yet this was no circus act. It was an important moment in the lives of the deceased's family and the show had begun.



**Navigating London traffic**

With a little trepidation, I sat in the back of the hearse with a man I didn't know in a coffin behind me. The smell of lilies and leather was powerful – a quiet moment for contemplation. So much time was taken to dress the hearse and make sure the right flowers were on top of the coffin; the rest were arranged on the roof.

Richard and his driver had a photo of the man on the dashboard of the car. They spoke of him with such familiarity, I wasn't sure if they knew him personally but they spoke of him with reverence and I kind of knew that stranger or friend would receive the same respect and level of 'professional service'.



For the next two hours, Richard Putt and his team belonged to that family. Everything he did was with the family in mind: navigating London traffic, walking in front of the hearse for part of the way (stirring personal memories of my mum's funeral), checking everything was running smoothly in the crematorium, showing people to their seats, helping the grandchildren to place flowers on their granddad's coffin, taking part in the service singing



and praying. I felt quite humble witnessing his 'performance' and deeply touched to be able to help serve people at their most vulnerable. My simple role of giving out the order of service moved me deeply and I struggled to hold back the tears. Why do we cry at funerals of people we don't know that well? One of the drivers told me;

**'We have done our job properly if no-one has noticed us.'**

At the end of the service Richard gave the widow his arm and gently led her from the chapel to the cards and flowers waiting outside in the sunshine. He collected the cards for her to take home.

Driving back to Leverton's Head Office afterwards in an empty hearse in the heart of London, the noise and bustle of the busy streets of Camden Town all around me, it struck me

how transient life is – a fleeting moment on this earth, that's all and yet every single life can make such a huge impact on others. It is so important the end of each life is marked and celebrated in a farewell ritual.

Not many people would want to be a funeral director, even fewer would be able to do it. When the light is snuffed out on our loved ones, funeral directors step forward from the shadows and help us prepare for that final goodbye. They are unsung heroes.

Since my day in London, I have been told I witnessed 'the cream' of the funeral industry and that not all firms have the same standards. I find this very sad and yet what a benchmark they have set.

I hope it is a long time before I have to open another funeral director's invoice but when I do, it will be with a greater understanding of just what 'professional services' really are.





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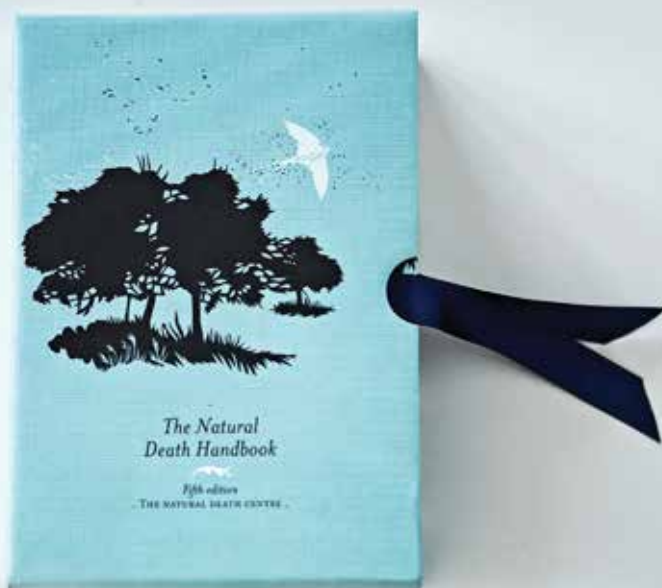
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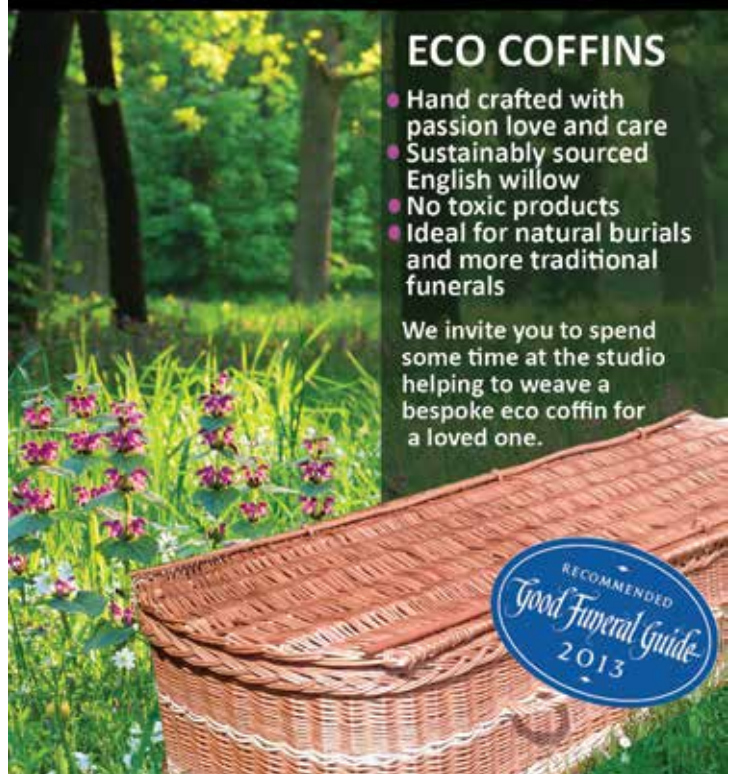


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# DEATH, DIVORCE AND DEBT





by Rosie Inman-Cook



## In the last edition we explored some of the misinformation and scare tactics used by so-called professionals.

We were contacted by Anne Wadie, who had some interesting additions to the points we were making about estranged and distant relatives being pressurised into taking responsibility for funeral costs and as we learn from Anne, possibly, debt.

This is what she wants everyone to understand specifically about divorce and joint assets.

“I have noted the comment about people not inheriting debts – which is generally true – but the situation can become slightly more complex if people have joint assets:

Sometimes after a divorce the settlement of money and property may not be formalised in terms of ownership. Thus, a property co-owner might find a charge placed against a property for funeral expenses and other debts even after they have divorced the person who has died.

Further, when someone has not divorced and not made a will, their former spouse is still next of kin and inherits any assets (even if they’ve long since lived apart and there is a new partner). Thus they may get landed with dealing with the estate and reimbursing funeral expenses. A surprising number of people also die between the decree nisi and the decree absolute and it is only the latter that disinherits. It would be good if all solicitors handling a divorce included writing a new will in the package for their clients.

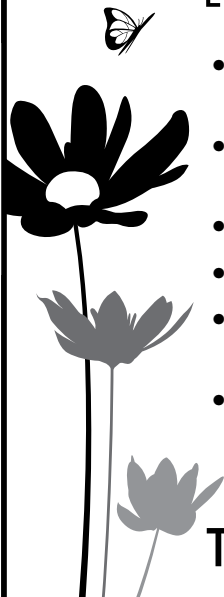
I would encourage anyone concerned about debts on an estate to seek advice. If the debts are small, there is a real possibility of creditors’ writing them off. If the debts are significant then the best thing to do is to seek professional advice from an insolvency specialist (lots of probate professionals won’t do insolvent estates) or walk away from the situation completely. If someone starts to work on the estate and they make a mistake, the creditors can then hold the personal representative liable! We would suggest someone seriously consider walking away and allowing the creditors to take over the administration”.





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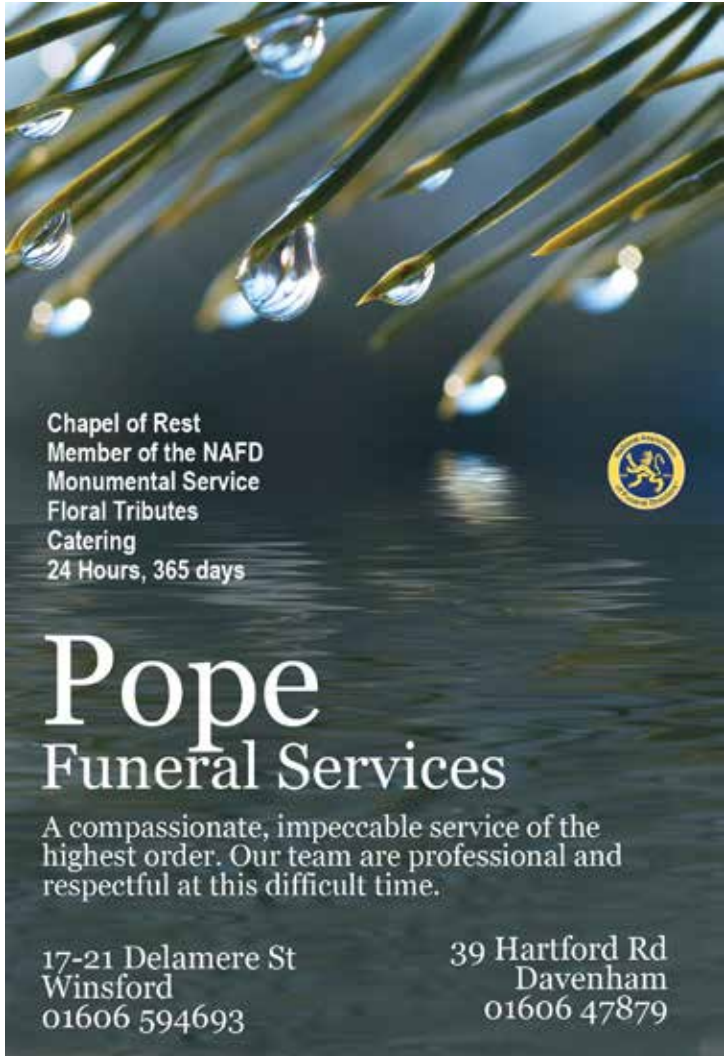


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# Funeral Poverty Can I get help?

## **DWP Benefits**

**The first big mistake individuals make is that they assume it is the benefits that the deceased was receiving, that are taken into account.**

**WRONG, it is the benefits that the next of kin who is organising the funeral is getting.**

**If this person qualifies they can only hope to get one third of the cost of the average 'basic' cremation, help of £1,200 at best.**

**The DWP will try to claim this back from the estate so it may in fact turn out to be a loan rather than a payment.**

**There are moves afoot to increase the value of this benefit but I can't see this happening any-time soon.**

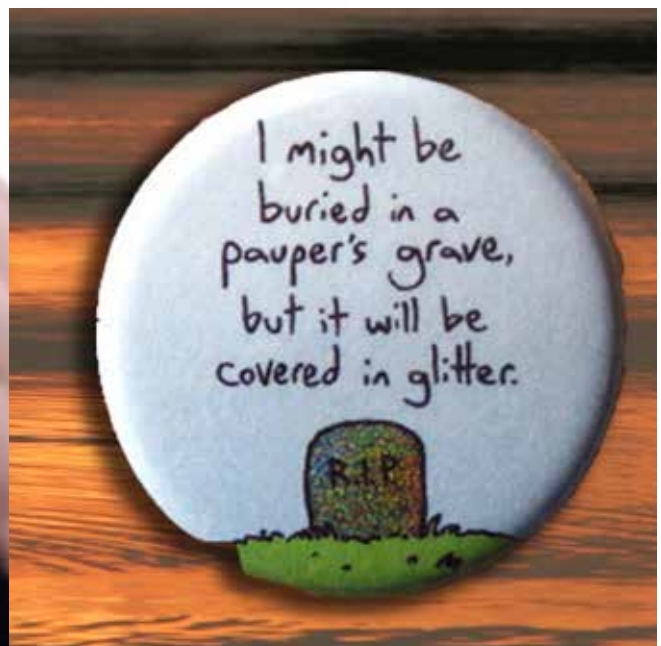


# What choices do I have?

## A Paupers funeral

If no relative takes responsibility for disposing of a body, the council will be forced to carry out an 'environmental health funeral'. This could be a burial or cremation depending on the cheapest option available to the council. Families get no say and have no rights in the future regarding memorialisation. The council will be top of the list of creditors when it comes to claiming from any estate. Some families thinking that this is the best value way of dealing with a funeral need to think again, they may find it cheaper to organise a direct cremation themselves and pay for this from the deceased's estate; we all know that councils don't necessarily go for the best deals.

As we pointed out in the last edition of M2D, the council cannot pursue families when looking to get reimbursed only the estate of the deceased.







## Free Funerals

**Donate your body to medical research/education** - They fund the eventual cremation. You must organise this in advance, whilst you are alive. Also be aware that at the 11th hour they may not accept you and your family need a backup plan.

**Get buried on your own land** or that belonging to a friend, by your family, wrapped in your favourite blanket.

## Under £1,000

**Have a direct Cremation**, there are a handful of specialist undertakers offering this.

**Get your family to carry out a DIY, Direct It Yourself funeral** - By cutting out the undertaker the costs will simply be that of the crematoria or cemetery fee, plus the cost of a coffin or shroud

(if you use one). Cemetery fees vary hugely, the private natural burial sites do not penalise you for being buried outside of your council tax area. Some crematoria have cheaper time slots available at unpopular times of day.

## £1,000 - £2,000

**Direct burial** - Some natural burial sites have a funeral director collection service. For this 'no funeral' option you are simply collected and buried.

Many independent funeral directors are now offering a 'super basic' service for under £2,000 depending on your choice of cremation or burial. Shop around.

## £2,000+

Normal rules apply, shop around.

**WARNING.... Not all funeral directors are the same.**



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# If it's legal, dignified and respectful, anything goes!



**Having land, wanting to be buried there and then feeling the need to share my privilege with others, set me on the road to starting a woodland burial site.**

**The practicalities were very straightforward and within six months we had our first burial at Tarn Moor in November 2002.**

The pleasure of being able to share and guide the principle of natural burial was overwhelming. Within only a month of opening, a family had asked me to help them plan and prepare a funeral, one they wanted to be in control of. They asked me to lead the ceremony. I arranged outside music, we decorated the coffin and grave surround together and I still smile when I think how I bartered with the limousine company because we only needed a hearse for 15 minutes!

This was the start of many wonderful, personal and fitting funerals, with tears and smiles, live music and dancing, picnics and fly pasts by Spitfires, to mention but a few.





On one occasion a lady was delighted to see a shroud pictured in my file. Her husband had a full size green hide on his office wall and always used to joke, “When I die, wrap me in that and throw me in the ground” - which is exactly what we did – well not quite! I prepared the under part and she and her friend came and fastened the hide to make the finished shroud. A friend drove her and her husband over to the burial ground in their old Bedford van. They were a little early to arrive so they called for a cuppa at a roadside van. The van owner was very friendly and asked “Are you on holiday?” er .... No. “Ave you come to Skipton shopping?” er ... No. Then it came out – “Actually we are on our way to a funeral” – “Anyone you know?” she asked. “Well actually it’s my husband and he’s in the van!”

They proceeded to tell this jaw-dropped lady about the shroud and forthcoming ceremony, and laughed all the way to Tarn Moor. Although tinged with sadness, she rang to say what a wonderful day they’d had!

After setting up and running the award winning burial ground at Skipton for nine years, I have now become an Independent Eco-friendly Green Funeral Director and funeral celebrant.

In 2011 I was very busy with both Tarn Moor and my funeral directing. It was at this time that tragedy hit my own family. My pregnant, newly-wed daughter of seven months lost her dear husband to a motorbike accident.

With baby coming two months early, I knew I needed to let something go, to care for my own family and me. I decided then to concentrate on being a green funeral director. I now have time for my family and also devote myself to a wonderful job.

My business logo came from this situation. ‘Rosemary for remembrance – Lavender for healing.’



‘Rosemary for remembrance  
- Lavender for healing’



The only regret in my job/vocation is that I didn't come into it earlier in my life. I have been so privileged to meet such wonderful families and be able to guide them through many very special farewells.

Preparation for 'a good funeral' is probably one of the most important events and, of course, it is the last gesture that can be made for someone you love. There is no practice and no rehearsal, but so many small and personal things can be done that help the grieving process. I have noticed over the last twelve years how more people are aware of pre-planning their funeral and making their own ideas work. This is something I am involved with on a regular basis and I am now delighted to offer a pre-payment funeral plan in conjunction with The Ethical Funeral Plans Trust, a plan that is transparent and personal, allowing payment for specific needs. It is wonderful to see how more people are talking and being pro-active in planning their funerals and are so much more aware of the environment. The importance of knowing they, as a family, are in control, not the funeral director.

I don't see myself in direct competition with traditional funeral directors as I specialise in Woodland funerals, biodegradable coffins, handmade bespoke shrouds, and floral tributes from the hedgerow. I suppose I may be unique, as I don't think there are many funeral directors who plan and lead the ceremony, or call their chapel of rest 'the departure lounge'!

I believe it is important to be able to follow each stage personally with the family and not delegate. I encourage family involvement and attention to detail at every step.

I have now arranged and conducted 15 cremations, something I didn't anticipate, but I can still offer 'green' guidance. The first was for my own brother, which was very emotional and difficult (especially taking the ceremony) but extremely rewarding knowing that I was fulfilling his wishes.

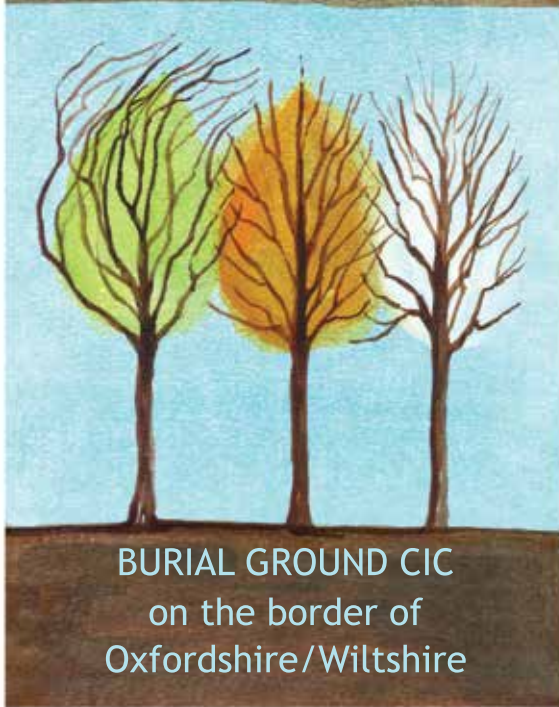
'I have been so privileged to meet such wonderful families'

by Wendy Pratt





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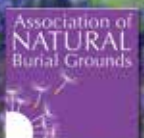
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# GO YOUR OWN WAY

**At the NDC office we are hearing of more and more 'would be undertakers' who are wanting to empower the public. Here is an account of one such person who is changing the way funerals are offered. This is something that the NDC have waited a long time to see expand. It will close the gap between us and the home funeral scene in the US.**

## Evelyn's Funerals

Bereaved individuals and families choose how much or how little help they want, saving money in the process. If they do a bit of research with the Natural Death Centre or the Good Funeral Guide and are willing, many can even do the whole process themselves.

Evelyn Temple has been a civil funeral celebrant in Berkshire for almost ten years. (A celebrant

helps families to write and if required leads a ceremony based on personal memories, words and music.) Sometimes individuals with a terminal illness want to plan their own funeral and may find it easier to talk to someone, like a celebrant, who is 'outside' of their immediate circle.

Now Evelyn is extending the service she provides to include more of the practical details around the funeral, such as completing paperwork, collecting, transporting and caring for the body of the person who has died, liaising with the crematorium or cemetery. Her time working with families has shown that there is a real need for a simpler kind of funeral.

"I want to make the funeral experience more straightforward, more natural, more normal," she explains. "There are some basic, legal, minimum requirements you have to fulfil but otherwise, you are more or less free to do what you like. People are

By Rosie Inman-Cook

CONTINUED



## CONTINUED

usually in such a state of shock and sadness that they don't know what they should do and can sometimes end up with a funeral package that they perhaps can't afford and later on wonder if they really needed."

Evelyn wants to encourage families to bring the person who has died back home so they can say goodbye in their own time and in their own space. She has invested in a FlexMort portable mini cooling system to enable families who feel this is important.

"I am trying to streamline and provide a service that is a bit different, is without fuss and is also low cost, for people who don't have the need or money for all the extras. I want to lift the taboos and secrecy surrounding funerals and show people that they really can go their own way."

"Saying farewell should be the focal point of the proceedings, not feeling guilty or worried about how much you can or can't afford. You can have a simple coffin, no hearse or limousine, and still have the most fantastic funeral ceremony. Every funeral should be different and personal"

"I never tell people what they should do, or say 'this is the proper thing that everyone else does.' It's about saying Goodbye in the way that suits them. I just ask them questions to help them arrive at their own plan. I don't employ a team of pallbearers in uniform or maintain a fleet of cars. My aim is to be open and transparent and give people the confidence to sort out a lot of the practical things themselves if they can, and in doing so perhaps save money.

If they prefer to leave things to someone else, then I can help."







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We wish Evelyn every success and we really like her open, up-front, display of prices on the net. Well done Evelyn.



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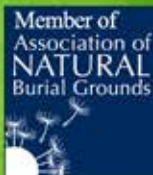
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# Love at the end

I sit with you dear mother  
Watching your chest rise and fall  
I am hyper-aware focussed, on your breath, alert for any change.  
But nothing changes, so I begin, eventually, to settle,  
to sit with the ebb and flow of your remaining life force.  
I read you prayers,  
but mostly I sit in silence,  
aware that this is the last of our time,  
that you will leave and I will stay.  
The hours pass and still I sit:  
the observer of your final journey.  
When will you be free?  
I can do no more than be present for you:  
to be the witness to your journey.  
I finally sleep next to you. I am so very tired.  
You pass into the light; and when I awake my life has changed  
forever.

©Mandy Preece, 2013





Similar to Evelyn's journey towards funeral directing, Rosie was very pleased to hear from Mandy Preece and her colleagues. Here we share Mandy's vision with you and wish 'Love at the end' every success.

That is the story of my mum's final days as I sat in vigil with her. Nine years ago I cared for my mum at home until her death from stomach and pancreatic cancer. She died in her own home, with her daughter and her beloved dog sleeping next to her. Afterwards, exhausted and unsure, I gave her care over to funeral directors. Now, years later, I wish I'd kept her at home, cared for her body and given her that final act of love.





My parents' deaths inspired a new 'life' for me. Once I had healed from the loss, I knew I wanted to make a difference to the deaths of others. I trained with Felicity Warner at the Soul Midwives' School and began volunteering at Macmillan, Caring Locally at Christchurch Hospital in Dorset. I have now spent hundreds of hours sitting at the bedside of those at the very end of life – supporting them and their families.

Soul midwives are non-denominational, holistic and spiritual companions to the dying. We sit, we listen, we hold a hand, we may give a therapeutic treatment, we may play soothing music, but most of all, we give our undivided time and our presence.

At the end, we sit in vigil: a steady loving presence in the dying person's room.

To sit in vigil and witness someone's journey towards death and beyond is an honour. It is deeply humbling and deeply life-affirming. For families, this vigil also creates a peaceful space in which they can begin to make their own transition: from carers to mourners. It gives them the time and space to begin to adjust.





But what about after death? The nagging concern that I could have done more for my mum has not left me. If someone had arrived just after my mum had died, to wash her and lay her out, my husband and I could have slept, eaten, got some fresh air and then come back to my mum refreshed to take part in that final care: dressing her, brushing her hair, sitting with her and surrounding her with love. We created a wonderful eulogy and funeral service for my mum but I was racked with grief. Would that grief have softened if I had continued to care for her at home? I think perhaps it would.

Just before Christmas, a lady asked me if she could bring her husband's body home. I knew she could, but I didn't have all the answers to her questions. And so, in memory of a wonderful patient at Macmillan, Operation Jenny was born: I have given myself a year to study, to learn and to develop a business to support families to care for their loved ones after death and to be aware of their funeral choices.



I want to take the soul midwifery reverence and care of the dying onwards beyond death. Thus the idea of Love at the End was born. Love at the End (nicknamed the Late Club) is a cooperative of local soul midwives working together to provide a seamless service of care and support for families: from soul midwifery, to care of the body, to funeral arranging and celebrancy. We are still in the creative stage: the website is being developed, training undertaken and there are constant discussions over tea and cake at Late Club meetings.

I passionately believe in giving families choice and in supporting people to honour their loved ones by caring for their bodies and creating memorable and unique funerals. I believe that supporting a family in grief to create their own rituals can help soften the pain and overwhelming feelings of loss.

Now the Late Club have to turn that passion into a reality. Watch this space ...

Mandy is writing a blog about her year of study if you would like to follow it.  
[www.loveattheend.co.uk](http://www.loveattheend.co.uk)



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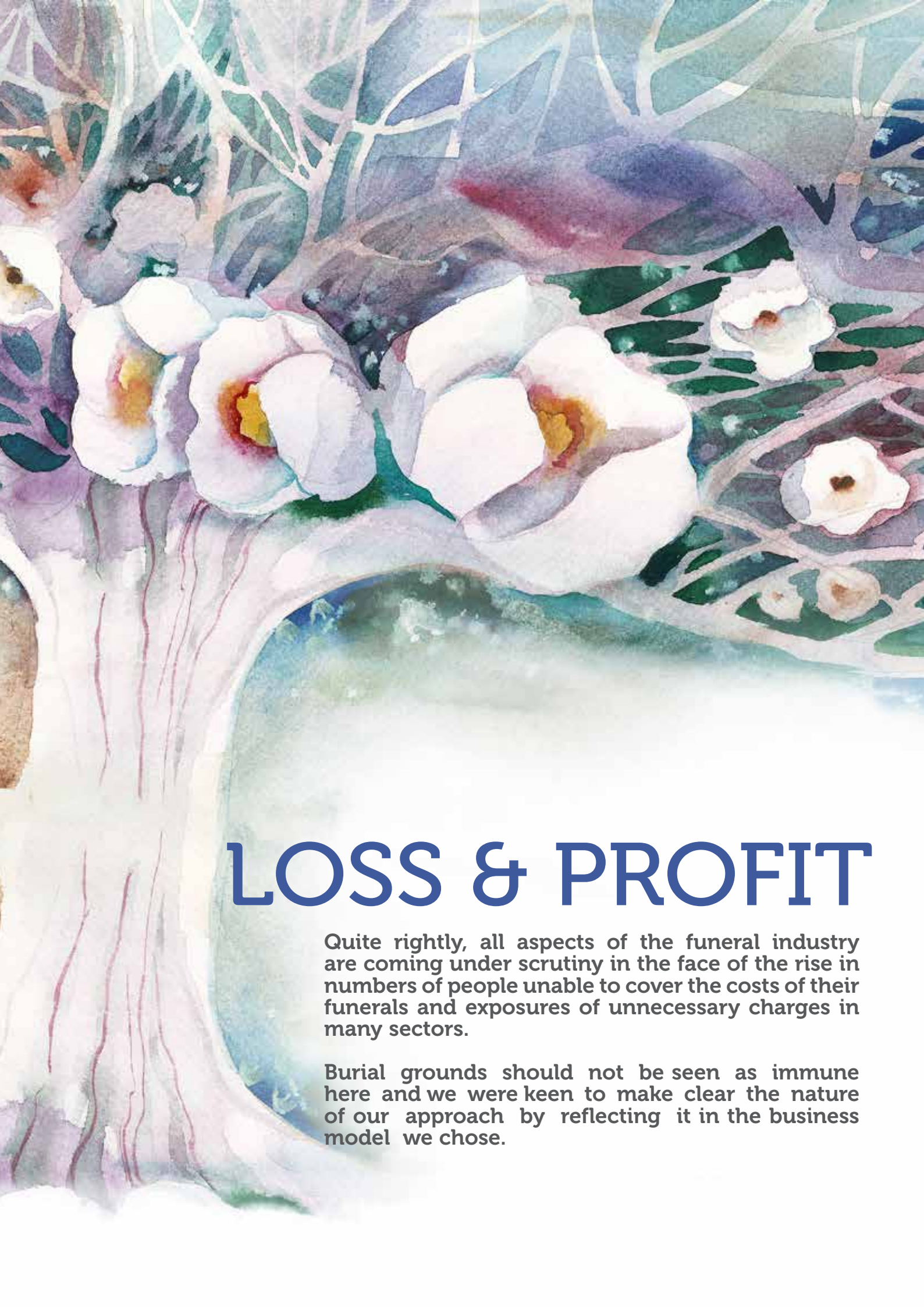
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# LOSS & PROFIT

Quite rightly, all aspects of the funeral industry are coming under scrutiny in the face of the rise in numbers of people unable to cover the costs of their funerals and exposures of unnecessary charges in many sectors.

Burial grounds should not be seen as immune here and we were keen to make clear the nature of our approach by reflecting it in the business model we chose.



We began business as a private trader and then, when we were ready, changed our status to a Community Interest Company and, as far as we know, we are the only burial ground currently working in this way – we would love to find out we are wrong about this and hope that in a few years this will not be the case. This is a comparatively new business structure which has been adopted by a considerable number of social enterprises around the country.

You can view a lot of information about them online at [www.bis.gov.uk/cicregulator](http://www.bis.gov.uk/cicregulator). The information given there is clear and straightforward and, in my experience, they respond quickly to email enquiries. This is how they introduce the information to you about what a CIC is:

### Community Interest Companies (CICs)

Community Interest Companies (CIC) are a type of limited company designed specifically for those wishing to operate for the benefit of the community rather than for the benefit of the owners of the company. This means that a CIC cannot be formed or used solely for the personal gain of a particular person, or group of people.

CICs can be limited by shares, or by guarantee, have a statutory "asset lock" to prevent the assets and profits being distributed, except as permitted by legislation. This ensures the assets and profits are retained within the CIC for community purposes, or transferred to another asset-locked organisation, such as another CIC or charity.

A CIC cannot be formed to support political activities and a company that is a charity cannot be a CIC, unless it gives up its charitable status. However, a charity may apply to register a CIC as a subsidiary company.

What the two CIC models share in common is that the organisation planning to become a CIC must demonstrate that they are serving a particular community through the operation they are running and that they are not a business for profit. This sends a very particular message and appeals strongly to people who have become sensitive to the issue of overcharging in the funeral industry.

**Charles Cowling whose business, The Good Funeral Guide is a CIC, says:**

#### Why a CIC?

"Because, through its asset lock, it enshrines altruism and demonstrates dedication to the general good, while at the same time offering a governance structure which enables you to operate with greater flexibility and nimbleness."

#### Why not a charity?

"The distinction, in a nutshell, might be described thus: a charity is a fully evolved institution which knows exactly what it wants to achieve and whose aims and objectives will remain unaltered. A CIC is a more entrepreneurial vehicle better adapted to diversification and initiative taking".

The difference between this and a charity is it is somewhat less complex to set up, does not require a board of Trustees and is not designed for a large turnover. The disadvantage is you may not qualify for a range of grants to which you might gain access to with charitable status.

However they are ideally suited to a local group who may have the possibility of making use of a piece of land as a burial ground and need to constitute themselves formally in order to run it. Community groups are another route which could be considered for this and definitely suitable when the impetus for the project begins with a group of local individuals. Ours did not start that way. I am aware of at least one burial ground that has been initiated through a parish council. However, there is no asset lock which I consider to be an advantage in the CIC, offering reassurance to those looking into the running of the business.

Emma Restall -Orr at **Sun Rising Burial Ground** has taken another approach to her burial ground. It is run as a limited company with a charity wing called **The Friends of Sunrising**. This group aims to double the amount provided by the business towards the future management of the site by fundraising activities, workdays and other events. She says this represents both a financial and emotional investment on the part of those involved. This is similar to the business model used by much larger national charities.



The relationship between charities and burial grounds may also be one we see more of with the charity taking the initiative. The winner of The People's Award for Natural Burial Grounds in 2013 was the South Downs Natural Burial Site in Hampshire. The burial ground generates the money needed for **The Sustainability Centre** which runs an excellent programme of environmental work with children.



Al Blake, the manager of the site, says "As soon as people arrive and see all the children rushing around having a fantastic time I don't have to sell it to them. They have decided before they even see the burial ground. And that is what makes my job so worthwhile – knowing we are making that possible."



**The Sharpham Trust** in Devon is another charity which has recently decided to offer part of its estate as a natural burial ground.

The director of the charity is quite clear that they need the burial ground to make money for their other charitable purposes but says that at the same time they have been able to invite the public in to a very special part of the Estate where formerly they had no rights of access which fits perfectly into their charitable remit. I wonder if one day we will see the National Trust going down the same route. I am sure a lot of people would enjoy the thought of being buried in a secluded part of one of their favourite properties.







Of course there are many burial ground operators working across the sector who are quite clear that they are running their business to high standards and to make a profit with no charitable dimension and many of them are doing an absolutely excellent job. The point is that there are several ways to go about this burial ground business and the CIC model is one of which I think a lot of people remain unaware.

You have to decide what suits your aims and approach best. This is a straightforward, transparent way in which some individuals or a small group can take control of small-scale provision in their local area. As has been recently highlighted in the media there is a crisis in the amount of land available for burials and this might prove a very constructive way forward.

In addition, it can involve people directly in the shaping of their local burial ground and so make them feel connected to it and in control which in my experience always aids the grieving process.

I look forward to hearing your comments on [info@woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk](mailto:info@woodlandburialwestmill.co.uk)



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**by Rosie Inman-Cook**

# **Whose Fault is Funeral Poverty?**





**Fact** Most 'basic' funerals cost between £2600 and £3500.

**Fact** 1 in 5 families have trouble paying for a funeral.

**Fact** Some families will be eligible for help from the DWP but this is likely to only cover 30 - 40% of a regular so called, "basic" funeral.

**Fact** Only 40% of families who apply for help receive it.

A recent report has concluded that the main causes of funeral debt are the lack of planning and provision by individuals or that their relatives have inadequate savings and possibly unrealistic expectations, ie extras like dove releases, plumed horses and huge floral tributes etc.

I find this hard to swallow and personally see the fault lying firmly on the desk of the funeral directors who allow families, especially those who have expressed financial difficulty, to get into trouble.

It is a complicated issue which could be, I believe, drastically reduced if all funeral directors were obliged or inclined to inform all families of all options, not just their own company's 'cheapest' or 'basic' funeral.

**continued>>**

continued>>

## Undertakers are like car sale show-rooms

There is your Jaguar, your Mazda, your Volkswagen and your Auto Trader magazine selling second hand and DIY options. (That's me at the NDC by the way).

So, the grieving family sit in front of the helpful Jaguar man and tell him that they are flat broke. Maybe they gave up work to look after the deceased; all their savings are gone. He may help them fill in forms for the limited state help available, if they are eligible. But and it is a HUGE BUT, he will tell them that the cheapest 'basic' funeral will cost £2,600. That may well be the case but what he doesn't tell them is that this is simply the cheapest package his company provides.

He is not obliged, encouraged or allowed by his head office to let the family know that they could go down the road to a more flexible independent undertaker who will cut the service down to the bare minimum or that they could arrange a direct cremation for under £1,000 or that they could do it themselves and not employ a funeral director at all.

So your average family, who think that all undertakers are pretty much the same, assume that this quote for £2,600 must be the price that they all charge. They don't think to shop around and they proceed to sign on the dotted line. (Last week I had a call from a lady who had signed with the Jaguar man having been told that the basic "cheapest" option would cost her £4500, even though she told him she had no money).

Basically the public generally trust this professional to be giving them the most relevant advice.





And funeral directors wonder why they struggle with increasing amounts of bad debt!



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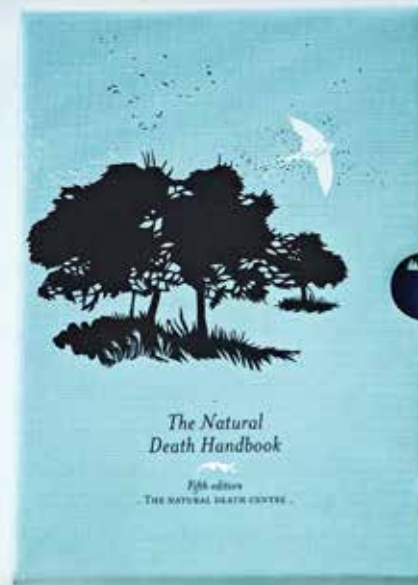
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# Funeral Confusion





## **“He wants a natural funeral coz he didn’t believe in God”**

I get this type of call fairly regularly. How has this mishmash of ideas entered the public mindset?

“Let’s rewind a bit” is my usual response.

“Do you want a natural burial or a ceremony without a religious minister?”

“Oh, he wants a cremation; can they take the cross down? What’s a natural burial? Oh no, not that, he liked those baskets, though.”

## **Should I take it that there is a section of society who think that being Godless is natural?**

They seem to imply this as they have no particular ‘green’ agenda. Or is it simply that if you have a woven coffin that makes a funeral natural regardless of the fact that cremation is not necessarily that ‘green’. Maybe they see the Victorian style funeral as unnatural.

This is an extreme example but not an unusual scenario.

There is, however, another more common, general amalgamation and confusion regarding the use of the word ‘funeral’. I try to dissect and separate this with callers who are getting muddled and obviously don’t realise that there are fewer set formulas than they presume.

“So,” I say, “you have two separate things here. The necessary decisions to make are: firstly about the essential disposal of the body and secondly how you will mark the occasion”.

## **How will you dispose of the body?**

Cremation or burial? - Regular, Natural, Home Burial or Direct service?

Who will carry this out?: A funeral director, providing a full or part service or will it be a Direct it Yourself, DIY affair?

## **Then the ceremony**

Will there be a send off or not?

Religious or not?

Outsider led or family conducted?

On the same day or not?

It is surprising the number of people who have no idea that the two elements can be separated. The separation may offer far more flexibility and be very helpful for many families.

## **You can have:-**

A close family only disposal then a memorial service later in the year when the dust has settled. If this follows a cremation maybe the ceremony can be organised around the burial or scattering of ashes or the planting of a tree etc.

Or you could have a big funeral ceremony in church followed by a party/tea, entertaining all the relatives and friends who have turned up, with the cremation or a more distant natural burial interment taking place the following day, witnessed by the family only or simply arranged by the funeral director, at their convenience.

## **Any order goes.**

In the meantime I will continue to contemplate nature and God and be reassured that the vast majority of religious ministers, of whatever persuasion, view natural burial as returning the deceased into the care of God’s creation. They do not have a problem with it. If you would like to read about the **Reverend Peter Owen-Jones** and his thoughts on natural burial, please see the [first edition of this magazine](#) (page 23).

## **Or are the big black funerals unnatural?**

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