

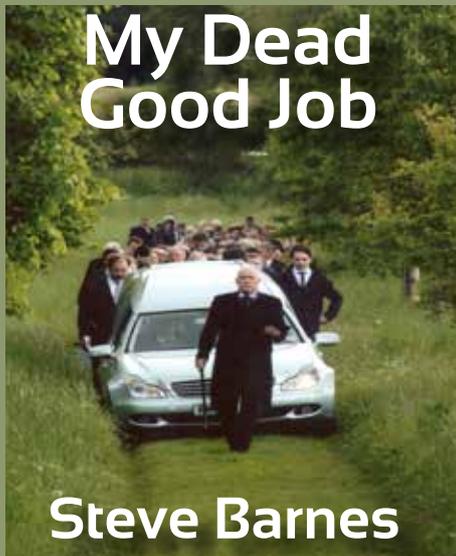
The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

fifth edition 2015

Plus
Much, much
MORE!

Rosie
visits **ALL**
CANNINGS
LONG BARROW



**My Dead
Good Job**

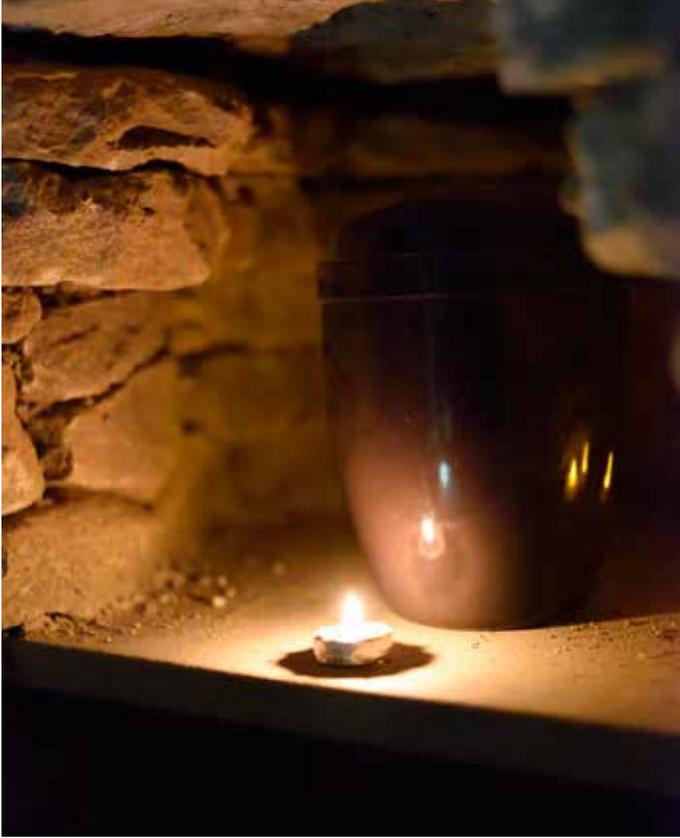
Steve Barnes

**HOME
FUNERALS**
could you do it
for your
loved one?

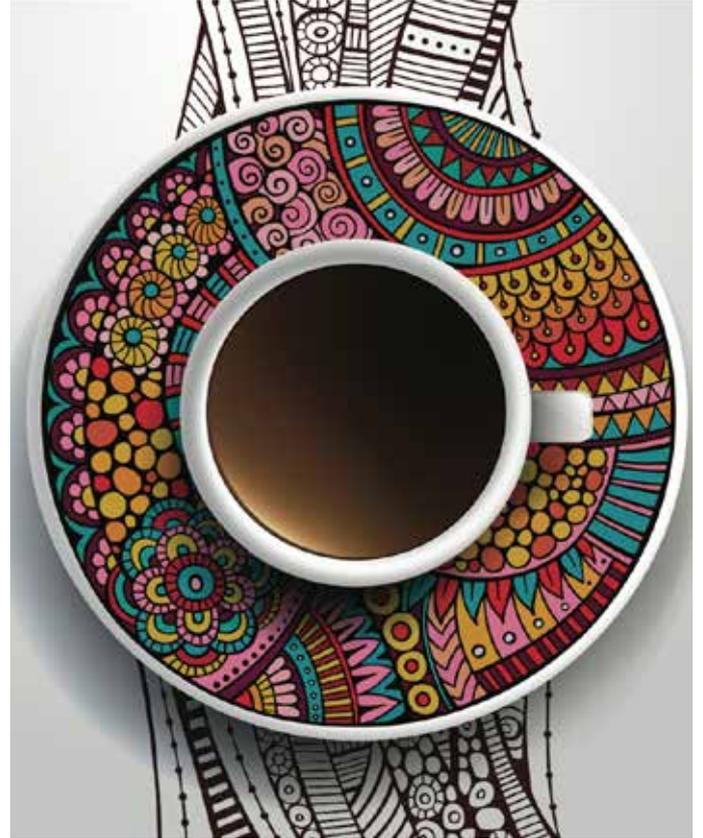


UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

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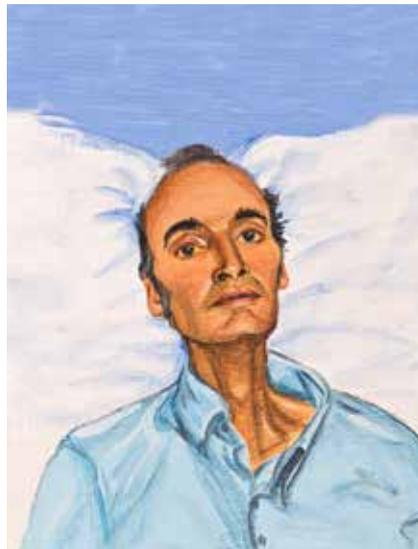
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There are two main themes to this edition. Firstly a couple of personal perspectives concerning crematoria and a report on an extraordinary new place to house ashes. The second theme is 'home funerals', with several articles by people involved in this blossoming movement.



Calls to the helpline here do seem to have cyclical trends. It used to be all about 'green' and 'natural'. We still receive a high percentage of these but over the last couple of years it has moved toward costs. The funeral poverty problem is being avidly debated by different groups and we covered this topic in the last edition.



At the Ideal Death Show in September I was elated, yes elated, to see so many like minded folk come together. Our founder Nicholas Albery would be so pleased to see how far things have come since he founded the NDC; nearly a quarter of a century ago. Here is a link to an [excellent article in the independent](#) about the event.



What did strike me however, is how far we still have to go. If you are middle class and able to access information there is no limit to what is available but if you are elderly, isolated, on a low wage or an immigrant worker it can be really hard to find the right help and advice.

These groups are the ones who are the most vulnerable, as consumers, when facing funeral expenses and finding out what is legal and possible. Most importantly acceptable.

It is a funny thing but when individuals are told how many other families are now doing things, it becomes more acceptable to think laterally. Thoughts of disrespect and tradition, or should that be formulaic and standard, are more easily pushed aside. Opening realms of individuality and potential financial savings. I would call it pragmatic and realistic but when folk have had years of being expected to 'do the right thing' it is so easy to make funeral arrangements that are inappropriate, unnecessary and financially irresponsible.

'It is OK to do it like this'

'Many others are making arrangements like that.'

This permission is so empowering. It seems to take away guilt and open families up to what can be, not only, better value but better all round.

I hope you enjoy the articles – submissions welcome.

Happy new year to you all

Rosie Inman-Cook
Editor



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**'stepping in and
going the extra
mile'**

the backroom boys

In this article we hear from a funeral celebrant about her experiences and admiration for the cemetery and crematoria techies. I know, having talked to other directors and celebrants, that Penny has been lucky. Others feel that there is a real variety out there: in fact one undertaker described the council staff as bombastic to me today. He definitely felt that the service was generally better at private crematoria than at the council operated ones but as you will read below this is not Penny's experience at all.

THE BACKROOM BOYS and GIRLS—DON'T WE LOVE THEM!

I'm sure I speak for all other Celebrants, Clerics and Funeral Directors when

I applaud this band of technicians. Although it is implicit in their role that they facilitate all aspects of the Funeral Service, including the audio-visual requirements, these are the individuals who, on the day, form part of a team working with all disciplines, stepping in and going the extra mile to ensure that funeral services run smoothly. They also without a shadow of doubt, step up to the mark when circumstances prevent all the immaculate planning of mere human beings!

I was motivated to write this article following a particularly testing day; I had stepped in for a fellow celebrant hurt in a road accident. The duty technician – without being prompted – checked the number of verses of a particular hymn on the service sheet vis-a-vis the chosen choral CD because it had not arrived. He then suggested a more suitable version from a selection. It was to be played as a reflective piece and as such was of tremendous importance to the family. He also checked and amended the timing of a further piece of music, as time was a bit tight.

By Penny Barber

CONTINUED

CONTINUED

A few weeks before, I had observed him working simultaneously with three Funeral Directors. The Priest for one funeral had misidentified the venue and was going to be substantially delayed. The next service was a committal and as all mourners were present and with the technician's flexibility and willingness, a swap of times was comfortably made. If that wasn't enough to contend with, the celebrant for the third service had been stuck in traffic with a crash ahead of him.

Everything worked smoothly, even to the point where the delay overall was the ten minutes required for the celebrant at the last funeral to arrive! Happily, this situation is rare, yet always a possibility considering the external factors which we can't always control.

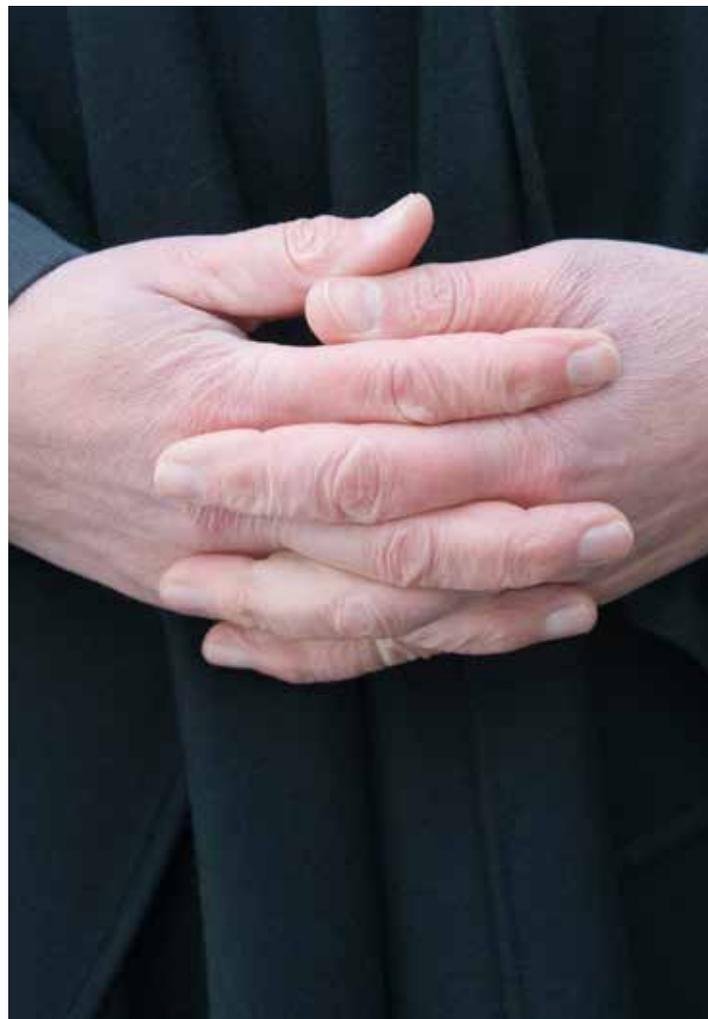
Dealing with other delicate situations:-

You only have to indicate to a technician that one of the attendees isn't welcome in the main body of mourners, and he will take them (usually to the vestry where they are settled) and then quietly guide them into the chapel after others have taken their seats.

At a burial, I have sighed with relief as they have eased a casket into a space dug for a coffin, when the family had a last minute change of heart.

On the rare occasion when I have omitted to announce a piece of music and moved on to the family's acknowledgments, the technician has bravely begun to play according to the order of service I issued to him.

The winter before last, I battled early through snow and ice, badly spraining an ankle to be welcomed by the crematorium technician at Anfield in Merseyside, with tea and toast at 8.30am to combat the shock and the cold.



When there is a special circumstance, for example where a family member is to sing the entrance song, a quick intro to the technician ensures a well-coordinated start to their choral delivery.

I have gratefully witnessed them getting rid of motorists trying to squeeze their car past the hearse, just as the bier is being wheeled forward, only to find that these disrespectful drivers are only there to use the facilities and not there for a funeral!

I have proudly watched them stand and speak at our annual out-door Ecumenical Sunday Service for the Bereaved and I have watched them witness the interment of ashes with genuine respect and empathy for the family.

**‘tea and toast... to
combat the shock
and the cold’**



Finally, each time they come forward, having started the playing of the processional music, dressed in their best to meet the Funeral Cortege, checking the details and assisting in conveying the deceased if required, I have a little picture in my head of the days when they could also be in their overalls, cutting down tree branches, mowing lawns or, of course ensuring the safe operation of the cremators.

These kind and compassionate individuals often acquire their position having worked in other departments for the Council. They often learn from others in the role and, of course, will be taught proficiency in operating the cremators, and their role also requires them to prepare the chapel prior

to each funeral and to ensure the smooth running of the service itself. Mourners won't recognise them as other than part of the Funeral team, they blend so well and go about their work with quiet commitment. We have well-placed faith in their ability and when we thank them at the end of a service we mean it more than words can ever say.....thank you so much.

**Penny Barber
Spiritualist and Civil Celebrant**

With the growing trend in bespoke and very personal funerals, designing your very own, unique coffin is becoming extremely popular - it's a remarkably rewarding act of love and an important part of the grieving process.

We asked Will at Greefield Creations, the UK's largest provider of cardboard coffins to show us how some of his clients went about things.



Fiona Hughes' self-declared "scatty and unconventional" family organised a funeral with a difference as a tribute to the 52-year-old.

Fiona was transported in her sister's camper van in a white cardboard coffin, decorated with photographs, messages, graffiti and artwork that family members had spent several days preparing.

Sister Dina said "As a family we are all a bit scatty and unconventional...Fiona would have been absolutely ecstatic to see what we have done.

"It is very difficult for everyone, particularly for her daughter Melanie, but it has been a very therapeutic experience to decorate the coffin... It is a celebration of Fiona's life.

Mary Harris painted a coffin for her relative Mick using a Celtic Theme to reflect his life.

The funeral was at Westmill Woodland Burial Ground and went perfectly. Her thank you letter read 'After ringing round to find a biodegradable coffin and being met by attitudes ranging from gushing to cold and mercenary, you were a relief and a pleasure to talk to.

I would mention that the delivery man, when taking the box out of his van, let it slip through his fingers and the corner of the box hit the ground, and I was afraid the coffin would be damaged. But it wasn't. Maybe he knew from experience that it wouldn't be'.





Geoff Dodd 1929-2014 ran his blacksmith shop in High Street, Spalding for many years. In retirement he turned it into a living museum, warmly welcoming children and adults alike - a wonderful legacy and a dream come true to Geoff.

When his wife and daughters came to Greenfield for a bespoke coffin, they told us:

“We wanted to portray the wonderful life Geoff had.... looking through photographs to choose which ones to put on his coffin was a pleasurable time bringing back wonderful memories. Without doubt, that made part of organising a funeral a little more personal. Geoff didn't like fuss. A cardboard coffin was the most suitable option for us. It certainly put smiles on people's faces at his funeral and was talked about no end!

We were thrilled with it, really we were and I'm sure Geoff would have approved too!”



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The Bluebells in Ashridge...

This coffin is in memory of Peter Onslow's Mum.

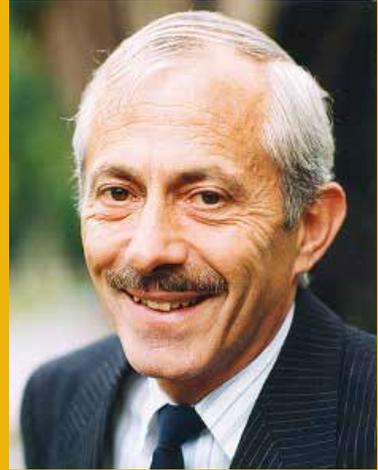
Peter, from Hemel Hempstead, has spent most of his working life as a graphic designer and in the print industry. Peter produced all his own artwork for his Mums coffin and we transferred it to our own template for production.

The Inspiration... Peter wanted an 'alternative, non-religious' ceremony and organised the whole funeral himself. Every year, without fail, Peter went to see the bluebells with his Mum and Harvey (the dog).

Family and friends attending the funeral were all invited to bring a single rose to be placed on the coffin. Everyone commented that the funeral really felt like a 'celebration' of his Mums life.

Peter has kindly allowed us to use his coffin design in the future and we have now added it to our range. Peter was given the opportunity to name the coffin and he has called it... 'The Bluebells in Ashridge'.

CREMATION OBSCURA



Ken West - regular columnist for 'More to Death' and a man renowned for saying it like it is, reveals a darker side of the cremation industry and some of the most recent trends within this very efficient little earner.

I can readily get heated up about cremation; not the emissions this time but that boring old word transparency. Forty years ago, when life was simple, a local authority opened a crematorium, issued a table of fees and everybody knew precisely what the charges were. But in recent decades the increase in private crematoria has changed all that, and my question is, why?

This question arose when I had to arrange the cremation of a member of my family some months ago and my internet search was enlightening, but for all the wrong reasons. As it was, I used Milton Keynes Crematorium, local authority managed and their fees were on their website. If that appears too simple then think again; it all depends on where you live.

The Westerleigh Group website states, 'We are dedicated to serving the bereaved in an atmosphere that is caring and professional'. Those words caring and professional convey little and neatly sidestep other words like consumer and rights, as no fees are shown, not even for the memorials displayed. Four of their crematoria, at Bristol, Aberystwyth, Basildon & Bury St. Edmunds, offer natural burial and, again, no prices are shown.



- crematoria
- burial grounds

Those people living in Craigton, Stockport, Grenoside (Sheffield), Lichfield and Shrewsbury have a crematorium managed by the largest consumer organisation in the world, the Co-op. Their CE was on television recently highlighting their ethical stance, but the words ethical and consumer seems to have bypassed their crematoria as well as their three natural burial sites at Hinton Park, Poole & Wimborne and Mayfields, Wirral, with none displaying a fees list.

I also have to ask who is the Co-op? For instance, Havant Crematorium is managed by Southern Co-operative, and they have a fees list on their website. Is all this complicated, or what?



The largest company is Dignity, with no fees list shown for their 38 crematoria.

Ken West's frank and well researched appraisal of UK crematoria

<<The company **Memoria** operate two crematoria at Cardiff & Glamorgan, and Kirkleatham (Redcar & Cleveland) and their website adopts the flowery language of the other companies in expressing their 'mission to provide exceptional standards of service'. Perhaps a list of fees is unexceptional; anyway, they didn't bother to include one. Neither do **Austin's**, a firm of funeral directors, who operate Harwood Park Crematorium near Stevenage, nor **Manchester Crematorium Ltd.** situated up there in the North, nor funeral director managed **Roucan Loch Crematorium** (and green burial site) near Dumfries.

At least these crematoria have a website, something I could not find for the **London Cremation Company**, a subsidiary of **The Cremation Society**. They operate crematoria, apparently, at Golders Green, Banbury, Garden of England (Sittingbourne) and Woking.

How untransparent is that?

An absence of a fees list and a general lack of transparency go hand in hand, for instance, where you might want to arrange an Independent (DIY) funeral. The **Co-op** are unequivocal, and certainly not ethical, in stating, 'We cannot arrange a funeral direct-

ly'. They insist that you must choose 'which funeral director you wish to take care of all the funeral arrangements'. No help there then, nor with **Dignity**, who state that, 'Your funeral director will assist with all of these arrangements'. None of the other crematoria mention independent funerals or offer any information or help.

This lack of transparency also has a financial implication if we consider what happens to precious metals from jewellery and teeth, as well as that contained in prosthesis (hip joints, etc.), which remain in the ashes. All these crematoria must be aware that the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management (ICCM) operates a transparent scheme to reprocess these metals and the scheme donated over a million pounds to charities in 2013. Only **Westerleigh** mention waste metals, and then only via their 'Latest News' pages. Although the **Co-op** pose and answer many questions on cremation, they make no reference to waste metal. **Dignity** state, 'All that is left is a small quantity of bone', which is incorrect. **Austin's** do not mention the income from waste metal and yet make a feature of their 'Charitable Fund'. The remaining crematoria say nothing, yet they all have waste metal. >>

<<I am considering around a quarter of all UK crematoria in this article, and they also represent nine natural burial sites, none of whom are members of the **Association of Natural Burial Grounds** (ANBG). Indeed, the lack of a meaningful standard is apparent. **The Westerleigh Group** and the **Co-op** have adopted the Charter for the Bereaved at just one site each and yet without a fees list they do not meet Charter requirements. With such poor transparency, it is surprising that councils consider these firms as suitable partners for the outsourcing of public crematoria (and cemeteries).

The more cynical amongst you might ask whether these crematoria recognise the bereaved as customers at all. Indeed, **Memoria** state that their staff are dedicated to working with funeral directors. If funeral directors are the real customers then this implies a cosy monopoly intended to shut out troublemakers, those consumers who want to know what they are paying, or those seeking help and advice to avoid using a funeral director and maintaining the traditional funeral, the status quo.>>







Photograph:
Action Press /
Rex Features

>>If you doubt my analysis then consider the new and emerging 'Direct Cremation' option via the internet. This service was started in Canada to enable the bereaved to circumvent the expensive American style of funeral. It is possible that the few companies advertising this service in the UK are existing funeral directors, perhaps those aware that the breakdown of the funeral monopoly is on the cards as the internet impacts on the market.

For around £1000, they collect a body, have it cremated without ceremony, and the ashes either retained at the crematorium, or placed in the Garden of Remembrance. They can be returned to the applicant for an additional charge. The family can then hold a service over the ashes if they wish.

By avoiding a funeral director, hearse, limo's, embalming and viewing, this is the cheapest funeral, at least where the Independent DIY option is not feasible. Consider also that, unlike local authorities, who do not have the legal powers to act as a funeral director, every one of the private crematoria I mention could offer a local Direct Cremation Service, but they choose not to. That fact rather defeats the Westerleigh statement that '... we want to anticipate peoples' needs and be open minded about what services we should provide'. They choose not to, of course, because it would upset the traditional funeral directors, their real customers.

The visual standards at private crematoria are, without question, very good so why this consistent absence of a

fees list? because, if it were the case that, unlike local authority crematoria, they were to offer a discount on the cremation fee and guessing that this might be worth £50.00 per cremation, then a funeral director carrying out 200 cremations a year would be discounted £10,000. If this encouraged funeral directors to use a private crematorium rather than a public one, then that would be a restrictive practice.

I have made many assumptions because, similar to the bereaved, I only know what I can see on the internet. Overall, I accept that the bereaved may be perfectly content with what they experience at private crematoria, and low transparency might be a satisfactory trade off for quality services. But the monopoly influence on the market is not good, neither for the bereaved as consumers, nor in creating conditions that might support more innovation, not least in reducing funeral costs and, consequently, funeral poverty. Neither can we move forward the Charter for the Bereaved or the ANBG; they are shut out.

My final point is that these crematoria, together, are a significant contributor to global warming. Sure, they mention abatement but most state that they cremate same day, just as always. They go no further, such as batching cremations on one or two days a week to reduce energy needs and emissions. In fairness, most public crematoria are no better, and it does not appear that the bereaved are asking these environmental questions either.



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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

So there you have it. I see the impact of this regularly, when members of the public phone me for support having been treated abruptly by jobs-worths who do not seem to comprehend and are unaware of consumer rights. "You cannot pull up outside our crematorium in anything other than a hearse – it is not dignified". "No, we will not allow you to come here without a funeral director".

I hope that the companies mentioned above will respond; I would like to publish their justifications for being so unhelpful in some areas.

Has Ken hit the nail on its head when identifying their real customers as the funeral directors?

Is there really a £50 back hander going on?

Having been inspired by Ken's article, I decided to google council crems and see what advice I could find. Most said nothing about funeral director- free funerals and many did not have a website but there were two that stood out as shining examples of transparency.

Rosie Inman-Cook



Worthing
Crematorium

READ
FULL
DOCUMENT

DIRECT IT YOURSELF FUNERAL PROCESS

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO ARRANGING A CREMATION

You do not need to use a funeral director to have a cremation at Worthing Crematorium. Increasingly people are coming to us to arrange a funeral direct. This may be an option you would consider.

This guide explains the sequence of events for arranging a funeral and cremation yourself at Worthing Crematorium.

HATS OFF!

to good Ol' Porchester Crematorium for their comprehensive guide to Independent Funerals

TRANSPORTING THE BODY - Although you may be able to hire a hearse from a local Funeral Director, historically this has been difficult. The transport of a coffin, with or without the body, requires a van or an estate car.

You need to transport the coffin to the mortuary if the body is to be retained there. You have a common law right as an executor to be given the body. You will need to speak to the mortuary staff to arrange for the collection and they will inform you of any procedures necessary. Once you have removed the body or if the deceased died at home, you need to consider how to proceed. The body can be retained at home up until the funeral but the room must be cool, and try to avoid difficult stairs. If you prefer, the body may be left at the mortuary and collected on the day of the funeral.

You can purchase a standard coffin from a Funeral Director. All standard coffins are made from chipboard with approved veneers and plastics for cremation purposes.

You may construct your own coffin using chipboard or wood. The materials you use must be suitable for cremation, chipboard is preferred. Ferrous screws may be used and wood braces may add strength but these must not be used on the underside. No heavy metals, PVC or plastics generally should be used. Handles are useful but not strictly necessary.

Crematorium staff will be happy to help with any queries you may have. In both cases the coffin should not exceed 31" in width.



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This family run site is an area of natural
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where people can come to reflect
and remember their loved ones

all photos in this article are
provided courtesy of Rob Fanshawe



All Cannings Long Barrow

www.thelongbarrow.com

by Rosie Inman-Cook

When I told folk at the pub where I was going this week so many of them wanted to come with me but I limited space in my car to two young photographers and their kit. We were off to visit the first long barrow to be built in the UK for 5000 years.

I've been in a couple of the prehistoric long barrows namely, West Kennet and Maeshowe. Our visit today, on Armistice Day, seemed somehow very poignant, remembering our relatively recent losses as well as revisiting something akin to the way our more ancient ancestors honoured their dead.

Accompanied by the fitting sounds of Martyn Bennett's 'Bothy Culture', we drove in low cloud and constant drizzle through the villages of north Hampshire, on into Wiltshire where that county's prehistoric landscape eventually loomed out of the mist.>>

Long barrows are Neolithic (New Stone Age) tombs which are roughly contemporary with the causewayed camps. There are two main types of long barrows: those made entirely of earth, called earthen long barrows, and those made with a chamber of large stones, called megalithic or chambered long barrows. The main thing to remember about long barrows is that they were communal tombs, holding from one to fifty adults and children. Not only were they tombs, but centres of religious activity centering on a cult of the dead and fertility. Often, the bones of the dead were used in ceremonies performed at the recessed entrance to the barrow. Another curious thing about the barrows is that the dead were usually interred after all the flesh had been removed, and occasionally after the bones had then been burned in a form of cremation ceremony.

Equally curious is that we don't know how these people disposed of the vast majority of their dead, as only the bones of a very select few were interred in the barrows. Of the other 99.9% of the population, we have no archaeological record.



‘standing proud,
fitting perfectly into
its hilly backdrop’

<<Nestled at the feet of the Marlborough downs, topped with their earthworks and enclosures, we met Tim Daw, the inspiration and driving force behind the project. Sitting around his farmhouse kitchen table, snuggled away from the weather, I was delighted to get to know a bit more about this extraordinary, but equally self-effacing man.

Most astounding was the revelation that he has, in two months since opening, sold two thirds of the niches in this retro-columbarium. I am so pleased for him, his financial ‘punt’ was not insignificant and could have bought him a smallholding retreat in Ceredigion should he have been so inclined.

At 11 am we sat in silence, our vigil breaking the excited chatter about the potential for open-air pyres and building techniques. We then jumped into Tim’s car and trundled round to the site. >>



The local flora has yet to repopulate what was, until two months ago, a large, muddy, building site. Like human gestation, this build took exactly 9 months and there, standing proud, fitting perfectly into its hilly backdrop has grown a long mound.

In the centre of the facing front wall, built from Wiltshire Sarsens, is a large, low lintel. Ducking below this, we entered through a helix - embellished wrought metal security gate into the 23 metre central passageway. The huge flat stones above our heads, holding back thousands of tonnes of chalk and earth, were so reminiscent of those in the ceiling at Maeshowe. Tim was keen to point out that this was not a pastiche or copy; he wanted a uniquely designed barrow meeting the needs of 21st century man. To the sides, circular chambers retreated into the darkness. Their walls and those of the passage are beautifully dressed, in the style of dry stone walls, with a sparkling, crystal loaded, honey - coloured, limestone.>>



<<The temperature is pretty constant according to Tim's max/min thermometer but our breath was visible by the light of our candles and torch. Still and in total silence, I gazed up into each of the circular domed chambers, constructed again with decreasing rings of flat limestone, skilfully laid by a couple of stone - masons from Anglesea. I was also pleased to see that the local wildlife had discovered the shelter of the building, moths were hibernating in the crevices and Tim told me of the butterfly that led one family towards their niche.

It is a stunningly beautiful, peaceful resting place. Tim envisages that most families will seal their niche as have the Grays with a smoothly and skilfully carved stone.

We joked about the endeavours of our forbears with antler picks and buckets at Grimes graves and Maiden castle. What would they have made of Tim's 350 tonnes of limestone, 45 tonnes of Sarsens and 3,500 tonnes of chalk being manoeuvred into position with the benefit of modern plant?

So who is buying all these plots? Tim feels his experience of the 'average' customer is pretty similar to that experienced by the natural burial site managers. It is definitely not your 'tree hugging' pagan, just regular everyday people. He does not expect that his 'inurnments' (his chosen term for the placing an urn in a niche) to appeal predominantly to any one particular belief system.

The fact that he has sold so many, so quickly, must be a huge relief to his wife and bank manager. Although this fact, in another way, is a shame, as those who may have need of his facility may be sorely disappointed to find that it has become full within just a few months. Will he extend or build a sister mound? I got the feeling that he had been there and created that and wouldn't revisit the experience. Maybe I will ask him again next year.



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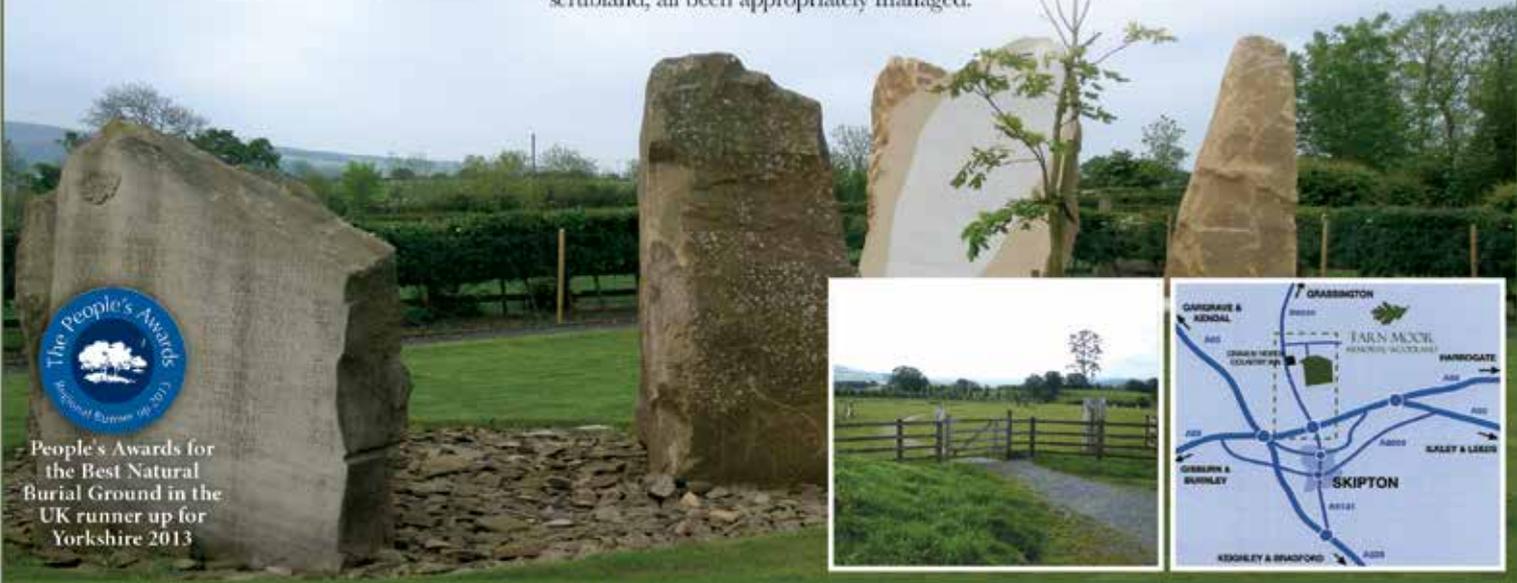
MEMORIAL WOODLAND

Natural burial for people and pets in the beautiful countryside of Skipton, North Yorkshire

Diversity of beliefs, a wish for nonconformity and a conservation approach to death are some of the many reasons why burial outside the strictures of church or local authority is being sought and has been catered for by the memorial ground since opening in 2002.

The ten acres, or thereabouts, of land being the memorial ground is located to the north of Skipton, North Yorkshire with elevation and location giving long reaching, panoramic views over adjoining countryside.

The conservation approach will give an area of diverse habitat which will include areas of oak woodland, open pasture, traditional meadow and scrubland, all been appropriately managed.



People's Awards for the Best Natural Burial Ground in the UK runner up for Yorkshire 2013

Access to the memorial woodland is always available during daylight hours, footpaths, seating and open areas giving a variety of areas for family gatherings but allowing quiet individual contemplation if required.

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The Death Cafe movement and why it is so important to me and should be to everyone.

A Death Cafe event is currently the safest place I can think of to talk about the most frightening thing in the world. **Death.**

Even the word itself is almost too awful to say, never mind to contemplate. The concept is rarely discussed openly in Western society.

Outside of family it is only within the culture of organised religion where questions about death are addressed but the limits here are that it can only be interpreted through the lens of that particular religion's dogma.



HAPPY WONDERER



'relearning
what it is to
be human?

It is almost socially unacceptable to mention a lively interest in it in public. Even when the subject is addressed philosophically, it is awkward to assume an objective position, the irony being the inevitability of it for everyone. No matter who you think you are, what you have become, how much material wealth you have accumulated, no amount of money will stop it from happening. It is difficult, nay impossible, to distance ourselves from it as we are committed to doing it by the very act of being born. There's a feeling of, 'But I didn't agree to this, it's not fair'. It is almost seen as a punishment for living, but what if it isn't? What if it's the opposite?

We don't live in the midst of death in the Western world any longer. Our modern culture of ease and comfort means we are naturally healthier and live longer than even a century ago. But there is a growing feeling of ennui and a sense of something missing that no amount of material possessions can fill. We seek more, expecting that when we have the right things, everything will fall into place and we will find peace and happiness. But it doesn't happen and we are left grasping at thin air, numbed to the needs of others and encouraged to consume. We continue frantically filling our lives up, but what if we just stopped? Would we be better off letting it all go, starting again, relearning what it is to be human?>>

<<What's happening is that we are almost sleepwalking on the surface of life and in failing to live more deeply we are denying our chance to die well.

Is it by denying thoughts about death and treating conversations about death as morbid that we somehow think it won't apply to us? We can push it away? That it will somehow keep passing us by, won't pick on us too soon as long as we don't draw attention to ourselves? Or even worse, to try to outwit it? Are we in fact meant to try and outwit it at all costs?

But no, no one gets out of here alive. Although our culture expects us to assume there may ultimately be a way found and that we will submit to any process that gives us 'more time', have we really agreed to this? The reality is that death is now usually seen as a failure of medical intervention rather than the natural ending of a well lived life.

Think about that, or don't, it's too frightening.

As is the way with thoughts, anything frightening and left unexamined only increases its power over us as our imagination feels the need to fill in the gaps of knowledge. At this point, overwhelmed and exhausted, subscribing to a religion offers comfort and easy platitudes, you can relax, its all sorted, no need to worry about it any further. You have been reassured that someone else knows what it's all about. But they don't, do they? Not really. Even with the best of intentions they don't actually know do they?

The fact is that no-one living does. What happens at the end is natural magic and will ultimately be revealed as one of the laws of the Universe yet to be defined where religion and science may meet. Interestingly as modern science evolves, using our ever more sensitive technology to measure and observe, quantum physics is starting to sound increasingly mystical. Quarks both strange and charmed inhabit multiverses. Computers extrapolate dry mathematical theorems towards ever more bizarre conclusions, discovering eternal spiralling patterns in nature of staggering beauty and complexity, an elegant framework that underlies reality itself. A breathtaking web of infinite possibilities in space and time is starting to emerge for every single particle observed, no matter how brief its existence. The numinous it seems, is very real.

Too often these questions are left until the end. So it's only when we are faced with our own mortality, as time evaporates, that insights and answers start to crystallize, although of course by then it's too late to do anything about it.

**'no one gets out
of here alive'**

We live in a sanitised culture where death is screened from us as though it may contaminate us and spoil our living. Nothing could be further from the truth - instead of living fully in the glorious moment despite or because of being in the shadow of death, we thrash about pointlessly, blinded by our eternal artificial light and deafened by relentless white noise. Eventually our connection to the universal web weakens, allowing neglect and atrocity to take root in our world.>>



'death itself is only
the natural inevitable
result of being born'



<<Our poor connection means we are really unable to see, feel or hear the dancing resonant beat and ancient rhythms that hold our bodies of clay and stardust together. Like badly-tuned TVs the picture is unclear, unfocused and distorted, relaying chaotic energy. We find we've stopped dancing and are merely spinning in ever decreasing circles. All that is required of us in the mad world we have created is to be born, consume, and die.

The futility of it all becomes overwhelming. So we play and make a loud noise rather than face the fear. We call that fear death, but that isn't the fear, the fear is what happens next. Separation? And so we spend the very end of our lives in a state of wretched anxiety.

Whereas death itself is only the natural inevitable result of being born, of being a part of the cycle of life where renewal always follows death and decay. Nothing is wasted, no energy is ever lost, it is always recycled into brand new life. That much is plain to see in nature all around us. So what do I, as a thinking being, capable of choice, want to do with my own wild and precious life?

Simply, how do I learn how to live well? How do I make my life, and therefore my death, count? One answer is to procreate and for some that will be enough, but what about the rest of us?

As we go through life the question becomes more pressing until one day we realise no one else can tell us: we have to work it out for ourselves. Don't leave it until the end to do this. Do it now whilst you still can. It's life affirming. Really, stop everything and listen.

Silence. Listen harder. Feel the shifting edge. Look over and into the black abyss of becoming and unbecoming and realise you are a vital part of it and know you can't fall: it will hold you.

To understand even a fraction of what you see is enough to begin a glorious sea change, a paradigm shift in your perception of reality.

You can now feel the presence of the two most important questions taking shape on either side of you. Death on one side, asking 'Do you know why you are here?' Destiny on the other, asking 'And are you doing what you should be doing?'

Only you can answer.

Julie Adrienne Troup
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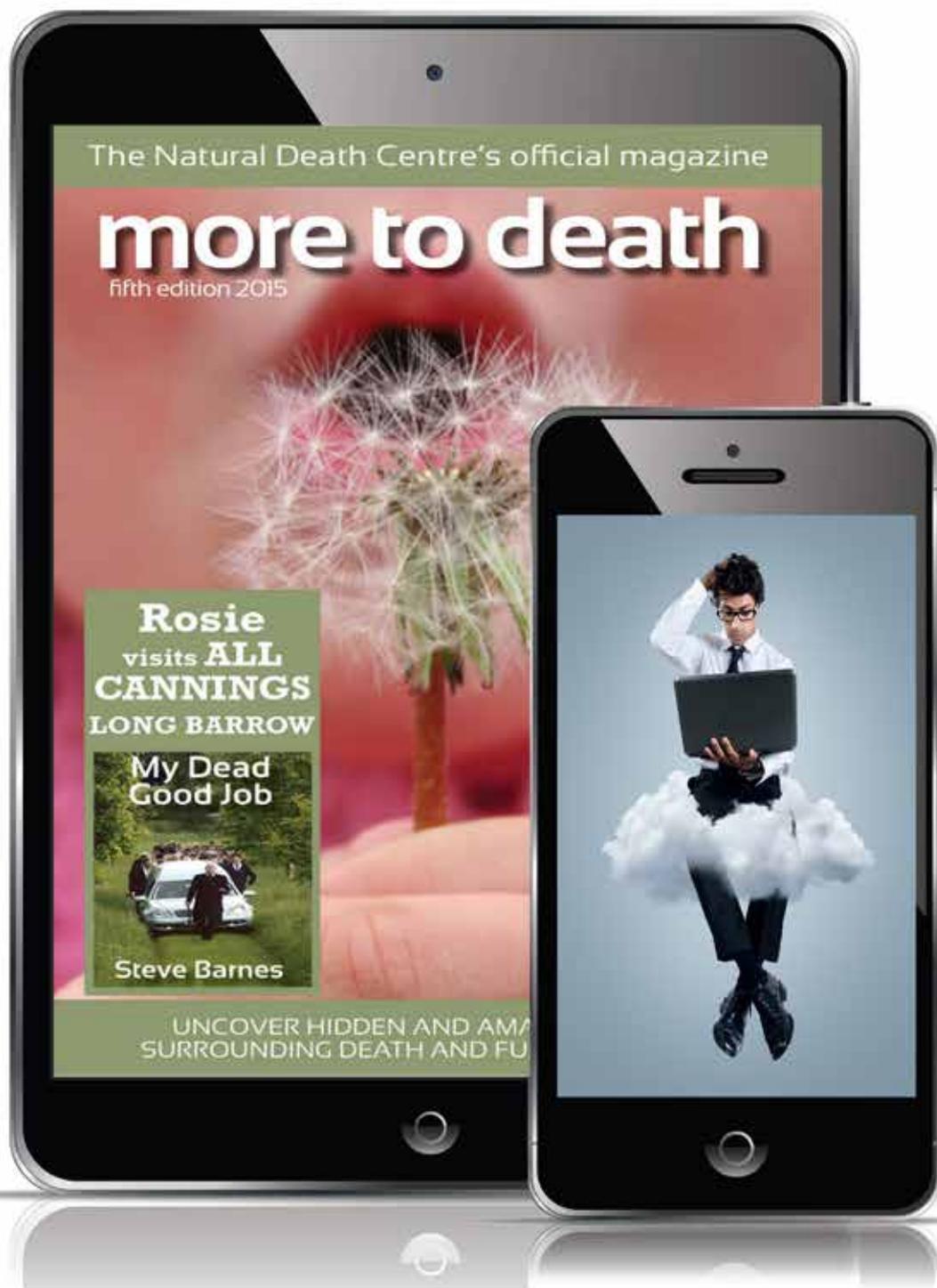


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Great Myths of the Funeral World

Hardly a week goes by at Margaret Rose Funerals without someone quoting one of the many myths that surround funerals in the UK - here are just a few that we hear on a regular basis, and the truth behind the myth:

'Of course, they re-use the coffins at the Crematorium'

Perhaps the most common myth, but completely untrue.

'If you want to visit the Chapel of Rest then the deceased has to be embalmed'

Not true - any requirement prior to viewing is simply the policy of that particular funeral home, not anything that can be attributed to Health & Safety or any other legislation.

'You have to have a hearse for the funeral'

There is no legal requirement to use a hearse to transport the deceased – perhaps you would like a motorcycle or campervan hearse, or maybe you'd like to use your own vehicle. As long as the vehicle is big enough to carry the coffin, you can use any transport you wish.

'You have to have the service in a Church or Chapel'

Unless restricted by personal religious views, you may hold the funeral service in any place you would like (as long as you have the property owners permission!).

'All Funeral directors charge the same don't they'

Not true, the price can vary enormously, shop around and ask for fully inclusive prices (you may find it easier to ask a friend to do this for you).

Now you know the truth behind these myths - but there are many more out there, perhaps you've heard a few yourself!

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My Dead Good Job

Following on from the [article in the Autumn/Winter 2013 edition](#) of the More To Death where we spoke to Steve about why it has taken such a long time for his burial site to join the Association of Natural Burial Grounds. Steve has written a follow up article on relationships with families after the funeral. Detailing the level of service he provides and how this gives him a feeling of, for want of a better phrase, a tremendous sense of job satisfaction. His thoughts and actions are duplicated at dozens of other natural burial grounds throughout the UK. Like him, these members of the Association are carrying out, with love and kindness what we, who also do it, know is the most wonderful of jobs.

As I mentioned in the previous article, Tithe Green opened in 1999 and I took the post of manager in 2010. Initially there was a period whereby a certain amount of discouragement of traditional memorialisation was required and visitors were actively encouraged to plant wildflowers as an alternative.

As time marches on, I have found this to be an ongoing process, but it does allow me to 'chat' with visitors whenever I come across them at the site.

I have often found that grieving friends and relatives just want to talk and for someone to listen and it can be even more comforting for them if that someone was not necessarily associated with the deceased – they just need to talk and I am happy to be the one that listens! I have heard all sorts of wonderful stories about all kinds of wonderful people and I feel extremely privileged in being able to share in the good memories that visitors have when they are here. There are also, of course, many comical memories, I believe these, in themselves, help the healing process.>>



‘grieving friends and relatives just want to talk...’

<<For a number of families there is a tree planting ceremony or the placing of plaques at graves and memorial trees. I always try to meet with them for this and again it is another opportunity to chat, to listen and to encourage families to become part of a growing community of people who are involved in developing a beautiful and natural legacy for future generations. I believe it is therefore very important to provide plenty of time for this and to not rush such occasions

I think it is also very important to listen to the opinions of everyone with regard to the way the Burial Ground is managed. There are some extremely knowledgeable people around and I have been fortunate to learn many things from these people in the short time I have been here. There is a balance to be achieved when providing families with their immediate need for a final resting place, whilst keeping an eye on the future and the direction the Burial Ground should take. Often when people understand what we are striving to achieve they are more than willing to help in this vision.

We have continued to run our Christmas 'amnesty' each year and I believe this is one of the areas that we can provide a much needed service to our visitors. It is of course a very normal tradition to place wreaths on graves at this time of year and we are quite happy to see people doing so, whether the wreaths are natural, plastic or whatever. We publish a date in our notice board when we carry out a clear up of Christmas items so people can arrange to remove them themselves should they wish to. We do still draw a line however and I have on one occasion had to remove baubles, garlands and fairies





**Article by Steve Barnes
Tithe Green Burial Site**

from a memorial tree! This tidy away also allows us to have a full clear up of the Burial Ground should there have been any other inappropriate memorialisation.

Over the last two years we have also organised an Autumn wildflower planting event which this year was held on 4th October. We publish the event in the Burial Ground notice board, on our website and also by e-mail. The event entails arranging for a local wildflower farm to set up a stall at the Burial Ground selling plants suitable for planting throughout the site. Being experts in the growing of wildflowers they are able to give help and advice on which flowers/plants to buy and planting techniques. We had a fantastic turnout the first year and following feedback we have now included tea, coffee and cakes for sale by a local vendor as well as providing a portable toilet on site. Unfortunately there was a threat of rain this year but we were pleasantly surprised to find yet another fantastic turnout. What an uplifting sight to see groups of people all over the Burial Ground planting wildflowers on and around the graves!

As regards job satisfaction, I struggle to know how to describe exactly what I feel from my post. I hope that I am being successful in providing an appropriate balance of meeting people's needs as well as planning for the future. I very much enjoy the time and interactions with the families and visitors I meet and often come away from a chat with a sense of feeling that I have provided that listening ear; I suppose all in all you could say that for me job satisfaction is something I receive in abundance.



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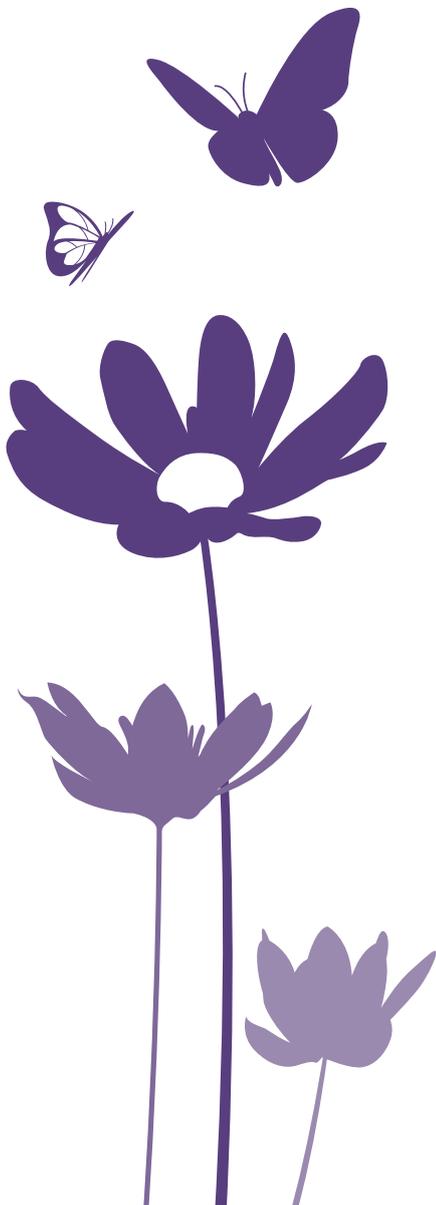
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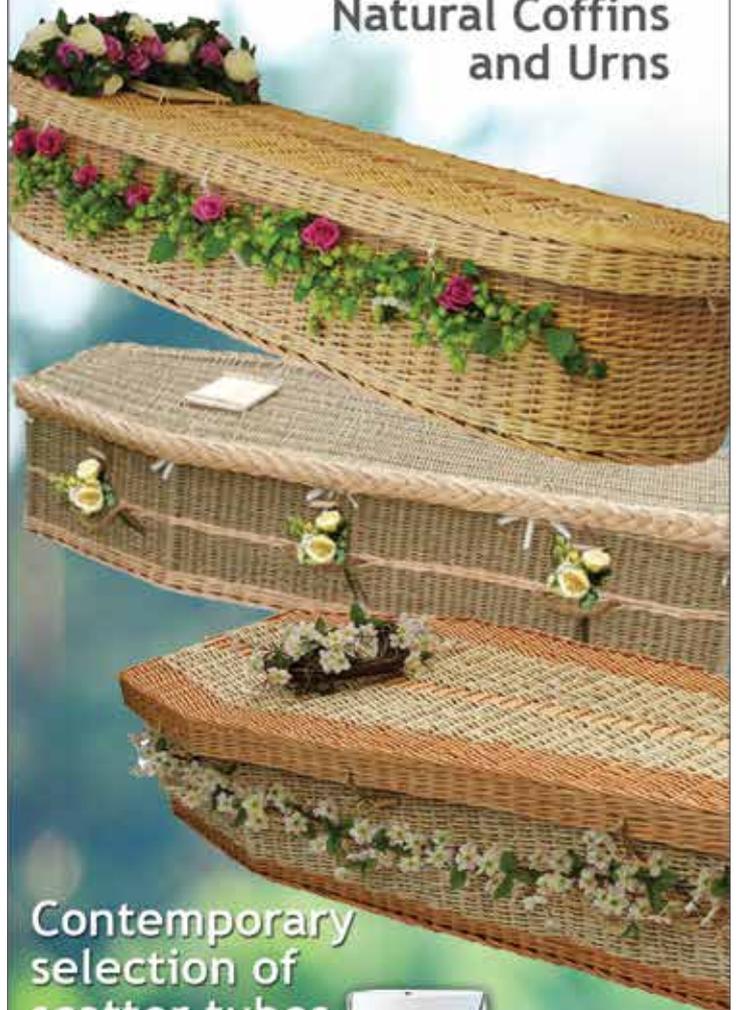
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Living , Dying and Funerals

As a Funeral Celebrant, I carry with me a constant and very deep sense of privilege when I am invited to view, through an opened window, someone else's life experiences. I am awed, each and every time, by the wonder of the story shared and in discovering, through that, what has been given to others in the living of that life.

I am moved, too, in a profound way on those thankfully fewer occasions when there is no-one present, able, or even willing, to step up and speak for the one who has passed. A life that has caused hurt and shame is still a life lived, a life carrying lessons for all involved.

'No man is an island' – we are all one - and the unspoken invitation always, of course, is to look within. So, when my role as celebrant has been fulfilled and I am engaged in silent reflection, I hear the question how would I, or others who have known me, choose to have reflected the life I have lived and the paths I chose to walk down ?

Through recent months I have shared in the wait for death of someone I grew to love very much as a friend, a woman I respected greatly. K. had terminal cancer and from the time of her diagnosis began to prepare in practical ways for her departure. She spent time in her earliest lucid moments, before her mind became increasingly dulled by medication, noting down her final wishes, giving away possessions – stripping out the material manifestation of the life she had lived.

K. had made her home into a sanctuary – a beautiful oasis of calm and tranquility for spiritual seekers and for those wishing to 'open themselves up' as healers. She was a spiritual teacher, healer and mentor for many .

In planning for her transition she also gifted her home to close friend, fellow-spiritual teacher and soul midwife P. for the continuation of that work, intending for him to create a new sanctuary there in his own way and according to his own wishes.

K's spirit soared in the loosening from earthly ties that can otherwise bind – powerfully excited and filled with eager anticipation of the next stage in her soul's journey. She planned a service that she hoped her friends would enjoy when we gathered to say goodbye for the last time – music, songs and anthems for a choir, hymns, readings, poetry and tributes from a given few... asking us all to wear bright colours on the day ! We shared the joke that, as a one-time producer of her own version of plays and 'Cecil B de Mille type spectaculars' during her earlier years as a teacher, she would no doubt be hovering at her funeral service to give us all marks out of ten. I heard inwardly a distinct 'nine' on the day for my efforts – wondering only briefly where I had dropped my lost mark. That is between me and K!

How wonderful to be included – and how moving to see the many different faces of the woman we had all loved conjured up for everyone there through the words we each put into our tributes. K. had provided the context but hadn't known the words we would choose to speak

in our acknowledgement of her. Each having played one part, the service came together in a most beautiful and fitting tribute to a life well-lived, worthy of our celebration and worthy indeed of K.

What a privilege, too, to witness her facing her death with such dignity, graciousness, and compassion both for herself and for others. Her life was inspiring, but so, too, was her dying.

Much of the spiritual understanding that K. demonstrated in her life and in her dying, can be heard expressed in the words of the song 'Who you really are' written by Kirtana, a deeply spiritual American singer-songwriter.

"Who you really are"

We measure success
by the things we accrue
or the bonds that we form,
or the deeds that we do.
But these too shall pass,
as hard as we try
to hold on to form; form will die
But inherent in this dance of form
Is the chance to see what's yet unborn
And the choice to throw this chance away
And be caught up in the play
of who we think we are,
who we think we are.

and as Kirtana continues
This is your lifetime; it could end at anytime.
Where is your attention?
Where is your prayer?
Where is your song?

In a fortunate life,
comes a call to be free
From the cycle of bondage and mis-identity,
to wake from the dream
and finally realise
the truth of one's being
before the body dies
So before the final scene is past,
see the screen on which it's cast.
See what's seeing this me and you.
And then you will see who...
who you really are, who you really are
Who you really are, who we really are.



Could there be more
to this life we call "mine"
than a journey through space
or a story line?
More to life than the body can sense
than the mind can conclude
from experience
Does who we are begin with breath,
depend on form or end with death?
Strip away these roles, these names
and tell me what remains
And who you really are,
Who you really are.

We would like to express my sincere appreciation to Kirtana for permission so graciously given to quote the lyrics of her song "Who you really are".

www.kirtan.com

Benet is a qualified Soul-midwife and Independent Funeral Celebrant living and working in the Border City of Carlisle. She is committed to funeral services being thanksgivings for and celebrations of the life lived, reflecting the wishes and personal views of the deceased or, if those are not known, as they are believed to have been by those closest. She believes there are no rules when it comes to making that final farewell and as part of her work is privileged to offer support to those who wish to plan for their own funerals in their own time. www.benetwaterman.co.uk





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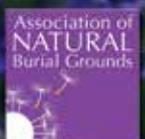
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To Have and to Hold



As a green funeral director and civil funeral celebrant, I have written and guided many people through a simple, personal, unique farewell to someone they loved. It never ceases to amaze me what a wonderful privilege it is to help a family through one of the most important events of their life.

I have recently married and decided we, too, wanted something simple, meaningful and personal, so we planned our wedding and ceremony, for which I wrote the words.

I very quickly came to realise how similar it was to a funeral!

You plan a funeral for someone you love and want everything to be special, as you do for a wedding. The more we planned, the more it became like one of my funerals.



We played lovely music that was special to us; we had written 'our story' about how we met, why we loved each other, our thoughts on marriage etc. We even had reflection time to music (and we danced a little) while we all took in the beauty of the loch. Oh, and then there was 'the tribute' like a eulogy – our dear friends and witnesses said some lovely things about us! The vows were unique to us and very entertaining!

With my funerals, I encourage family involvement and suggest the choice of using homegrown, garden flowers and also the option of decorating the coffin themselves. I decorate the grave surround with hedgerow foliage: we did this for the wedding too. We had rosemary and lavender from the garden for my bouquet and the tables. Their relevance was important to us, as we stated in our ceremony. Rosemary was for remembrance of people we have loved and lost and the healing lavender for all those we know who are having health problems. Rosemary and Lavender are also my business logo!



Giant daisies from the garden were not destined for a grave, but decorated the lodge. Added to this we collected greenery from the woods creating a wonderful natural effect. The finishing touch was water lilies from the loch for the table centre.

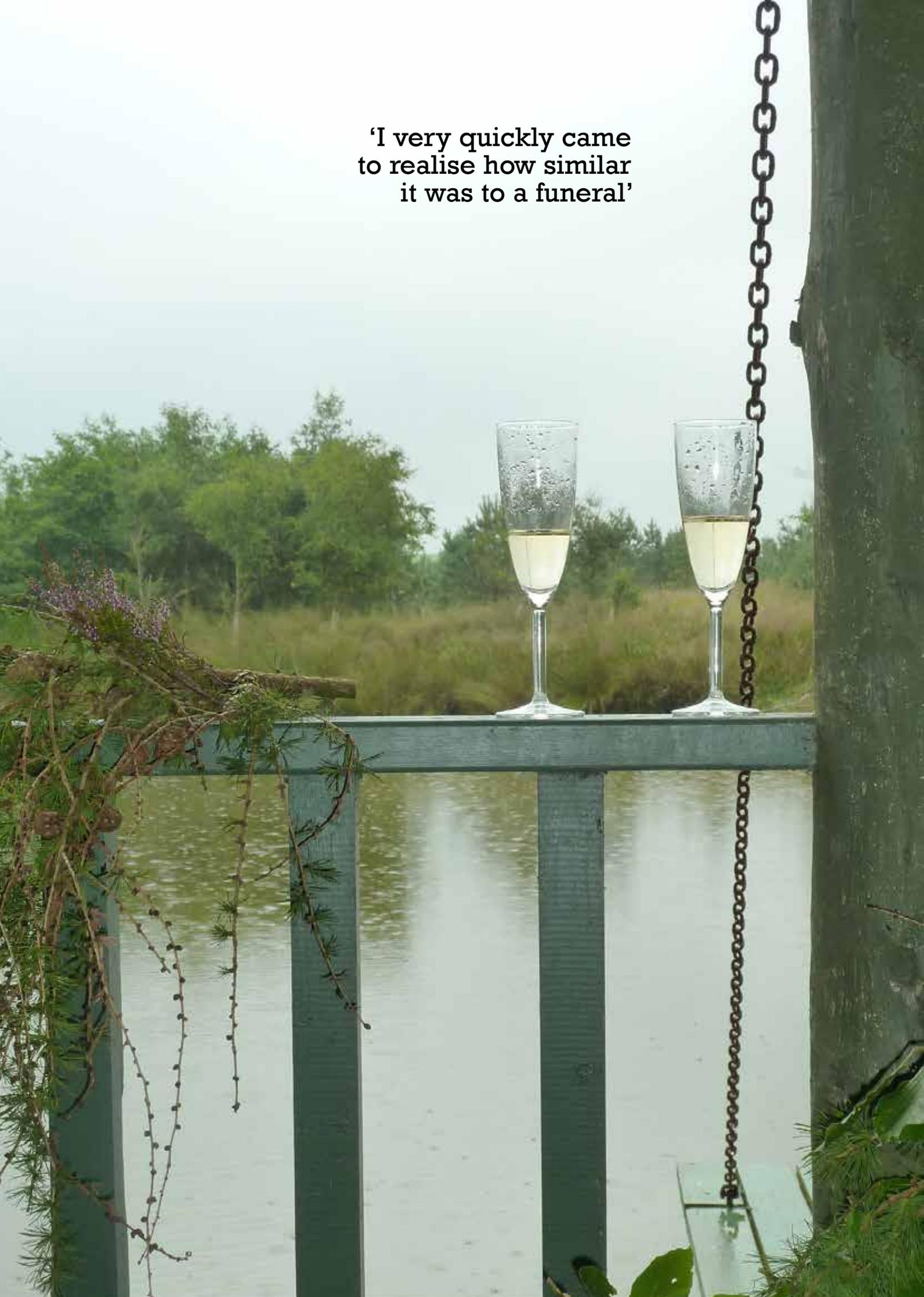
The day was perfect. With four friends and the celebrant, we were in our favourite place in the world - a private moorland setting in the borders, by an idyllic loch with a fishing lodge for a BBQ and the dancing which followed.

Our transport was a landrover. We all wore 'country clothes' except me of course, I wore my 'Mum of the bride' dress from four years ago..... and the only extravagance (other than the champagne and lobster) were the aubergine wellies I bought to match my dress!

It was our day: it was perfect, just as we planned, but it was uncanny how everything we did could have been altered slightly for a funeral.

It was so satisfying to have created it ourselves and I am now proud to be Mrs Wendy Clarkson.

'I very quickly came
to realise how similar
it was to a funeral'



Where there's a Will there's a Way

As manager of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds, I witness the journeys taken by inspired individuals when trying to open green cemeteries. At any time we have twenty or so provisional members whose experiences are, mostly, far from smooth. Torturous, frustrating and infuriating is probably the typical experience. **Rosie Inman-Cook** asked **Sheridon and Tom from Atlantic Rest Burial Site** to share their story with us.



Sheridon told us...

“Tom and I were introduced to Natural Burial shortly after we met in 2005. His grandparents, Nancy and Bill, planned ahead and bought their burial plots, side by side at the lovely Westall Park, a natural burial site in Worcestershire. The inevitable time came for one of them to occupy their plot and not long after, Bill joined Nancy. We attended their funerals and our experiences inspired us to open our own site.



The idea simmered away for a very long time, so we kept our eyes on the property market waiting for a suitable piece of land to become available. Then, in 2011 my Granfer Cyril died: he was a Cornish born and bred farmer who lived in the hamlet of Woolley, in North Cornwall, not far from our home. After retirement, he had retained his land, renting it out to a local farmer from across the valley. His passing meant this land was now available for us to invest in.

I remembered Penlow Lane and the fields from my childhood; my sister and I had ponies and our mother took us out on



‘the idea simmered
away for a very
long time’

little hacks around the village. The abundance of foxgloves down the lane is what I remember most; little did I realise that Penlow Lane would one day become a headache.

After Granfer retired and sold his cows, the lane became unused. The tenant farmer no longer accessed the fields from the lane and so, one day, we went on an expedition. It took a while to reach the field; we travelled slowly and carefully along what had become a strip of jungle. Yet this was such a turning point in our search - getting to the end of that lane and taking in the view; it just felt so right. I often describe it as being like finding your wedding dress - you just know it is the right one.

Tom worked long and hard to regain vehicle access to the field, allowing us to get our mini-digger in to excavate some test pits. These showed that the field was a suitable medium for burials to take place.

As part of the planning application we began a public consultation process. We invited the homeowners in Woolley to a meeting that went well and was positive despite a small response. The subsequent ‘pre-application’ enquiry to Cornwall Council in September 2012 was also favourable.

Encouraged, we submitted a full application for a change of use. The pre application did not, however, tell us that the Highways Department would now decide they required a transport statement and topographical survey - an expense we had hoped to delay until after planning was granted. Nor did it tell us that the Environment Agency would request a very detailed Controlled Waters Risk Assessment which would be difficult to source and would take quite some time to conclude.

This involved another company drilling three ten metre deep bore holes, to check for water. It all resulted in us having to withdraw the application, (whilst on the worst timed family holiday ever) as the required reports could not be produced in the two weeks we had been allowed. So much for the benefits of pre-applications.

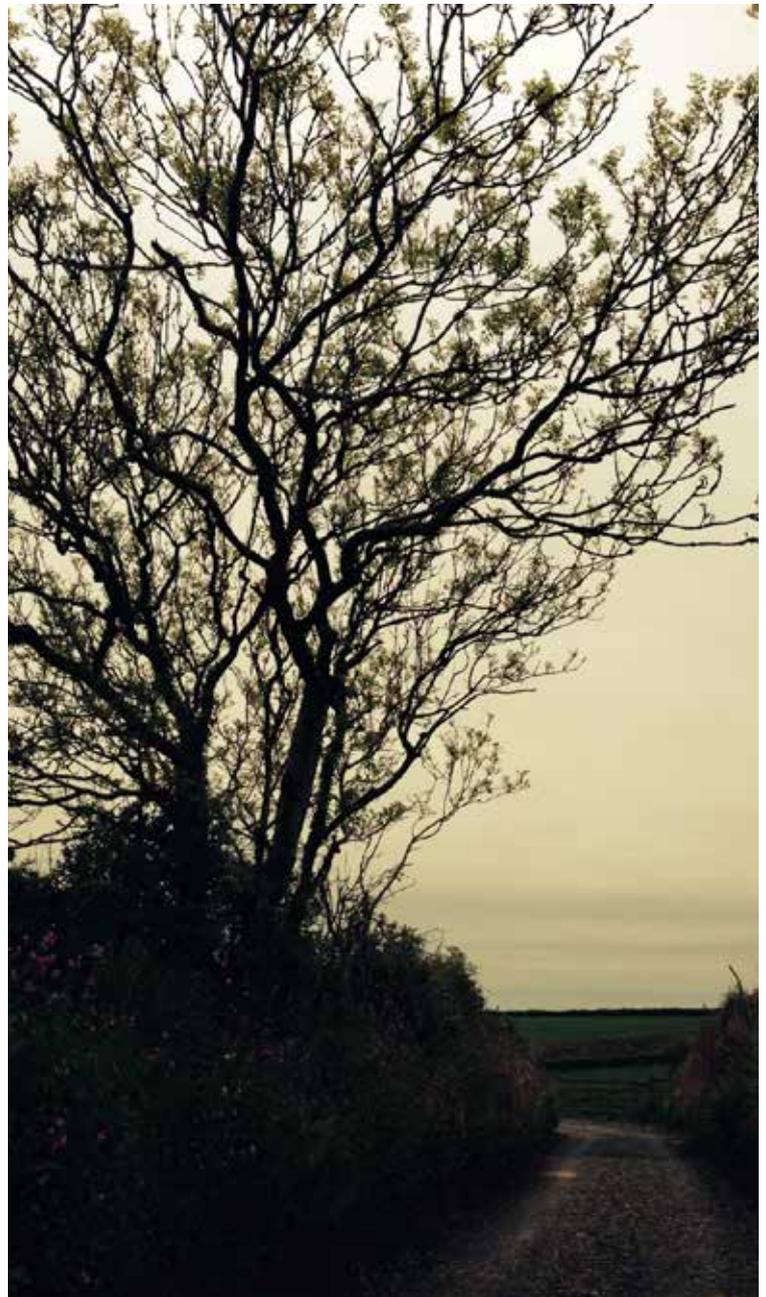
Whilst all this was going on, we were in the midst of the 'Penlow Lane headache'. My family had historically enjoyed rights of access along the lane but for commercial use, such as the burial ground, we needed to own it. You would think that this would be quite simple - find the owner, agree a price, pay the money and solicitors complete the paperwork. Don't be silly.

We met the owner and started things moving. In August 2013, the purchase of the lane was completed and we finally thought we were on our way. We then realised the last piece of land in front of our gateway was not included in the sale. The valuable lesson learned here is that land registry plans with hand drawn felt tip outlines are not always reliable.

We completed the two outstanding reports, allowing us to re-submit our application, quite certain that we finally had all the necessary documents. We also went along to a local parish council meeting to explain our idea. Several objectors attended this meeting and had the opportunity to say their piece. Two days before the decision was due on our application - the divisional ward member called our planning application to committee. It was heard on Monday 6th January 2014 in Liskeard.

A slight dampener over the Christmas period was the news that yet another survey, an ecology report was needed.

Judgement Day came; it was the scariest three minute speech I have ever given. The opposition was strong and one lady, with whom we now get on fine, spoke against the application.



'it is one of the most rewarding things anyone could do'

Standing at the front and being asked questions by the committee members was daunting but after some in depth discussion a proposal was made and a vote taken. Eleven counsellors voted for and three voted against but finally we had permission.

Now the real hard work was to start. We carried out all of the tasks ourselves, with some extra family help, in some very cold and wet conditions. I can now operate a variety of plant machinery including a digger and a dumper. By May 2014 we were ready.

What a journey! Looking back, I can't quite believe we went through so much. We would never have got there without the immense support from our family, friends and of course Rosie and the other Burial Association operators, constant founts of knowledge and advice.

I do have to stress that every little disappointment we met along the way was made worthwhile when I met the family of our first resident. We had fought to provide this service to local people and their gratitude is deeply touching.

We had our third burial not long ago and again, the reward for helping a family at such a desperate time certainly brings huge job satisfaction. We've also had several forward thinking couples book plots.

The local community have now come to realise the benefits of our burial site and most of the objections have thankfully faded; their fears and reservations have subsided and our memories of the battle to open our gates are slowly starting to fade. In their place is gratitude for having had the strength to persevere, and warmed by the response of those families we have already served. This is the beginning of an adventure and although it's not been straight forward, quick, easy or cheap; I promise you it is one of the most rewarding things anyone could do.





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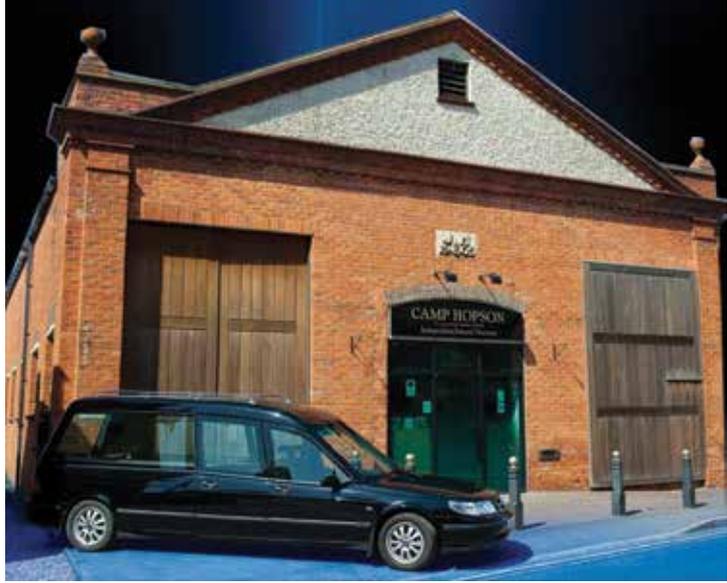
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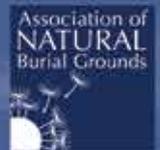
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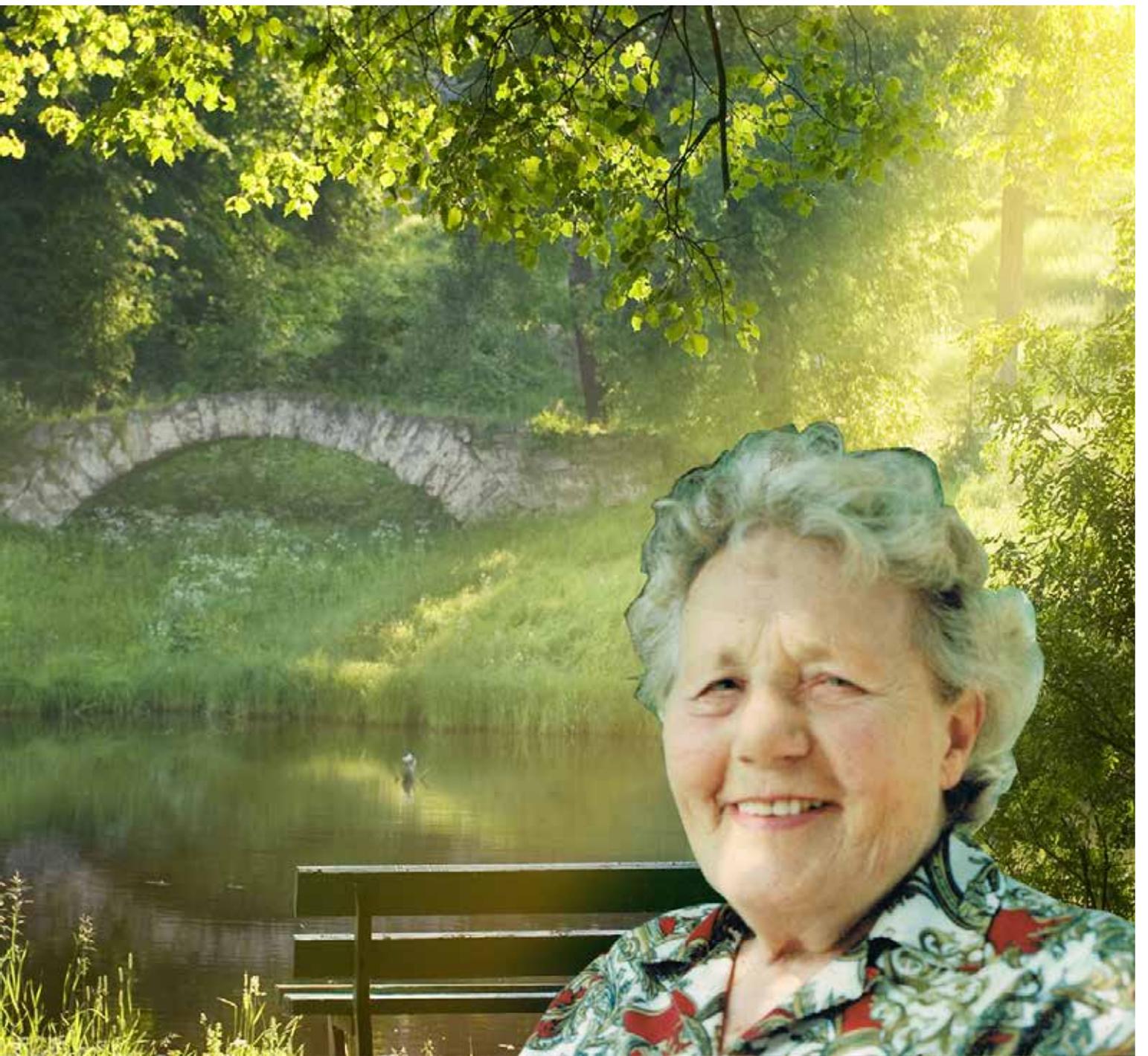
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death gives us far more than it takes away

Archa's story of her mum's farewell

A loving daughter shares her experience of helping her mum through illness and then treating her with love and respect in the most beautiful way, right up until the final moments when her remains were cremated. Archa Robinson and her family did it their own way; it's food for thought.







Mum died Tuesday morning at 7 am, full moon. Sans, Yatri, Vimlan, Megan and I spent all night in her room in the hospital, camping out on the floor staying with her to the end. One of us had been with her constantly for the eight days before too.

She did it beautifully and was her lovely self all the way through. We made sure she was comfortable, and if she looked distressed we got her more diamorphine. She didn't need much, and for the last seven hours needed nothing. She waited till we were all asleep on the floor – except for Yatri who was by her side, and then she breathed her last breath. There was magic in the room through the whole night – and after.

We told the staff that we were some weird religion and she wasn't to be touched by anyone but us for six hours. We didn't tell them she had died an hour earlier. It was beautiful sitting with her, we had a sense of relief that it was over for her. Then my friend Cara, an Alternative Funeral Director came and helped me wash and prepare her body. We massaged lovely oils into her, Sans and Vimlan helped.

Clare, Mum's nurse, who came three times a week to bath her and take her out for coffee or just chat, arrived and was in tears, she felt Mum was her surrogate granny. She and Yatri chose some

clothes; a pink jumper that Mum loved, even though it had tomato soup stains on the front, and her mauve trousers, some socks and shoes.

We told the medical staff we wanted to take her home. This shocked them all, and they all ran round like headless chickens. They told us that due to paper work that she would HAVE to go to the hospital mortuary ice box for a couple of days, until the doctors got round to signing the papers. We said “no way” was she going to their ice box, we would just put her in our car and take her home.

They had never experienced anything like this before.

The nurses couldn't believe that relatives should pour so much love into a patient and then want to take her home; they loved it but were also challenged and flummoxed by it. Eventually the charge nurse took the initiative and spent the morning sorting it all out for us and we got Mum home. Vimlan, Sans and Matthew prepared Yatri's front basement with rugs and candles and music and a beautiful Buddha figure and we laid her down on a bed of flower petals, her leopard rug and pillows. Here she lay until Friday when we had her 'farewell party' and cremation.

Lots of people came to visit her, talk to and meditate around her. George, Clare's eight year old son, said he was never going to shoot anyone on his play-station again after his visit. Dilly and her puppies ran all over her and the puppies tried to nick all the daffodils we placed around her head. She looked lovely - as cold as alabaster but a good colour, just as though she were sleeping. She had chocolate with her too.

On her first night at 'home', I had a bath and put my pyjamas on, and kissed her goodnight. It was lovely to have her there, to be able to sit with and lay next to her. Yatri spent the first night asleep at her feet and I had a cuddle too. I was so glad she was at home and not in an icebox; to be able to go and visit her whenever we wanted; mediate next to her; sit and drink coffee with friends next to her; gossip over her; have time to see and be with her body and gradually realise that it had become just a shell now. It really helped us to let go.



We had a “Margie Farewell Sherry, Irish Coffee and Nibbles Party” on the morning of her cremation. Friends arrived and visited her beautiful bamboo basket (coffin). We then had some lovely music, soppy songs, some poems and we surrounded her with lots of old photos of her life; people were leaning over her open basket looking at them, it was a bit like ‘pick and mix’.

There were lots of tears and laughter and yet it all felt very natural. Six of our male friends carried her out of the house and up the road for one last ‘look’ at her old house and then into the back of our Mondeo, which Megan had cleaned and prepared with a lovely cloth and flowers.

A few friends had prepared the crematorium with flowers and candles and there was more music and songs. At the back of the crematorium, we heard the oven being turned on and sat for a while until we knew the burning process had begun and she was ‘blowing in the wind’. Then we left.

The last few weeks have been incredible, it seems death gives us far more than it takes away. We are taking her ashes to her birthplace, Bideford in a week or so.

Love, Archa Robinson

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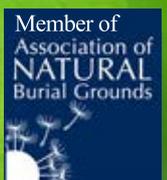
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Care in Death

bringing the funeral home

Claire Turnham
shares how she hopes
to change death care
gently, one family at a
time.

Home-based death care is not a new concept. Not long ago, death, like birth, was seen as a natural part of life. When a loved one died, families, friends and neighbours gathered together to care tenderly for their own at home, to support and help each other and to make arrangements for the funeral. Families were responsible for washing, dressing and respectfully laying out a loved one's body in the front room or parlour.

This approach was considered a normal way for families to connect, grieve and deal with death. Nowadays, it is more likely that when a loved one dies their care is hurriedly handed over to strangers and for professionals to lead and direct the funeral.

But times are changing and there is a growing resurgence in home funerals and home-based family-led care. Increasingly more and more families are recognising they are the best people to care for their own loved ones and are taking responsibility to lead and arrange part or all of the funeral themselves. >>



Reclaiming death care

<<The mission of the contemporary home funeral movement is to support families to reclaim their right to home based after death care. Whilst I acknowledge that not all families may feel comfortable in being so actively involved, I believe it is important for everyone to be fully aware of the options available so they can make informed decisions in accordance with their loved one's beliefs, values and wishes.

Home funeral ceremonies

Just as individuals, families and communities are all different, there is no "standard" home funeral service – they are as unique as the lives they honour. The family are able to choose whatever feels right for them and create a personal ceremony which reflects the true beauty of their loved one's life.

Why consider a home funeral? Lower cost, higher value

While there are many advantages to home funerals, being substantially more affordable being a significant one, it is not necessary to spend money on funeral costs you do not want or need. Families also have the freedom and flexibility to be more involved in doing things their own way in their own style and using their own resources. They can choose to keep things as simple as they wish.

However, I believe that the true value of a home funeral lies in the extra time spent in caring for your loved one. Slowing down the process allows all involved to accept and absorb the death at their own pace. Friends and family have more time to sit and be with the body, to grieve and do things in their own way and to say good bye.

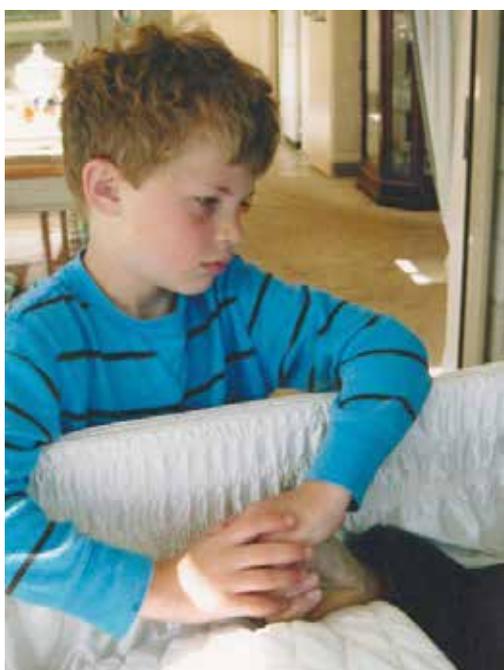
Home funerals keep everyone involved and connected in the spirit of community. Caring for your own can be a very tender, last act of love and ensures loved ones are only touched by known, loving hands. Family-led death care is more intimate, more meaning-





ful and ultimately allows for greater healing. For those families whose babies are miscarried, stillborn or die in hospital the benefits of these few days together may be even more precious and profound. For some, it may be the only time they have. By taking their baby home, parents, siblings and grandparents can simply welcome and make life - lasting memories with each other, before having to say goodbye.

Home funerals too may help children understand and accept the death of a loved one more naturally, especially when they are sensitively supported and death is explained in a simple, honest and age appropriate way.



When children can see loved ones continuing to being cared for at home they may feel more love and less fear. For those children who choose to be involved, they may feel more valued and included in the process. This helps children learn to grieve in a healthy, natural way.

Home funerals are kinder and more respectful to the environment. In most cases embalming is not necessary and your loved one's body can be kept, or brought home to be safely cared for in the few days between death and the funeral ceremony.



Family and friends are encouraged to support each other, use their own resources and help with practical tasks. Emphasis is placed on personal engagement rather than expensive professional services.

Participating in this way helps families and friends to honour their own relationship with their loved one and the love they shared, in a way which nourishes and sustains them always.

My story

When my Dad died I knew intuitively I did not wish to hand over his care to strangers. As his only daughter, I had been lovingly caring for him since he was diagnosed with terminal cancer. Perhaps because of my personal experience of being a home-birthing and home -educating mother, the idea of now continuing to be him at home just made sense. It was a very natural, instinctive and life -affirming decision.

With the support of my family, friends and the local hospice, I devoted my time to caring for my Dad before he died in his own home. Knowing that death was not far away made us appreciate each moment. We shared much love, laughter, tears, memories, life stories and wisdom together. It was an incredibly precious and special time and we found joy in simple family moments. With each passing day we became more attentive, more caring, savouring every moment, making it last. We lived totally in the moment until he died gently cradled in my arms, surrounded by us all.

My dad's death was calm, beautiful and like nothing I had imagined it would be. After keeping a vigil with him similar to that during a birth, my dad died consciously, without fear and most importantly, knowing how much he was loved. It was a loving, awe-inspiring time and he died with my bless-

ing, without pain and in peace.

At the time of Dad's death, like in life, I felt as his daughter, it was natural for me to continue gently caring for him as I had in life and we kept his body at home for 5 days until we led his funeral. The children were fully involved, too, and each took on their own role by choice. Poppy (14) wrote poetry and helped with gathering photos and music, Celia (12) helped dress him, Theo (7) drew pictures and Fern (4) talked to him.

I had always felt very safe with my dad and I remembered fondly how as a child he had lovingly held my hand. When he did so I felt secure and protected. After he died being able to hold his hand again was very important to me. When the time finally came to let his body go I was able to still feel the imprint of his hand in mine and I still feel it to this day.

With the help of family and friends we celebrated Dad's life with a beautiful and intimate funeral ceremony in his own much-loved garden. For my Dad, it was perfect and I feel hugely privileged and proud to have honoured his life in such a loving, simple and meaningful way.

For myself, this experience was life changing and transforming.

Claire Turnham

This article was first published in Juno Magazine September 2014

**‘an incredibly precious
and special time..’**



Did you Know?

Caring for a loved one at home after death is legal. The body of your loved one can lie safely and naturally at home until burial or cremation. Embalming is often not necessary nor required by law.

You do not need to use a funeral director. Families can make all arrangements and decisions surrounding the after-death care and funeral for their loved one. You can fill out and file necessary documents, and transport your loved one in any vehicle, including a family estate car. You can lead part or all of the funeral ceremony yourself or choose the services of an independent celebrant or leader to co –create the service with you. Home-funeral ceremonies may be held at your home and/or in any place of personal significance.

Traditional coffins are not required by law for burial or cremation. You may choose a shroud, build your own casket or buy a cardboard coffin which you can decorate and personalise to make your ceremony more personal, affordable and meaningful.

Home-funerals save money. They offer greater value and greater choice with lower costs and lower environmental impact. You have more freedom and flexibility, more creative control and more time.

Claire Turnham,
founder www.onlywithlove.co.uk
01865 362984/ 07881641583
claire@onlywithlove.co.uk

Claire is Mother to four children and lives near Oxford. As a family death care educator, independent celebrant, funeral arranger and home funeral guide, Claire can undertake all aspects of a home and family led funeral. Claire is passionate about sharing her skills, knowledge and experiences to help others. She is also a regular death cafe facilitator and OxBEL volunteer.

If you are looking for someone to help you through the 'dying at home' process, organising a home funeral or would just like to talk things over with someone who can offer expert advice, we recommend the following ladies.

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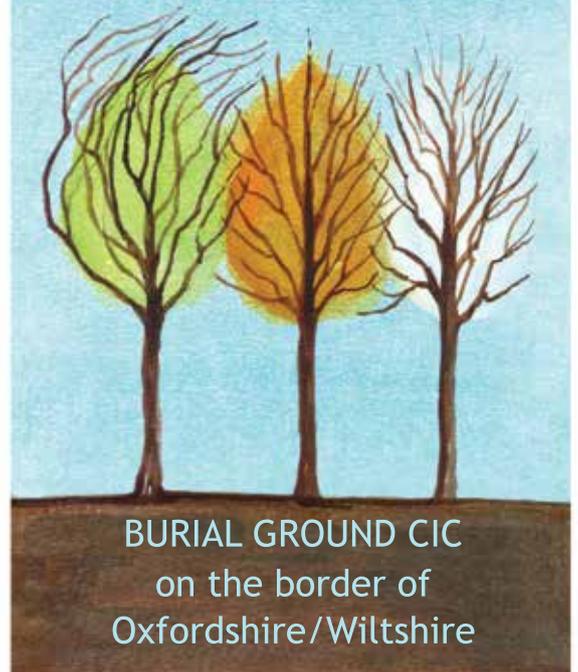
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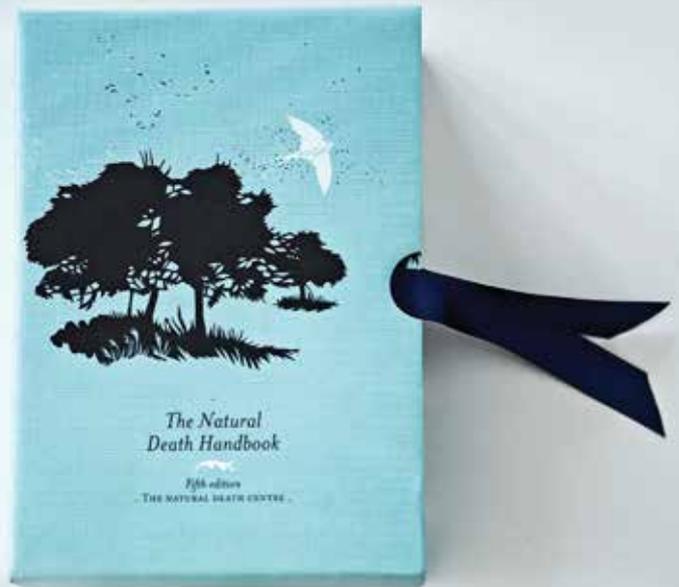
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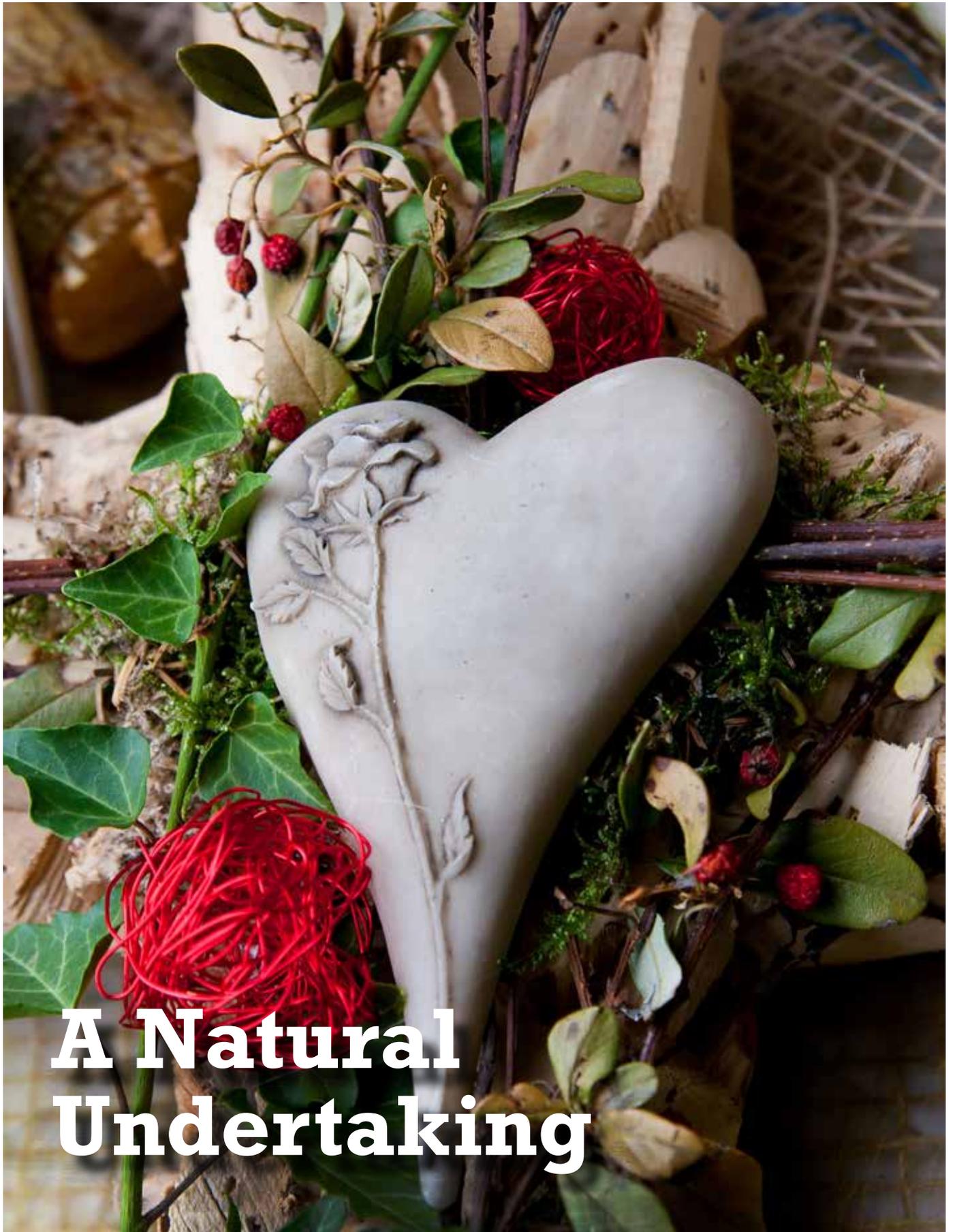
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A Natural Undertaking



Carrie Weekes & Fran Glover

I am an undertaker now. How did that happen?

There are some things you should always remember, like your mother's funeral for example. For the last twenty years I've been trying to remember mine.

I've attended other family funerals since then, and each time I've experienced the same thing – a strange detachment, a sense of the surreal.

None of these experiences felt like anything anyone in my family would ever take part in – the clothes, the big cars, the vicars I'd never met before, the unquestioning following of rules... As a family I think we have our own ideas about how things should be done which make us who we are,

our own in-jokes and small rituals. But mention a funeral and suddenly we're contracting out the most important and significant moments to be planned and carried out by strangers.

These funerals could have belonged to anyone.

Surely this could be different? Surely my family wasn't completely unique?

I've had a variety of roles over the last twenty years: my last was helping people set up and mobilise social enterprises. The sense of empowerment people felt when they benefited from these projects was overwhelming, but this funeral thing just kept rolling around in my head.>>

‘could that be made possible for everyone who wants it?’

<<Eventually I talked about it in the pub.

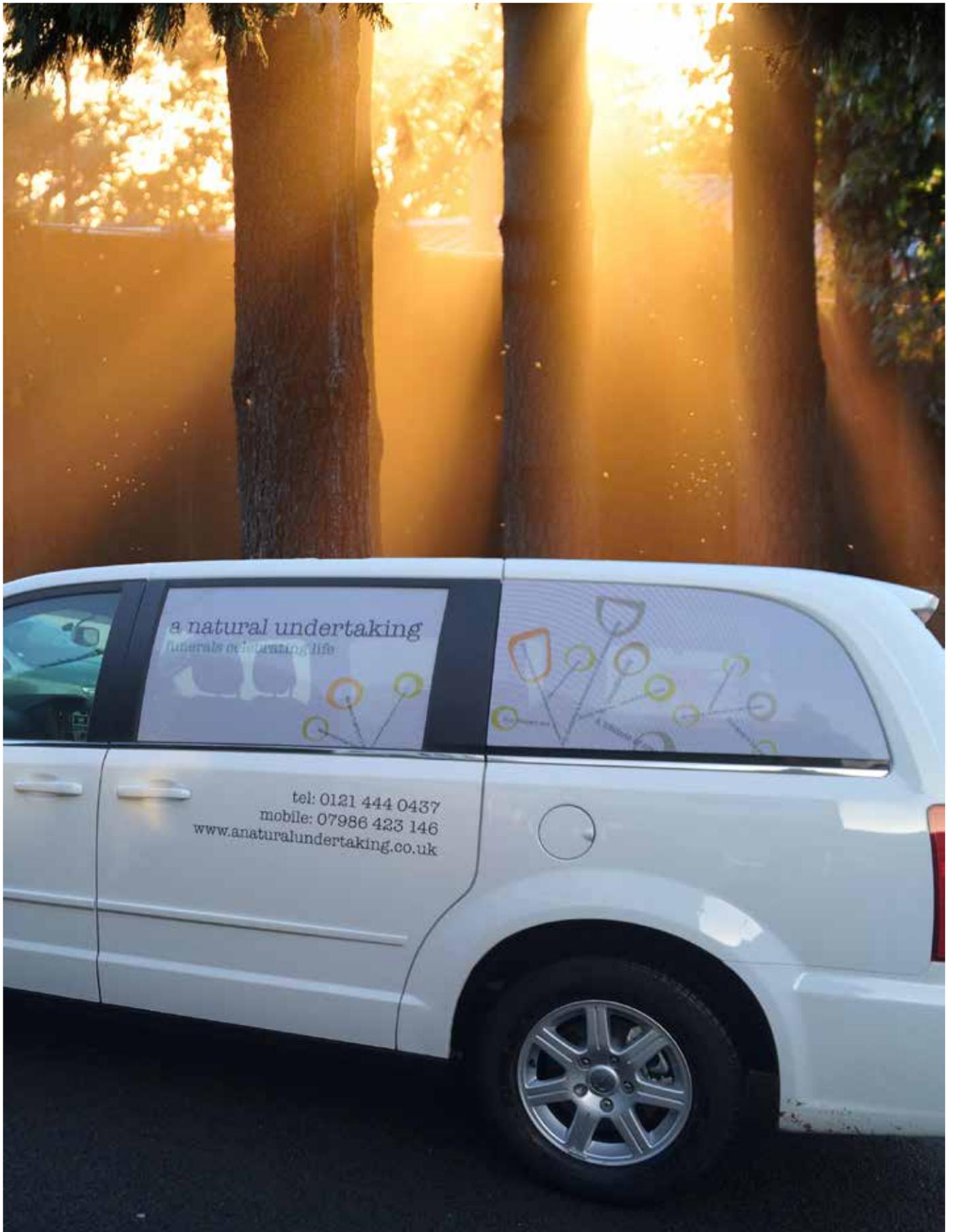
Spurred on by my friends I went online and Googled “How to become a funeral director”. Blimey- this business is impenetrable! Looks like you need to be born into it!

I spoke to Simon at Green Fuse who suggested a celebrant training course as a “way in”. It felt like something I could do. I like helping people and I’m not scared of speaking in public.

I didn’t get to do that course. My beautiful daughter was diagnosed with a very serious illness on the day I was due to travel - all plans went on hold for two and a half years.

She’s better now, thank goodness, but several of the children we got to know in hospital never got better. Those families are the ones who really need a service that is human and kind, and more importantly, led by them. The idea that these families would hand their dead child to a stranger to “look after” before a funeral just nagged at me. Hospices offer alternatives that genuinely promote healing. Could that be made possible for everyone who wants it? Could I help people to do that? What if we gave people information about what is possible? Would they still make the same choices?

Working in the funeral industry now was more important than ever.>>



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<< I read the **Natural Death Handbook** and went to the Good Funeral Awards in 2013. I was not part of this business but I looked around and I spoke to people and I realised this was my place: that these thoughtful, passionate and very funny people were my new tribe. And nobody thought my vague plans about doing “something” in Birmingham were mad: quite the opposite.

Fast forward to the Good Funeral Awards 2014 in Birmingham. I’ve got to know the organisers, have been flying round the streets of Bournville, talked about them on local radio. I’m part of this tribe now...

I now have my own undertaking business. A brilliant lady named Fran Glover came into my life socially several years ago. Fran runs her own marketing company, is passionate and driven and just GETS this. She took my vague ideas about doing something and fashioned it into a plan, one that made sense. She gave me numbers and dates and ambition.

The name ‘A Natural Undertaking’ came from a friend during a pub quiz. Sadly we didn’t win the quiz but the name just seemed right. Death, whilst painful and sometimes unexpected is after all a natural and normal part of life.



I'd made good use of the previous twelve months with some amazing work experience.

I had seen the art of the possible at Clandon Wood natural burial site, I learned practical stuff about trolleys, transport and kindness.

I spent time with Clare at VW funerals, Lucy at the Independent Funeral Company, the wonderful Sarah and Lel at Wallace Stuart.

I picked the huge brain of Charles Cowling at the Good Funeral Guide over cups of coffee.

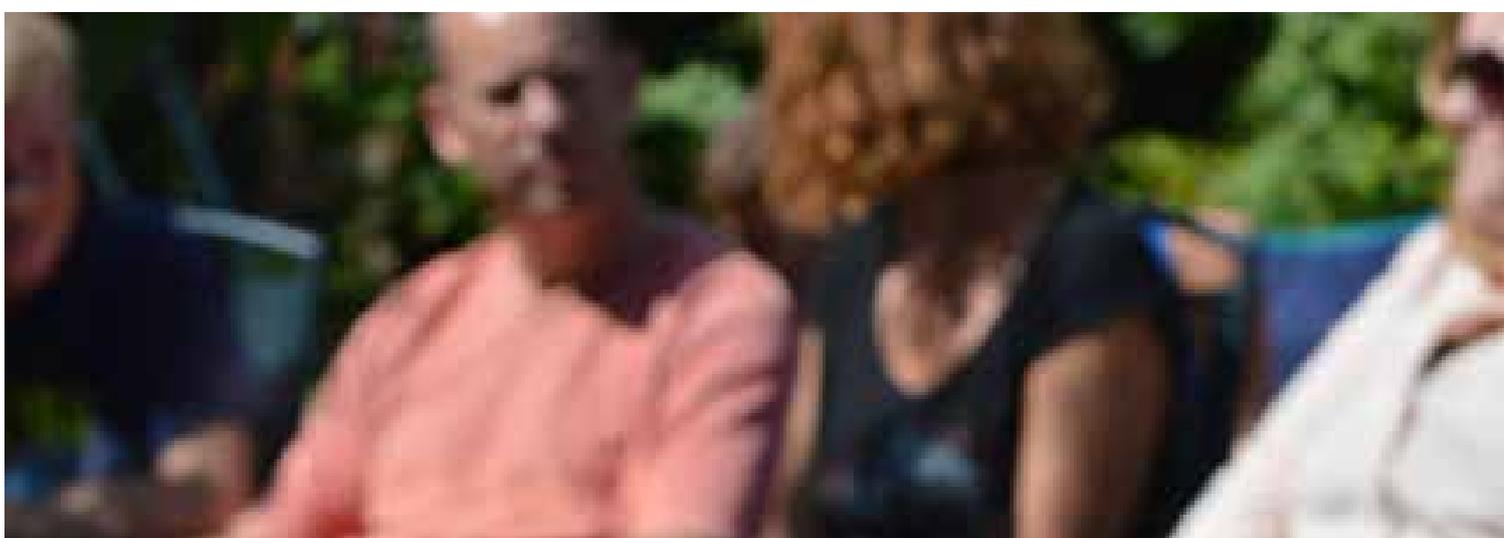
I attended Death Salon in London and found that this tribe is International.

I ran Birmingham's first Death Cafes: gathering a bunch of strangers above a pub on the sunniest afternoon to talk thoughtfully and humorously about death.

Our cardboard coffin decorating party will probably go down as the strangest calendar event of the year.

We held this for friends and family to show them what we're trying to do. >>





<< People just don't talk about death – almost as if talking about it will make it happen. Of course it will, to all of us, and there's a big difference when everyone else knows your wishes. We engaged our friends through art and food. And of course all the kids wanted to lie in the coffin! Wow.

I also got a job with a major funeral directing chain. I lasted one day. They didn't want me. I didn't want to be there. This isn't about complaining that things are wrong as they are. They're not. Lots of families get the funeral and experience they want. But this experience proved to me that there was a huge need to provide a

service to people like me and my family, people who want more control and say over what happens to a body when someone dies, and how they should remember their friends and relatives.

And so to the Good Funeral Awards 2014. We got a call. It's our first funeral and we're surrounded by the best in the business. We asked for their help and advice and they gave it.

Ru and Claire from the Green Funeral Company, Barbara Chalmers from Final Fling, Charlotte Graham, Lynne Watson, Jona-

**‘people just don’t
talk about death’**



than Howell, Clare VW and Evelyn Temple, Charles Cowling and Rosie Inman-Cook: These people really are the best.

The funeral and the moments running up to that point were exactly what the family wanted. It felt so good to be part of something so important.

So now we really are undertakers: we have a beautiful (white) vehicle, a website (www.anaturalundertaking.co.uk) that we think is welcoming and informative and a big pile

of leaflets to help spread the word around Birmingham.

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Carrie Weekes
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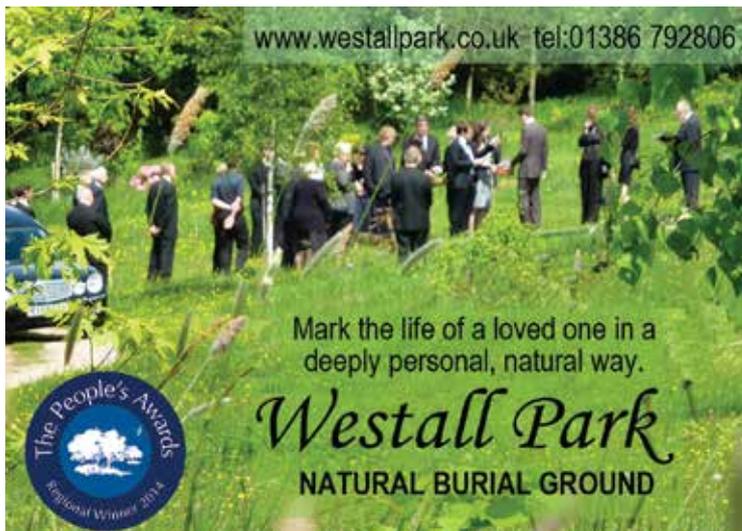
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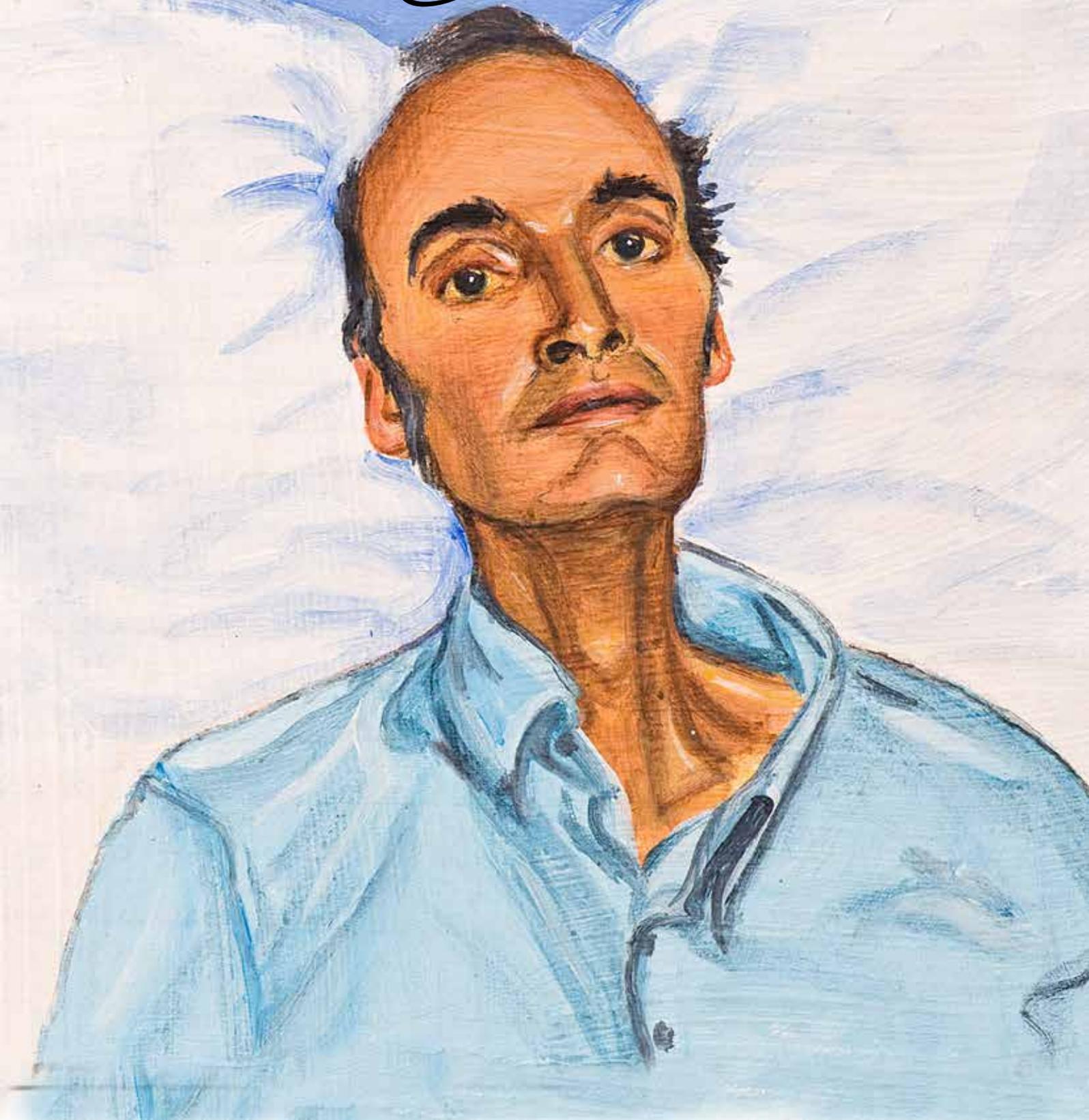
The Natural Death Handbook



Everything you need to know about...
.....well everything!

BUY
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A
Graceful
Death



The 'A Graceful Death' exhibition and all the work I do now came about because I fell in love.

In November 2007 my partner Steve died of liver cancer, and everything in my world changed.

Until that point, I had thought that love was all, and that if you loved, you were invincible. I couldn't understand why, if I loved Steve so much, he was not immune to this dreadful disease that took him away from me so fast and so relentlessly.

As he was dying, I painted him. I painted his last few weeks, days and the day that he died; it was a way to try and understand what was happening and to keep a hold of the memory of his poor body as it changed and shut down as I watched. He is so beautiful, I thought, the cancer has ravaged him and he is so weak, but still his soul is shining. He is still there, still alive, and still Steve.

There was something about the way his dying was so visible and so unstoppable that made me want to capture it in paint, so that I would never forget how he did his dying, I would honour his spirit by remembering this most difficult and most vulnerable part of his life.

The 'A Graceful Death' exhibition opened tentatively in my house in 2009, and I began to see that not only was I not the only person to be bereaved, but that most people were carrying with them stories of grief and loss with no one to tell them to, nowhere to put them. During this first exhibition, the reaction was not "Poor you Antonia", it was "Oh!"

This is my story too, this is my Mother. Or my Grandfather. Or my son. People recognised their own stories, and began to talk, and the exhibition began its work.

I started to paint other people at the end of life for the exhibition, and to ask them two questions:

Who are you?

And what do you want to say?

If I was putting together an exhibition of what it was like to die, who better to ask than the dying themselves.

The exhibition grew with the new people I painted and interviewed, and everywhere it went, it provoked powerful reactions. Some people loved it, some did not. Those who did not, left very quickly. Those who stayed, were moved and inspired by the stories and the images of the sitters that had agreed to show their portraits and share their words about what it is to be dying and how they are doing it. It made people talk, it inspired people to feel emotions that had lain hidden, and it encouraged openness about what dying is. >>



All I have left is time



>>I worked with some amazing people for this exhibition, most of whom have now died, some of whom have not, and I show them just as they are with whatever illness is making them die, and show how normal the dying really are.

One thing that struck me very early on is that until we are dead, we are all very much alive. And just because you are dying, you are not invisible nor are you necessarily miserable. Some of the people painted for the exhibition had a wonderful sense of humour, and

while working with them there were many light hearted moments.

The exhibition has now grown to include 53 paintings with written and filmed interviews, and an 'A Graceful Death' film and book. It has poetry and essays sent in by members of the public, it has music composed for it and it covers cancer, motor neurone disease, still birth and suicide because they are the people who have come forward to be included.>>



And so, on Saturday 28 March 2015, at the West Cliff Baptist Church in Bournemouth, the ‘A Graceful Death’ Exhibition will be joining a host of end of life care experts, professionals and thinkers at an ambitious death awareness event called Dying to Know, run by a group of local soul midwives, non-medical, holistic end-of-life companions, of which I am one.

Dying to Know is an event designed to give the public the opportunity to discuss and explore all aspects of death, dying and funeral choices, and to encourage discussions and conversations around what it means to die, how to prepare for it, and how best to address such an emotive and frightening subject. There will be support, advice, workshops, talks and discussions. There will be tea, coffee and cake. And there will be people there who understand the difficulties that can accompany the end of life for not only the dying but the carers too.

Dying to Know will include a wonderful panel of speakers including:

- **Dr Simon Pennell**, medical director at Lewis Manning Hospice in Poole and part of the Clinical Palliative Care team in Southampton
- **Stephen Nimmo**, FdSc MSBP MD of Chester Pearce independent funeral directors from Bournemouth

- **Felicity Warner** Principal of the Soul Midwives’ School in Dorset
- **Revd Angie McLachlan**, a Partner of Red Plait Interpretation LLP also from Dorset, specialising in the interpretation of cemeteries, death and mortality
- There will be workshops discussing Green Burial by the Natural Death Centre manager **Rosie Inman-Cook**
- Home Funerals by **Claire Turnham** of Only With Love, Patient Approach
- Soul Midwifery from **Mandy Preece**
- Sound Therapy from **Sarah Weller**
- Dementia Friends by **Fr John Hyde**

Dying to Know will also include a wide range of stands and information about end of life support, funeral choice and bereavement and most important, there will also be space for reflection and quiet conversation supported by soul midwives.

And of course there will be the ‘A Graceful Death’ exhibition. There will be one new painting and interview for this Dying to Know event: this will be the first time it will be shown.

All profits from the event will go to the MND Association, Julia’s House and the West Cliff Baptist Church’s Open Door Homeless project.

Antonia Rolls

Dying To Know

End of Life Matters and Death Awareness Event

featuring 'A Graceful Death' -

portraits from the end of life
by Antonia Rolls

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