

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

fourteenth edition 2019

**LAUGHTER
IS THE BEST
MEDICINE**

**Travelling
with ASHES**

**THE
BEAUTIFUL
BURIAL GROUND
PROJECT**

**UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING**



Editor's Blurb

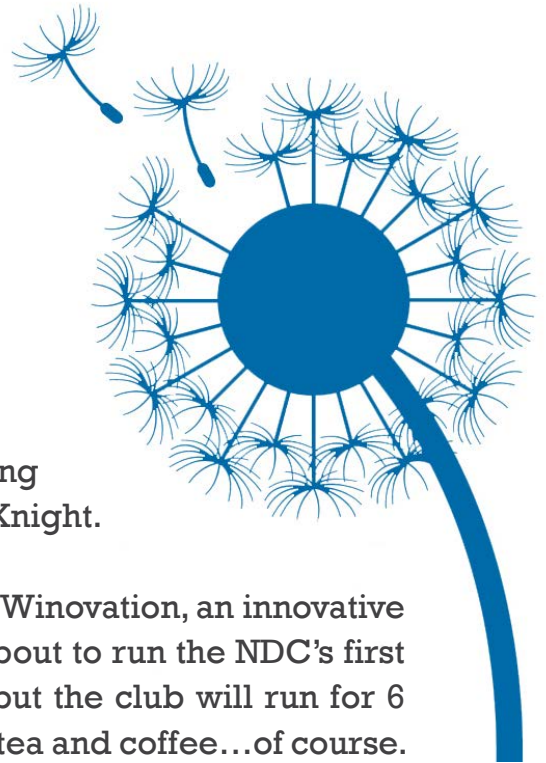
Well I believe that we have produced yet another, diverse and bumper edition of More to Death. We hope that you all enjoy reading the interesting articles written by our creative contributors and look forward to hearing your views on social media.

So, what have we been up to since our last edition?

Well apart from media work, giving talks, manning the helpline and holding the best attended to date get together of all the managers of the ANBG, we have been very busy! Oh and let's not forget the all-important People's Awards have been judged and the best place to rest in Great Britain has gone to Old Park Meadow in Essex, a complete list of winners and runners up can be found on page 112.

We, along with the rest of the funeral world will be attending the three day, biannual 'death fest' that is the National Funeral Exhibition. This year it is being held at Stoneleigh Park and it has been a while since NDC has attended but we hope to meet up with old friends and make some new ones. We are sure it will be as extraordinary, fascinating, inspirational and exciting as previous years and one thing is guaranteed...when you exhibit it will be extremely exhausting but also great fun!

Our mission this year at the show is to tell the funeral world about our new and very exciting project the Cremated Remains Advice Bureau or CRIB for short. Not only will it be a web site full of useful information and inspiration regarding what to do with ashes. We hope that it will provide the funeral industry with a tool to help the ever-increasing problem of funeral directors getting stuck with ashes. I won't say anymore because Rosie has written an article all about CRIB in this issue. You can find out more information about this exciting project at www.crib-ndc.org.



We are also about to run another project which is being taken forward by our wonderful volunteer Charlotte Knight.

After successfully applying and winning a grant from Winovation, an innovative project of Winchester County Council, Charlotte is about to run the NDC's first ever Coffin Club. The dates are yet to be released but the club will run for 6 weeks and will consist of a one-hour talk followed by tea and coffee...of course. Then, those that have a burning desire to own and decorate a flat packed coffin can do so. Hopefully everyone will leave with a completed funeral wish list and an enhanced knowledge of the funeral industry. You can register your interest on our helpline 01962 712690.

Here at the NDC we were encouraged by the Treasury's announcement of their proposals to regulate UK funeral providers of funeral plans through the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The government says that evidence has shown, some providers have used misleading sales tactics, costing vulnerable customers up to £5000 and there are widespread concerns. The government has stated that companies using high-pressure or bullying tactics to sell funeral plans could face fines and criminal charges. About time too...springs to mind and this will hopefully provide much needed protection to vulnerable families.

If you find our 14th edition an interesting read please forward to everyone you know and if you have a website hyper link to it! Lastly, if you feel creative or know someone who has something to say and are happy to share, why not write an article?

Happy reading!

Carol Anne Waters

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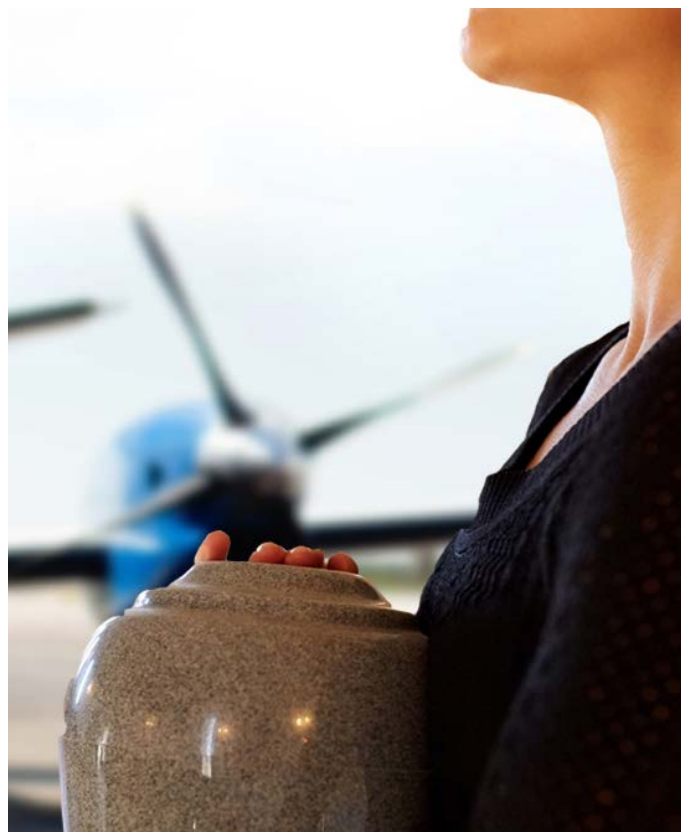
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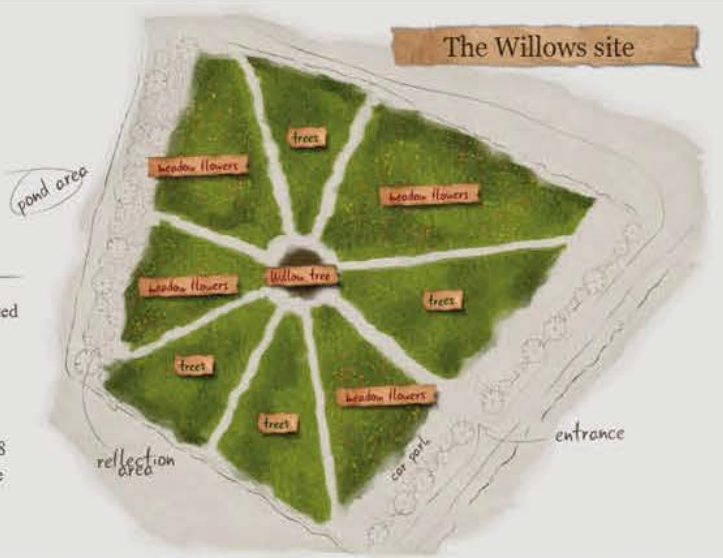
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a fitting place to reflect and
remember your loved ones.

Death Culture

My name is Aki and I am a post-graduate student at a Japanese university where I specialize in the Sociology of Religion. I am very pleased to be able to share my thoughts and findings with you via this article.

For several years now, I have been researching so called ‘tree burial’ in Japan. This is a new concept and style, where a shrub is planted over interred ashes instead of a headstone. I imagine that this novel practice is similar to natural burial in the UK, which has become increasingly more popular, sweeping across the UK since 1993. The similarities appealed to me, so I have decided to work on this phenomenon and its global growth by comparing our different countries.

With this in mind, I visited the UK a total of three times, between 2017 and 2019 touring natural burial grounds and sites. On my second research trip, I met Rosie Inman-Cook, manager of the Natural Death Centre (NDC). Rosie has been most helpful to my research and gave me fruitful access to information collected by the NDC via their Feedback Forms.

The forms monitor the level of customer service given at the green cemeteries that are members of the **Association of Natural Burial Grounds**.

The feedback received also highlights some of the rational for choosing to use this option as opposed to a traditional cemetery. I am very grateful and would like to thank Rosie and the NDC for this opportunity afforded to me, as it has improved the quality of my research no end.

Every culture has its defining features or individual uniqueness

Every culture has its defining features or individual uniqueness which I believe becomes clearer, when being observed by the eyes of an outsider. Following my experiences and upon completing my investigations, I would like to share with you my impressions of British Natural Burial and I would be delighted, if after reading this article, you find your own originality of death culture.>>





>>My first visit to the UK was the summer of 2017. I was carrying a large backpack and to me, people walking around the streets of London, looked urban and fashionable. I felt my appearance was not suitable for such a city.

In June, I arrived at the first natural burial site I visited, the **Woodland Burial Site in Carlisle City Cemetery**. I arrived by coach from London and I remember it well. I was a little apprehensive as it was the first time I had visited a cemetery, it was dark and drizzling.

I took a bus to the cemetery, which stopped just outside the gates. I walked past many old-fashioned headstones and Victorian monuments, backed by green and very calming trees. Later, I realised that I very much liked walking around British cemeteries because they are so full of history, beauty, symbolism and nature.

British cemeteries are so full of history, beauty, symbolism and nature

However, on this particular, first time cemetery visit, when I reached the woodland section I felt very alone in such an alien environment. I can easily recall the feelings as if it were today.

As I sat on one of the benches at the allotted appointment time, I saw a man approaching me, his name was Michael, who I now know was the manager of the cemetery. After a brief greeting I found that my initial cold feeling went away as he was so kind and thoughtful with regards to my having travelled so far with such a large backpack. He attentively, gave me a guided tour of the site.

My first impressions of this woodland area were that there appeared to be no graves. I felt as though I was walking in a natural park somewhere. It was very quiet with only the sounds of birds singing and squirrels running along the tree branches.

The original area used for burial was already mature, the trees cast shadows over the grounds that were covered with grass. Since this section was opened in 1993, it was surprising that the trees had matured and become so big during that time. I was told that these trees had grown naturally and without being cared for by man.

I also noticed some offered goods and flowers attached to the trees or placed around them. Such memorabilia indicated to me that this place was unquestionably a burial site. >>





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BETH
BERT
WILKIN

ALSO OF HELEN WAUDE
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WITH





>> Whilst Michael and I were sitting on the bench and talking about the woodland burial site after his tour, I asked him what kind of people were inclined to choose this, as opposed to a traditional cemetery. He gently replied, “those who feel awkward about tiny and tidy” pointing to the lawn section next door.

what kind of people were inclined to choose this, as opposed to a traditional cemetery?

As you might know, one of the aims of many natural burial grounds is the conservation of its surroundings, the natural habitat and the wildlife. The person who established the first natural or woodland burial site in the UK, Mr. Ken West, definitely had a clear purpose to utilise the abandoned space within a cemetery for ecological benefits. This would mean that these sites could have numerous functions, not only for burials but also natural conservation, education and recreation etc.

I feel that the concept of cemeteries having multiple purposes is very British. In the 19th Century, many private cemeteries opened, designed to fascinate the majority of Victorian people with their fine and magnificent chapel buildings and beautiful landscapes. They attracted many visitors as well as mourners who enjoyed spending time in the cemetery. Even today, I can see a lot of visitors, walking dogs, running and looking around the sculptures in the old sections.

I recently heard that there are unique cemeteries that even accommodate wedding ceremonies. In Japan this would be both unbelievable and unthinkable! To some extent it might be argued that it might be the same for natural burial grounds but in a different way. People can still enjoy the burial sites by walking around for pleasure, appreciating a wild habitat in natural surrounding as well being a burial ground to visit their dead relatives.

the attitude towards the dead are quite different between our societies

My findings suggest that the attitude towards the dead are quite different between our societies, even though we both live in post-industrial and ageing societies. To be honest, I still have a slight uneasiness standing beside a fresh burial mound because I am more familiar with the dried cremated bones and the large stone memorials above them>>.

>> Today almost all Japanese consider that the dead truly 'pass away' after the cremation is completed.

So, I had never imagined that I could actually walk on top of graves until visiting the British sites. On my second visit I had the opportunity to look around the **South Downs Natural Burial Site** in Hampshire with Rosie. It was a very cold and windy day in February. I was hoping to take some photos with my phone but sadly it soon lost power because of the temperature.

Rosie and I passed a group of people who were leaving a funeral. They were wearing warm, practical clothing with boots and not mourning dress as I would have expected. We walked through the quiet woods and reached the burial grounds, I was totally unaware that we had already entered it. Rosie and I were now standing amongst the graves but I couldn't distinguish where they were. Some plots had flowers on the grave but otherwise I couldn't tell at all... I began to get worried and had to ask Rosie 'am I stepping in the graves?' She said 'yes, but it doesn't matter'.

Respect for the deceased's wishes, their life and the natural surrounding that these places provide families, is most relevant

Such experiences didn't mean that people do not respect the dead in the UK because I believe that they definitely do. Respect for the deceased's wishes, their life and the natural surrounding that these places provide families, is most relevant. They bury their dead to return them to the earth as a natural process. However, if we had no artificial markers to point out where the burial plot is, how can families visit the graves?

This was the biggest question that I had asked myself, since arriving in the UK. Although the situation has slightly changed these days, most Japanese still visit their family graves regularly. Once again, I felt real concern for this very thing.

When I visited one burial site in Bath later in 2018. It was a 'meadow cemetery' and it looked like a plain field or just farmland. There was no plaques or trees to mark the burial plots and visitors have no clue how to find the graves. The site simply sits as one with the local landscape, the view being particularly beautiful. People can breathe fresh air and feel refreshed in the open field... personally speaking I like the place and its landscape very much. >>



people can breathe fresh
air and feel refreshed in
the open field







>> However, when I imagined if I tried to bury someone I loved there... I would hesitate, could I do it? I would want to put markers down to show the exact place they were resting.

Of course, this doesn't mean the Japanese still wish to have a permanent memorial for their graves, in fact it is the reverse. More and more people have begun to think that there is no need to maintain graves in perpetuity and the designated duration of memorials is sufficient. However, as one Japanese scholar described it as 'expiry date', we need a 'valid duration' of memorials at the beginning.

I would want to put markers down to show the exact place they were resting

Another aspect I find myself being interested in, especially concerning British natural burial, is a lack of established religion. Leaving Carlisle in 2017 I jumped onto a train back to London and the next day I rushed to Cambridge to see a natural burial site run by the Anglican Church Trust. It was a lovely day, actually a little hot! The sky was high and clear, a sharp contrast to the deep green grasses and bushes. Stepping onto the site I was astonished by its landscape... I wasn't able to see any religious symbols even though it was a consecrated site, run by the church. The ceremonial building looked simply like a wooden cottage, not like a chapel.

Later, I also learned that most natural burial sites in the UK have no annual ceremonies for those that are buried there. Some British people state the reason for choosing a natural burial is because they or their loved one are or were not religious. This might suggest that natural burial, in a relative way, is considered as 'non religious' when comparing it with other options and I find myself asking why do people avoid being 'religious' even at a time of bereavement.

During my stays in the UK, I was able to visit several cathedrals in various locations, Westminster Abbey, Winchester, Bath and Canterbury Cathedrals, to name just a few. These buildings were in general packed with lots of people who appeared to me to be fascinated by the historic and cultural heritage related to the religious aspects of the buildings. I am also not a religious person but Buddhism and Shintoism is deeply embedded in our culture so it would be fine for me to have a buddhist funeral when I die. However, I can't accept today's Japanese 'custom' of holding a wedding ceremony in a chapel according to the Christian way because Christianity is not part of our culture. >>

how do British people find a way to honour the deceased without a religious ritual?

In contrast to the UK, Japanese practice of tree burial has a deep connection to Buddhism. The first tree burial site was opened at a Buddhist temple and most tree burial sites have religious or multiple religious ceremonies for those that are buried there. Many bereaved families get together to take part in them.

I find myself asking, how do British people find a way to honour the deceased without a religious ritual? I now find that I am struggling to give you a good explanation for these differences between us.

In the end I would like this article to point out that more and more people across the world are starting to choose natural options when it comes to choosing a final resting place.

However, each of them is not exactly the same... for example, the Japanese tree burial promises reincarnation in the blooms of the tree.

the Japanese tree burial promises reincarnation in the blooms of the tree

When I think of myself I could find many remarks of Japanese style by learning about the British one, I showed here. I believe that when you turn to other societies to examine and view their different death cultures you will hopefully be able to discover your own unique one.

I hope you will discover your own culture's uniqueness of death.

Aki







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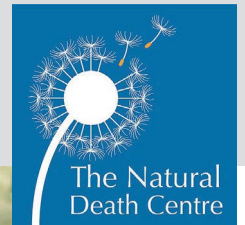
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The Beautiful Burial Ground Project

The Beautiful Burial Ground Project is a Caring for God's Acre initiative funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project aims to put burial grounds of all types across England and Wales on the map by revealing their hidden heritage and importance to biodiversity.>>





>>To increase the amount of knowledge held about the biodiversity of all types of burial grounds we aim to gather 75,000 biological records (recorded sightings of all types of wildlife) across the four years of the project.

To do this we are both encouraging existing wildlife recorders to visit and make records in burial grounds and are organising training sessions for people with an interest who could potentially become recorders in the future.

Traditional Churchyards are often the first area of enclosed land in a village and so hold remnants of the countryside which once surrounded it, this can make them vital biodiversity hotspots. In a similar vein natural burial grounds are often returning land back to what it might have once been and will become a growing refuge for biodiversity in the future.

George Sharp, Community Coordinator for the project, can work with burial ground managers to arrange sessions on their sites in a range of biodiversity. Site managers will receive a list of species found during the session which will hopefully help inform future management and potentially interested individuals who may return to the sites to survey for species in the future. Sessions are free of charge both to host and participants thanks to our funders the Heritage Lottery Fund.

To find out more about the project visit [The Beautiful Burial Ground](#) pages on the [Caring for God's Acre](#) website www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk or contact George on george@cfga.org.uk



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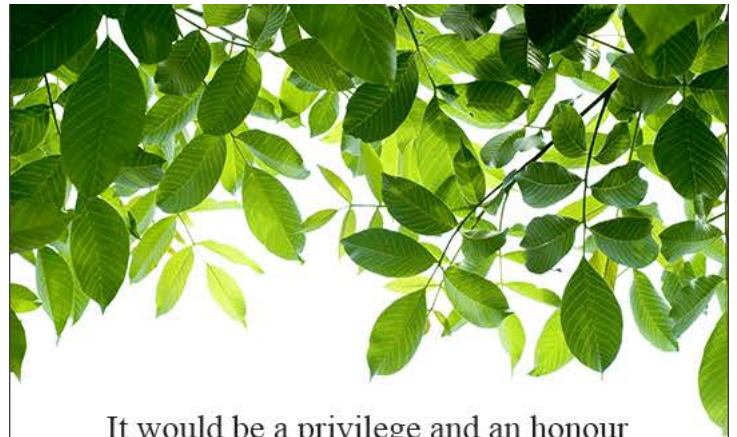


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and when the
earth shall claim your
limbs then you shall
truly dance...



Words to Remember

Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning.
Every poem an epitaph *T.S. Elliot*

Have you ever thought about what readings you might like for your funeral? Beautiful words that epitomise or represent your life. Imagery that once spoke to your heart and then later will speak to the hearts of those remembering you.

Or are you thinking about something meaningful to share yourself at a funeral or life celebration? How to express yourself, how to find the words to convey what someone meant to you, their quirks, their smile, and their values? Why not choose a poem or write one?

Poetry has inspired the words we have used to memorialise our dead, for centuries. A stroll around any cemetery reveals epitaphs and verse starred across gravestones old and new. Some appear to reveal the freedom death can bring:

**'And when the earth
shall claim your limbs
then you shall truly dance'**

Others announcing our impermanence as humans and adoration for one other:

**'she was but as a smile
which glistens in a tear
seen but a little while
But. oh. how. loved. how dear!'**

Overall it feels like an acknowledgment of this person's existence on Earth, a way of marking them immortal in words.

Poetry is not only found where we lay our dead. It can form part of either a religious or non-religious funeral service in addition to music, dance, eulogies or other manner of creative expression - part of this cultural ritual of honouring.

Poetry can help serve to create a meaningful and individual celebration or reflection. The use of metaphor in poetry gives us an opportunity for openness and connection, through sharing in an indirect way, which might feel safer during vulnerable or sensitive times. >>





>>'The Exequy' was an elegy written by Henry King (1657) who was Bishop of Chichester from 1642. He wrote:

**'Till age, or grief, or sickness must
Marry my body to that dust
It so much loves, and fill the room
My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.
Stay for me there, I will not fail
To meet thee in that hollow vale'**

Written for his deceased wife, King uses this traditional metric form, an elegy, which is a poem that shows the stages of loss. It starts with a passionate expression of sorrow, which can be likened to the searching, anger, denial and bargaining that is often present in grief.

It moves on to admiration and appreciation for the person who has died, sometimes heroising, before finally ending on words of acceptance, consolation and reunion.

Elegies differ from eulogies in that they are used to express feelings in verse rather than through story-telling, but funerals can be a space for both of these.

So why and how do we use poetry?

Words can muster powerful images and evoke emotion, so it can be cathartic to read, write and listen to poetry. It can be another element of the grieving process.

Often the language people choose in their poems can suggest that the presence of the person who has died continues in some way. >>

>>Many poems chosen for funerals conjure up the sense that the bereaved maintain some connection and relationship with the deceased.

In doing so it helps the person to adapt to their new situation, absent of this person, therefore creating meaning and recognition of love and a bond that never dies. We carry people within our hearts, always. I believe poetry does this; it can be a dialogue with the living and the dead and can allow people to live on.

The poem may even be in the first person, from the perspective of the deceased – suggesting that they know that life is not the end. An example of a popular poem that is read at funerals is ‘Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep’ by Mary Elizabeth Frye, it starts:

**‘Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there I do not sleep
I am a thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints of snow’.**

Nature is also commonly used in creating beautiful imagery that parallels the cyclical existence of life and death. We can witness these natural cycles and to think about this can somehow bring solace and normality around the subject. Our unspoken connection to the natural environment is therapeutic in itself and poetry often draws on this gem we are given, reminding us of the beauty in everything and in ourselves.

Writing your own poetry

Have you ever felt you struggle to express yourself? Some people prefer to write and feel liberated through this therapeutic and creative experience.

During bereavement, language might become more difficult and writing can be a release – I know when my grandmother died it was poetry that held me and helped me. To share something from the heart, felt important to me and it was a way of communicating that I hadn’t shared with my family, so was very moving. I sat down and tried to think about why I loved my Nan, what she was like, how she made me feel, the moments we had together. I looked deep inside and listened.>>





APR. 10 - III - 1935
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MRS. E. J. WOODS
LAWSON, MISSOURI

>>Creating our own poetry gives an opportunity to show our humanness, how our imperfections can bring humour ‘I loved the beauty of her smile, infectious, but not when she left her hair down the plughole!’ Poetry can be beautiful, honest, fun, uplifting – it can cover the whole fabric of human experience in a way that many other written forms cannot. It’s the simplicity of it that enables this, nuggets of charm.

Like the music you choose, poetry doesn’t have to be melancholic, it can be celebratory and joyful and can announce all that you have been grateful for.

Mary Oliver wrote a poem called ‘Gratitude’ which was just that, asking questions of life. Why not adapt the poem for yourself, not only to step back and appreciate life, but also to share in death? Mary Oliver asks:

**What did you notice?
What did you hear?
When did you admire?
What astonished you?
What would you like to see again?
What was most tender?
What was most wonderful?
What did you think was happening?**

I feel there is a misconception around poetry always needing to be threaded with technicalities. Anyone can be a poet if they speak from the heart – don’t get distracted by structure, rhyme, musicality. Honesty is the key. There’s nothing more beautiful. In the shared human experience of loss words can bring comfort.

Article by Sam







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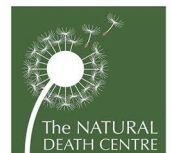
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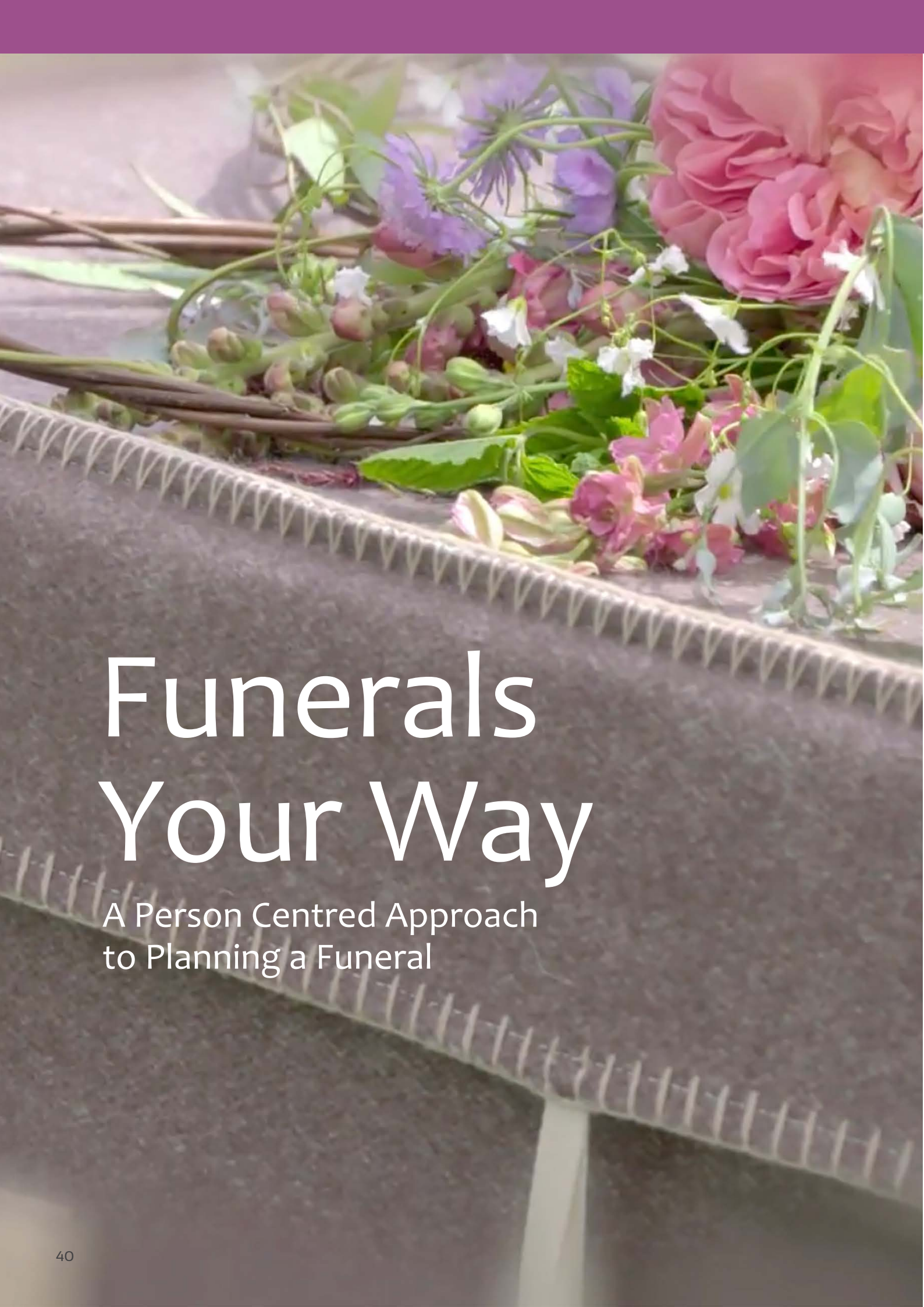


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I became a funeral director because I believe that funerals are a very important opportunity for people to gain a growing acceptance of their loss, and to set the tone for a more positive bereavement.

Everyone we support has different needs that could potentially be met during the funeral arrangement process or by the funeral itself. As a funeral director, I feel our contribution is to create a space for people to understand what would be helpful for them and to support people to create the event that is right for that unique individual and their family and friends.



In May 2018, I supported a lady to arrange her father's funeral.

We met again in August 2018 because her mother had died, and she needed to plan her funeral. In conversation, she mentioned that since May she had been involved in three other funerals in other parts of the country.

She told me that she had shared what she had learnt while arranging her father funeral and had been able to empower others as a result. She also said that it was "like ripples on a pond" because the people who attended those funerals remarked how they identified with some of what they had seen and would hope to make similar choices when they were making funeral arrangements.

This conversation was the starting point for my book "Funerals Your Way – A Person Centred Approach to Planning a Funeral".

I wrote this book to share with people what is possible and to provide a step-by-step decision-making framework to make the task of articulating funeral wishes, or planning a funeral, seem accessible and help people to feel more in control.

While articulating the choices and possibilities, I was very aware that I did not want the reader to feel that there was any expectation to personalise everything or participate, engage and reflect the individual if that is not right for them. I hope that I have shared possibilities to create opportunities, not add more pressure to perform!>>

>>I hope that it helps people who would like to express their own funeral wishes or need to plan a funeral for someone who has already died. Some people find it very important to articulate their wishes and the boxes at the end of every chapter are designed to help people to write down their thoughts as they evolve.

Some people who I have met are not able to speak to anyone close to them about their funeral, and I hope that this book can help some of those people to still feel able to express their views but might not feel confident to approach a funeral director to do so.

I have also written it to be helpful for people who would like to feel more prepared because they know someone close to them is going to die soon.

Many people describe feeling out of control after someone has died and being able to gather information, understand the process and options can help to manage that.

Since the book was published in November 2018, I have received emails from people who have told me that the book made the process seem manageable, positive and allowed them to see that the funeral could be a positive and helpful event, rather than someone that they simply “need to get through”.

There seems to be a growing awareness that it is helpful to discuss our funeral wishes with those close to us and it is something that people are increasingly being encouraged to do.>>





a key driver to improving
bereavement care is
to increase public
expectation
about funerals





>>I believe that this is very difficult to do without a basic understanding of funerals, because without that you don't have the shared language to communicate with.

“What would you like for your funeral?” is a very big and intimidating question.

However, “It would be helpful for me to know how you would like your beliefs to be reflected in your funeral?” or “Do you know that you can have a funeral service almost anywhere. Do you have any thoughts about where you would like us to gather?” are softer and more likely to result in a meaningful conversation.

People who have read the book have told me that they felt more confident to ask the important questions and subsequently the burden of “not knowing” has been lifted.

Although I wrote “Funerals Your Way” to help individuals, I also hope that it may contribute to a much wider goal. Every profession should strive to evolve and improve, and I believe that a key driver to improving bereavement care is to increase public expectation about funerals. Once information about possibilities and funeral choices has been shared then people will expect person-centred, emotionally-intelligent support from funeral directors – and standards will continue to rise accordingly.

Sarah Jones
Independent Funeral Director
Full Circle Funerals

Death, dying and funerals are still very much a taboo subject. At the Natural Death Centre, we pride ourselves in giving, clear, simple, honest and impartial information with regards to death, dying and funerals. **This accessible, informative and thought-provoking little book certainly wins my vote.**

I was impressed by the way that Sarah gently leads the reader through an overwhelming labyrinth of choices, decisions and processes which families face.

Sarah's caring and thoughtful nature is evident throughout as she takes the reader on a journey of discovery, empowering and inspiring confidence with each chapter.

Dealing with death is a stressful and confusing time. Your thoughts are all over the place and I particularly like the way she encourages the reader to write down their thoughts, creating head space to think, at the end of each chapter.

The structure of the book enables the reader to dip in and out of the chapters or pick it up and put it down again when needed. It helps the reader think about their own mortality and it explains what to expect from a funeral director.

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SARAH JONES

FUNERALS YOUR WAY

The book also gives the reader a wealth of options and ideas that perhaps families would never have thought of on their own to create a unique and personalised funeral.

Anything that encourages people to think and talk more openly about death, dying and funerals is a winner. A great little book if you are organising a funeral, if you are supporting someone else, or if you want to plan your own.

So, well done Sarah!

Review by Carol Anne Waters

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*You can shed tears if
gone or you can smile because
they lived - David Hankins*



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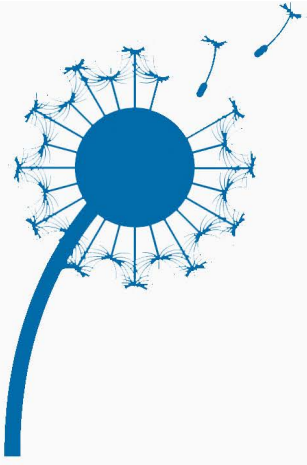
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LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

This is not a laughing matter. This is serious business. Laughter is good for your health and wellbeing. What better time to try and remember this fact, is leading up to and following a bereavement?

When guiding a family through a death and making plans for a funeral, I believe it is very important not to lose sight of the person's personality and in particular their humour.

Albeit a very sad time I encourage the memories to reflect your loved one. Not just the facts and stories, but the amusing anecdotes too. Making a funeral so personal, unique and a celebration of life.

One of the best feelings in the world
is the deep-rooted belly laugh

Laughter, in the correct circumstances, can be healing when feeling sad for many reasons, but especially when grieving.

Some people would advocate the benefits of owning a pet to enhance your pleasure in life and giving comfort. Imagine how an elderly person, living on their own, gains from the company of a small dog or cat; the physical interaction of touching and stroking its fur. Yes of course a pet is a blessing and one of many things to enhance our lives BUT Laughter is on another level.

From a small giggle to a side splitting gaffaw (what a fantastic word, as Miranda would say) GAFFAW - nearly as exciting as my favourite word spurious. One of the best feelings in the world is the deep-rooted belly laugh.

A smile starts on the lips, a grin spreads to the eyes, a chuckle comes from the belly; but a good laugh bursts forth from the soul, overflows, and bubbles all around, giving a huge sense of satisfaction.>>







>>Think about when you meet someone new, the first reaction is to shake hands. The human contact, however small or simple, can be recognition of how you are feeling. A twinkle can bring a smile and automatically enables an engaging conversation.

A smile is infectious and can bring people together, strangers or not. As soap is to the body, so laughter is to the soul, and in Psalm 42 it tells us that God has a smile on His face.

There is already so much to love about laughter, but did you know that laughter is very good for your health, in many different ways. Who would have thought it;

Lowers blood pressure

Reduces risk of stroke and heart attack. So, grab the Sunday paper, flip to the funny pages, and enjoy your laughter medicine.

Reduces stress hormone levels

A work colleague with a wicked sense of humour can make the work day a brighter place and time go by quickly and reduce stress.

Works your abs

One of the benefits of laughter is that it can help you tone your abs. When you are laughing, the muscles in your stomach expand and contract, similar to when you intentionally exercise your abs. Meanwhile, the muscles you are not using to laugh are getting an opportunity to relax. Add laughter to your ab routine and make getting a toned tummy more enjoyable and burns calories!

Improves cardiac health

Laughter is a great cardio workout. It gets your heart pumping and burns a similar amount, of calories, per hour as walking at a slow to moderate pace. So, laugh your heart into health.

Triggers the release of endorphins

Endorphins are the body's natural painkillers. By laughing, you can release endorphins, which can help ease chronic pain and make you feel good all over.>>

>>Produces a general sense of well-being

Laughter can increase your overall sense of well-being. Doctors have found that people who have a positive outlook on life tend to fight diseases better than people who tend to be more negative. So, smile, laugh, and live longer!

Boosts T-cells

T-cells are specialized immune system cells just waiting in your body for activation. When you laugh, you activate T-cells that immediately begin to help you fight off sickness. Next time you feel a cold coming on, add chuckling to your illness prevention plan. So, laughter can help you live longer.

Social benefits

Strengthens relationships - attracts others to us - enhances teamwork -helps defuse conflict and promotes group bonding.

laugh and the world
laughs with you, cry
and you cry alone

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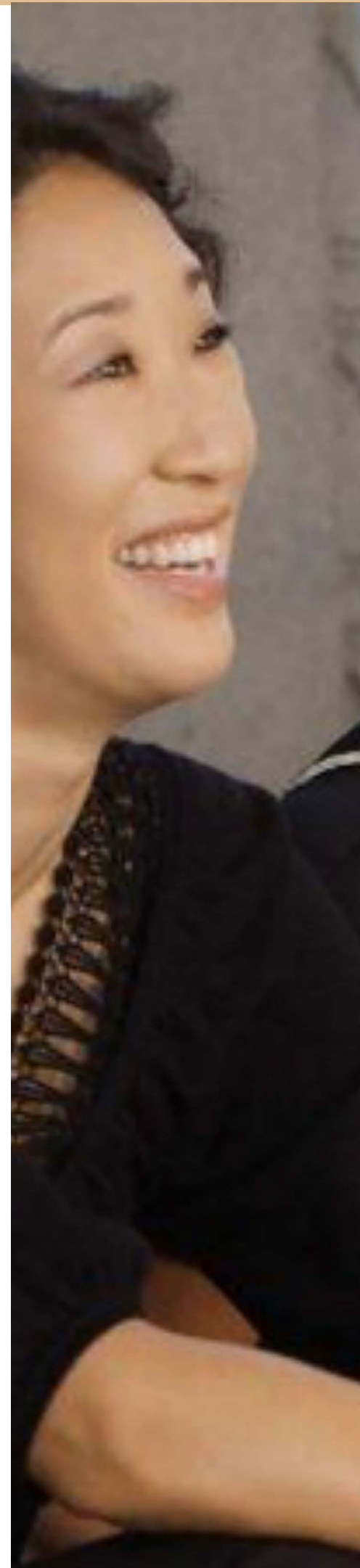
Always laugh when you can. It is cheap medicine, but as with anything, there is a time and a place, however there should be no guilt in laughing following a bereavement. Everyone is individual as to how they cope... laughter may just help.

Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone.

Article by Wendy Clarkson

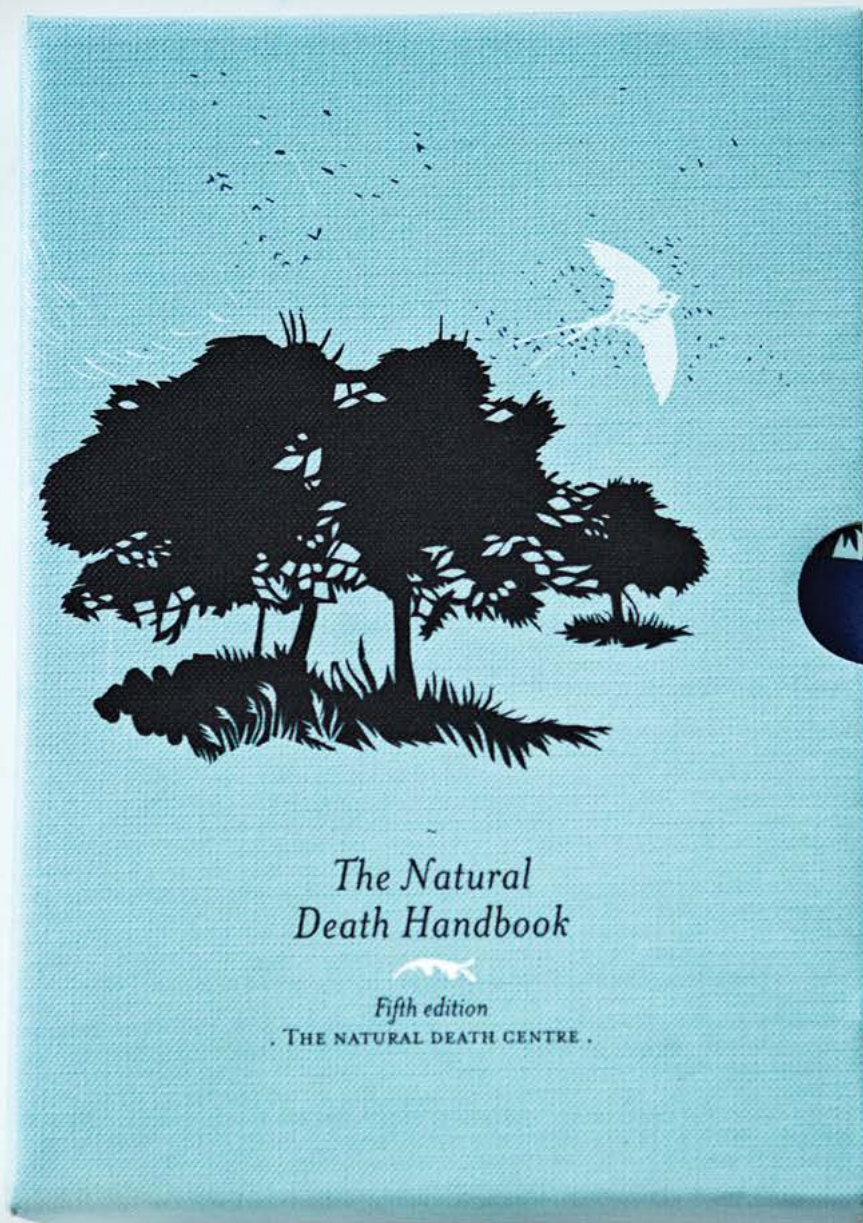
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Article by Toby Mynott at Simple Kent Funerals.



I was recently contacted by Cheryl from Canada. Her sister had died in Ashford, Kent and Cheryl wanted to arrange a simple cremation ceremony.

I met Cheryl on her arrival into the UK and during our chat she explained that it was her sister's wish that her ashes be placed in a columbarium in Paris, France, where she had previously spent many happy years.

I did some internet research and contacted several funeral directors and cemeteries in Paris. They all said pretty much the same thing - that columbarium niches cost upwards of €1,000 for a 30-year concession (shorter-length concessions available too) and that according to regulations, only residents of Paris can buy a columbarium niche in a cemetery.

In order to fulfil her sister's wishes Cheryl is considering taking up residency in Paris, which means living there for a minimum of 183 days or 6 months. In the meantime we are looking after Cheryl's sister's ashes.

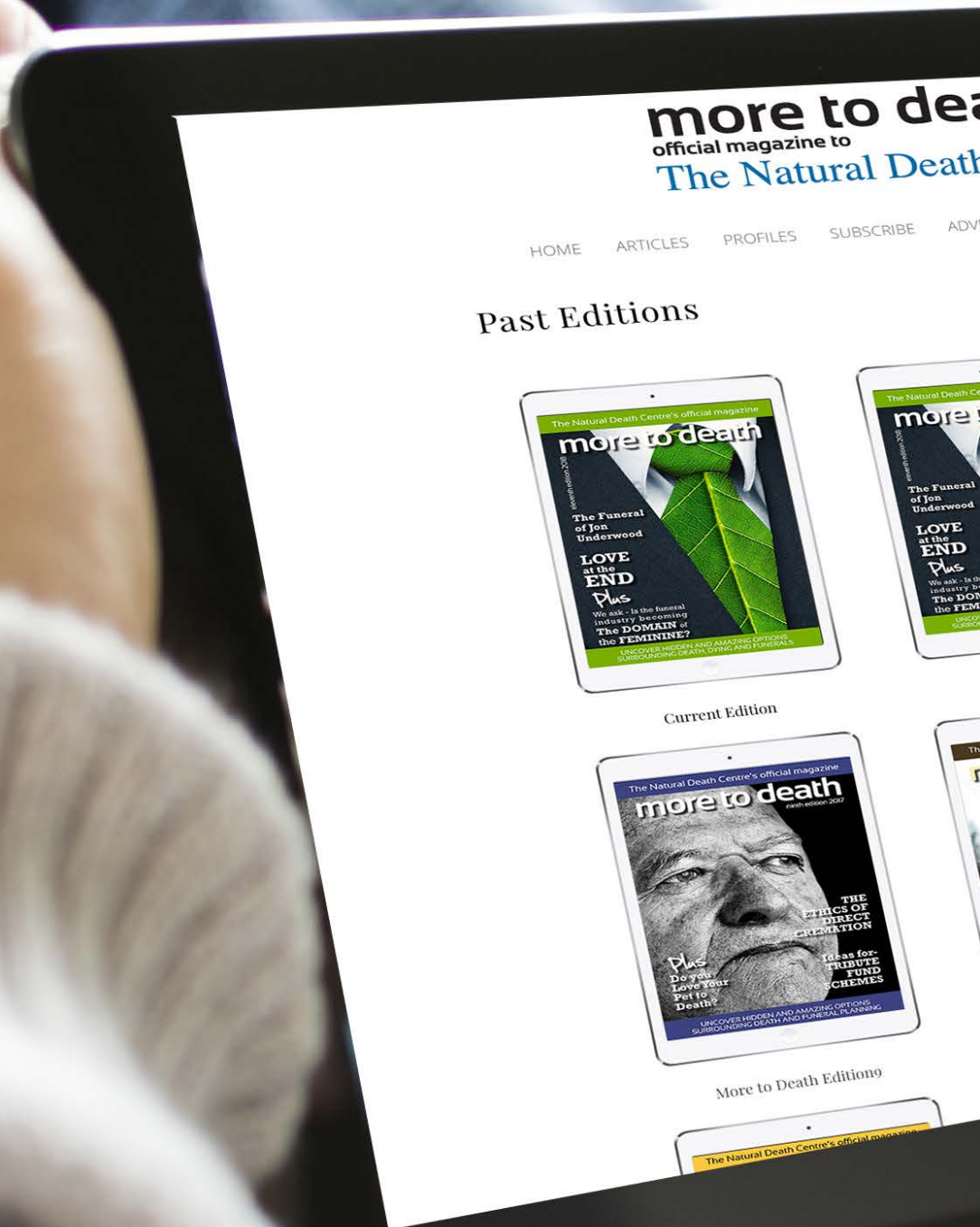


TRAVELLING with Ashes

I also did some internet research on travelling abroad with ashes and these are the key things I found:

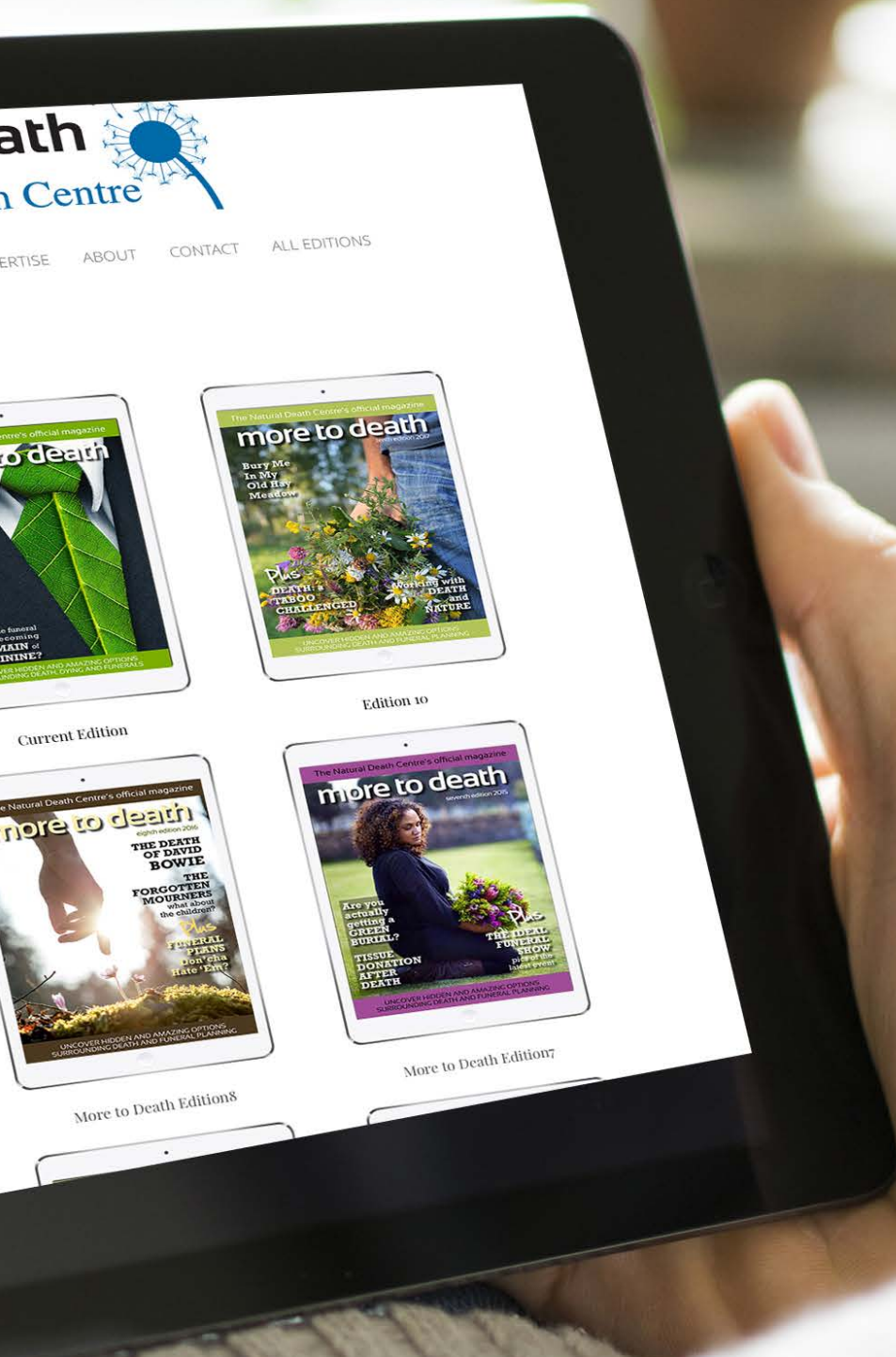
- take the death certificate and
- the certificate of cremation and
- it's best to travel with a document from the funeral director or the crematorium confirming the urn only contains the ashes of the person who has died
- have proof of relationship with the person who's ashes you are transporting
- contact the trainline or airline to ask what their guidelines are
- the urn will be x-rayed so don't use a metal container
- you may need to declare the ashes at Customs with the paperwork above
- arrive early to allow time for security checks
- to double-check, contact the embassy or high commission of the country you are going to and ask what their requirements are.

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Funeral Tributes beauty or a waste?

As a civil funeral celebrant, I find the funeral industry very interesting. The way that death is a taboo subject and my growing awareness of the restraints that most people seem to feel when they are touched by death. I enjoy making a difference and pride myself in supporting families through a very sad and difficult time. Holding families by the hand and helping them navigate the many paths required to craft and create a highly personalised and dignified funeral ceremony. I am getting frustrated and find it quite ironic that families who struggle the most to pay their funeral bill, chose to say goodbye with beautiful and excessively expensive floral tributes.

In the main, it is a challenging time for families when dealing with death and I totally agree that beautiful fresh flowers can be the perfect way to create a personalised tribute. Offering a sense of comfort and for some, floral tributes are the ultimate way to say goodbye.

Given my experiences with families and funeral flowers, I have changed my view point entirely. Harsh as it may seem flowers die, they are very expensive and largely due to global transportation of flowers, they have a large carbon footprint. To some of the families I have worked with flowers can be seen as a burden, at a time, when frankly they just don't need another one... more importantly, I have discovered that flowers are an utter waste... literally!

That said, I would hate to see no flowers at a funeral and I totally promote and support the right for families to have a choice. However, I actively try to inspire families to be mindful of the environment when choosing their floral tributes. >>



>>More importantly, I encourage them to think about what they would like to do with their flowers after the funeral ceremony has ended. It is news to most of my families that their beautiful expensive floral tributes are destined for the bin.

There are over 600.000 deaths a year in the U.K. so it is reasonable to assume that there are also 600.000 funerals. How people choose to remember a life is changing and being mindful about flower tributes can have, surprisingly, a significant impact. Arguably, how we care for the environment is fast becoming an important aspect of all decisions we make, especially as the decisions made today affect our future generations.

everyone needs to reduce their carbon footprint and being dead doesn't mean it doesn't apply

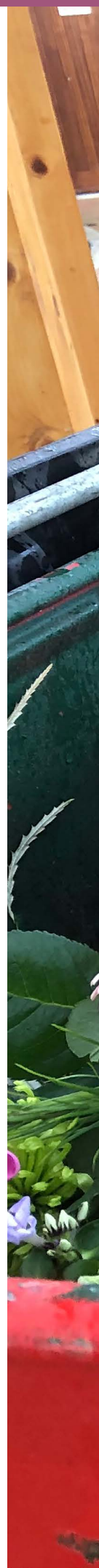
I think it is fair to say that more and more people are starting to reflect on how they want to be remembered and how, in death, they can encourage consideration for the environment. The fact is, everyone needs to reduce their carbon footprint and being dead doesn't mean it doesn't apply.

I hope this article will highlight and create awareness about what happens to most of the beautiful floral tributes following a funeral when everyone has gone. If this article encourages people to make responsible decisions... it will have been worth writing it.

At a graveside, if visited, flowers can be enjoyed for all to see until they completely lose their beauty, after which they are removed by cemetery staff. However, up to 70% of all funerals in the UK are held at crematoriums and within 24-48 hours, floral tributes, still in their full beauty are binned! Sadly, all floral tributes attend a funeral of their own making and becoming part of a mass grave that gets dumped in a commercial waste bin, to be transported on their final journey to landfill.

During my research for this article I spoke with crematoria staff and they all agreed that floral tributes, although beautiful, are such an expensive waste! It transpires that crematoriums do not use garden waste bins neither do they have the resources, manpower or time to recycle any of the parts that floral tributes contain.

This ultimately means that thousands of all non-biodegradable parts used to create these floral masterpieces like florist foam, plastics forms, ribbon and cellophane go directly to landfill and will remain on our planet, polluting our environment for an undetermined number of years to come.>>









>>Being mindful about our choices, especially in death, about the products we use and how we dispose of them may seem to you like insignificant actions but theoretically, 600.000 small actions could make a huge difference to our island.

There is so much waste when it comes to floral tributes at funerals... it is criminal. Even when families request no flowers or family flowers only, attendees feel the need to bring or send a floral tribute of some kind.

Usually there are family flowers, mourner's flowers, coffin sprays, wreaths, letters that spell out MUM, DAD, NAN etc, simple basket designs, cushions, crosses, single stems and lets not get started on the individually commissioned displays like football shirts, golf holes or motorbikes.

There are several ways in which families can take steps to ensure that their beautiful floral tributes are environmentally friendly and some are listed below:

- Use a florist who source locally grown stems.
- Use a florist who source their flowers from responsible farming methods i.e. where flowers are grown where possible, ensuring no negative impacts affect the integrity of the environment.
- Use a florist who only buys what they are going to sell or at least checks out if their supplier donates spare stems to hospices, care homes or a community placement.
- Ensure only biodegradable and sustainable materials are used in the creation of your floral tribute like moss, willow and a mixture of foliage.
- Chose a natural arrangement and avoid the traditional use of floral foam.
- Ask your florist to reduce their use of plastics and cellophane wrapping, use natural materials instead like hessian bows.
- Ask for donations to a charity instead of floral tributes.
- Ask for single stemmed floral tributes.
- Share one big tribute from the family instead of lots of tributes.
- Ask your florist to use flowers that are in season.
- Discuss with your florist how the flowers within your tribute could be reused e.g. made into individual posies following the ceremony and displayed at home.
- Use foraged flowers or flowers cut from a keen gardener's garden... what better tribute could there be?
- Go DIY and create a tribute from wild flowers.

If we've got to go...
and go we all must...
why not go green?

There are also practical things you can do to show your support to the family and honour the life of someone who has died:

- Write your tribute in a letter or a card
- Visit the bereaved family or take them out for a coffee.
- Listen to the bereaved family and give them the space they need to grieve.
- Pop by unexpectedly, especially when everyday life continues
- Use your culinary skills to create a feast
- Take your floral tribute home and enjoy its beauty.
- Take your tribute home and recycle the components so they do not all land up in landfill.

I am definitely not saying that flowers should be banned from funerals, far from it. What I am saying is we should all be mindful to make responsible choices when it comes to floral tributes.

Be bold ask florists how your beautiful and heartfelt, chosen floral tributes can be made more environmentally friendly and be less wasteful.

If we've got to go...and go we all must... why not go green!?

By Carol Anne Waters

Editor,
More to Death
Civil Celebrant
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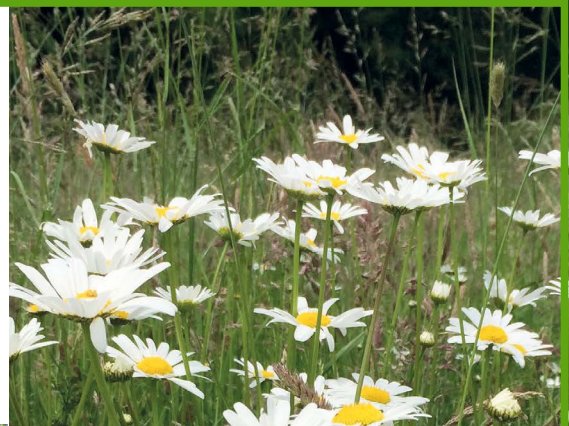
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On Thin Ice?

Cracking plans to freeze-dry corpses

For nearly two decades many people the world over have been hopeful that freezing, breaking-up and drying of human corpses will become available as an alternative to current cremation and burial methods.

Some corpses have been stored for many years without a funeral, in freezers across Sweden, in expectation of this new method. Yet still the only publicly visible signs of this concept, called Promession, are a website, a Facebook page, some computer animated videos on Youtube an online advert for franchises and several Promessa representatives around the world.

For nearly two decades a Swedish biologist, Susanne Wiigh-Masak, has been promoting this new form of body disposal, Promession, as a gentle, ethical and greener alternative to current burial and cremation methods. The Church cemetery in the small Swedish town of Jonkoping hoped to be the first in the world to offer it.

Many people were convinced of its imminent availability and some wrote in their wills that they would like to be “promessed” if the process was available when they died.

In Sweden, at that time, people had to be buried or cremated within two months. Ms Wiigh-Masak, along with the relatives of the deceased, managed to get a special dispensation to delay the burial or cremation of a dozen Swedes who had wished for Promession in their wills. Their corpses remained in deep freezers across the country for several years.

With Promession still not available the legal dispensation permitting the delay to funerals was withdrawn. Many of the relatives continued to want the corpses to remain frozen.

As a result, several of them had to be buried or cremated against their distressed families' wishes.>>

Thun

ICE

>>So, what is this process that so many have longed for?

Descriptions of it vary. *This is the version described in the advert on a website called Start-upmatcher.com which is currently promoting franchises for Promessa:*

The body enters the “Promator”, where it is sprayed with liquid nitrogen to make it very cold and brittle. Vibrations – like mobile phone vibrations - make it disintegrate into tiny pieces. All “foreign bodies” – dental fillings, pacemakers, hip replacements etc are then automatically removed. A vacuum chamber then removes water from the frozen pieces through evaporation.

The dry “promains” are either then composted rapidly in a shallow grave or have a very short cremation in a compact cremator. Everything inside the promator is automated and not touched by human hands.

The idea still has fans. The Promessa Facebook page claims that there are over 4,000 people in 98 countries who have signed up as “Promessa friends”. The concept receives media attention from time to time all over the world – mostly positive. However, many more negative news articles were generated in Swedish during the years that Jonkoping was trying to obtain a promator.

One of these articles, in the Sydvenskan on 26 January 2014, *Har tar resan slut for 3 av 4*, provides an interesting perspective on those years.

It recounts how, despite the Jonkoping’s cemetery committee strong desire to have a promator, new conventional cremators were eventually installed instead.>>





NITROGEN



Susanne Wiigh-Masak
zdnet.com

“for the body to compost to soil,
it is essential for the body to be
in pieces, not whole”

>>The story commences at the beginning of this century. Here are some extracts:

When in 2001 Lennart Angselius, former cemetery manager in Jönköping, heard about Promession, he immediately became very interested. Promessa Organic AB had applied for a patent in 2000. Several other cemetery committees quickly reported interest.

Ingemar Petersson from the crematorium at Malmo thought it sounded like a good idea at the beginning.

The crematoria leaders met Wiigh-Mäsak who described the steps in the process.

This could not work, quickly claimed several biologists, physicists and physicians. The anatomy professor Bengt Johansson at Sahlgrenska Academy in Gothenburg was one of those.

“A body cannot be broken by gentle shaking even after being immersed in liquid nitrogen. On the contrary, a frozen body is hard. By cooling it down to minus 196 degrees, nothing changes that changes the basic strength”.

After three meetings with Wiigh-Mäsak, the Malmö crematorium gave up in 2002.

“It had sounded good at the beginning, but we saw through it quite quickly” says Ingemar Petersson.

The cemetery manager in Jönköping, however, continued to like the idea of Promession.

“We felt a lot of mockery from the industry because we believed in promession,” said Lennart Angselius. *“But we continued.”*

“There is no basis for assessing the method” said the state funeral survey in 2009. *“As far as the investigation is possible, the situation is the same today”* the 2013 survey states.

“Only our customers need to know how it works” said Wiigh-Mäsak. She claimed that the process had been tested.

“We did that right from the start. We had small tests in 2002, individual pieces of meat from animals that we made lab tests. In 2003, we started working on adult pigs which had died naturally. We processed a large number of pigs in a full scale plant weighing six tons. It was set up in Stockholm.”

“The test facility worked like a prototype. There we had an opportunity to show it to our former customer, who was Jönköping.”

“This is not true,” says Lennart Angselius. *“We never saw a working plant.”*

“We got to see drawings. We visited an industry in Uddevalla where they explained how they would build up such things. We went to Stockholm and met many people.”



ecofuneral.es

Ingemar Petersson recalls an attempt by Promessa to vibrate pieces of frozen pork. *“It was a few years later. We sent a representative who later reported that it was a flop. It would never work.”*

Finally, Jönköping’s cemetery manager gave up the idea. *“Because a product did not arrive, we could not get any further. So, the church decided to build a new crematorium”* said Lennart Angselius.

What is most surprising is how promession could get so far, says Ingemar Petersson.

“There was no substance in it. But those who tried to explain this in the media did not succeed in reaching many, and therefore she has been able to push it forward.”

During these years of indecision, the frozen corpses waited.

On 29 February 2012 the Sydsvenkan published an article *“Tvangsbegravning avbrotts efter tulmut”*, which points towards the distress that was caused to the families involved.

“Forced burial was interrupted after turmoil. In Sweden there are twelve deceased persons who are frozen while waiting for a freeze-drying funeral. Wiigh-Mäsak acts as agent for all.

In Linköping, a case was decided last year. The Social Council made a decision on a compulsory funeral. The funeral commenced on the specified date, but the

man's widow came to the scene and some turmoil occurred.

“She was very upset and walked in. It was a desperate situation and I made the decision to cancel the funeral. It did not feel worthwhile” says Gunnar Forsberg, Griftegårdschef in Linköping.

The man was put back in the freezer. His relatives have applied for a further delay to the funeral but have been refused. Griftegårdschefen is now waiting for decisions from the municipality.

In Helsingborg, a similar situation occurred last year. The relatives chose to accept the decision and the man was buried.”

Two frozen corpses still remained in Jonkoping in early 2016. This was reported in the Jonkopings Posten on 25 January 2016 Tva nedfrysta kroppar kvar.

It explains that the bodies had been kept for ten years but Promessa Organic AB which had gone bankrupt the previous year. Magnus Berggren, the cemetery manager, did not know when the two bodies would leave the crematorium at Jonkoping.

Other papers report that Wiigh-Masak and her husband also went personally bankrupt in 2015. Despite all these problems, Wiigh-Masak appears to remain determined to promote the concept overseas.

In the UK, Promession has received recent mention in a recent Law Commission report, parliamentary questions reported in Hansard and on the website of Orbitas Bereavement Services, a company owned by Cheshire East Council.

According to the Promessa website, since March 2017 five Promessa representatives have been recruited in the US, a partner in Spain, an education partner in the Netherlands, and masterclasses have been attended by people from countries including Norway and the UK.

More details are given in the news section on the website www.promessa.se which also indirectly gives a taste of Susanne's world travels in recent years.

In June 2017, she carried out an interview for the Austrian Macher Report podcasts. During this she still claims that 5mm vibrations are used which can scarcely be seen and cause the frozen body to fall apart.

Also, she says that for the body to compost to soil, it is essential for the body to be in pieces, not whole; in her words, promession mimics nature as in the past carnivores would have broken up the body and spread it around; in reality, surely they would have eaten the flesh and then the animal feces would have composted over time.

The drying stage is described as an extra step “to give time” as it stops the body decomposing until the point it is put into the soil and rainwater moistens it again. Towards the end of the interview, the point is made by Susanne that no-one will place an order without there being a facility where the first promession can be seen; she says more money is needed for this.

It would be intriguing to see what happened if anyone attempted to place an order.>>

>>We can only guess what fragmented dehydrated human would look like. This photo shows freeze-dried diced beef. It contains only the lean muscle of the cow. A whole human freeze-dried in small pieces would include all the other different types of tissue and organs of which we are comprised – skin, bone, hair, brain, spinal cord, gut etc.



We can only guess what fragmented dehydrated human would look like

The body is around 70% water so the total volume would be less than half that of the original corpse. In order to compost, it would need to be rehydrated thus taking up more space again.

The NDC's Rosie challenged Susanne on the phone asking her is she worried that like the 'brains' behind Ecolation, she too would be chased through the courts? (there are multi million dollar law suits pending from disgruntled US investors in the Irish company's freeze drying 'process'). She claims to sleep very well and that Ecolation just copied her idea!

She also feels no responsibility for the upset caused to the in-limbo families and feels that there is nothing wrong with bodies being frozen for years. Asked if it was time to retire – she is in her sixties – she said that her work is too important and that she will continue to educate the world about her improved method of body disposal.

WHY?

Personally Rosie cannot see why anyone would want to process a body in any way and then have to pay for the remains to be buried anyway. Working in the real world and with her knowledge of natural history she also worries that rotting, rehydrated, fragmented bodies, in shallow graves, will surely just present a bite-sized smorgasbord for rats.





Stuck with Ashes

by Rosie Inman-Cook



**So, the funeral is over.
The bill is paid.
Calls and visits have stopped.**

Soon after this point, for some, it starts up all over again. “Here are the ashes, off you toddle”.

There are reportedly over 400,000 sets of unclaimed ashes sitting in store rooms and on shelves at funeral directors. The reasons why they are uncollected seem varied.

Is it because families cannot agree on what to do with them? Because they cannot face another expense? Because they don't care what happens to them? Because they are procrastinating over a final goodbye? Have they forgotten? Do they believe that they are not actually getting the right ashes back (a common belief) and that they are just a mix of that day's cremations?

How many more sets are on mantelpieces or in the bottom of wardrobes? We know many of these are kept as the spouse or relative wants their remains to be reunited, and possibly buried together when their time comes.>>

>>I recently took a call on our helpline regarding an unexpected bill of over £1,500 that an undertaker is trying to charge for storage!! They won't release them till it's paid and the longer they are left the higher the bill. I know that the industry has raised the issue of storing ashes but I never realised their solution was to charge or even that they planned to charge so much. Have the families been warned? Is this common practice? The word ransom comes to mind!

So many questions.

I gave a talk recently, after which a lady approached me and confessed that somehow in the midst of her grief she had either not absorbed or indeed, as she suspected, not been told about this re-emergence of her mother. She had said her goodbyes at the crematorium and thought that they would automatically dispose of the ashes. The funeral director's call had completely caught her by surprise and she was actually a bit peeved that the undertaker had not prepared her for this second round.

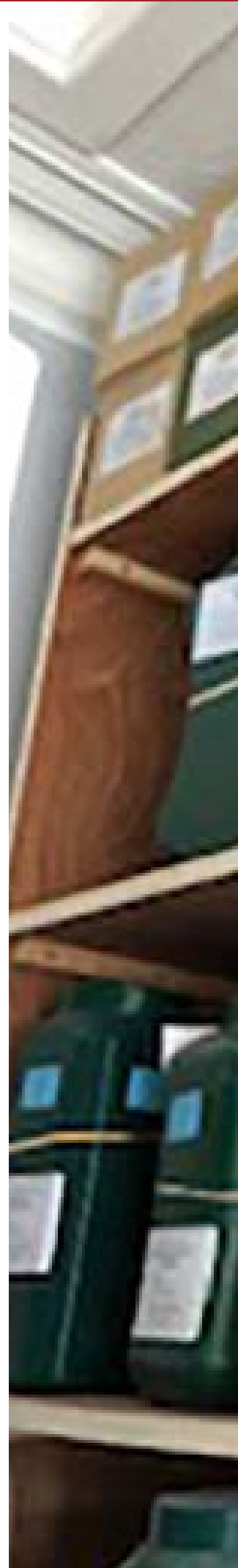
the NDC has launched a new service... the Cremated Remains Information Bureau

I suspect that when many families are sat at the undertakers making arrangements, "Will it be a burial or cremation?" and prices are discussed the undertaker fails to mention that the generally, slightly cheaper option of cremation does not include subsequent costs associated with the final placement of ashes.

This incurs a second disbursement fee which means that if you want to place the ashes somewhere like a cemetery rather than scattering them to the wind, the decision to cremate can actually work out more expensive than if there had just been a burial in the first place.

With all this in mind the NDC has launched a new service and website the Cremated Remains Information Bureau or CRIB.

It explains the laws surrounding disposal of ashes and inspires families with responsible and positive options; as well as a few 'creative' ones.>>







At a l

Have a look at our charity's

Plant a Tree • Scatter in a V

Make a Diamond

No sales, just

www.crib-ndc.org



Loss?

thought provoking website.

Wood • Bury in a Meadow

• Fire into Space

suggestions!

g • 01962 712690

Frequent calls to our helpline are from families who have decided that they like the idea of burying their relative's ashes somewhere, and then planting a tree on top. Their local council can't help, the local stately home won't help nor will the golf course. They haven't a suitable garden and are basically stumped.

To readers of this magazine the answer might seem obvious, "Go to a natural burial ground". However, to many people, especially families who have cremated for three generations or more, the whole concept and existence of natural burial is just not on their radar.

Most of the natural burial grounds accept ashes for burial either around existing trees or under a dedicated memorial planting. With the latter option, the family pay a bit more for a whole burial plot, one big enough to support its own tree. This has the added advantage that the family can bury several sets of ashes over the coming years, in effect creating their own family plot... friends accepted.

the answer might seem obvious, go to a natural burial ground..

With all the worldly worry about deforestation and climate change, the opportunity to plant a tree as a positive living legacy is for many, a no brainer. Plus, the family have somewhere peaceful, attractive and positive to visit.

If you know someone who is struggling to find the perfect resting place for some ashes, please sign post them to www.crib-ndc.org

If you are a funeral director sitting on dozens of urns please give us a call and we can send you some leaflets to forward to your families or you could print off some from the image/link below.

Rosie Inman-Cook
Manager

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beautiful · personal · affordable

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Spring Tour & Cemetery Inspections



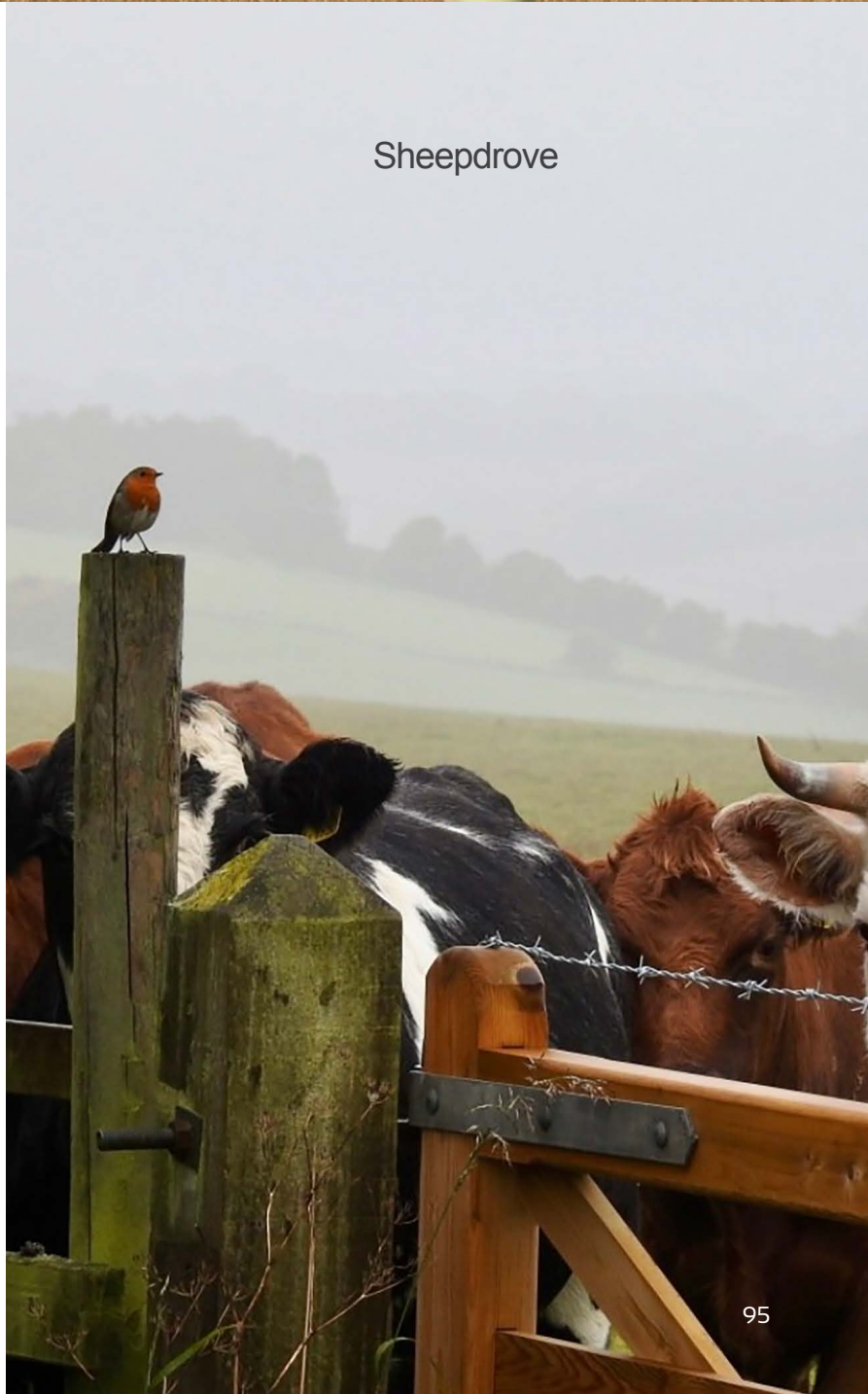


Westmill

In March, after chairing a really vibrant and well attended meeting of natural burial ground managers in Herefordshire, I was charged with continuing my inspections of members' sites.

I popped in to see Westmill near Swindon and Sheepdrove near Lambourn on my way up. Both passed muster and are loved and cared for by their farming managers/owners. Both are open sites within arable settings where the new tree planting is really getting hold.

Wow, Herefordshire is beautiful, I have a real thing for its black and white timber-framed houses, living in one in Kent as a child has something to do with it, I suppose. >>

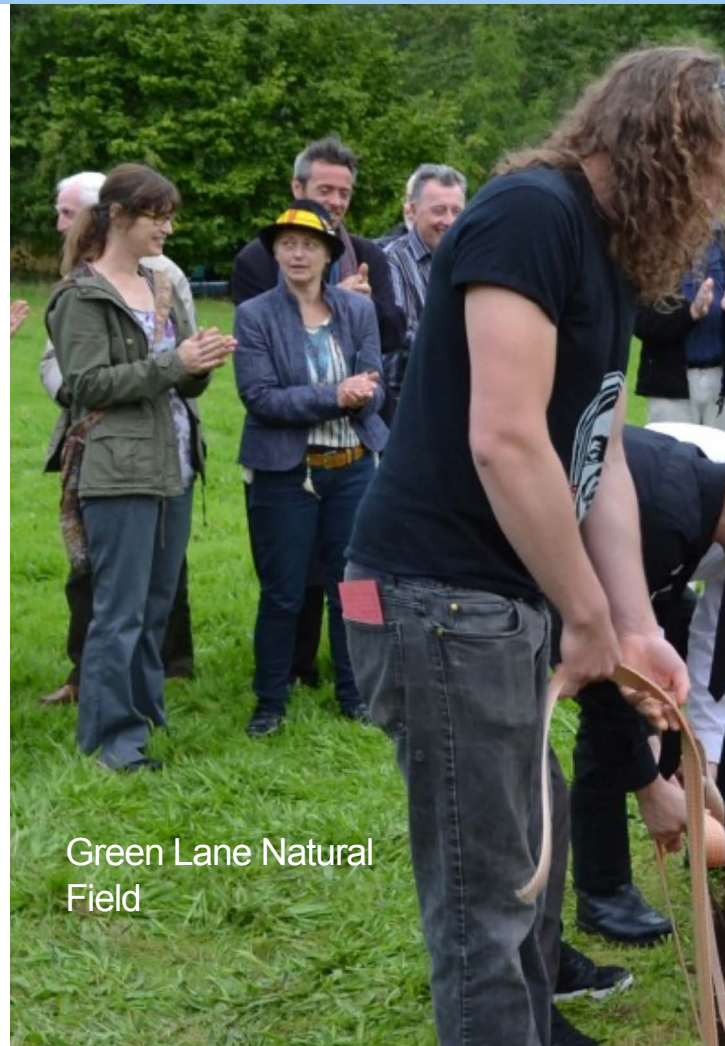


Sheepdrove

Our host was Humber Woodland of Remembrance who for the second year running, have won the People's award - Best in the West. A well-kept (strict) site with stringent planting policies and no clutter. Diane tells me that recent climatic conditions have really encouraged Spanish Hyacinths to proliferate, causing her a huge headache as they will easily cross pollinate with our more delicate, native bluebell. She is sure that some plant nurseries have been selling far-from-pure bulbs to her families. A season of plucking and rooting up for her this year then!

From Leominster I headed north to Westhope near Craven Arms. Fine weather and unbroken sunshine accompanied me to my meeting with Andy and his daughter Faye. The site was much as it was when I visited a few years back. Quiet and tucked away, full of daff's and apple blossom. We discussed expanding into a neighbouring field and Andy showed me the grave marking, engraved engineering bricks which he is teaching Faye to make, she professes to be better with a chainsaw than an angle grinder.

From there I travelled west over the border to Montgomery to see the experienced hands of Eira and Ifor Humphreys. They must have one of the steepest sites in the UK, their burial field rises high on one side affording fabulous views of the upper reaches of the severn valley. Theirs is one of the few sites that retains an agricultural use, it is simply cut for hay every year. Consequently, a casual observer would have no idea that there are so many folk resting in that peaceful part of Powys.



Green Lane Natural Field



Fenns Meadow



GREEN LANE BURIAL FIELD
THE NATURAL CHOICE

South to my last destination for the day and a bed for the night at one of the UK's newest sites, Hay Meadow, near Llandrinod Wells. Richard and Sarah have established a generous sized offering tucked into a high, hidden valley in the Black mountains.

It was Lambing time and some of the ewes were out with their new, energetic, pranking offspring.

The weather held and the blue skies, mountains, lambs and the green of the burial field were wonderfully refreshing. They have invested a lot of time, love and money into this site. A splendid new compost loo, picnic benches and landscaped car park have served a few local families lucky enough to discover this gem.

The next leg was my longest as I headed North West through Snowdonia. Arriving in Pwllheli at Bodhuan Sanctuary Wood's office to discover that Bella, the founder, had been admitted to hospital. I was however shown the ropes and given a tour of the site. A rarity, as natural burial sites go, this is one of only half a dozen in the UK that are actually set within existing, mature woodland. A very wild site, probably one of the most natural I have seen. A network of paths wind through and around the trees and ferns – I'm glad I'm not their grave digger!

Then east, back into England to find my bed at Fenns Meadow in Shropshire. Tasteful holiday cottages converted from the original farm steading, another diversification farmers James and Emma have undertaken.>>

>>Breakfast, then a look at all their paperwork whilst avoiding the attentions of their large Labrador who joined us for a stroll to the burial ground. I suppose the best way to describe this one is burial in a set-aside strip. They are just starting the second row of burials along the edge of an old hedge line, lots of wildflowers coming through. This is my preferred way of doing things. Adding to the field border and widening a wildlife corridor with an old hedge at its centre.

North to Swanlow Park in Cheshire, still dry but less sunny. Alan and daughter Jade Plumbly have established quite an unusual offering. I think they are the only private operators who have a conventional cemetery with its rows of gravestones with associated bling, a cremated remains memorial garden, again with bling. Then, to the rear a splendid new wood that is such a contrast and is so very pretty. Granted I was seeing it full with blossom and its new, spring colours but I was really surprised how idyllic and established it was. Unusual in that they allow small gravestones but as they are laid out radially around the trees it didn't feel regimented, more meandering.

Getting onto the M6 I sped north passing counties, where there is unfortunately no natural burial provision, up to the Lancs, Cumbria border and Dalton Woodland Burial Ground near Burton in Kendal. A very discreet wooded site where the trees seem to be wearing boots of moss. A rigorously managed site that sits quietly within what feels like quite enchanted woodland. Surprisingly silent considering it is just a few minutes from the motorway.



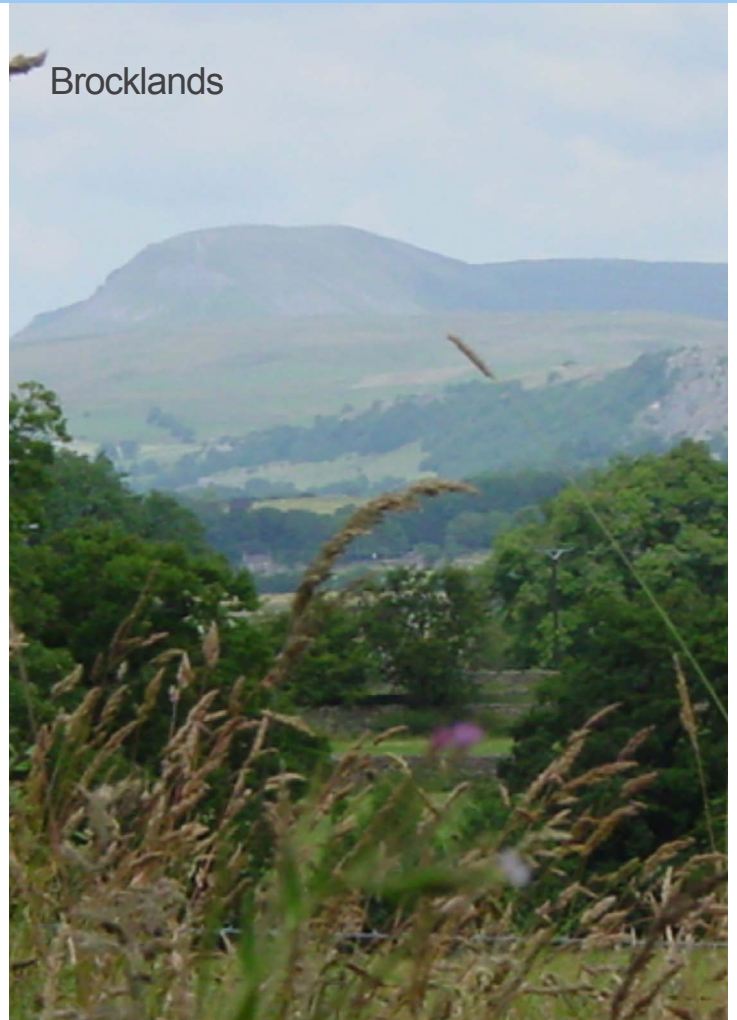
Humber Woodland

Writing now I am realising that this really was quite a tour, no wonder it took me several days to recover! And I still had 4 to go!

On the back lane out of Dalton I headed South East into Yorkshire, to Brocklands near Settle.

Staying in the rambling Georgian farmhouse was very welcome and in the morning a look over Chris's paperwork and records then down his grand, tree lined drive to the burial ground. Like many of the longer established sites I am always delighted to see how big the memorial trees have become in just twenty years. Lots of cowslips and a fine view towards Pen-y-Ghent. A big sky here second only in terms of scale to the huge views at Higher Ground Meadow in Dorset.

Half an hour further into Yorkshire I met up with new managers at Tarn Moor near Skipton. It is so good to see new, young blood coming into natural burial management. Becky and Chris are still finding their feet and seeing what improvements they can bring. >>



Brocklands



Tarn Moor



Locko Park

Dalton Woodland



>>At the entrance stand some huge monoliths which are engraved with the names of the buried. Chris is a mason and it was through his engraving connection that this energetic couple have come to the site.

Eastward towards York and the parish cemetery at Rufforth which is run with love and great detail by the clerk and enthusiastic villager Helen. A charming, cosy and sheltered site with lots of birdlife. As expected, the record keeping is precise.

South to Doncaster or Donny as my old Mum calls her home town. A comfy night and excellent supper at Owston Hall hotel, also owned by Jamie and Eleanor, adjacent to their Meadow cemetery.

A fairly new site so the landscaping is still taking shape. A good size, with a wooded backdrop on one side. Near a busy road so that landscaping will come into its own in a few years.

Crossing back westward to Derby and Locko Park I dropped in to see Farmer Rob in Barnsley who wanted me to have a look at the potential of one of his fields. Disappointingly it was too near the M1 which would have been a road too far for grieving families to tolerate. He has since emailed me a more promising location to look at. Met up with Tracie in the Locko estate office did all the necessary checks and then drove out of the back of the estate up to the burial ground.



Situated behind a country pub and with great views it is not surprising that the uptake has been good at this, another, relatively new site. They have a small tumbled down, brick, barn near the entrance which Tracie has plans to upgrade into a ceremony space and office. Just the job.

I was knackered and still had 150 miles to go to get home. All in a week's work!

My next round will be the East Midlands then the North East and Scotland. At that point I will have finished, for this round of inspections anyway – its only taken me two years!

What a privilege it is to get to see all these stunning places and meet with such thoughtful, dedicated and caring folk.

Britain and our natural burial sites are so beautiful and I am pleased to report that house-keeping at our members' sites is all in order. They are safe and organised refuges for the public and wildlife alike.

**Article by Rosie Inman-Cook
Manager
Natural Death Centre**

a death brings out the best and the worst in everyone

Claiming the Dead

What makes us human? This is a question that has always fascinated philosophers and psychologists, since we as a species first became self-aware, and it is often around the most intense and universal experiences we face that we can most clearly see patterns of behaviour that we share.

Our rituals around death and dying may be hugely varied throughout the world, and have been influenced by social culture, cognitive history and the dominant religion, but what can we learn about ourselves from the more innate instincts and emotions we feel that can be seen around the time of death? Many of these come right to the fore around the time that someone dies, and as one wise old funeral director told me, when I first started in the business, a death brings out the best and the worst in everyone.

We are deeply connected to each other as social creatures. Our sense of self, who we are and what meanings life holds for us are all informed by our personal relations in all forms.

We become the reflection we are in the eyes of another, a feedback system so profound that our whole identity can hinge not on who we are but how we are seen.

families have torn
each other apart
over possessions and
the smallest of
meaningful items

The total and final absence of the person as a reference point in our lives means that the process of grieving is not only for whom we have lost, but what we have lost in them. A part of us dies with that person and as humans who not only resist change, but also fear pain and loss, a particular kind of 'ownership' or 'repossession' of the person who has died comes about in not just literal but metaphorical ways too.

You will all have heard stories of fighting about money and inheritance when someone dies, often between siblings, and second families - times when families have torn each other apart over possessions and the smallest of meaningful items and this can create long term separations, court battles and exclusion of family members. >>





>>Never pretty and deeply upsetting, these rifts cause huge harm as people close ranks and exhibit the most fundamental and primitive human instincts—those of tribalism and rights of territory. These fights can also develop over the details of the funeral ceremony; the music, who speaks, what to say and the amount of religious content to be used, as people seek ownership over the process. Often the person who has been around the least in the months or years before the death, becomes the loudest voice...covering their guilt with a present opportunity to make up for it in organising the funeral.

This, and many other kinds of guilt can be shunted into an overpowering sense of owing something to the dead...how much to spend, what kind of coffin they should have and doing right by the person who has died. Differences of opinion between family members can be taken incredibly personally and opposition given to decisions which are clearly just taken to spite someone else - a act of rage towards another. A funeral becomes payback time in a very real sense.

In our work, we have witnessed very distressing stories of possession and even theft of ashes, so common that crematoria now need to see proof of identification from the next of kin in order to collect them directly.

One reason for the sense of ownership that happens with mortal remains is that there is very real need we have as humans, to have some tangible remains of a person to hold on to. We do not 'get over' a loss, but rather make it a part of our present lives. Physical remains are a part of this constant reminder of what is left of a life. A sense that they mattered...and still do.

This goes against any logical examination considering that ashes are nothing more than calcium and minerals but they become a symbolic representation that not all is lost of a person, that this person can therefore be possessed, fought over and can ultimately represent the spoils of battle and evidence of victory.

differences of opinion between family members can be taken incredibly personally

But it is not just ambivalence towards other members of the family that can surface, nor a real fear of the pain of loss. We fight for the remains of a person as a way of holding on to ourselves, our very identity, and our personal and familial historical myths. We are not simply 'what we eat' but 'who we have loved'.

We had our first call from Mrs Stares when we were just about to go on holiday, but she was very keen to get things moving for the funeral for her sister, who had died during the previous week, and had no husband or children. She was quite young, just 61, and had died from cirrhosis of the liver. She was a drinker and although they had not seen much of Dannie over the last 10 years due to issues with her lifestyle, her extended family would be taking this on and wanted a lovely funeral for her, near her old home in Gloucester. Mrs Stares explained how hard the last years had been for all of them, with Dannie and her drinking, and proceeded to complain vehemently about her rather difficult friends who were already clearing out her flat, taking her things and claiming that various household items had been promised to them. >>



>>One friend in particular was being a real problem. Jane. Jane was being obstructive, Jane was taking stuff, Jane was trying to organise the funeral, Jane had moved into the flat, Jane had no rights and was really taking advantage of the situation, as she had done for many years, since meeting her after Dannie had moved to Bristol. She was after her money.

Apparently, she had also been rather a bad influence on Dannie, dragging her off on drinking sessions, with Dannie picking up the tab, as she had recently been made redundant with a large payoff. Jane had taken her for a ride and seen her vulnerability. Slowly Dannie's life had gone downhill and she had lost nearly everything by the time she died.

Mrs Stares explained that her family were stepping back in now, doing all the things they wished they had been able all those years of relative estrangement, giving Dannie love they had all felt for her, in a last act of kindness. A proper family funeral, in her home town, back where Dannie belonged. With those who knew her best.

As her tale progressed it was clear that they very much remembered Dannie as she was in her early years and told stories of a lively young woman, talented and fun, Although she had always been a bit of a party girl, she had been right at the heart of a family who loved her.

We were quite touched that the family had stepped in for Dannie and all the estrangement of the last years had been forgiven without question, and they would step up and pay for her funeral. We explained that we were away for a few days but would be on the phone if we were needed.

So far, so good.

What we were not so happy about was that Mrs Stares then announced that it was to be family only at the funeral and when it had been arranged, we were not to give out the details to anyone else.

One way of looking at who we are, our 'sense of self' is to imagine we are built of Lego bricks with a new one painstakingly added with every experience and life event to create a myriad of colours, and somehow coming together in a loose whole, a completely unique shape, composition and form every one of us. As we go through life we build a sense of ego on all these collective unique experiences and these make us who we are. Every brick is integral to the whole and holds a special place.

The very basis of these are our childhood perceptions and memories, right at the foundation. Mrs Stares shared a childhood and much of her life with her sister, and their relationship, as she saw it, was fundamental to her own sense of identity. Danny, her older sister was someone she had looked up to, and this family myth of an idyllic childhood was something Mrs Stares could now reclaim, erasing the lost years as if they never happened.

Dannie would forever be in some way the young woman she had known when the two shared everything, be seen just the way Mrs Stares wanted to remember her. A person that reflected the way that Mrs Stares imagined herself. A picture that could not be changed whatever the evidence or her very own place in things would be called into question.>>

>>At 6.30am the next day we got a call from Mrs Stares. There was a problem.

Jane had registered the death and had already asked another funeral company to organise the service. Dannie had been collected from the hospital and gone to their chapel of rest completely against the instructions of the family.

How could this have happened when Jane was not the legal Next of Kin? Mrs Stares was off to a solicitor that very morning and would fight this terrible woman every step and would have an injunction served immediately to stop whatever arrangements were being made. She was furious and on the phone for at least an hour, complaining to us that the funeral had been arranged at a Bristol Crematorium, the family had been excluded from all input and told not to get involved.

We cancelled our morning boat trip and called the other funeral director.

It turned out that Jane HAD claimed she was the next of kin, had somehow managed to register the death and collect the death certificate, and then had apparently lied on the application forms for cremation. She had told the funeral director Dannie had no interested family, and also told them she had legal proof of being next of kin with a document drawn up with Dannie and herself at a solicitor.

This poor funeral director was quite shocked, and when we told them that Mrs Stares was seeking an injunction, they agreed to cancel the arranged date for the funeral, to await further instructions.

Mrs Stares in turn, was advised she could get an injunction and the police went to see Jane to let her know.

Later that day we received a rather elated call from Mrs Stares. Jane had retreated from everything to do with the funeral and Mrs Stares was keen that we proceed with new funeral arrangements as soon as possible. We were to collect Dannie from the other funeral director and go ahead with a date in Gloucester. We decided to just come home and get on with it, feeling that justice had been served and quite triumphant that we had been able to help Mrs Stares, despite losing our holiday.


The story was actually a lot more complicated in the conversations and legal aspects than we have said here, but suffice to say, Jane was not heard from again by the family. A date was arranged for a private funeral and Mrs Stares won her battle to bring Dannie home.

When we brought Dannie back to our mortuary, we gently unwrapped her to prepare her for the coffin. We took the cover off her face and immediately our hearts sunk like a stone.

Dannie was quite masculine looking, she had very short hair, little round glasses and earrings - two Venus symbols locked together and we realised the truth of the situation in that moment.

Jane was not Dannie's 'annoying' friend... she was her partner.

**Article by Angela Ward
Funeral Director at Go Simply Funerals.
Please see advert on page 93.**

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in a firm, supportive grip. The hand on the left is wearing a grey and white striped long-sleeved shirt and a beaded bracelet. The hand on the right is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt with a floral pattern. The background is a soft, out-of-focus scene of sunlight filtering through green foliage, creating a warm and hopeful atmosphere. The text "we realised the truth of the situation in that moment" is overlaid in the upper right quadrant.

we realised the truth
of the situation
in that moment

PEOPLE'S AWARDS ANNOUNCED



ARDS

Best of

the Best

Places to Rest

2019



Here we are again! Hundreds of feedback forms have been read, reviewed and scrutinised. This year's head judge was a lady with no connection to the NDC who had no prior knowledge of any of the burial sites. Each year the judges are chosen for their complete impartiality and we make sure that they are unaware of all previous results.

She was overwhelmed with the exceptionally high standard displayed by all of the natural burial sites. The worthy winners were chosen based on the percentage of family's comments which spoke of care and empathy and also detailed the quality of the service offered by the site's staff and not the quantity of burials carried out.

All the winners demonstrated going that extra mile when it comes to the service they give to their families. Families expressed in abundance that there was nothing they could have done better!

I reiterate what Rosie stated last year 'if this could be bottled and spread throughout businesses and society in general what a wonderful, successful world we would inhabit.'>>

>>Congratulations and well done to the overall winner,
Delyse Jackaman and her team at Old Park Meadow, in the
heart of Essex between Chelmsford and Dunmow.

Congratulations and well done to the overall runner up,
Al Blake and his team at South Downs Natural Burial Site in
Hampshire.

In our book they are all winners...





Here's the rest of the results...

SOUTH EAST of BRITAIN

Winner - South Downs Natural Burial Site

Runner Up – Eden Valley Woodland Burial Ground, serving the Kent area and South London.

SOUTH WEST of BRITAIN

Winner – Atlantic Rest Natural Burial, Cornwall's newest natural burial ground at Penlow Field, Wooley near Bude.

Runner Up – Pentiddy Natural Burials, Bodmin Moor.

EAST OF BRITAIN

Winner – Old Park Meadow

Runner Up – Brightwater Green Burial Ground near the village of Owmbly, ten miles north of Lincoln.

WEST of BRITAIN

Winner – Humber Woodland of Remembrance, four miles from Leominster in Herefordshire.

Runner up – Westhope Green Burial Ground, a hidden gem in the Shropshire hills.

NORTH of BRITAIN

Winner – Brocklands Woodland Burial near Settle, North Yorkshire in the beautiful Ribble Valley.

Runner Up – Cloverly Woods of Rest in Aberdeen. Quality not quantity... keep up the good work!

the only funeral magazine
that really cares...



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www.naturaldeath.org.uk