

The Natural Death Centre's official magazine

more to death

tenth edition 2017

**Bury Me
In My
Old Hay
Meadow**

Plus

**DEATH: a
TABOO
CHALLENGED**

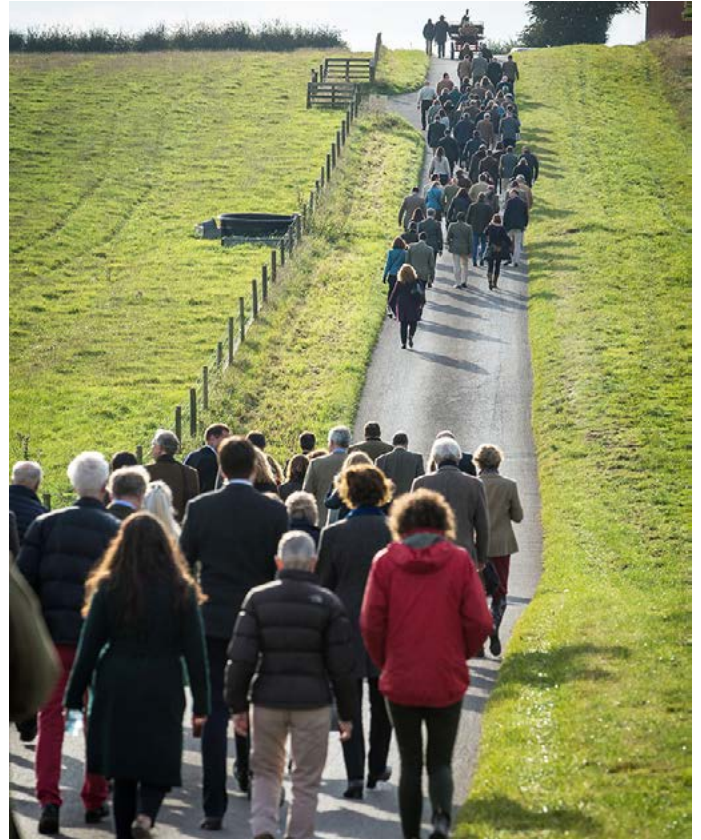
**Working with
DEATH
and
NATURE**

UNCOVER HIDDEN AND AMAZING OPTIONS
SURROUNDING DEATH AND FUNERAL PLANNING

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Editor's Comments

Heartfelt admiration have to go to Russell Davison and Ilse Fieldsend for bravely coming forward in the press this spring to talk about their decisions to look after his wife Wendy and her daughter Georgia at home in the days leading up to their funerals. They have done more to inform and empower than we could have done in years. Huge respect and thanks go out to them and their families. Information and support always available from us at the NDC.

In a few days I am off to the [National Funeral Exhibition](#). I will report on any cutting edge innovation or gossip in the next edition.

Editor's moan:-

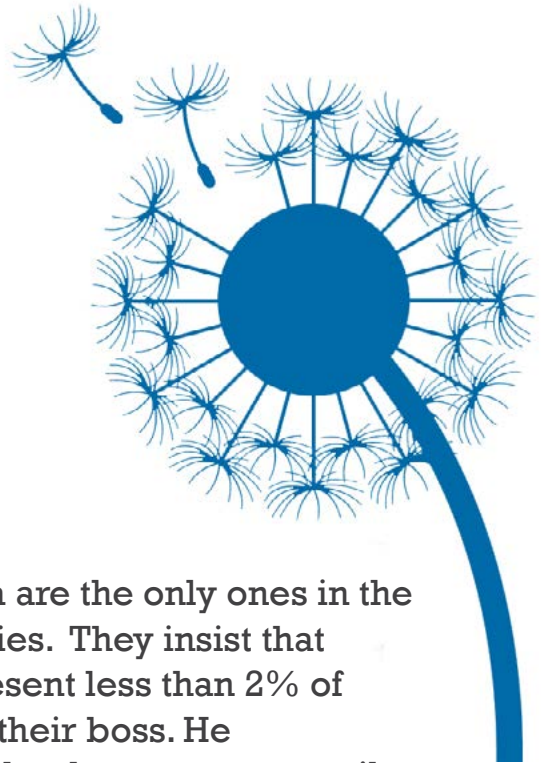
[A race to the bottom](#)

That is how many of the mainstream are referring to the provision, growing availability and promotion of direct funerals (nothing to do with making less money of course).

Why don't they get it, or understand that their opinion of how funerals become dignified and respectful, or what value there is in a ceremony, is not how everyone sees it. How dare they force their version of the 'best' funeral on everyone? Especially when a funeral ceremony is completely unnecessary, when there is no one left to attend for example.

We are not saying that one funeral is right, the other wrong, just that we should all be informed and empowered to make the most appropriate choices for ourselves and our families. It goes without saying that this information should be coming from those whose job it is to guide people through funeral arranging.

We hold a list of recommended providers of this service.



Refusing to be Helpful

The London Cremation Company's six crematoria are the only ones in the UK who are stubbornly refusing to help DIY families. They insist that everyone must use a funeral director. They represent less than 2% of crematoria in the UK, which I have pointed out to their boss. He refuses to see how unhelpful they are being or indeed answer my emails, he even said that a funeral is only dignified and respectful if a funeral director was involved! In some cases a family may be desperate to use their local crematorium', Golders Green for example. They are being forced to spend around two thousand pounds more than necessary or told to go elsewhere. How out of touch can you be? Crackers!

Even the mighty Dignity and Co-op operated crematoria will support and guide families wanting to take loving care, of someone themselves, or who need to save on the undertakers' charges.

The Increasingly Disgruntled and Forthright Elderly

"If they cant be bothered to come and see me whilst I'm alive, why should I foot the bill to entertain them when I'm dead". They like the direct option, saving two thousand pounds on average! I am hearing this more and more.

Please spread the information you may learn from this publication, plagiarise at will and if you have a point to make submissions are always welcome.

Have a great and enjoyable Summer.

Rosie Inman-Cook

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Bury Me in my Old Hay Meadow

The idea of a green burial ground has been on our minds for a long time. Twenty-five years ago, my Mother-in-Law told us that when her time came, she wanted to be buried in a field so she could go back to nature. Like myself, she loved nature and gardening was her passion. Ten years ago, she sadly passed away and had her wish.

We found attending her funeral was such an uplifting experience that it sowed the seed in our minds to create our own natural burial meadow.

2007 was also the year in which Richard, myself and our three children - our youngest being only five months old, moved to Busnant Farm. We took on the mammoth task of totally restoring our new home. As the years went by, the idea of a green burial ground kept coming into our minds.

In 2014, after restoring our home, Richard and a group of local farmers visited Green Lane Burial Field, where Ifor and Eira Humphreys inspired him. >>

He came home that night and said,
‘the top meadow is going to
be a burial ground.’



>>Our life has always been pretty green and we have been referred to as 'the good life pair', in reference to the TV series. We are virtually self-sufficient now, eating mainly our own meat, vegetables, and eggs. We have a huge vegetable patch and a freshly re-planted orchard, which is run organically. The farm uses very limited chemicals and we avoid fertilisers - hence why we have lots of wildlife, especially hedgehogs.

Hay Meadow Burials is just another green thing added to our list, with our latest addition being two hives of bees.

At the beginning of our journey, we were lucky enough to have had unanimous support from everyone around us, but it was mentally exhausting when so many boxes needed ticking and surveys needed to pass.



We joined the ANGB and received so much help from Rosie Inman-Cook, whose enthusiasm for the subject is so infectious

Help and support also came from Ifor and Eira and our great friend Nigel Elgar and so many supportive friends and neighbours.

At times, we were left disheartened and unsure whether we would be granted planning permission as so many obstacles needed to be overcome - in the hope of convincing the planners of our proposal, I had an idea to write a poem.

Bury me in my old hay meadow,
Way up in the hills, clear skies, bright
stars and sunsets that mellow,
Where sheep will continue to graze above me,
I'll welcome any faith, religion or belief,
whatever it may be,
Away from the grime of modern day life,
Simply, down a quiet country lane no hustle, no strife.

Bury me in my old hay meadow and
let the hay grow tall,
Don't bury me in a formal plot, with old
bone dust, surrounded by a wall,
No headstone that needs cleaning,
No grave that needs attending,
No mower weekly over me,
No burden to my loved ones will I be.

Bury me in my old hay meadow,
No fuss, no fancy frills,
Just leave me be amidst these wild Welsh hills,
Skylarks, curlews and yellow wagtails,
nesting amongst the wild flowers
before the hay is cut,
Keep this hedgehog haven that
greed and pollution forgot,
Hedges full of budding leaves, berries and birds,
At night time owls and foxes

I hoped that by reading it they would
understand my reasons for why
I believe we have such a unique
and peaceful spot and get them
to change their minds

>>Whilst I was outside gardening, I kept scribbling things down and then I eventually put all the pieces of paper together like a jigsaw and wrote my poem. It did take me a while but I wanted to include everything around our home as well as my own personal reasons. To my astonishment, it was never needed! We were in total shock to hear we had been granted planning, when we had virtually given up.



We successfully opened January 2017 having had the support of neighbours rallying around helping us, who we will always be so gratefully to. Barely two months after opening, we successfully completed our first funeral - a lovely family who had faith in us.

Having seen the poem on our website, I felt absolutely honoured when the family asked if my poem could be read at the funeral. It was incredibly moving to hear the words read out so beautifully, making me think of the tough challenges we had overcome and how rewarding it is to see what we have created.

‘Thank you to all those lovely people who have made this all possible’.

Article and poem by Sarah Vale



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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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PRODUCTIONS



Along with being a celebrant and running Westmill Woodland burial ground I am a theatre practitioner and now I have created a short show that is a storytelling piece – a performed talk. It has been on the road for a while now.

I speak to the audience as myself, share some of my own experiences and those I have encountered through my work and then afterwards, those who want to, have a conversation with me. These have been moving, illuminating, informative and funny. >>

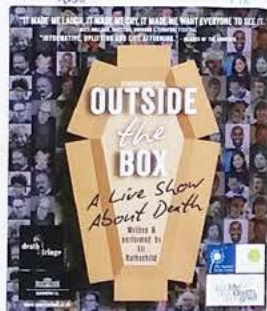
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2016



Talking about sex doesn't
make you pregnant
Talking about death won't
make you die.



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He is not happiest who has the most
But he who needs the least.

>>In Huddersfield the audience just took over, standing up to tell one another their stories, ask questions. The relief at being able to talk was palpable.

In Cheltenham a row of palliative care doctors answered a series of audience questions once we knew they were there and one story stays with me particularly of a doctor taking her stethoscope and placing it on a little girl's chest and then letting her listen to all the hearts beating of the people present with her and then explaining that her grandfather's heart had stopped working. She had been told to find a very direct simple way to explain to this girl, who lived with autism, what it meant to say someone had died. People tell one another about resources they have found useful and swap other valuable discoveries.

I invite written stories at each venue and these are now forming an ever growing resource on our website (see below) and sometimes barging their way into the show because they are so irresistible.

The man who is buried in the back garden of his old pub and still being stood the odd pint by his old regulars who pour it over his grave.

The woman who released her father's ashes from the top of his favourite fell. It was a blustery day. She found, when she got home and bent to take off her boots, that some of his ashes were still nestling there. She did not clean them out, she just walked them around with her over her next walks.

'Oooh, that's a bit morbid isn't it?'

Jacque who raised funds for her partner's funeral through crowdfunding when she found the state could not offer her any support with the costs. She shopped around and found a wide range of prices and services on offer.

So many funny, brave, quirky, sad stories. I believe we are all full of them but unlike birth stories they are not felt to be welcome.>>







>>One woman came up to me afterwards and said how wonderful it had been to carry on talking to her friends about the subject after the show, how over and over again it was her experience that if death got mentioned someone always nervously changed the subject or tried to 'brighten' things up by saying something along the lines of 'Oooh, that's a bit morbid isn't it?'

Well, yes, it is literally morbid but that does not mean it has to be depressing and sometimes it is and that needs acknowledging and making space for too.

I have been delighted to hear that the show has successfully acted as a trigger to lead someone into a long avoided conversation with their parents and one couple told me they saw me in Edinburgh and then, noticing I was going to be in Oxford, booked to come with their daughter thus enabling a valuable conversation to emerge.

Several recently bereaved people have come up to me afterwards saying they hadn't been sure about coming but they were so glad they did. They felt less isolated and even uplifted. One person even berated me thinking there might be a few too many laughs in it.

Another person said. "I was offered this ticket when someone else couldn't come. I wasn't at all sure I wanted it but I am so glad I came. I really enjoyed it if that isn't a strange thing to say." It isn't.>>

>>Everywhere I go I ask my audience this question at the end. “Who here has heard of Braxton Hicks? Who has heard of Cheyne-Stokes?”

There are always a good showing of hands for the former. When I ask if any of the much fewer hands for Cheyne-Stokes are medically qualified we go down to one or no hands usually.

There we have the difference between our approach to birth and death. For those who don’t know, Braxton Hicks are practise contractions. Not every woman will experience them close to giving birth but many will and all are told about them so they know what is happening.

Cheyne-Stokes is a pattern of breathing commonly experienced when people are close to death but who gets told about it?

The result is that people can feel quite alarmed when they experience a cessation of breathing for a long pause before it resumes. They can think someone has died before they have and feel very disorientated.

There are, of course, many other common indicators – clutching of the air or blankets, pointing at the ceiling, believing someone has come to see you who has already died. When my father told me my mother had come to see him I thought there was something wrong with his medication. So much more helpful to recognise this for what it was however you interpret what is actually happening here in a metaphysical sense.

**So who is going to start the first National
Death Group? National Childbirth groups
are everywhere**

The show can still be booked for Autumn 2017 and Spring 2018. Contact John Ward. tour@fullcircleproductions.org.uk or visit www.fullcircleproductions.org.uk

Article by Liz Rothschild



"IT MADE ME LAUGH, IT MADE ME CRY, IT MADE ME WANT EVERYONE TO SEE IT."

MATT WILLIAMS, DIRECTOR, MIDNIGHT LITERATURE FESTIVAL

OUTSIDE

the
BOX

*A Live Show
About Death*

Written &
performed by
Ib
Nobbschild



For those wanting to, there will be a chance to share the conversation and add new stories to the show's repertoire as it travels around the country exploring the territory outside the box.

www.fullcircleproductions.org.uk



"A remarkably refreshing and important show, gently dancing on the line between playful irreverence and necessary solemnity." Broadway Baby

Outside the Box - A live show about death



Stories collected from life's finish-line by Liz Rothschild - performer, celebrant and manager of 'Cemetery of the Year 2013' Westmill Woodland Burial Ground.

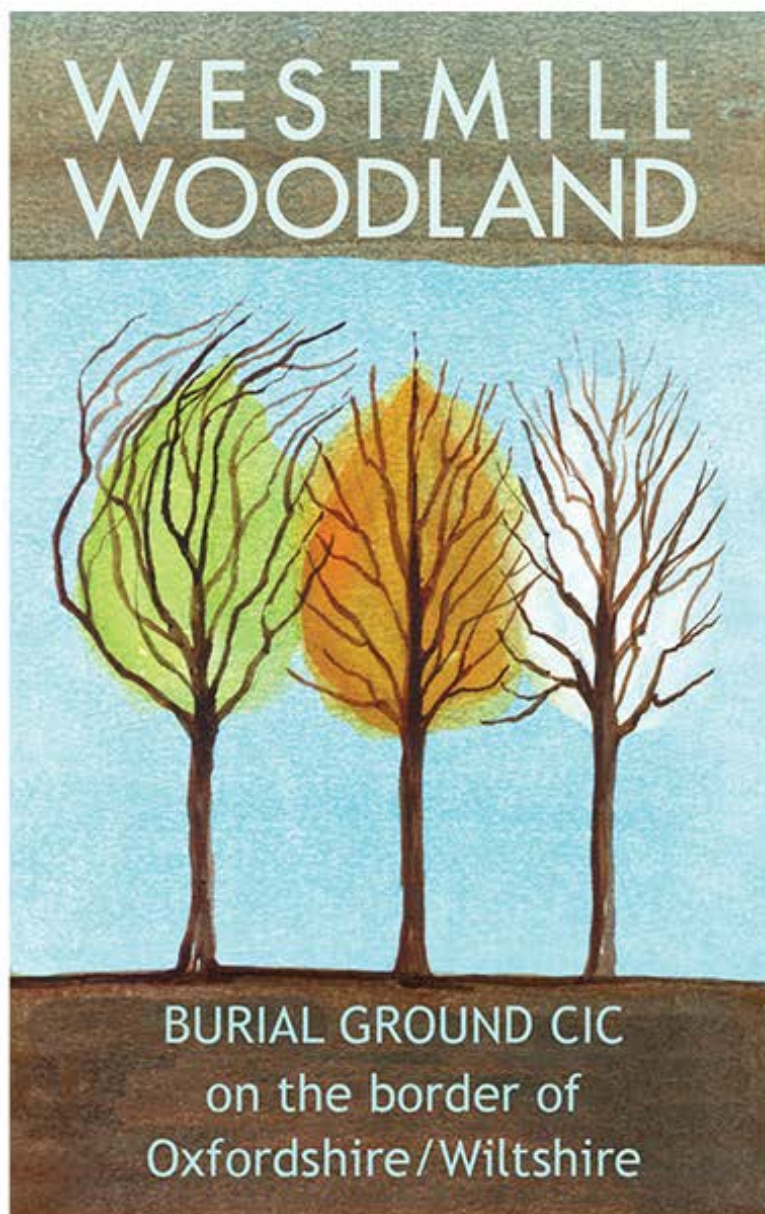
This groundbreaking one woman show, combines mercurial tales and miraculous truths with a hint of history and some pithy commentary on the funeral industry (from one who knows).

Funny, wise and taboo bursting; putting death back into life.

Come and meet Liz and be part of an ever evolving touring show that meets new audiences, starts new conversations and collects new stories as we explore the territory outside the box!

"Talking about sex doesn't make you pregnant, talking about death doesn't make you die" Jane Duncan Rogers

WARNING: THIS SHOW MIGHT CHANGE YOUR LIFE..AND YOUR DEATH



Liz Rothschild is the manager of Westmill Woodland Burial Ground and is also a Celebrant.

To find out more about her work please call her on **01367 700615.**

You can visit Westmill by clicking on the image below.



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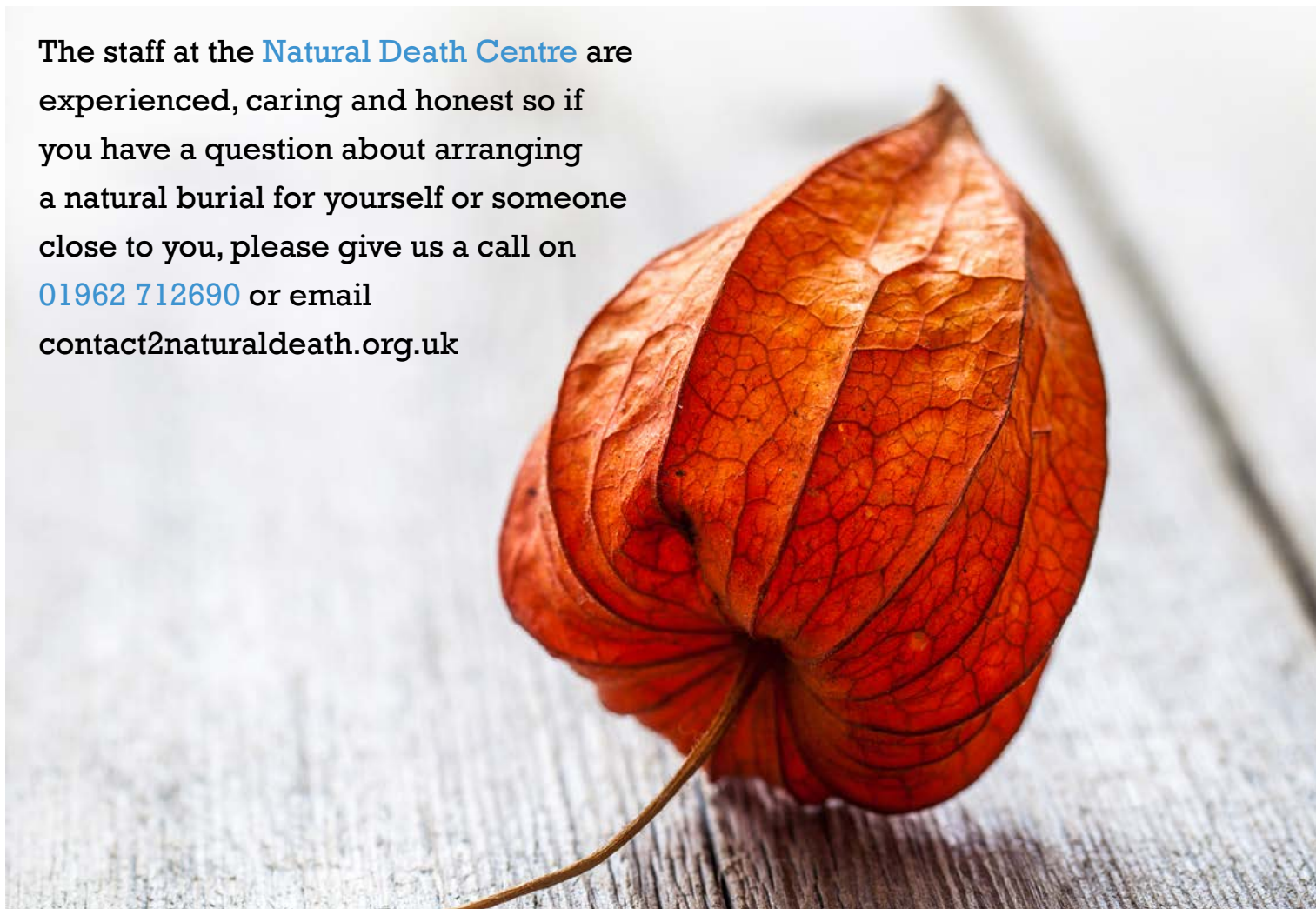
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The staff at the [Natural Death Centre](#) are experienced, caring and honest so if you have a question about arranging a natural burial for yourself or someone close to you, please give us a call on [01962 712690](tel:01962 712690) or email contact2naturaldeath.org.uk



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page56



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Now we can help when you are faced with the loss of a loved one. Funerals are events that none of us want to attend or organise but sadly the majority will have to at some point.

If you are facing this situation please feel free to call us and see how we can assist you.

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A beautiful funeral needn't cost the earth'

highergroundmeadow.co.uk



I DON'T WANT AN 'EFFIN FUNERAL

Some months ago I attended the funeral of my cousin's wife – she was 58 and died of pancreatic cancer. She had only gone to the doctors with a tummy ache – six weeks later, on Christmas eve, she was told her condition was terminal.

The funeral was reflective of my cousin's generous nature and his desire to give her the 'best send off' money could buy. What our mums would have called a 'good send off'.



No expense was spared, the horse drawn carriage, three funeral cars and all the trimmings not to mention the free bar at the wake afterwards. It must have cost him thousands of pounds. I wondered about the funeral director who had attended him in his grief – had he 'suggested' this or had my cousin spoken to his wife about it beforehand? >>

>>As well as being there to support him and his sons, I found myself observing him throughout the day in a detached kind of way. He was dazed, exhausted and broken, allowing people to shake his hand, hug and embrace him, make empty but well intentioned promises of 'if you need anything, just ask'.

The sound of horses hooves clip clopping through the streets of Liverpool to the all too familiar chapel at Anfield crematorium where a packed congregation mumbled their way through the hymns, shifted in their seats during the priest's utterings, if truth be known keen to undo their black ties and 'get back to the club' for a pint and a sausage roll.

Susan's body was carried in for the quarter of an hour service, that's all you are allowed at Anfield, they are too busy to allow any more time – go over your slot and they literally turn your favourite tune off – there is another hearse outside waiting with another family to go through a similar ritual. Life goes on...>>





The day progressed as so many wakes do, plenty of alcohol, buffet food and relatives you don't see or speak to from one week to the next all laughing and joking about things that happened years ago....'We should get together more often, shouldn't we?' the common theme of conversation. Talk of people who have gone before, too many, too soon sadly – the 'they're looking down on us type of conversations that aren't unique to my family, I'm sure.

My cousin sat quite numb, not hearing the platitudes, not hearing the empty promises, smiling when necessary, pint in hand. He seemed alone in the crowd, his world had come to a very abrupt end and he was left at 59, to bring up his disabled grandson alone. Life goes on...



Something inside me said

‘I don’t want this when I die’

In recent years my life has taken a turn down the spiritual path, keen to understand life (and death) more, looking for answers, searching for inner peace and contentment. The days of being a Friday night girl in search of the right partner with a penchant for Selfridge’s handbag department far behind me.

Why do we have to have a funeral?

It has crossed my mind so many times in my work with the Natural Death Centre but at this funeral, I asked myself ‘What the f*** is this all about?’

I have come to understand that our bodies are ‘the carriage’ that carries us around on the earth plane, it perishes and then falls away. We however, continue returning in a fresh, new, baby costume and start the cycle again. Life goes on...

Society seems to need to perform this ritual where the ‘carriage’ has to be paraded in some sort of ceremony – washed, put in a box or vessel of some kind, loaded into some form of transport (usually a hearse, or in this case, a horse drawn carriage) and driven to a place of faith. It is prayed over, sprinkled, sang to...

Following the service, it’s the same performance - either to the crem or burial ground. What’s it all about? What’s it for? Who is it for?>>



Not me. I don't want an effin' funeral

>>I don't want people to remember my funeral. I prefer to make an impression when I am still here, amongst the living. I don't mind too much what type of impression I make, as long as it is authentic and that people remember who I am in my entirety; the good, the bad, the laughter, the moods, the mistakes, the achievements, the dreams, the weaknesses, the love, the searching, the sense of humour, the intention, the crazy mixed up life I have led. I want to go out like a candle wick does when the candle runs out of wax. No need to blow, no attempts to relight it, happy for the glow it gave to the room. Life goes on.

When my time comes and my light goes out, I don't want the people around me to parade my carriage through the traditional ritual and have to pay a fortune for the privilege. Let me go, like the candle. Discard of the carriage, in any way you want, efficiently and without ceremony.

Let my ashes blow in the wind, in the
Highlands of Scotland, the place that has
so often given me great joy.

If you want there to be a gathering, make it an honest one where people remember me with understanding and compassion.

Direct cremations are fast becoming an option for the bereaved – families can choose to have their loved one cremated quite clinically and then choose to hold a remembrance service afterward.

For me, making this choice myself, rather than leaving the decision to my sister not only takes the pressure off her but also gives me dignity in some way, that I will die as I have lived, in my own way, by my own little set of rules.

'I don't want a funeral' I say to my sister during the course of the wake expecting her relief and instead getting 'Well it's not about what you want'. A funeral is for the bereaved, a chance for them to say goodbye...it's important. "How can you be so selfish?" Gosh, I hadn't thought about it like that - maybe I need to rethink... But that my friends is for another article.

article by Jayne Lea

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Talking about cake doesn't make you fat.

Similarly talking about death and what happens when we die, doesn't mean we'll die sooner. Nevertheless we all know we will die sometime.

Hence at A & A Doyle Ltd we offer a homely office where the atmosphere promotes the opportunity for a chat over a cup of coffee.

For some this may seem odd because of age-old taboos but for many people, having the opportunity to ask questions about what happens when we die, or talk about the choices that can be made, really helps. Fears are dispelled and, for many there is a sense that the knowledge gained has helped them to take control and make their own choices.

Some people find it difficult to speak to their family and friends about death and dying which is why we offer a free service where people can record their funeral wishes in a friendly and supportive environment.

the trusted, local choice

Following the meeting a document is prepared which can be given to family, executors or anyone responsible for the funeral arrangements. This can also be amended or updated at any time - nothing is set in stone.

Increasingly in these straightened times people are concerned about the costs of a funeral. Do they have enough money saved or sufficient insurance cover in place to cover the potential account? Will their death cause financial difficulty for loved ones left behind?

This question is easily answered and all funeral directors are bound to offer clear pricing information to the public. Most people know that the cost of a funeral can be considerable but what many are unaware of is that the cost of the same funeral can vary considerably from one funeral director to another. The differences in price may range from a few hundred pounds to approaching £1000 - even after discounts have been applied.

Where our family cares for yours

Some may think it is vulgar to talk openly about funeral costs, but consider this - How many people would spend such a considerable sum of money on anything else without checking whether they were receiving the best value?

Over the years Awdri and Allan Doyle, the owners of A & A Doyle Ltd have spent many hours answering questions and helping people plan the funeral service which suits them.

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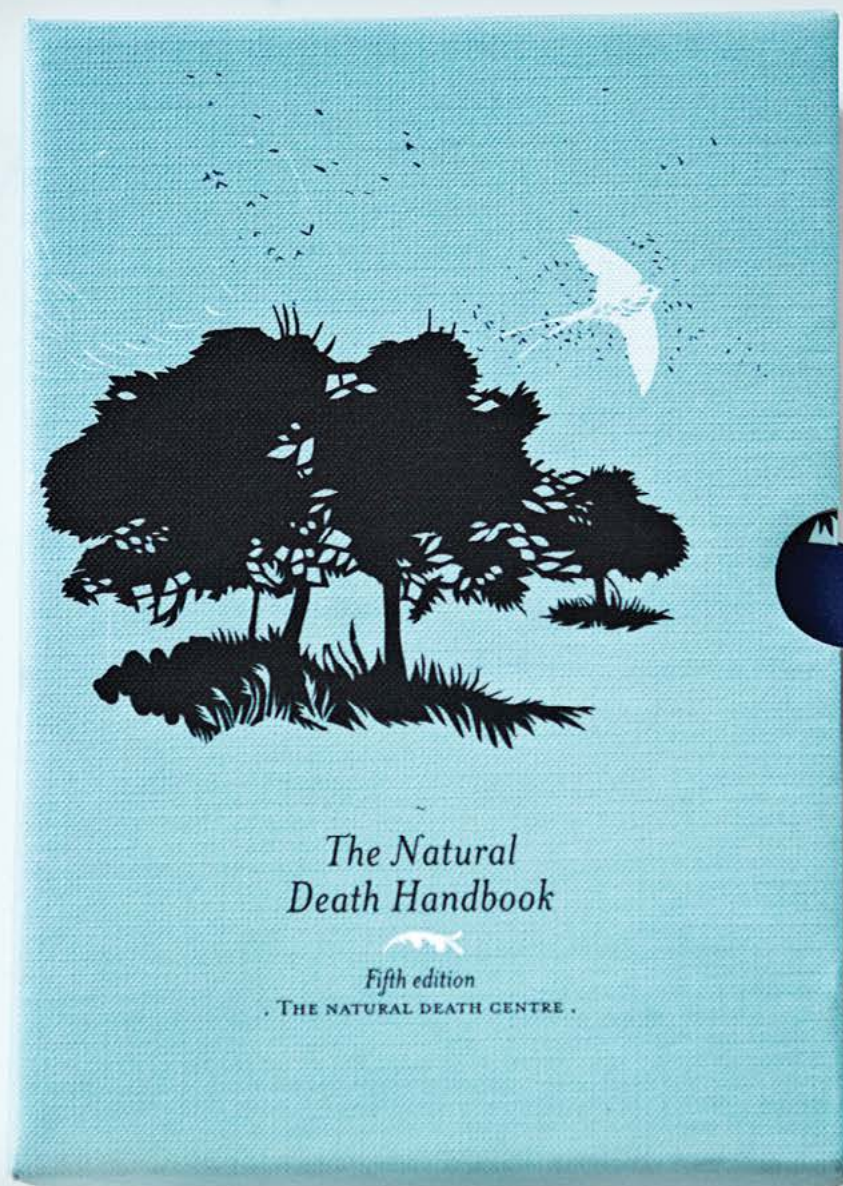
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Death:

A Taboo Challenged



Life once asked Death,
*‘Why do people love me but hate
you?’*

Death responded,
*‘Because you’re a wonderful lie and
I am a painful truth.’*

Death. What makes us so afraid that we shy away from the word? It carries the same connotations as Voldemort does in the Harry Potter series. Fear.

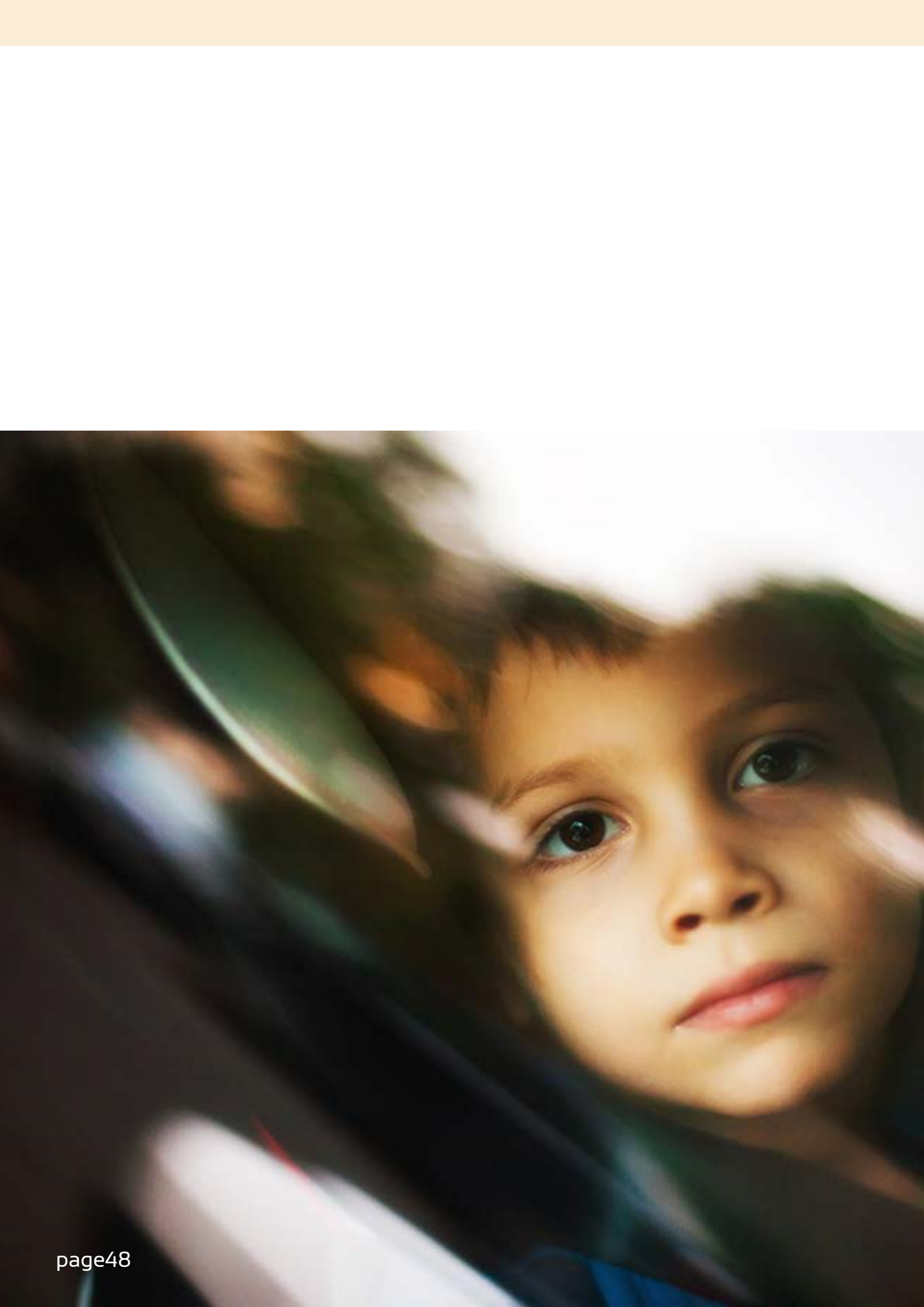
There are very few who do embrace death or who talk about it so openly.

Joan Bakewell recently made a point about this on her ‘We Need to Talk About Death’ segment on BBC Radio 4. She challenged the status quo surrounding death and spoke openly on how she would like to die, when the time came that is.

It’s not only Joan speaking openly about death, Jon Underwood and Sue Barsky Reid are the masterminds behind ‘Death Café’ a non-profit organisation that encourages the discussion of death. On their website they introduce themselves as follows: “At a Death Café people, often strangers, gather to eat cake, drink tea and discuss death.”

Cake, tea and death, what a strange notion

Which proves my point of how strange it is to talk about death. Could it be that the multitude of celebrity deaths in 2016 has triggered the need to embrace death? >>





>>I currently work for a company who offer pre-paid funeral plans so my mind is often focused on death. Personally I'm not a huge fan of the topic. My mother has a theory that my irrational fear stemmed from 2003.

For me, 2003 was a continuous funeral with many loved ones dying. Draped in black, shoved in the car and told quietly there was no need to cry whilst not fully understanding what was going on. Except that when that curtain closed the flames would come and I wouldn't see grandma or granddad again.

While I attended multiple funerals that year I only ever attended cremation services, I know for sure that is not how I want to depart.

For a while I thought being buried would be a good choice but... worms. I might be dead but still...worms.*

Then I came across an article that said I could be buried in a pod that would use my body to blossom into a tree. I like the idea of still living despite being dead.

Although I don't like death I don't think my fear is bad, the fear encourages me to be adventurous, to travel, to meet new people. Death doesn't hold me back, death encourages me to have no regrets.>>

>>If death was a topic openly talked about surely the prospect of death would be easier to acknowledge and understand. Not only would society's views change but the entire funeral planning process would be understood.

Let's face it, unless you've planned a funeral before, its requirements are vague presumptions because we avoid researching the topic until the necessary time.

It's a tall order to plan a funeral while grieving when you're unfamiliar with what to do, what to choose.

With a bit more openness or understanding the taboo around death could be broken. Of course it's not the cheeriest of topics and I will be the first one to hold my hand up and say death makes me feel uneasy. However, I think it'd be a lot easier with an understanding of others' opinions.

Why it is others aren't afraid? Or seemingly unphased by death?

My mum told me that as you get older death doesn't bother you as much, is that true? All I know is that there are two sureties in life one is that you're born the other is that you die.

I suppose it's how you handle or accept the facts of life, how you view the world that really determines your outlook. For me, I'm going to keep on living, maybe research death, listen to Joan, I might even hold my own Death Café and see what others feel and have to say about death. One thing is for certain, death needs to be talked about, it's the only way we are going to break the taboo.

“You only live once but if you do it right, once is enough”
– Mae West

Editors note:-

1 From my experience of digging graves, there are no worms at the depth coffins are interred, it is the microbes and enzymes already within our bodies that break them down.

2 The principle of being buried in a biodegradable container and having a tree planted is nothing new. The natural burial movement started here in the UK back in 1993 and is now spreading across the globe. The egg shaped, Italian designer, burial pod into a tree product is still at a start up/concept phase, smaller urn versions are now available.

Rosie Inman-Cook, Manager



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Changing the Dinosaurs' Mindset

How depressing after the 25 years that natural burial grounds have existed that, in general, the larger firms of undertakers are still not supporting the idea.

From the dozens of burial site managers up and down the land the story is the same. They are, in general, generating their own business; seldom getting that call from the undertaker saying "I have a family with me who are looking for a natural burial sometime next week. Can they come and see you this afternoon to pick a plot?"

Worse still. Recently bereaved families are visiting the burial site first, loving it, choosing a plot that "mum would love", toddling off to their local, "they did Dad's and Nan's funeral" FD, never to be seen again.

The pensive looking funeral director behind his desk has sucked his teeth and expresses concern over entertaining the mourners out in the open, or the distance for them to travel and talks the family into a nice dry trip to the crem'. The emotionally vulnerable family weaken and agree because this professional must know best!

WHY is this happening?

Because a natural burial, where the family are not rushed through the system and are able to spend unlimited time at the grave side and even back-fill the grave, takes too bloody long.>>

>>In the half-day that is lost attending a natural burial, the men and vehicles could have squeezed three trips to the crematorium in.

You only have to look at the day's worksheet secreted in the hearse or the pall bearers pockets to see the reality of this.

Oh and the wheel arches and cills may pick up some mud on country lanes and, worse of all they may get their shoes dirty. Clean, efficient and ergonomic profitability is what the busy boys want,

Bugger what might have been best for the family.

Many of these undertakers consequently do not put the option of a natural burial on the table when families arrive overwhelmed and distressed in their offices, not knowing what their options are.

The bereaved may even want burial for cultural reasons and are still not told how affordable a natural burial plot is compared to the local municipal, consequently spending thousands on a plot rather than hundreds or feeling cornered financially into choosing a cremation.*

The same cannot be said of the smaller independents who may only do two or so funeral a week. For them a green burial is a lovely day out supporting the family, who enjoy their full attention and have a meaningful, time rich experience in a beautiful setting. >>



Proper, caring, funeral directing I call it.

>>So what should the big boys do to satisfy their advertised mission of choice and respect. Well, with the family's agreement and liaison with the cemetery manager they can - SHOCK HORROR - drop off and go.

When many families discover that once they reach the burial ground, perhaps following a church service, the men in black can disappear off to their next job, they are delighted. Most cemetery managers and staff will happily guide families through the pall bearing and lowering into the grave.

It is not rocket science and so many families do not want the funeral director hanging around whilst they take their time reading poems or popping champagne corks.

The cemeteries don't want to be funeral directors and are not trying to muscle in, they are simply trying to help everyone out, including the industry.

This system is working well at one well known NBG in the south where at 50% of the funerals the family and the burial site staff take responsibility once the coffin arrives on site. The undertakers trust this established woodland site to look after 'their families', get the grave size right and supervise safely. A great outcome for the mourners and the funeral directors alike who can maximise the use of their hardware and personnel plus keep their shoes clean.

What the 'refuseniks' fail to realise is that this attitude is losing them work. Increasingly families are searching on line, discovering the burial ground they want and asking the burial ground for a recommended undertaker. So those supportive independents are getting busier. Hooray.

One well known Green site became so frustrated and disillusioned with the attitude of the industry that they have set up their own undertaking service, having invested in vehicles and building a state-of-the-art mortuary. It wasn't what they wanted to do but have been driven to do it. They are thriving.

So fossils, don't you think it is time you evolved?

**Average natural burial ground
(ANBG member) plot price is £600.*

*Average plot price in 32 London boroughs
is £3200. Haringey tops the list at nearly
8K for a new grave.*

Please click on the cover of Edition 6 for an article on 'Burial for Urbanites',

**Article by Rosie Inman-Cook
Editor**



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The path of a natural burial can have such varied beginnings.

Families, who have experienced tragedy but know that a young life who was at one with nature, would only rest peacefully in a woodland setting. Individuals who led a life of conservation and ecological ethics who wish to be buried in a manner that is eco friendly and low impact.>>



>>Families who wish to keep things simple, subtle and cost effective. And then we have those who choose a space that is not segregated to a single faith. An open and welcoming space that encourages a free flow of individuality and a more relaxed approach to grieving. It's really not as intimidating to talk about as you may think.

Let me talk you through our day:

The morning sun warms the glass panelled walls of the dining room as the kitchen team busy themselves with scotch eggs, home made chutneys and the smell of baked ham fills the halls.

A team welcomes family and mourners as they arrive to hang their personal items to the memory tree. They bring photographs and smile as they place them alongside many more on a large board with a solitary name at the top.



Their smiles evolve to hugs as people share their stories.

Peace descends as the coffin bearers carry the wicker coffin, bathed in flowers. He's here. We close the doors to the celebrant and the funeral party, as this is their time. Reflection.

The rhythmic beating of horse hooves on tarmac awakens the senses as the family and mourners proceed behind the coffin up to the natural burial ground. Winding through the downland, sharing love and laughter as they go.

There is something entirely beautiful in the blessing of wild birdsong and the woodland delivers just that. A chorus to welcome even the most weary of hearts. The burial is a personal time that is guided by the family and friends (and sometimes, the deceased). A scene of peace, calm and solemn good will. >>

We wish you well on your journey, good friend.

>>The group returns to the centre for greetings of food and warmth and of tea and cake. It's time to breathe, time to gather your thoughts and fortify your body. Eat, drink and be merry for you are among friends.

As I type this, I can hear, echoing in our courtyard, the laughter of children and the chattering of family and friends as they remember a loved one who has been buried today. This is a celebration of life and a gathering of love, support and nourishment. This is the essence of a natural burial - a journey through the life of the deceased and through the memories of those who remain.

Family and mourners return throughout the year to spend time with the deceased and reflect upon life, death and the miracle that intertwines them both. Nature is a haven, a place to seek solace and to escape the humdrum of everyday life.



We choose to walk the hills, breathe in the scent of wildflowers in meadows or take in the light dappled beauty of the forest to help soothe our senses. Why should that change in grief or death?

Natural burials are about leaving our footprints on the hearts and minds of those we love, rather than leaving them on the earth.

“Death, for those who live on, is the ending of a chapter rather than the end of the book and although the dead have no more part to play as characters, their influence may continue; right through the story.” – John Peel.



**Sophie Marshall
Sheepdrove Natural Burial Ground**



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The *Magic*

I was really taken with Sophie's article above, describing a typical funeral at Sheepdrove.

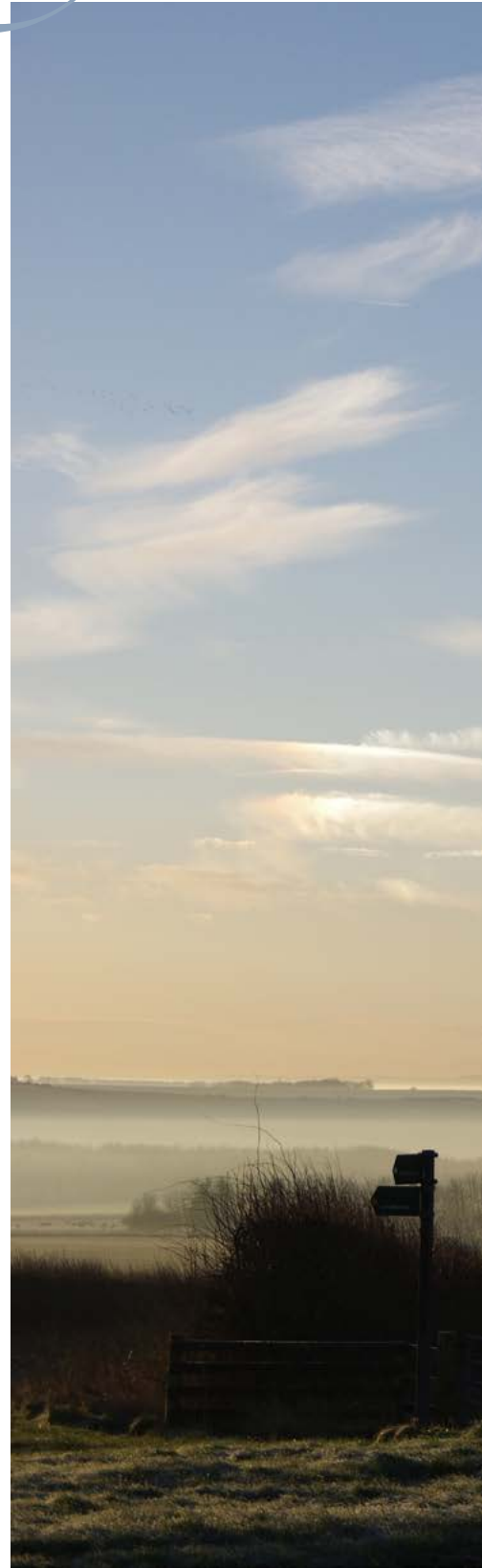
It is one of the most recent to open in the UK. The quality of the feedback forms I have received about their customer service so far indicate that this site is one to watch.

A Brilliant start - Editor

Here is a bit about the site and the people behind it.

The burial ground covers four acres set within a 2,500 acre working organic farm owned by campaigners and environmentalists Peter and Juliet Kindersley. It is a truly inspirational place with a team whose hearts lie in the countryside, a shared passion and an ethos of self-sufficiency, environmental sustainability and animal welfare. Their commitment resonates, with values that we all hold dear: blaze a trail, pursue your dreams, hold true to what you believe in and make a positive impact on the world.

The woodland enjoys an elevated position with glorious views of their organic meadows and the surrounding valleys. Snowdrops, cowslips and the many blossoms of spring give way to sun-dappled leafy shade and the wild flowers of summer, the fiery blaze of autumn glory and the frosted patterns on bare branches in the silver light of winter.>>



of *Sheepdrove*







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William Wordsworth 1888

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The Naming of Cats

Maureen loved cats. When she moved back to England from Singapore, she brought nine with her. The bill for quarantine was hefty. When she retired, Maureen looked after numerous injured and ill cats during their final months.

So it felt entirely appropriate that we should read T S Eliot's poem 'The Naming of Cats' at Maureen's funeral ceremony. **There were two good reasons for this.**



Firstly, the poem says that cats have three different names: one which they use in public, one used with friends and family and another which is known only to themselves. At another level of meaning in the poem, this refers to people having three different personas – public, private and personal – as it was thought Maureen did perhaps. In the same way, people across the world have differing relationships with death, which affect our behaviour in profound ways at cultural, social and psychological levels.

About seventy thousand years ago Homo sapiens had evolved with larger brains to give them imagination, inventiveness and consciousness of the future. However, it is thought this also meant they needed to cope with the fear of death. Their consciousness gave them the knowledge that they were vulnerable, for example, to being eaten by a lion (no offence meant to cat-lovers!)... they had seen it happen to other members of their tribe and it gave them a mortal terror. To avoid being overwhelmed by that terror and rendered unable to cope with daily life, they used their imagination to come up with ways of dealing with their fear.>>

The predominant way of coping with mortal terror to emerge, was to imagine that death was part of a transition to another life or being.

>>The mortal body was somehow transformed into another state or continued to live in another world. And so, in pre-historic times, animist and pagan

beliefs evolved in which spirits existed in the natural world to look after us and we would join them after death in a supernatural world. Subsequently, such beliefs developed into cultural ways of coping with mortal terror.

Archaeological and recorded evidence shows us that rituals, art and mythology (stories) emerged as ways of reinforcing such beliefs into cultural 'world views' or organised religions. These also assisted believers by affirming their existence and place in society, in a similar way to our political systems and moral codes. Funerals rituals were part of those cultural systems.

Funerals have many functions at a social level, according to personal beliefs. They help us to commemorate or venerate a life; allow the passing of the spirit into another world or the soul into the next life; assist in grieving or coming to terms with the loss of a person to the family; provide a public show of mourning or status.

A funeral consists of two basic components; a ritual plus disposal or preservation of the corpse.

These have taken varied forms amongst different societies, involving the familiar cremation or burial and including sky burial, pyramid tomb, boat burial, being dug up and bones kept as holy relics, etc. Evidence of elaborate burials go back at least twenty-eight thousand years to the archaeological site at Sungir, near Vladimir, Russia.>>

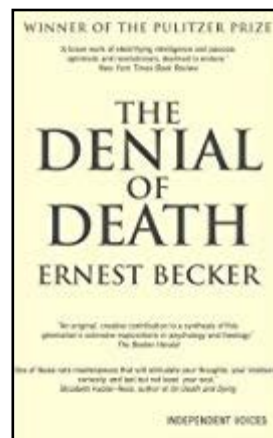
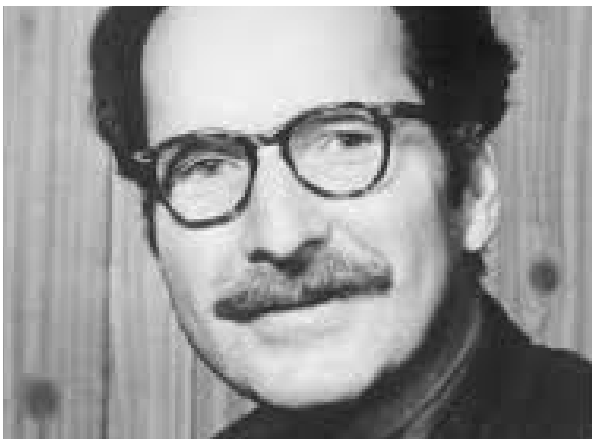




For most people who die nowadays, there is usually some form of memorial, headstone, urn, shrine, Facebook page, photo album etc.

>>These are all symbols of the way in which death affects our behaviour at a social level. Throughout human history, generations have wanted to remember their ancestors.

Psychologically, death makes deep impacts on our behaviour at conscious and sub-conscious levels. At a conscious level, grieving can affect our ability to function in daily life. We may feel unable to sleep or eat normally, shocked, numb, angry, lost, revengeful or even relieved. At the sub-conscious level, some very interesting work has been done by American psychologists*, based on the theories of Ernest Becker, an anthropologist who won a Pulitzer prize in 1974 for his book 'The Denial of Death'.



Becker said that our individual character is partly formed around the process of denying one's own mortality and that this denial is a necessary component of functioning in the world. Much of the evil in the world, he believed, is a consequence of this irrational need to deny death.

Becker goes on to say that to help banish the mortal dread, we need to have confidence in a cultural scheme of things (world view, social values or core beliefs) as well as comfort in our own self-worth. It can be deeply disturbing to have one's self esteem damaged or fundamental beliefs called into question.>>

‘This sub-conscious fear of death has been shown to be related to harsh judgements of other people; to depression and mental illness; seeking wealth, fame or power; suicide and substance abuse; anxiety and phobias’

Many people go to all sorts of lengths to keep reminders of our mortality at bay. Our self-worth as humans may be bolstered by practices like body adornment, make-up, hairstyles, depilation, body art, plastic surgery. And our world view may be reinforced by spiritual uplifting (e.g. prayer, meditation, trance) or identifying with our social group through e.g. body art, fashion or wearing badges.

At a social level, when someone ‘different’ challenges our core beliefs, we have a tendency to ostracise, threaten, humiliate, or destroy them. Nation states or extremist groups use whatever military technology or terrorist tactics they have to defend their secular or religious ideologies – whether to keep the world safe for democracy or rid the world of evil. Both sides claim the ethical high ground. Violent confrontation can ensue from what one side sees as a righteous reaction to a humiliating injustice... and then vice-versa.

I hope this doesn’t all sound too doom-laden, when you started reading about pussy cats. If you think about various things going on in the world today, perhaps you can see the relevance of Becker’s theories. So, I’ve written this article in the hope that more people will seek to come to terms with their own mortality and be able to talk about the end of their life. Groups like Death Café, Dying Matters, the ‘Before I Go’ programme, end-of-life doulas and palliative carers are all helping to do this. Then perhaps more people can be content with living this life to the full.

Oh, and the second reason for reading ‘The Naming of Cats’ at Maureen’s funeral was that she must have named a lot of cats during her lifetime.

Reference: * The Worm At The Core. On the role of Death in life. Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski 2015. (Based on the work of Ernest Becker)

Article by Tony Carter, Humanist Funeral Celebrant.



The Naming Of Cats

by T. S. Eliot

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES.
First of all, there's the name that the family use daily,
Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James,
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey--
All of them sensible everyday names.
There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,
Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:
Such as Plato, Admetus, Electra, Demeter--
But all of them sensible everyday names.
But I tell you, a cat needs a name that's particular,
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,
Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum--
Names that never belong to more than one cat.
But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no human research can discover--
But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess.
When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
His ineffable effable
Effanineffable
Deep and inscrutable singular Name.





If you would like to know more about family led funerals but aren't quite ready to make that call, why not listen to Claire on the video above and see how you feel afterwards.



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Imagine

- being listened to with compassion, sensitivity, warmth and grace
- feeling nurtured and empowered to keep/bring your loved one home when they die
- being guided to lovingly take care of their body naturally, like you did in life
- the only hands to tenderly touch your loved one are your own gentle, loving ones
- Having more precious time to say goodbye in your way, in your own home
- helping to create a personal ceremony filled with deep meaning and lasting value
- saving substantially on the arrangement costs
- developing a strong and nurturing relationship with one person who supports you throughout
- having the opportunity to stay connected, participate and give back to your community
- knowing all this is legal, affordable and possible.

For those families who feel this choice may be right for them we seek to make a significant difference.

Claire Turnham



Victoria Cross Hero's Grave Returned to Former Glory

In recent months, one of our members
has restored some honour to a
celebrated War Veteran's memorial
in Colchester.

The grave of a veteran awarded with the Victoria Cross has been refurbished by a local funeral director in time for Remembrance Day. The memorial of Private Edmund Fowler, who was given the medal in 1882 after extraordinary bravery during the Zulu War in 1879, had fallen into a state of disrepair since his burial in Colchester Cemetery in 1926 after his death aged 64.

Private Fowler, originally from Waterford in Ireland, was serving in the Second Battalion of the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), when he was ordered to remove tribesmen from a cave up in Hlobane Mountain, South Africa. Advancing in single file, he had his captain gunned down in front of him before rushing forward and proceeding to clear out the stronghold.

After leaving the army, Private Fowler moved to Colchester with his family, making his home a Berechurch Road, St Giles and running a pub in Stanwell Street.

Lee Jaschok, Director of Freedom Funerals, cleaned up the memorial free of charge. Mr Jaschok was 'honoured' to be able to help in any way possible, saying:

"It was the least that we could do for such a
decorated war veteran buried in
Colchester and especially so he can be
celebrated once again on Remembrance Day
ninety years after his passing."



War Veteran Private Edmund Fowler
was laid to rest in Colchester
Cemetery in 1926 at the age of 64.



The background is a close-up of an acoustic guitar's body, showing the wood grain and the sound hole. Overlaid on this are several torn pieces of paper. At the top, a piece of white paper contains the name 'Billy Jenkins'. Below it, another piece of white paper contains the word 'death,'. In the center, there is a small, rectangular photograph of a man with grey hair, wearing a suit and tie, looking slightly to the side. Below the photo, a piece of white paper contains the word 'ritual'. Underneath that, a small white square contains an ampersand '&'. At the bottom, a large piece of white paper contains the word 'resonation...'. The guitar's strings and fretboard are visible on the left side of the image.

Billy Jenkins

death,



ritual

&

resonation...



Do We Actually Need Words at a Funeral?

As a musician, I'd been on and off the road and in and out of the studio all my working life. As I passed through the age of 50, burnt out and creatively buried, I was asked to read at the funeral for Jack Penfold, a locally known poet and member of my wife's creative writing group.

It was also requested that we attended the family visit by the humanist celebrant – for the surviving daughter, a devout Catholic, respected her father's wish for a non-religious farewell and wanted some support and input. I recognised the celebrant, Denis Cobell, he had been humanist chaplain to the Mayor of Lewisham. He too was known locally and indeed nationally as an active humanist having just completed a ten year stint as President of the National Secular Society.

**I felt at home during the meeting, it was
like planning a 'set list' for a gig.**

When we arrived on the day, at the local crematorium, we met Denis and together we wandered into the control room, again this all looked familiar, a bit like backstage at a small arts centre. >>

As I stood to read the poem, a witty discourse on false teeth, I instinctively ran with Jack's mischievous sense of surrealism.

>>I placed my head on the coffin and covertly pulled a harmonica from my top pocket. Strange sounds began to emerge.

A few weeks later, following protracted discussion with my wife and weighing up the stress of bandleading, long distance travelling, the decline of the recording industry (don't get me started on digital downloads), set against the enormity of, say, ringing a distraught father to say 'Hi, I'm the humanist celebrant who will be conducting the funeral for your five year old daughter'. My application to train for funerals was eventually dispatched to the British Humanist Association.

Soon, I found myself being interviewed by the same Mr Cobell. 'Well, Billy', said Denis, with that twinkle in his eye, 'you're a musician, so you'll no doubt have lots of musical suggestions to help a family. If a family is lost for ideas when, say, the coffin is lowered for cremation, I might suggest Bach's 'Air On The G String'.....'Those of a certain age know that best for its use in a certain television cigar advert.

Once more, I felt at home. In July 2008, after six months of brilliant BHA training, script writing, humanist meet ups and observations, I sat in a garret of a hotel room in Glasgow, where I was performing with the award winning 'Kidsamonium', teaching kids the joy of jazz.

I was 'Billy The Aviator - The Guitarist Who Thinks He Can Fly. But Can't' (well, someone's got to do it...). I had just been given BHA provisional accreditation status as a celebrant and I spent every free moment in that hotel room re-reading my enormous amount of learning materials and thumbing my ever enlarging travelling collection of ritual, theological and free-thinking reference books.

I was about to return to my South East London patch to begin my new 'vocation', armed with two objectives. One, was to call myself an 'officiant'. Thinking back to the possible clash of the word 'celebrate' when a life had been cut too short, I felt 'officiant' was more neutral.>>



with Mentor
Denis Cobel

**‘Why don’t we use the word ‘Minister’?
I questioned one of my trainers.
‘That has religious connotations’,
was the terse response.**

>>I’d never considered the Minister of Transport or the Minister of Arts religious...

A few years later, when I attended, with my aunt and uncle, the first high church CoE morning service I’d been to in about 40 years, which they used to call Matins but seemed to be called something like ‘Messy Church’ - or was that what they call ‘Sunday School’ now? How it amused me that the programme listed not ‘vicar’ but ‘Celebrant’!

The second objective was to book into Charlie Hart’s Equator Studios with my acoustic guitar, to document pieces inspired by my training and the whole concept of ‘ritual’, loss and bereavement. After a couple of hours recording some sketches, producer and engineer Charlie was quite frank with me. ‘I think you need to go away and work on this a bit’.



At first, I could blend the music and the funerals. One quartet recording, I told Charlie, took me 26 funerals to pay for. 'No Billy', he replied, 'what you really mean is that 26 people had to die just so you could make an album'.

The funerals were indeed a perfect complement to my musical life, but with several advantages. I only worked locally (my 'humanist parish'), the 'gigs' were always daytime and, the best bit, I'd be given the cheque before the 'gig' actually started' – not something recommended in the sometimes dubious world of the music business.

But, two years in, in 2010, I played my last live concert. A fitting event to pause with, as the BBC Big Band played my music whilst I twanged over the top of them and it was recorded and broadcast later on Radio 3.

But even at that event, the death profession seeped in. I ended the first half by informing the audience that 'there is about to be an interval, that you will all walk out of the auditorium, and we must all treasure every single moment we live and breathe – for you may not return.....'.>>



Wild West Funeral of
Bill I -Two Persons' Stone

>>This led me into singing the beautiful 'For All We Know' first popularised by Nat King Cole ('for all we know, we may never meet again....')

Somehow, I seemed to be meeting a family, collaborating, creating and conducting a funeral on an average of one every six days. Plus, all the necessary liaising with my regional colleagues, BHA head office, funeral arrangers and many others within the funeral profession – all of whom I held and still hold in the highest regard. It had to be a Traditional Jazz banjoist who dryly told me, whilst we were taking part in a Chapel of Rest dedication for a new funeral parlour, that an anagram of 'funeral' was 'real fun'. But that 'real fun' left no time for the hedonistic joys of music making.

So, after nearly seven years and 368 funerals later, once more I was burnt out and creatively buried. I was ready to return to Charlie Hart and Equator Studios.

The study of comparative religions, beliefs and rituals, studying (mostly face on) how humans act and react during a funeral, led me to the thought that you could take away the words and semantics from a funeral. It is the rhythm of the intonation that resonates. Meaning does, of course, give solace.

**But sometimes, words can jar and interrupt the
purity of what I call 'the final journey'
– insomuch a funeral is the last time one is in
the physical presence of the deceased.**

I took my 'low strung acoustic guitar' into the recording studio, tuned two tones lower than normal with the note 'A' at 432Hz, slightly lower than the accepted 440Hz and began musically documenting the resonance of a typical non-religious ritual.

Non-religious insomuch as that was what I'd been practicing. But 'spiritual'? Absolutely!

Billy Jenkins

Death, Ritual & Resonation

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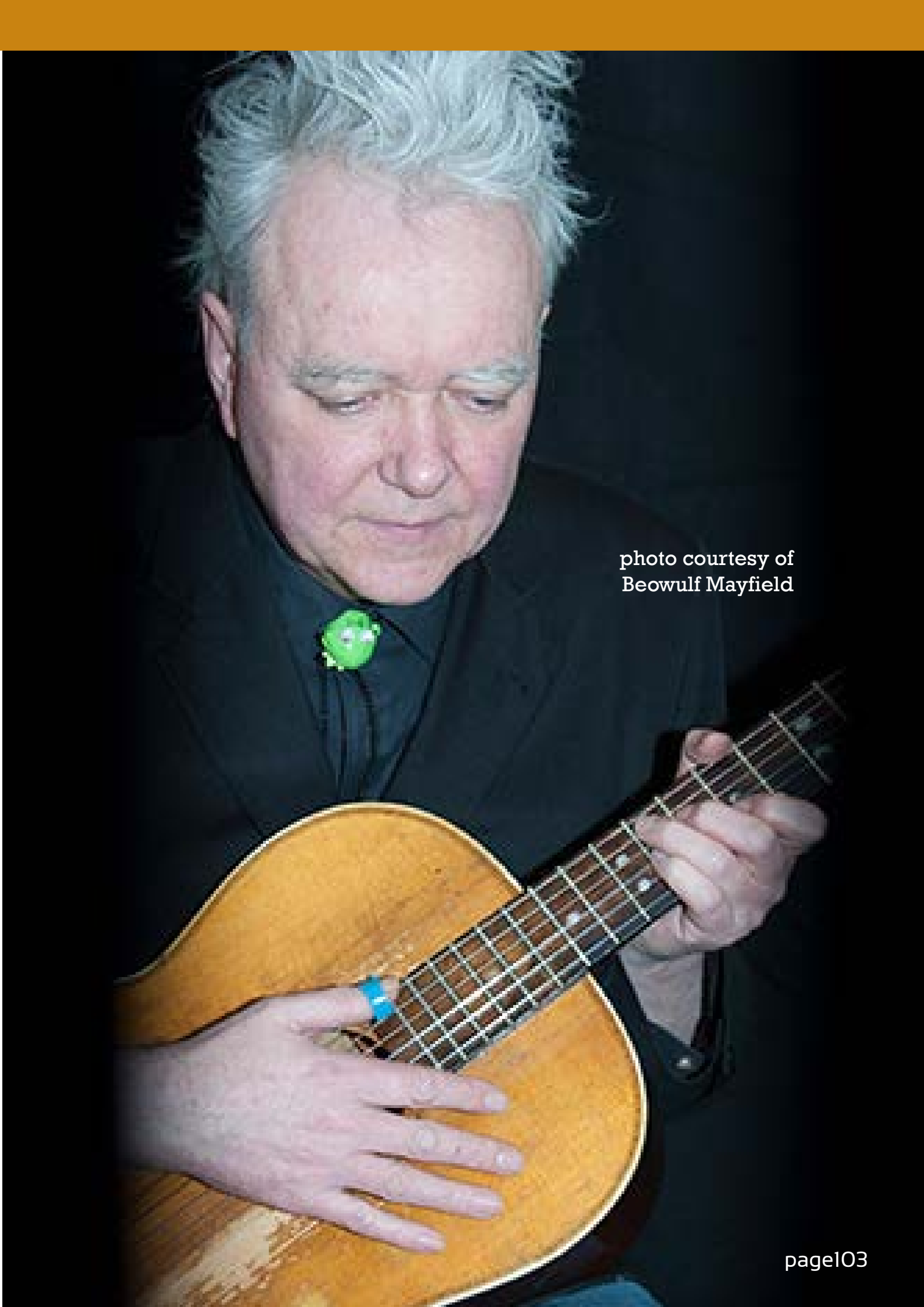


photo courtesy of
Beowulf Mayfield

This year the final judging of the annual People's award for the best natural burial grounds was heroically undertaken by Lucy Talbot of Dead Maidens fame.

Well over 500 feedback forms, received throughout the last year were scrutinised, particularly for comments regarding the level of customer care that families experienced. This is what Lucy had to say of all the entries.

'The bar was very high, consistently so in fact. It was a difficult task but a truly enjoyable one. I was overwhelmed by the feedback. So many of the comments brought tears to my eyes, the sheer beauty and often simplicity of the touches placed on the services provided, just incredible. The quality and skill must be recognised of each nominee I had the pleasure of reading about.

The comments continually painted me warm pictures of kind, motivated individuals going above and beyond. It struck me that however big or small the team, detail and a personalised service was never compromised

It was an honour to be involved in this process, keep doing what you are doing and be proud of the difference you are making.'

Lucy Talbot -
Dead Maidens



Good!

**WELL
DONE!**

NICE

COOL!

So these awards are not about facilities, they are about the experience. The success of the following sites comes down to the passion and commitment of the staff not to mention their attention to detail.

The winners and runners up in the 5 regions of Britain are:-



**SOUTH
WEST**

Winner:

Jo and Tom at Higher Ground Meadow in Dorset.

Runners up:

Ele and Anthony at Pentiddy Natural Burial Ground in Cornwall.



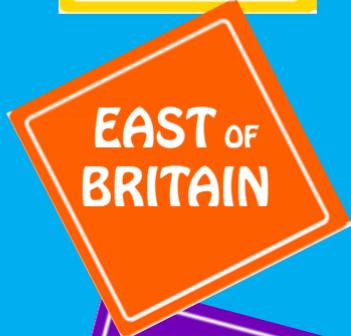
**SOUTH
EAST**

Winner:

Sian Muir at Deerton Natural Burial Ground in Kent.

Runner up:

Linda Parry at St Albans Woodland Burial Ground, Bedfordshire.



**EAST OF
BRITAIN**

Winner:

Chris and Jenny at the Willows Natural Burial Ground Leicestershire.

Runner up:

Chris and Jonathan at Brightwater Green Burial Ground in Lincolnshire.



**WEST OF
BRITAIN**

Winner:

Andy Bruce at Westhope Green Burial Ground, Shropshire.

Runner up:

Eira and Ifor at Green Lane Burial Field in Powys.



**NORTH OF
BRITAIN**

Winner:

Chris Weston at Brocklands Woodland Burial Ground near Settle.

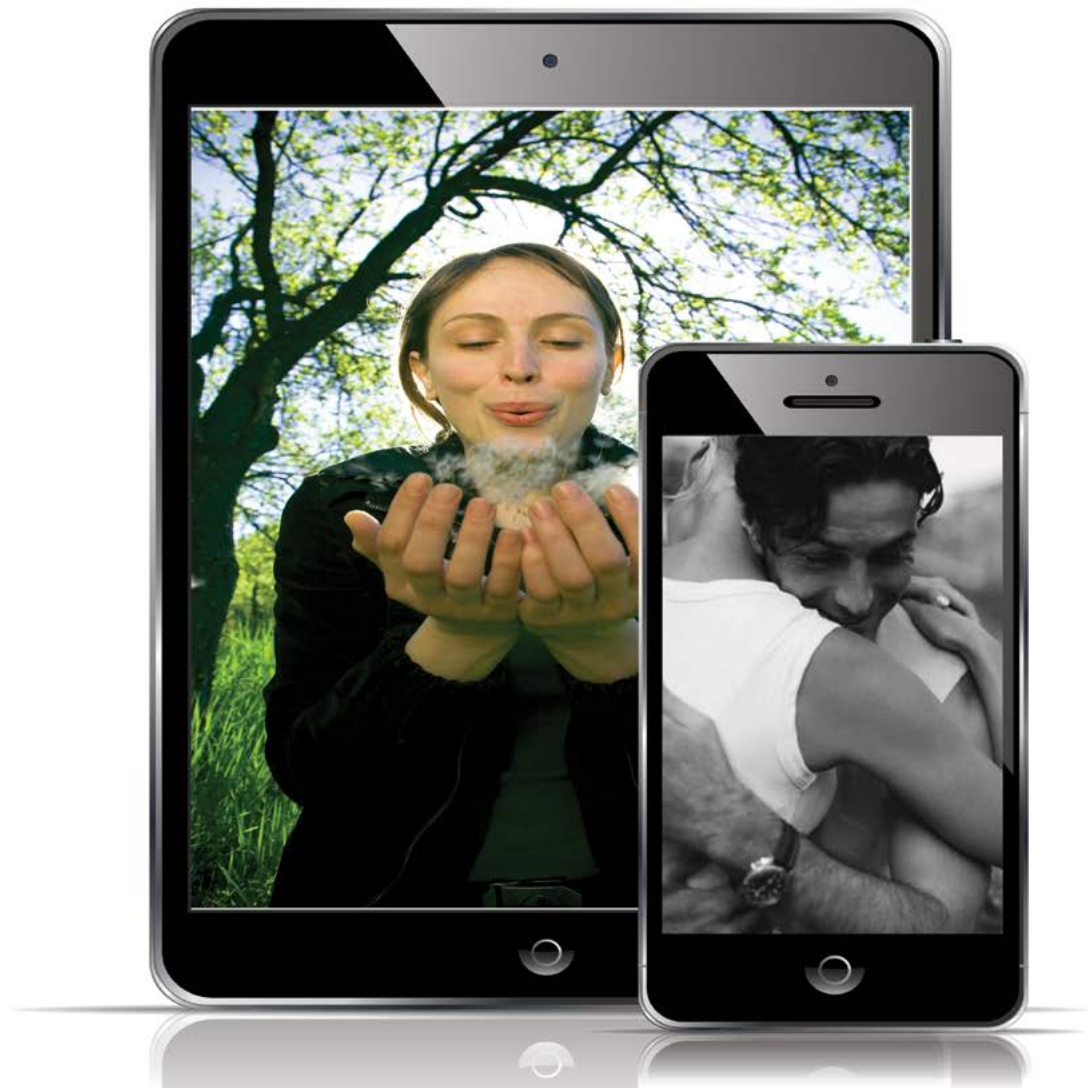
Runner up:

Fiona Rankin at Cloverly Woods of Rest in Aberdeenshire.

**From the five regional winners the over all best in
UK 2017 was again awarded to;
Higher Ground Meadow in Dorset.**

The Natural Death Centre's own burial ground in Kent can obviously not be entered into the fray. As Lucy had no idea who was who I snuck Martin and Amy's Eden Valley feedback forms into the mix. They did really well. I plan to enter them into the Good Funeral Guide awards instead.

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