

THE DEAD IN ENGLISH URBAN SOCIETY C.1689-1840

Submitted by Natasha Mihailovic, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History, December 2011.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is predicated upon a rejection of the existing characterisation of attitudes towards the dead in the eighteenth century. In current thinking this period witnessed the first signs of a reduction in the extent to which people had contact with the dead. However, this assumption is supported by very little research. In focusing on proximity and exposure to the dead body at an 'everyday' level this thesis tempers the century's association with distance and change by revealing a high level of proximity and very significant continuities with both the preceding and proceeding periods. Utilising sources from London, Bristol and York it follows the dead body from the point of death through to its eventual resting place, concentrating in particular on the impact of the newly-emerged undertaking trade and burial practice in the century and a half prior to the widespread establishment of extramural cemeteries and eventual outlawing of burial in towns. The following key questions are addressed: how were spaces shared between the living and the dead; where exactly were the dead present; who had contact with them; and in what ways. The result is a picture which demonstrates that during the long eighteenth century the living shared their private and public urban spaces with the dead to a significant extent. The attitudes governing treatment of the dead body revealed in the process are shown to be at once timeless and period-specific. Foremost among these is the concept of 'decency'. It is shown that this idea, whilst far from unique to the eighteenth century, had a particular contemporary significance shaped by social and economic factors and their effects on the class structure and urban environment. At the same time, visible in all aspects of treatment of the dead is a pragmatism born of limitations on time and, in particular, space which did not always sit easily with notions of decency, particularly once the dead were underground.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Table of Contents</i>	3
<i>List of Tables</i>	6
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	7
<i>Abbreviations</i>	9
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	10
INTRODUCTION	11
Historiography	11
Aims and Approach	16
Sources	23
Structure	26
PART ONE	
CHAPTER ONE: THE BODY	29
Introduction	29
Preparation	30
'Nameless Offices'	30
Layers-Out	39
Presence	45
Houses and Dead Houses	45
Marks of Death	57
The 'Wake'	62
Conclusion	65
CHAPTER TWO: THE UNDERTAKING TRADE	67
Introduction	67
Origins	68
Composition	71
Structure and Organisation	84
Employees	93
Conclusion	97
CHAPTER THREE: FUNERALS AND MOURNING	99
Introduction	99
Heraldic Funerals	101
The Spread of Heraldic Form	107
Pauper Funerals	114
Mourners	116
Mourning	123

Favours	124
Sett Mourning	127
Mourning Clothing	129
Conclusion	138
CHAPTER FOUR: CHANGE AND 'DECENCY'	141
Introduction	141
Historiography	142
The Eighteenth-Century Perspective	146
Undertakers	148
Funerals	159
The Bereaved and Mourning	166
A New Interpretation	175
The Middling Sort	176
Supply, Demand, Decency and Form	182
Conclusion	189
PART TWO	
CHAPTER FIVE: PLACE OF BURIAL	192
Introduction	192
Religion	194
The Service	195
Diversity	197
'Outcasts'	200
Church Burial	201
Family and Community	203
Family	203
'Strangers'	205
Paupers	207
Individuation and Impermanence	212
Conclusion	216
CHAPTER SIX: BOUNDARIES	217
Introduction	217
Secular Uses	218
Markets and Fairs	219
Trade and Domestic Usage	222
Access	225
Context	235
Movement	238
Extension	239
Reduction	245
Remains	248
Organised Exhumation	249
Grave Robbery	252

Conclusion	263
CHAPTER SEVEN: OVERCROWDING AND REFORM	264
Introduction	264
Overcrowding	265
Protest	276
Reform	283
Cemeteries and Legislation	283
Context	287
Change?	294
Conclusion	298
CONCLUSION	299
<i>Bibliography</i>	304

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE TITLE	PAGE
Most commonly recurring occupational titles including undertaking in London trade directories	77
Most commonly recurring occupational titles including undertaking in Bristol trade directories	77
Occupational titles including undertaking in York trade directories	78
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in London trade directories	79
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in Bristol trade directories, 1-10	79
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in Bristol trade directories, 11-20	80
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in York trade directories	80
Number of undertakers in Bristol trade directories by year	90

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE		PAGE
1.	Detail from 'A certificate for the burial in woollen of Elizabeth Addams of Bramfield, Hertfordshire' (1734), GL/Bside 8.24	33
2 & 3.	Details from the trade card of Thomas Eyre, Undertaker, 356 Oxford Street (c. 1784) BM/Heal Collection 124.25 © Trustees of the British Museum	111
4.	Detail from the trade card of Thomas Nicholl, Coffin Maker and Undertaker, Auctioneer, Appraiser & Sworn Exchange Broker, No. 17 Duke Street, West Smithfield (n.d.) BM/Heal Collection 124.54 © Trustees of the British Museum	117
5.	Invitation to the funeral of Revd Mr John Postlethwayt (1713) GL/C22.26	120
6.	Invitation to the funeral of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1792) © Trustees of the British Museum	120
7.	Detail from the trade card of R. Lancefield, Carpenter & Undertaker, No. 15 Great Chapel Street, Soho (1838) BM/Heal Collection 124.45 © Trustees of the British Museum	121
8.	Mourning ring with internal inscription reading 'Eliz. Nicholas obt 4 Mar. 1732 aet. 22' © The Trustees of the British Museum	125
9.	Mourning ring (1810-11), V&A/M.10-1973	126
10.	Mourning ring for Betty Savory, died 1798 aged 86, V&A/M.161-1962	126
11.	Anon, 'The Countess of Salisbury' (1696) © Trustees of the British Museum	133
12.	'Evening Mourning Costume & Morning Deshabelle', <i>The Ladies' Monthly Museum</i> , Saturday, September 1, 1821, p. 168	134
13.	'Dinner Dress', 'Evening Dress' & 'Untitled', <i>The Lady's Magazine</i> , June, 1830, p. 389	135
14.	'General Mourning Fashions', <i>The Lady's Newspaper</i> , Saturday, December 15, 1849, p. 335	135
15.	'Advertisement for Jay's Mourning Warehouse', <i>Le Follet: Journal du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c.</i> , Wednesday, May 01, 1850	137
16.	R. Newton, 'Undertakers in at the Death!!' (1794) © The Trustees of the British Museum	151
17.	Anon, 'Three Friends Going on a Visit' (1796) © The Trustees of the British Museum	156
18.	Anon, 'The Way to Save Trouble' (1796) © The Trustees of the British Museum	157
19.	'Undertakers regaling themselves at Death's Door Battersea Rise Surry' (1801), Collage Image Collection, GL/6735	163
20.	George Scharf, 'Old St Pancras Church; view inside the churchyard' (1818) © The Trustees of the British Museum	195
21.	Francesco Bartolozzi, 'Burying the dead' (1792) © The Trustees of the British Museum	195
22.	J. Finlay, 'View of an old house on the north side of St Bartholomew's Churchyard, said to be the house where Milton lived' (1846) © The Trustees of the British Museum	223

23. from 'Proximate Causes of Cholera', *The Lady's Newspaper*, Saturday, September 22, 1849, p. 159 267

ABBREVIATIONS

BL	British Library
BM	British Museum
BOR	The Borthwick Institute, York
BRO	Bristol Record Office
GL	Guildhall Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
TNA	The National Archives
V&A	Victoria & Albert Museum
YCA	York City Archives
YCL	York Central Library

STYLISTIC NOTE

All sources have been quoted in their original format. Neither spelling nor punctuation have been modernised.

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INTRODUCTION

Although death and, to a lesser extent, the dead, have come to form a discrete area of research over the past three decades, there remains a great deal of scope to extend our knowledge of the subject, and the range of approaches used in its consideration. This study seeks to address two things whose limited presence in the existing literature is particularly striking. The first is a period, a broadly defined long eighteenth century, which has received extremely scant attention from historians of death in Britain. The second is an emphasis on the ways in which death and the dead interacted with and were a visible part of the world of the living within the domestic and public spheres.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The scarcity of work considering these two aspects of the subject is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, because the themes of interaction between the living and the dead, the proximity and visibility of the dead to the living and the shifting boundaries between the two, are central to the thesis of the first major historical treatment of death, Philippe Ariès' epic *The Hour of Our Death* (1977); and secondly, because within his thesis the eighteenth century is associated with significant change in these issues, an association which continues to play an important part in the characterisation of death in the period.

Inspired by the work of sociologists and psychologists of the 1960s, *The Hour of Our Death* is a complex, somewhat impressionistic and polemical interpretation of attitudes towards death and dying over the past millennium, with particular focus on the last five hundred years.¹ In it Ariès suggested that

¹ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. xvi

the eighteenth century was a time of both anxiety and indifference to death, when death's character began to shift from being familiar and 'tame' to 'untamed' and 'savage', marking the emergence of features he saw to be characteristic of contemporary attitudes towards death.² The century was, therefore, one in which aspects of 'traditional' and 'modern' attitudes met and combined uncomfortably to create an unhealthy and problematic relationship with death characterised by a combination of both fear and denial. In between these two anxiety-ridden centuries, the eighteenth and the twentieth, Ariès identified a period in which there was a partial return to more 'traditional' attitudes which regarded death as 'tame.'³ In the twentieth century, he argued, death once again became frightening, as well as a shameful taboo.⁴ The dead and dying were increasingly confined to hospitals, in particular from the 1930s onwards, and so death became increasingly 'invisible'.⁵ Thus, according to Ariès, during the twentieth century aspects of physical and spiritual anxieties originating in the eighteenth century reappeared with much greater intensity, causing widespread and profound fear and avoidance of death.

In Ariès' native France a significant amount of research has since been conducted on the subjects of death and dying, and non-native historians of the country have also contributed to the field, most notably John McManners with his *Death and the Enlightenment* which offers a detailed survey of many aspects dying and death with particular stress on religious issues.⁶ Historians of Britain have also added significantly to the history of death, but have tended to focus upon the early modern or Victorian periods. Important surveys by Vanessa Harding, Peter Marshall, Ralph Houlbrooke, David Cressy and Clare Gittings have examined many spiritual, social, practical and legal aspects of death and dying in the early modern period, including demography; beliefs in the afterlife; funerals and other rituals associated with the body; the probate

² Ibid., pp. 30-1, 346; Joachim Whaley, 'Introduction' in Joachim Whaley (ed.), *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (London: Europa Publications, 1981), pp. 5-7.

³ Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 409

⁴ Ibid., p. 614

⁵ Ibid., pp. 573, 611

⁶ John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes towards Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981)

process; and the effects of death upon the family and social structure.⁷ Studies of the Victorian period are fewer. Pat Jalland has made a comprehensive survey of the culture of death among the middle class of the mid-nineteenth century, covering all the key aspects of dying, death and bereavement.⁸ James Stevens Curl has examined the establishment and usage of cemeteries in the nineteenth century, and given some attention to Romantic artists' and philosophers' conceptions of burial places in the eighteenth century.⁹ Ruth Richardson has assessed the practice of dissection and passing of Warburton's Anatomy Act in 1832 in detail, while Julie-Marie Strange has surveyed the social and cultural history of death and dying among the poor of the late nineteenth century.¹⁰

Research into the eighteenth century is also patchy. Ralph Houlbrooke's survey of death in the early modern period reaches to 1750 and covers a range of religious, practical and material aspects of preparing for and dealing with death, although it focuses predominantly upon the seventeenth century and uses relatively few later sources.¹¹ Several archaeological investigations have shed light on contemporary death rituals and burial practices. Excavations of St Bride's, St Benet Sherehog and Christ Church, Spitalfields, all in London, give insights into the organisation and management of burial space within urban churches and their vaults. Detailed examination of the remains found in Spitalfields and St Benet Sherehog has also been used to illuminate demographic issues, aspects of occupation and lifestyle, including

⁷ Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1984).

⁸ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

⁹ James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (London: David & Charles, 1972)

¹⁰ Ruth Richardson *Death, Dissection and the Destitute* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988); Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3

contemporary diets, and the material culture of death among the local populations.¹²

However, it is the topics of undertaking and cemetery establishment, and the legislative reform of burial to which the latter became connected, that are particularly prominent among research concerning death in the long eighteenth century.¹³ Focus on these issues gives the impression, explicitly and implicitly, that these two developments constitute significant changes in the disposal of the dead and attitudes towards them. Moreover, it encourages a general teleology of removal, which persists in characterisations of death in the long eighteenth century despite the fact that historians and sociologists of the nineteenth and particularly twentieth centuries have qualified and nuanced Ariès' theories regarding exposure in relation to these periods, pointing out that the dead have not been removed as completely or as callously as Ariès argued.¹⁴ This teleology of removal is correlated with the growing role of professionals and institutions, in particular doctors, hospitals and undertakers, and of authorities' increasing regulation of the dead through registration and through their place and manner of burial, all of which are in turn seen to originate in the long eighteenth century: as Julie Rugg has observed, by 1850 many of the features considered central to the modern experience of death were in place, including the doctor at the deathbed; funerals arranged by undertakers; burial increasingly in cemeteries rather than churchyards; and state recording of death.¹⁵

¹² Gustav Milne, *St Bride's Church London: Archaeological Research 1952-60 and 1992-5*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 11 (London, 1997); Jez Reeve & Max Adams, *The Spitalfields Project. Volume 1: The Archaeology. Across the Styx* CBA Research Report 85 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1993); Theya Molleson & Margaret Cox with A. H. Waldron & D. K. Whittaker, *The Spitalfields Project, Volume Two: The Anthropology. The Middling Sort*. CBA Research Report 86 (York, 1993); A. Miles, W. White & D. Tankard, *Burial at the Site of the Parish Church of St Benet Sherehog Before and After the Great Fire. Excavations at 1 Poultry, City of London*, MoLAS Monograph 39 (Museum of London: London, 2008).

¹³ The doctor's role at the deathbed has received some attention, for instance by Roy Porter, although would benefit from further detailed examination. See Porter, Roy, 'Death and the Doctors in Georgian England' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 77-94.

¹⁴ Peter C. Jupp & Tony Walter, 'The Healthy Society: 1918-98' in Peter C. Jupp & Clare Gittings (eds), *Death in England: An Illustrated History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 256, 262-3, 274-5, 278

¹⁵ Julie Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation: 1760-1850' in Jupp & Gittings, *Death in England*, p. 202

However, although these are undoubtedly significant developments, existing research into these issues is insufficient in quantity and contextualisation to support the implication that they constituted an apparently uniform change affecting the whole population and significantly altering the relationship between the living and the dead. For instance, perhaps the main contributor to the field of undertaking research has been Julian Litten, also the author of a history of death from the early modern to the Victorian period.¹⁶ However, his work is in many places more that of an antiquarian than a historian, while that of Paul S. Fritz, author of an article on undertaking, differs little in content and opinion to that of Litten.¹⁷ Both do very little to put undertaking in its contemporary context or establish clearly just how prevalent it was during the eighteenth century. A broader theory of undertaking's development from the eighteenth century to the twentieth has been proposed by sociologist Glennys Howarth, but it is brief and its contextualisation sweeping and in places anachronistic, as chapter four will discuss.¹⁸ Cemeteries have also attracted the attention of several historians, although few have paid detailed attention to the origins of the idea in England or its spread in the decades immediately prior to 1850.¹⁹ Even those who have, such as Julie Rugg, have not traced these issues even further back, questioning their exclusive association with the early nineteenth century.

¹⁶ Julian Litten *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1992); Julian Litten, 'The English Funeral, 1700-1850' in Margaret Cox (ed.), *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England 1700-1850*, CBA Research Report 113 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998), pp. 3-16; Julian Litten, 'The Funeral Trade in Hanoverian England 1714-1760' in Peter C. Jupp & Glennys Howarth (eds), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 48-61. The content of the latter two items is very similar.

¹⁷ Paul S. Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade in England: Its Origins and Early Development, 1660-1830', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28:2 (1994-1995), pp. 241-253

¹⁸ Glennys Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry in England 1700-1960' in Jupp & Howarth, *The Changing Face of Death*, pp. 120-34

¹⁹ Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*; Julie Rugg, 'A New Burial Form and its Meanings: Cemetery Establishment in the First Half of the 19th Century' in Cox, *Grave Concerns*, pp. 44-53.

AIMS AND APPROACH

This thesis seeks to redress the scarcity of literature concerning the long eighteenth century and to question the assumptions made regarding attitudes and practices of the period. Its primary object is to demonstrate that focus on the early stages of modern means of 'managing' the dead, i.e. undertakers arranging funerals and burial in extramural cemeteries administered by authorities, and, more importantly, the automatic correlation of these forms of 'management' with the distancing of the dead from the sphere of the living and their removal from the hands of non-professionals, in perpetuation of Ariès' teleology, has created a distorted picture of the long eighteenth century. It will show that the period was characterised in large part by continuity rather than change, and witnessed no reduction or significant alteration in the nature or extent of exposure to or interaction with the dead. In order to make this assessment depth of analysis has had to be balanced with breadth of coverage. The resulting picture is not claimed as complete, and remains somewhat skewed by its focus on aspects of change, such as undertaking, even if its overall conclusion emphasises continuity. Even so, it is hoped that it will go some way to creating a more nuanced picture of death in the eighteenth century and prompting further research in the area.

The time period covered is determined by the practices under investigation. The start date of 1689 has been chosen due to the passing of the Act of Toleration passed in that year, as the growth in non-Anglican burial grounds and issues of denominational diversity are of significance in relation to the burial practices examined in chapter five. That date also falls within the first decades of undertakers' existence in London. The end date of 1840 is the starting point for inquiries into, and agitation demanding change in, urban burial practice, action which ultimately led to legislative reform in the 1850s, and throws into relief the continuity of practice prior to that date. In order to better contextualise this continuity the final chapter investigates the worsening overcrowding and treatment of remains which precipitated this action beyond the 1840s and into the 1850s. 1840 can also be seen as the point by which

undertaking had found its way into many English cities, large and small, and the point by which, in London at least, it had firmly established a relatively clear structure.

This 'long' eighteenth century is therefore revealed as a discrete period in the history of death. This will also be shown not only in relation to its many continuities, but also to some important changes, particularly in relation to undertakers' role in funeral organisation, the appearance of funerals and the development of a relatively widespread culture of mourning clothing, the latter two developments being interpreted as forming a 'new material culture of death', examined in chapters three and four.

These conclusions have been reached by expanding upon and moving beyond the concerns which have commonly framed historical discussions of death. Although the subject of changing modes of dealing with death is extremely broad, encompassing a large number of practical, physical, spiritual, and behavioural issues, to date histories of death have tended to focus on a relatively limited variety of topics. 'Demography and the causes of death, the process of dying, concepts of the afterlife, funeral rites, bereavement, and commemoration' have formed the core of historical death studies. Far less stress has been placed on death's social presence and context, or on 'the dead' themselves, despite the centrality of the idea of proximity to the teleology attached to notions of 'management.'²⁰ Exceptions to this are the work of Vanessa Harding, and Bruce Gordon and Peter Marshall's co-edited volume *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*.

Harding's *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500-1670* focuses upon the ways the dead and living shared physical spaces; how these spaces were ritually defined; and the many practical spatial issues attendant upon disposing of the dead in populous urban centres.²¹ She concentrates upon the long-term, and the ways in which the relationship between the dead and the living was

²⁰ Peter C. Jupp & Clare Gittings, 'Introduction', in Jupp & Gittings, *Death in England*, p. 1

²¹ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 6

one of reciprocity as the needs of each changed, and their spatial relations required alteration accordingly. As she rightly emphasises, death provides an insight into life and the living as 'responses to death, in the form of burial practices and funeral rituals, are clearly bound up with issues of personal and family or community identity, geography and the use of space, control of the physical environment, and the ordering of society and social behaviour.'²² Harding's consideration of urban environments, public as much as private spaces and her emphasis upon the dead rather than death in the abstract, have heavily influenced this thesis. Similar inspiration has been drawn from the *The Place of the Dead*, whose editors emphasise many of the same issues regarding the 'physical, spiritual, emotional, social and cultural' place of the dead in society, and note that the 'role and status of the dead after the process of dying was complete' is a neglected issue in histories of death.²³

By centring analysis on the body itself; investigating the practicalities attendant upon its care; who had contact with it; where; when; and how, this thesis aims to trace the nature and extent of proximity between the living and the dead in detail to establish how much the treatment of the dead and attitudes towards them really changed during the long eighteenth century. It rejects the idea that it is useful or meaningful to assess and explain attitudes towards death, and changes in them, using fear or other emotions; as Joachim Whaley has pointed out, whether 'men are more or less sad when faced with death is not something which historians can hope to measure.'²⁴ Instead it seeks to investigate attitudes and exposure to the dead as expressed through their practical handling and 'everyday' behaviour. Concentrating specifically on urban areas, it follows the dead body from the moment of death to its place of burial, considering not only the short term presence of the recently dead, but also their long term presence in burial places.

²² Ibid., p. 3

²³ Bruce Gordon & Peter Marshall, 'Introduction: Placing the Dead in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe' in Bruce Gordon & Peter Marshall (eds), *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 2; Ibid., p. 1.

²⁴ Whaley, 'Introduction', p. 14

Its findings are integrated with several key themes in the wider historiography of the eighteenth century in order to better contextualise the position of the dead and their treatment during the period. The first is urban history and urban change, as the growth in the size and density of eighteenth-century urban populations and the physical and attitudinal changes made in relation to urban spaces were a crucial factor affecting burial places and practices.²⁵

The second, closely linked to urban growth, is the emergence of an increasingly commercial economic and cultural climate, a development reciprocally connected to the growth of the middling sort, conditions without which the new material culture of death could not have arisen.²⁶ Although consideration is given to all levels of society, the connection of the middling sort to the new material culture of death and its associated trades inevitably means that they feature particularly heavily in the first part of the thesis.

The consensus among historians is that although the middling sort were a diverse group often engaged in competition between themselves, they were also unified by common economic, political and cultural interests and often complex webs of economic and social connections to the extent that they can be viewed and discussed as a single entity, albeit with certain caveats.²⁷ This thesis will apply the term 'middling sort' broadly, while acknowledging both the diversity of those who can be said to fall within the category and the difficulty of precisely defining who and what constituted 'middling' society. Those who

²⁵ Joyce M. Ellis, *The Georgian Town 1680-1840*, Social History in Perspective (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2001); Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: a History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Rosemary Sweet, *The English Town, 1680-1840: Government, Society and Culture* (Harlow: Pearson, 1999).

²⁶ Jonathan Barry & Christopher Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Maxine Berg & Elizabeth Eger (eds), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Henry R. French, *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Felicity Heal & Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994); Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (London: University of California Press, 1996); Hoh-Cheung Mui & Lorna H. Mui, *Shops and Shop Keeping in Eighteenth Century London* (London: Routledge, 1989); John Styles & Amanda Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*, Studies in British Art, 17 (London: Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁷ Jonathan Barry, 'Introduction' in Jonathan Barry & Christopher Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England 1550-1800* (MacMillan: Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 17-8

have defined the term using economic variables of income and employment have pointed out the considerable degree of blurring between those above and below the 'middling'. For instance Peter Earle, in his pioneering study of 'middling' society in London, defines them as people who worked, but were not engaged in manual labour, and who sought to increase their wealth. They therefore fell between the landowning elite who did not need to work to earn a living, and working people who were engaged in manual labour and did not earn enough to accumulate or better their position.²⁸ However, he also points out that professionals were often considered gentlemen despite their lifestyle and income having more in common with the middling sort than the gentry, while many whose income or lifestyle might place them among the working sort were in fact business owners and employers, rather than mere employees, positions more characteristic of the middling sort.²⁹ The importance of lifestyle and other social and cultural factors in defining the middling sort, including involvement in parochial administration and other community activities, involvement in politics and concepts of 'gentility', have been examined by a number of subsequent historians, including Jonathan Barry, Margret Hunt and Henry French, resulting in an even more complex picture of who the middling sort were, what they did and how they regarded themselves.³⁰ As these historians have observed, when considered in terms of culture and lifestyle, rather than wealth alone, the middling become an even larger and less well-defined category.

This thesis contrasts the middling sort with titled landowners and the aristocracy, referred to as the elite or nobility, and with the poor, who themselves are conceived of fairly broadly. At times the middling are considered together with elements of the gentry, who are often hard to distinguish from the wealthier middling sort, as noted by Earle. In very many of the sources consulted it is difficult to ascertain precise details regarding the

²⁸ Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (Chatham, 1989), pp. 3-5

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5

³⁰ Barry, 'Introduction', pp. 17, 20-2

social position of the people to which they pertain, and so terms denoting social position are of necessity somewhat loose. This problem of identification is compounded by the broad focus of the thesis; it is no coincidence that very many studies of the middling, including those of Earle, Hunt and French, concentrate on localised samples, as it is only in studies in which individuals, families and networks of association are closely observed and reconstructed that social status can be ascribed with any degree of precision. Nonetheless, the sources offer sufficient evidence to support a number of existing conclusions regarding the middling sort in specific relation to death's social and cultural history. Their connection to the inextricably linked forces of trade, expenditure and material culture is demonstrated, as is the fact that 'middling' culture, in this case the new material culture of death, spread beyond those who might be considered of the middling sort in terms of income and expenditure alone. Equally, it is shown that middling culture was not uniform and that, certainly in terms of the new material culture of death, its spread was determined by location as much as status or wealth. In so doing it also supports the work of those such as French, who stresses the difference between who and what constituted the middling and middling culture in urban centres and provincial areas, and different regions of the country.³¹

In addition to changes in the urban environment and the social structure, the continued importance of religion as a framework for ritually disposing of the body will be demonstrated, and contrasted with its relative absence in connection with discussions of the practical management of the body. Popular understanding and treatment of sacred space in urban areas, the functioning of eighteenth-century urban parishes and the church's gradual loss of monopoly over death rites will also be considered, as will the religious plurality and tolerance of the period as reflected in places of burial.

Finally, this thesis will add to the historiography of the body, providing another dimension to discussions of the dead body by considering the 'ordinary' corpse, as opposed to the exceptional corpse, whether hanged or

³¹ French, *The Middle Sort of People*

subjected to dissection.³² Discussion of body snatching will, however, be included as part of a wider discussion regarding the spectrum of contemporary opinion regarding buried remains, in which it will be demonstrated that the exceptional treatment to which bodies were subject by grave robbers came to form part of ordinary grave digging practice in overcrowded burial grounds, a development which met with remarkably high tolerance.

Discussion of all issues will be situated in relation to the very broad but very pervasive and powerful contemporary concept of 'decency'. Ralph Houlbrooke has argued that ' "decency" was one the keynotes' of the period 1660-1760, explaining that to contemporaries it connoted 'appropriateness, fitness, seemliness, order, comeliness, good taste and the avoidance of vulgarity or excess'.³³ It is equally characteristic of the century following the period discussed by Houlbrooke. Although not unique to the long eighteenth century, the concept governed the treatment and disposal of the body, and the nature and form of associated ritual, and underwent a process of alteration in the face of the changes mentioned above, including the incorporation of death into a new commercial culture, and the pressures placed upon burial places by the growth of urban populations. The evolution of the concept in tandem with changes in the culture of death sheds light on the forces behind these developments and upon contemporaries' perceptions of and reactions to them, and in turn upon contemporary understanding of death and the position of the dead. Comparison of understanding of 'decency' as it applied to the dead both above and below ground reveals that it allowed for a number of pragmatic considerations. This was often related to shortage of time and, in particular, space, and could, especially in relation to buried remains, lead to the compromise, sometimes outright defiance, of these standards.

³² Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*

³³ Ralph Houlbrooke, 'The Age of Decency: 1660-1760' in Jupp & Gittings, *Death in England*, p. 174

SOURCES

In order to produce an overview of the period a wide variety of sources have been used, although in the interests of manageability they have been drawn in large part from the archives of, and focused upon, three cities: London, Bristol and York. The choice of these cities is intended to allow comparison between cities of differing size and character. The capital was, naturally, the crucible for the changes which did occur in the period. It grew enormously over the period in question, its population quadrupling between 1700 and 1840 from 575,000 to 2,239,000, and doubling between 1801 and 1840 alone.³⁴ Bristol, regional capital of the south west and one of the biggest port cities in the country, was also a diverse city with a considerable amount of wealth where the developments and fashions of the metropolis might reasonably be expected to spread.³⁵ It too grew significantly during the period, its population rising from 21,000 in 1700 to 60,000 in 1801 and reaching 124,000 in 1841.³⁶ York, on the other hand, while also a regional capital, was much smaller, although in the latter forty years of the period experienced growth on a par with that of Bristol and London, that is of roughly double; its population remained stable between 1700-1750 at around 11-12,000, rising to 16,000 in 1801 but reaching 29,000 in 1841.³⁷ It acted as the social and administrative centre of the region and therefore also attracted wealth and 'society', although to a lesser degree than Bristol or London. All three cities were established social and commercial centres. The new manufacturing and industrial towns of the north and midlands were not incorporated on account of their very different character and process of evolution, although they certainly merit study and comparison with the findings of this thesis.

An urban focus has been chosen simply because it was in urban areas that the changes to be examined first appeared, and there that their emergence, spread

³⁴ Sweet, *The English Town*, p. 3

³⁵ Jonathan Barry, 'South-West' in Peter Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain Volume II 1540-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 79; Joyce Ellis, 'Regional and County Centres 1700-1840' in Clark, *The Cambridge Urban History*, pp. 674-5.

³⁶ Sweet, *The English Town*, p. 3

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

and nature can be assessed and measured most easily. Towns and cities had the social and economic structures which facilitated the emergence of undertaking. Their growth, and that of their populations, along with the process of urban improvement these factors encouraged, challenged, and ultimately made impossible, traditional urban burial practice, leading to the establishment of many of England's first cemeteries and the legal reform of burial. The continuity of practice identified is therefore all the more striking given that research was focused on places in which change was most likely to be found.

The sources themselves include those from the archives of Bristol and York considered most likely to contain information regarding death, and a selection from key London archives in which relevant information was identified. They have been complemented by the use of online databases of printed and visual sources. The sources utilised include a wide variety of parish records, including vestry minutes, churchwardens' accounts and burial registers; Corporation records; government Acts and reports; business records; insurance records; trade directories; Old Bailey trials; accounts and observations of contemporary culture in the form of books and articles; plays; novels; newspapers; magazines; probate accounts; letters and diaries. This combination of materials was intended to provide evidence regarding both official and institutional perspectives, and those most likely to contain insights into 'public opinion.'

The means by which these sources were identified and examined were varied, and dependant on the nature of the individual source types. Online resources, for example the Burney Collection of newspapers and Old Bailey database, were searched using a set of keywords including, for example, 'undertaker', 'mourning', 'coffin', 'burial', 'shroud' and 'funeral'. The same set of keywords was used to search online archive catalogues in order to identify potentially useful sources. This was most fruitful for London archives. In Bristol and York, printed catalogues were consulted to identify relevant documents, most of which were parochial in nature. All potentially fruitful extant parochial records falling within the time period in question were consulted, including vestry minutes, churchwardens' accounts, local Acts, the records of the Overseers of

the Poor and burial registers, as well as a variety of other surviving documents pertaining to relevant issues, most of them relating to burial grounds. All surviving trade directories from Bristol and York were searched individually for undertakers and other death-related businesses. London directories, being larger and far more numerous, were searched online using keywords. Although this produced a somewhat arbitrary sample the results, detailed in chapter two, correlated so closely to those from the Bristol and York directories that a more systematic, and time-consuming, sample was not considered necessary for the present study. A systematic sampling technique was applied to the account ledgers of the undertaker Mr Legg, discussed primarily in chapter three; in order to gain an overview of the composition and cost of the funerals he provided those listed on every third page of the ledger were used to form a manageable data set of seventy funerals from which trends in form and expenditure could be identified.

The ledgers of Mr Legg are one of several sources taken from the Chancery Masters' Exhibits held in The National Archives. The nature of the Exhibits mean that further information about the cases in which they were involved is unavailable, but the ledgers and other Exhibits remain extremely valuable sources in themselves. Also held in The National Archives are a small number of inventories of undertakers' estates processed by the Prerogative Courts in Canterbury. These contain some useful information regarding undertakers' premises and stock-in-trade, utilised in chapter two, but are not accompanied by sufficient additional evidence to be used to reconstruct clearer pictures of individual undertakers' social position or wider circumstances. The insurance records of a number of female undertakers, considered in the same chapter, have similar uses and limitations. A larger and more systematic survey of wills, probate materials, inventories and insurance records would be very valuable in building up a more detailed picture of the trade, and of the material culture of funerals and mourning, but was beyond the scope of this study.

The aim has been to gain as broad a picture of the practices and attitudes of contemporary society as possible, although many of the most fruitful sources

proved to be of an institutional and public nature. For instance, vestry records and churchwardens' accounts provided a significant quantity of information regarding the use of churchyards for activities other than burial, while newspapers proved highly illuminating on a number of issues, in particular the overcrowding of burial grounds. Other than the business ledgers of undertakers, private sources, such as letters, diaries and wills, often did not include reference to many of the 'everyday' practical issues with which this thesis is concerned, for example the preparation of bodies for burial or the use of burial places. Based on the information garnered from the source body as a whole, this has not been taken as an indication of the avoidance or anxiety ascribed to the period, but simply the result of many of the practices and attitudes in question being of too common and often unchanging a nature to merit comment, explanation or questioning. However, despite the inevitable partialities of the various source types and of the source body as a whole, which will be accounted for individually in the relevant chapters, they serve to paint a reasonably detailed and very suggestive picture of the place of the dead in eighteenth-century urban society.

STRUCTURE

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with the body above ground, following it from the point of death to interment. Chapter one outlines the preparation of the body for burial, demonstrating that exposure to the dead during this interval was high, and that undertakers appear rarely to have been charged with care of the body. Chapter two expands upon existing research on the undertaking trade, giving consideration to its nature and structure and highlighting the slow pace at which it spread across the country, thus demonstrating that for the majority of people during the majority of the period the means of funeral provision and organisation remained unaltered.

Chapter three considers the increasingly elaborate form taken by funerals, whether provided by undertakers or others, and the development of mourning

custom. It is strongly emphasised that the growth of a new mourning culture and trade in mourning was as important a development as that of undertaking and grander funerals, although it has received very little attention from historians. These changes in funeral form and mourning custom are seen to constitute a new material culture of death. This spread faster and further than either specialist trade, and beyond the middling sort who were the primary consumers of this new culture, and altered conceptions of 'decency' in relation to the disposal and commemoration of the dead. Chapter four considers the issue of the middling sort and notions of 'decency' in more depth to explain the reasons for the developments outlined in chapter three, asking why and how they occurred, why they took the forms they did and how they were perceived by contemporaries.

Part two concentrates on the buried body. Chapter five discusses the spiritual and secular factors which affected where and how bodies were interred, and demonstrates that burial grounds reflected the hierarchical divisions present in living society, although to an important degree they were also inclusive spaces. Chapter six goes on to consider the position of burial places in the wider urban environment, showing that they were used and viewed in essentially the same way as the profane spaces by which they were surrounded. It also shows that they were not permanent spaces, but subject to change in response to the needs of the living and changes in the wider urban environment. It concludes with a consideration of the implications of this impermanence upon attitudes towards remains and standards of 'decency' as they applied to the buried dead.

Chapter seven follows on from this discussion, detailing the severe pressures placed upon burial space by the growth of living and dead populations, the means used to manage this problem and the often brutal treatment of remains these involved. It emphasises the longstanding nature of overcrowding and that when change ultimately came it had more to do with concerns pertaining to the living than the dead.

PART ONE

THE BODY

INTRODUCTION

There are few societies in which it has not been considered necessary to show respect for the dead body, and therefore the memory of the deceased, their place in society, and grieving friends and relations, by preparing it for burial and tending it until that time. Eighteenth-century England is no exception. 'Decency required the performance of these rituals and dictated their form. This chapter outlines how the body was laid-out and housed until the funeral and assesses the nature and degree of exposure to the corpse. In the process, it reconstructs what 'decency' meant to contemporaries in relation to treatment of, and attitudes towards, the dead body. It shows that there was little restriction on who had physical or visual contact with the dead body and that a degree of proximity to the dead before burial was a central feature of death ritual during this period, being one of the most important ways of demonstrating respect for the deceased. It argues in turn that there is little evidence of a fundamental dislike of or unwillingness to be near the dead during the long eighteenth century. In addition, it demonstrates that religion did not inform the way in which the body was handled in any specific way, despite its continued centrality to the overall framework within which death was understood. Rather, Christian values and standards were implied in contemporaries' understanding of the 'decent' treatment of the dead. It also highlights the double significance of tending the dead, which was not only a demonstration of respect and/or affection, but also a public statement of conformity to notions of 'decency'.

The sources used for the different sections of this chapter vary in nature, quantity and temporal coverage. For the most part, they form the sum-total of available information found concerning the interval between death and burial.

Among the sources utilised are the ledgers of Mr Legg, an undertaker whose ledgers have not previously been used in studies of eighteenth-century death. Although the ledgers extend from the 1710s to the 1730s the only consistent records of funeral provision are from the 1710s, and are contained within the first of the four ledgers. The funerals listed on every third page of this ledger were used to create a sample which could be used as the basis for analysis in this thesis. The resulting data features primarily in chapter three of this thesis, but has also been used in this chapter where it illuminates aspects of the body's treatment between death and burial.

Despite the varied and uneven nature of the sources, they provide enough information to support the contention that various forms of contact with the dead body were a part of ordinary experience and, moreover, that some of these forms of contact were essential parts of death rituals. They are also sufficient to demonstrate that undertakers' involvement with bodies was limited. While change was a feature of certain death rituals during the eighteenth century, they are arguably more strongly characterised by continuity with previous centuries. This is particularly true of the initial actions taken after death had occurred.

PREPARATION

'NAMELESS OFFICES'³⁸

This sub-section will outline how bodies were laid-out for burial. Although information relating to these appropriately termed 'nameless offices' is scant, a general picture can never-the-less be established. It shows that the essential elements of the process varied little between classes and remained largely unchanged over the course of the long eighteenth century.

³⁸ In Dickens' novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* Sarah Gamp, an example of a woman who made her living helping with pregnancy, labour, and laying-out the dead, largely among the poor, is described as a 'performer of nameless offices about the bodies of the dead.' See Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* [1843-4], intro. John Bowen, Wordsworth Classics (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1997), p. 303. The individuals who laid-out bodies will be discussed in the second part of this section.

The absence of widely available preservation methods or means of refrigeration meant that the interval between death and burial and the care of the body during that time was determined by a biological timeframe. Rigor mortis begins to set in about four hours after death, first in the face and a little later in the limbs and extremities, and is at its most pronounced in the twelve to forty-eight hours after death. Sources indicate that laying-out would be done as soon as possible in order to take advantage of the relatively brief window during which the body was still manoeuvrable. However, the prompt washing and shrouding of the body is attributable not only to biological considerations. Placing the body in a prescribed state of cleanliness and composure was one of the most important means by which respect for the deceased was demonstrated. It would have been especially important if the cause of death had left any kind of visible sign on the body. Those dealing with the dead therefore had to respond within the confines of unavoidable physical realities while still carrying out the expected rituals with care, attention and solemnity.

No detailed descriptions of the laying-out process were found in the sources consulted. It can confidently be stated that the body would have been washed and had its orifices plugged. A much later, and more detailed, source suggests further steps which may well have been taken during the eighteenth century. This 1910 pamphlet, produced by two anonymous nurses to assist those called upon to lay-out bodies, instructs that the legs and feet be bound and that the entire process be conducted under a sheet so as not to expose the body at any point. It describes the instructions given as based on 'the usage of generations', and there is no reason to dispute this statement.³⁹ It is entirely plausible, and indeed likely, that the binding of feet and legs was undertaken in earlier periods; as stated above, continuity is one of the central characteristics of the body's treatment before burial, and in particular of the methods by which it was laid-out. The stipulation that bodies remain covered as far as possible whilst being washed and shrouded is more unusual and it is impossible to say

³⁹ Two Queen's Nurses, L. C. & A. E. H., *Simple Instructions for Laying Out of the Dead* (Richmond, 1910), pp. 1-8, quoted in Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 212.

whether this was a long-standing aspect of the laying-out process. These measures would have been used on bodies of both genders and all classes.

Once washed and bound, the body would be put naked into its shroud, a further practice to which every body was subject. Francis Maximilian Misson, the French traveller and author, recounted in 1719 that shrouds took the form of long shirts, made at least half a foot longer than the body so that the bottom part could be fastened 'so that the End of the Shirt is done into a Kind of Tuft.'⁴⁰ This style of shroud can be seen in illustrations dating from the first few decades of the eighteenth century, for instance that from Elizabeth Addam's 1734 certificate of burial in woollen, shown in Figure 1.⁴¹ It must be noted, however, that the 'tuft' on top of the head in this illustration does not accord with Misson's observations; according to his description, 'Upon the Head they put a Cap, which they fasten with a very broad Chin cloth; with Gloves on the Hands, and a Cravat round the Neck, all of Woollen...Instead of a Cap, the Women have a Kind of Head-dress, with a Forehead-cloth.'⁴² It is certain that different styles of shroud existed, and that they changed over time. However, too few descriptions and illustrations exist to chart any changes in shroud style, ways of securing the jaw or practices such as covering the hands and neck.⁴³ Gloves are mentioned fairly frequently in the account books of the undertaker Mr Legg, dating from the 1710s: of the seventy funerals used in a sample survey of the ledgers, the hands of the deceased were covered by gloves in twenty three cases.⁴⁴ Gloves are not mentioned in any later sources, but this cannot be taken as conclusive evidence that they ceased to be used. Excavations at Christ Church, Spitalfields, show that many bodies were dressed in clothes under their

⁴⁰ M. Misson, *Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England* (London, 1719), pp. 89-90

⁴¹ It was also used during the seventeenth century, as attested by John Donne's monument in Westminster Abbey dating from 1631. How far the style can be dated prior to this date is unknown.

⁴² Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 89-90

⁴³ At some point shrouds ceased to be closed at the bottom: by the Victorian period shrouds took the form of nightdresses, so this change must have occurred by the early nineteenth century at the very latest. This would in turn have produced further alterations to the dressing of the body; the Edwardian pamphlet quoted above mentions placing socks on corpses' feet. See Two Queen's Nurses, *Simple Instructions*, pp. 1-8, quoted in Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 212.

⁴⁴ This accords with Misson's account, which is concerned solely with the middling strata of society.

shrouds, although some were naked, and that these clothes were of a varied nature, including shirts or smocks, cardigans or jackets and leggings.⁴⁵



Figure 1. Detail from 'A certificate for the burial in woollen of Elizabeth Addams of Bramfield, Hertfordshire' (1734), GL/Bside 8.24

Elizabeth Addams also serves to illustrate legal obligations pertaining to the laying-out of the dead. Instituted in 1666, 'An Act for Burying in Woollen only' stipulated that no materials or threads other than those derived from wool be used in any aspect of the shroud's manufacture, decoration or fastening, a measure designed to protect Britain's wool trade from foreign competition.⁴⁶ The material from which shrouds were made was usually a thin woollen flannel. According to Misson, the shroud might be ornamented using 'Woollen Lace' or embroidered with black thread, although this is another feature of shrouding which almost certainly changed over time and which was obviously dependent upon wealth.⁴⁷ Burial in woollen was not popular among those who wished to be buried in finer garments and although it was repealed in 1814, the Act was ignored in many places long before. However, sources giving information about either those who chose to pay the fine and their reasons for doing so, or about why observation of the law lapsed, are few.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Molleson & Cox, *The Spitalfields Project, Volume Two*, pp. 202-3

⁴⁶ 18 Car. II. c.4. This original Act was repealed and replaced in 1677 by the more detailed 30 Car. II. c.3, 'An Act for Burying Woollen', which stipulated that 'no Corps of any Person or Persons shall be buried in any Shirt, Shift, Sheet or Shroud, or any thing whatsoever made or mingled with Flax, Hemp, Silk, Hair, Gold or Silver, or in any Stuff or Thing, other than what is made of Sheeps Wool only, or be put in any Coffin lined or faced with any sort of Cloth or Stuff, or any other Thing whatsoever, that is made of any Material but Sheeps Wool only.' Affidavits signed by witnesses were expected to be presented to parish clergy within eight days of burial. There was a £5 fine for forfeiture or non-compliance.

⁴⁷ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 88-90

⁴⁸ An index of surviving affidavits of burial in woollen, including the names, occupations and parishes of the deceased, entitled 'Affidavits of Burials in Woollen' exists in Bristol Central Library.

After washing and shrouding, the second step in preparing for burial was acquisition of the coffin. By the eighteenth century coffin burial was the norm for all individuals, even the poor, although why this came to be so is unclear.⁴⁹ Coffins could be obtained from an individual who described themselves as an undertaker, or from a carpenter, joiner, cabinet or trunk maker. They might be taken away immediately, or either collected or delivered at any time up to the day of the funeral, and could be either ready-made, or made on demand, with each type available in varying degrees of quality.⁵⁰ Ready-made coffins were available in a range of set sizes, down to those small enough for newborns and infants.⁵¹ When coffins were bought immediately, those purchasing them often measured the dead themselves with a measure of string which they took with them to ensure the correct size of coffin was selected.⁵² Simple 'shells', 'imperfect' coffins usually made of fir or pine wood known as 'deal', would be used for the poor, those who died in institutions such as prisons and unidentified bodies.⁵³ Better quality coffins would be made of other woods, most commonly elm. Mr Legg's ledgers indicate that at sixty of the seventy funerals covered by the sample taken the coffins were elm, eight were deal and in another two cases coffins were not purchased.⁵⁴

Whilst waiting to be coffined bodies would typically lie in bed, about which more will be said in the following section. The bottom of the coffin would

⁴⁹ Vanessa Harding has argued that 'it is probable that the majority of burials in single graves in London churchyards were coffined by the early to mid-seventeenth century', and it is to be assumed that this custom had become even more commonplace during the remainder of the seventeenth century both in London and elsewhere. See. Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 60.

⁵⁰ The delay between the ordering and delivery of the coffin could be fortunate. In 1719 an undertaker's servant forgot the lid of a coffin he brought to the house of a deceased gentleman, but upon returning with the lid he found the gentleman had revived. See *Original Weekly Journal*, Saturday, July 11, 1719. See also *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Wednesday, January 25, 1769, which described a lady's arrangements for the funeral of her servant, all of which were rendered unnecessary when 'to the great surprise of the family, as well as of the Undertaker, when he came on Tuesday morning to put her in a shell, he found the old woman at breakfast'.

⁵¹ For example, it was reported that the undertaker to whom the parents of a stillborn child went with a coffin request held ready-made coffins for newborns and stillborns. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), May 1846, trial of William Richardson, Anna Maria Richardson (t18460511-1182).

⁵² For example, David Evans and a friend went to an undertaker with a measure of his wife's body. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1818, trial of David Evans (t18180218-37).

⁵³ GL/S 393, Glen W. Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts of England and Wales* (London, 1858), p. 9

⁵⁴ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker

usually be covered with sawdust, bran, or some other absorbent material; Misson noted 'That the Body may ly the softer, some put a Lay of Bran, about four Inches thick, at the Bottom of the Coffin.'⁵⁵ Other forms of cushioning might also be used; in forty seven of the seventy funerals sampled from Legg's ledgers a 'pillow' was purchased, indicating such measures were not beyond the reach of middling incomes. Mattresses too, stuffed with various materials, might be placed under the body.⁵⁶ The ledgers also show that many coffins were covered on the outside and lined inside. A total of thirty nine coffins were covered, most in either 'Fine cloath bayes', 'Fine cloth' or 'Bayes', which seem to have been the same material, although two were covered in velvet. A total of fifty four of the sixty eight coffins in the sample were lined, thirty one with 'Fine Crape', nineteen 'Ruffled', six with crape and eight with unspecified materials.⁵⁷ This again indicates that 'additional' items of a decorative or otherwise technically unnecessary measure were affordable to a relatively large number of people.

Slightly different measures were taken when there was to be a long interval until burial. The coffins of bodies not buried immediately were typically reinforced in some way to contain the products, and the smell, of putrefaction, usually with double or triple lids, or even with a lead casing. Only six of the coffins provided by Legg were lead, and only ten had double lids.⁵⁸ Some undertakers put lime in coffins when they knew there would be a long interval until burial, although this could be hazardous. In 1728 a Hatton Garden home burned down after a 'dropsical' corpse covered with lime caught fire. *Fog's Weekly Journal* described how 'some Water broke from [the body], which meeting with the Lime, the Lime took Fire, and first melted the Lead, then burnt the wooden Coffin on the outside, and afterwards catch'd the House'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp, 89-90. Evidence of the use of sawdust, sometimes to fill the entire coffin around the body, was found in excavations undertaken at Spitalfields church. See Jez Reeve & Max Adams, *The Spitalfields Project. Volume 1: The Archaeology. Across the Styx* CBA Research Report 85 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1993), p. 82.

⁵⁶ R. C. Janaway, 'The Textiles' in Reeve & Adams, *The Spitalfields Project*, p. 95

⁵⁷ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Fog's Weekly Journal*, Saturday, October 12, 1728

As with laying-out, the process of coffining the body and the nature of coffins changed little over the course of the long eighteenth century with the exception that ornamented coffins became more widely used on a national scale. Although each had a practical purpose, the shroud and coffin were also aesthetic objects whose appearance and possible ornamentation contributed to the 'decency' of the deceased's treatment. Their nature also implies that the period between death and burial was one of transition during which the body continued to be treated, in some ways, as if still sentient; dressed in its shroud, whose appearance was somewhat similar to nightclothes, and, if budget permitted, with a pillow and even sheet in the coffin, the body was made to appear as if 'comfortably' asleep in bed.⁶⁰ As such, the shroud and coffin were also symbolic, a way of indicating the new state and social position of the deceased and a way of allowing the bereaved to come to terms with the death within the context of a familiar physical state, that of repose.

The body and the changes to which it was subject would be completely covered by the shroud. However the face, the most important and emotive part of the body, was left visible. It, too, underwent pronounced changes after death but under normal circumstances the coffin would be left open to allow viewing of the deceased with the changes wrought by death undisguised, although Misson mentions that faces were left covered with a small square of flannel until the time came to view them immediately prior to the funeral.⁶¹ The visibility of the face was important and viewing the dead an intrinsic part of death ritual. It was noted in Edwin Chadwick's 1843 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain: A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* that among poor women it was customary to touch or kiss the deceased, even if the remains were in an advanced state of decay.⁶² However, whether touching the dead was

⁶⁰ In twenty one of the seventy funerals sampled from Mr Legg's ledgers the body was covered by a sheet in the coffin. See TNA/C112/48. The shroud's similarity to nightclothes would have increased when it ceased to be tied at the bottom. See above.

⁶¹ Misson, *Memoirs*, p. 90

⁶² Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain: A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* (London, 1843), p. 39

of as widespread importance as viewing them is unknown: no further mention of the practice was found in the sources consulted.

There were options available for those who wished to either deny or postpone the physical changes caused by death, although these were rarely employed. An interesting opinion piece in a newspaper of 1760, a commentary on British death customs written from an allegedly Chinese perspective, mentioned that the faces of the dead were 'painted up' by undertakers.⁶³ Unfortunately, this is the only mention of applying make-up to corpses so it is impossible to say whether or not it was a common custom.

Another, more extreme, option to counter decay was embalming. In *Nekrokedeia; or, the Art of Embalming* (1705) surgeon Thomas Greenhill defended and explained this 'noble Art', advertising it as a means of making death and the dead body less horrible to observers, and arguing that 'A Corps lying unbury'd and Putrifying, is not only a dismal Aspect to our Eyes, offensive to our Nose, and ungrateful to all our External Senses, but even horrid in our very private Apprehensions, and secret Conceptions.'⁶⁴ The work's prologue contains a poem elaborating on these ideas.⁶⁵ However, the extent to which they represent contemporary attitudes towards death requires some qualification. As discussed in the introductory chapter, it is very difficult to try and measure or compare emotions over time and this thesis does not attempt to do so. It assumes that death and dead bodies were surely unpleasant to eighteenth-century people, both in theory and in practice, evoking varying degrees of disturbance and distaste on the grounds of their appearance, their subjection to the process of decay and the unavoidable mortality they embodied. However, as this chapter is in the process of demonstrating, any such feelings co-existed with strong convictions regarding 'decency' and respect which dictated that

⁶³ *Public Ledger or The Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence*, Thursday, February 21, 1760

⁶⁴ Thomas Greenhill, *Nekrokedeia; or, the Art of Embalming* (London, 1705), p. 26

⁶⁵ The poem includes the following lines: 'From common Ruine you the *Body* keep,/And turn the filthiness of *Death* to *Sleep*;/...*Youth* you preserve, and by your *Science* save/The living *Graces* in the rotting *Grave*/...The *Balm* and *Eastern Odours* you employ,/The *Noxious Vapours* of the *Vault* destroy;/You reconcile us to Things we loath,/We feel the *Flesh* is firm, the *Features* smooth;/We see, we smell, by e'ry *Sense* we try/Your *Skill*, and are no more afraid to *Die*.' See Greenhill, *Nekrokedeia*, prologue.

time should be spent caring for the corpse and further time spent around it before it was consigned to the ground. In any case, although knowledge of embalming methods, which were often invasive, was quite widespread among surgeons of the eighteenth century, it was practiced only upon the elite. Legg's ledgers show that although he provided embalming services, he did so very rarely; in the sample analysed only two payments for embalming, or 'putting the body up', occur.⁶⁶ An archaeological excavation of almost one thousand eighteenth-century bodies from Spitalfields' church vaults uncovered no evidence of embalming or other forms of preservation.⁶⁷

It is therefore problematic to argue, as Jolene Zigarovich has done, that embalming demonstrates an increasing sentimentality towards the dead body, along with an 'increasing preoccupation with mortality and the corpse, and...intense anxiety about bodily dissolution and disruption after death.'⁶⁸ The majority would not have received any treatment intended to prevent or disguise decay. Even those who could afford the process might avoid it; Claire Gittings has argued that elite women were significant instigators of night funerals, popular in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, because they disliked the idea of their bodies being exposed and mutilated in the embalming process.⁶⁹ Rather, the most convincing explanation of embalming during this period lies simply in the circumstances in which it was used: the wealthy were embalmed because they were likely to remain unburied for a longer period in order that they could lie 'in state' for visitors to pay their respects. It was, more than anything, a practical measure that was unnecessary for the vast majority of bodies. Physical decay was an accepted part of death and, ordinarily, remained undisguised.

This sub-section has shown that during the eighteenth century the body was laid out in much the same way it had been for centuries. To clean the body and

⁶⁶ In one payment is listed for 'Body put up', in the other 'Body Put Up w/Sweets', suggesting the use of herbs or more exotic substances. See TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg.

⁶⁷ Reeve & Adams, *The Spitalfields Project*, p. 127

⁶⁸ Jolene Zigarovich, 'Preserved Remains: Embalming Practices in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 33:3 (2009), p. 97

⁶⁹ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 190-1

put it into the state prescribed by custom, and to do so promptly but without haste, was an essential part of a 'decent' disposal. It is to those who had charge of this task that this chapter now turns.

LAYERS-OUT

Information about the individuals who laid-out bodies for burial is most readily available in Old Bailey trial records, in particular those concerning suspicious or violent deaths in which those who laid-out the body discovered suspect marks or injuries on the deceased and testified to that effect. However, although the contexts are exceptional, the details they contain are more widely applicable; in most cases foul play was uncovered only once preparation of the body had commenced, meaning that we can make broader generalisations based upon details regarding how and by whom the task was performed. These sources also add to the assertion made above regarding willingness to be around the dead; they show that the process was, although surely never exactly pleasant for those carrying it out, basically mundane, routine and unproblematic. It was a matter of necessity and a 'decency' owed to the dead, its necessity compounded by the limitations of time imposed by the progression of decay. There were no constraints on or stigmatisation of those who had physical contact with the dead.

In the majority of sources consulted the laying-out of the corpse was performed by at least two women. These sources suggest that the determining factor in choosing who would perform the task was, in many cases, simply their availability at the time. This would have been due in large part to the time constraints imposed by the speed with which rigor advanced, which inevitably governed the choice of who performed the laying-out as much as the laying-out itself. An example of the role of chance in the selection of women to lay-out the dead, and the relative informality of the process, is as follows: in 1818 Leah Madden was called to lay-out the body of Elizabeth Evans, but sent word she could not come, as did Ann Davis. Mrs Jones was called to perform the task

instead, which she did along with her daughter and Ann Davis, who agreed to help after being asked a second time.⁷⁰

A body might also be laid out by women who were friends of the deceased, although this too was often a matter of opportunity. When Robert Bennet Darnley's mother died in her home she was laid-out there by a friend who had also watched her in her last illness, along with a woman named Esther Todd who was lodging in the house at the time.⁷¹ When Mary Donovan heard her friend Mary Welch was dead she went to visit the home of the deceased. There she found two other women, and helped them lay Welch out.⁷² It is possible that particular women might sometimes be selected for the task owing to their relationship with the deceased and their family. For example, the body of Hannah Quinn was washed by an old acquaintance named Margaret Brucken at the specific request of the deceased's husband, despite the fact that Brucken lived on Tottenham Court Road, while Quinn lived on Haymarket; although these two places are not very far apart it would nonetheless be assumed, given the aforementioned examples, that someone closer could have been found to assist had not the husband been so particular.⁷³

These examples concern members of the lower classes. Even fewer references to laying-out among the middle classes exist. David Cressy has argued that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries family members or servants would usually lay-out bodies, and Pat Jalland has found the same to be the case for the middle classes of the Victorian period, servants and maids being more likely to take on the task than family.⁷⁴ There is no reason to assume that the situation was any different during the eighteenth century. Although none of the lower class examples found mention family members laying-out, it was almost certainly also an option among them.

⁷⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1818, trial of David Evans (t18180218-37)

⁷¹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1812, trial of Esther Todd (t18121028-73)

⁷² *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), September 1825, trial of Patrick Welch, Ellen Lyons (t18250915-42)

⁷³ See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1799, trial of Patrick Quinn (t17990220-32)

⁷⁴ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 428-9; Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 211.

The selection of women to wash and shroud the corpse could therefore be a matter of convenience and opportunity, or an act of friendship, a final token of affection and respect owed to the deceased. It is likely that in many cases it was a combination of the two, both because when death followed an illness during which the deceased had been attended by family and friends these were likely to be present at the death, as in the case of Robert Bennet Darnley's mother, and because news of a death was likely to travel fast among the local community, drawing friends and acquaintances to the home of the deceased, the latter factor being most relevant among the lower classes. Many women would have had some experience, or at least knowledge, of intimate care and handling of the body in life, whether that be the sick, pregnant, or postpartum body, and involvement in laying-out was part of this experience. Social position was not necessarily important in determining which women performed the act of laying-out. Nor was age. This is suggested by both the case of Elizabeth Evans in which assistance was given by Mrs Jones' daughter, who we must assume cannot have been particularly old, and that of Esther Todd, who was only thirty three years of age.⁷⁵

These sources do not mention women for whom laying-out was an occupation and source of income, occasional or routine, although they existed and were often employed during the long eighteenth century. Mary Fissell has shown, using Poor Law records and the records of institutions such as infirmaries, that one of the most common forms of occasional practice for poor women, in addition to midwifery, was nursing, which included caring for the sick, cleaning for them, sitting up with the dying and laying-out the dead.⁷⁶ Margaret Pelling too has shown that parishes would often pay older women to

⁷⁵ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1818, trial of David Evans (t18180218-37); *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1812, trial of Esther Todd (t18121028-73)

⁷⁶ She also notes that the employment of women for such tasks by Poor Law authorities and institutions was increasingly restricted to care rather than cure, in particular as watchers of the dying and layers-out of the dead. See Mary E. Fissell, *Patients, Powers, and the Poor in Eighteenth-Century Bristol* (Cambridge History of Medicine) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 64, 67, 12. See also Joan Lane, *A Social History of Medicine: Health, Healing and Disease in England, 1750-1950* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 52, 127. The employment of poor women to deal with the dead bodies of the poor who died in institutions was also mentioned by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*. See Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1838), introduced and notes by Ella Westland, (Ware; Wordsworth Editions, 1992), pp. 134, 156.

perform these tasks.⁷⁷ There would, therefore, have been some women who were particularly associated with availability to perform such tasks. However, they would have come from the poorer classes and tended to their peers, often at the behest of their local parish or an institution.⁷⁸ It is uncertain whether those not employed by parishes or institutions received payment for their assistance. It is certainly very unlikely that those with close familial or social relationships would have been paid for their time, although Pelling notes that individuals might be paid by parishes to lay out members of their own family.⁷⁹ In the Old Bailey accounts consulted payment is mentioned only once, when a lodger named Esther Todd was given half a crown for her role in laying-out another resident of her lodging-house.⁸⁰

Women also performed the office of searcher. Since the seventeenth century searchers had been responsible for giving verdicts as to cause of death, and continued to do so until the introduction of the Registration Act in 1837, which altered the process of reporting and certifying deaths. However, references to searchers during the eighteenth century are very rare, even in Old Bailey accounts, so we have little information about their role. We do know that these women, like those who were paid for their assistance in laying-out, would typically have been poor women appointed by the parish. Their existence is significant as, along with the Burial in Woolen Act and the later Registration Act, it marks one of very few points at which the body was subject to any form of external, legal regulation; all other regulating factors were cultural. However, like the Burial in Woolen Act the searchers' involvement was of a relatively casual, sometimes distinctly unprofessional, kind.⁸¹ At the same time, they

⁷⁷ Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 175

⁷⁸ Julie-Marie Strange has demonstrated the existence of such women among the poor in the later nineteenth century. See Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty*, pp. 93-4. A fictional example from the earlier part of the century is Dickens' Sarah Gamp. See Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, pp. 303-7.

⁷⁹ Pelling, *The Common Lot*, p. 175

⁸⁰ Esther Todd was paid half a crown for helping lay out Mrs Darnley. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1812, trial of Esther Todd (t18121028-73).

⁸¹ As Edwin Chadwick explained, 'The alarm of the plague having subsided, the office of searcher was, until the recent appointments of registrars under the new Registration Act, given by the parish officer to two old women in each parish, frequently pew-openers who, having viewed the body, demanded a fee of two shillings, in addition to which they expected to be supplied with some liquor, and gave a certificate of

demonstrate further the potentially significant number of people who would have been around and had physical contact with the dead body before burial.⁸²

The sources examined thus far all point to women being responsible for laying-out and otherwise attending to the dead. However, men would have been called upon to shave male corpses if necessary, and examples exist of men being employed to lay-out a male body.⁸³ The diary of Sussex shopkeeper Thomas Turner, who assisted in the provision of items for funerals and funeral organisation, includes mention of a payment made in January 1764 to John Brazer and William Starks 'for their trouble laying out etc. of Will. Lidlow, found dead in our parish.'⁸⁴ Margaret Pelling and Ian Mortimer also cite instances in which men were employed as nurses, watching individuals in their sickness, and to lay bodies out.⁸⁵ Therefore, although it was not common practice, men might be involved in handling and preparing the dead body.

Males might also assist in the body's preparation in the form of undertakers. They may have laid out the bodies of both men and women, although only men are mentioned in the sources consulted.⁸⁶ Even so, the involvement of undertakers in laying-out was limited. As the following chapters will explain, outside London undertakers appeared relatively late in the eighteenth century and those who described themselves as undertakers were a very varied group; some might provide grand funerals, in which cases it is likely they also assumed responsibility for the body, while others merely supplied coffin, pall and shroud, and had little or no organisational role or involvement with the

the fact and cause of death as they were informed of it, and this certificate was received by the minister as a warrant for the interment.' See Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 113.

⁸² Individuals called searchers are mentioned as having performed the task of ensuring that bodies laid in vaults were placed in the correct position near family in the report on the excavation of Spitalfields' church vault. See Reeve & Adams, *The Spitalfields Project*, p. 124. However, no other mention of individuals performing such a task has been found.

⁸³ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 89-90

⁸⁴ Thomas Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765*, edited by David Vaisey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 284

⁸⁵ Pelling, *The Common Lot*, pp. 181-2, 196; Ian Mortimer, *The Dying and the Doctors: The Medical Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), pp. 150, 181-2, 186

⁸⁶ See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1752, trial of Anthony de Rosa (t17520219-66), which mentions that an undertaker's servant washing a body. See also *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), June 1796, trial of Mary Nott (t17960622-6), which mentions an undertaker's servant washing the body of a murdered man.

body itself. The latter type of undertaker was the most common, and so although it is very difficult to be certain exactly who was more likely to wash and shroud the corpse, it follows that undertakers would have been much less likely to take on this task.

It is possible that certain circumstances might have made undertakers' involvement more likely, for instance if individuals were victims of obvious or brutal violence or, possibly, if they were strangers to the local area, although as stated above poor women employed by the parish would be likely to assist in the latter situation. As death was their source of profit undertakers may have been less likely to turn down the charge of dealing with unpleasant cases and those who offered laying-out services were also likely to have places on their premises where bodies could be housed until burial, making them additionally convenient when the deceased was without connections or if the body required examination by a coroner.

Although the evidence examined here is limited, it is nonetheless extremely suggestive. This section has shown that the preparation of the body for burial was characterised by informality and determined by individual circumstances, demonstrating in turn that the preparation of the body and its disposal was a process of several stages potentially involving a variety of people of both genders among whom the undertaker, if one was involved at all, was somewhat exceptional in having death as a formal and definite subject of business. Although searchers too were significant in bringing a form of formality to dealing with the dead body, their role was one of protocol, often carried out somewhat casually and with little aura of the 'official'. On the whole, the task of laying-out remained in the hands of individuals outside of an organised business of death who were called upon as and when required, demonstrating very little change from preceding centuries. Therefore the implicit use of undertakers as a sign or measure of changing exposure to and treatment of the dead, as discussed in the introduction, requires reassessment. No mention of religious considerations relating to the body's preparation is made in any sources, indicating that religion did not inform the body's treatment between

death and burial other than as part of wider notions of what comprised 'decent' treatment.

That laying-out was a task which remained largely outside the hands of undertakers, and that women continued to be actively involved in it, in addition to their involvement with the dead in the capacity of searchers, shows that unlike the pregnant or postpartum body, or the sick body in general, the business of dealing with the dead body did not witness the beginning of a process of professionalisation or defeminisation during the long eighteenth century; undertakers cannot be considered on a par with, for example, man-midwives or physicians.

We can therefore conclude that exposure to the dead body remained common during the long eighteenth century and there appear to have been few considerations affecting who performed the task, and apparently no stigmatisation of those who had physical contact with the dead. Importantly, the informality and lack of restriction on contact with the dead illustrated by the sources was not considered incompatible with standards of 'decency': providing that whoever laid out a body did so promptly and with the respect owed to the deceased this was unproblematic.

PRESENCE

HOUSES AND DEAD HOUSES

Standards of decency applied not only to physical contact with dead bodies, but also to the places they awaited burial and the behaviour of those around them. This sub-section will examine where bodies awaited burial and how their presence was viewed.

Burial registers show that bodies typically remained above ground for between two and four days, a timeframe in line with that imposed by the process of decomposition described above; rigor wears off twelve to forty-eight hours after death as the body's cells start to decompose, and by the time three or four days have passed bacteria in the gut begin to digest the intestines and spread to other internal organs, discolouring the skin in the process, and the

body begins to smell bad. Allowing time to elapse after death and witnessing these physical changes therefore ensured certainty of death; fear of premature burial was real and newspapers not infrequently published stories recounting the discovery and rescue of those unfortunate enough to be buried alive.⁸⁷ One example of many is as follows: a few hours after the funeral of a man, 'a woman passing through the Church-yard, thought she heard a noise issue from the grave, and ran to communicate her opinion'. Several people were eventually persuaded to accompany her to the grave, which they opened to find the man 'turned upon his face, greatly mangled by the efforts he had made to break from his horrible confinement, and literally smothered in his blood.'⁸⁸

This was a cautionary tale: the man had been buried just twenty four hours after his supposed death. Such swift interment was usually reserved for victims of infectious diseases, women who had died in childbirth, or those who had died of illnesses in which the condition of the body had deteriorated severely while the victim was still alive, meaning that decomposition after death advanced more rapidly than normal.⁸⁹ In any other circumstances burial just twenty four hours after death was liable to arouse suspicion of wrong-doing and censure for disrespect of the deceased. For example, in 1789 the *Public Advertiser* reported that suspicions regarding the hasty interment of a man, who it was feared may have been a victim of poisoning, had led to a coroner interrupting the funeral. He found the man was still alive, although hiding in his home rather than trapped in the coffin: in this instance prompt burial was not the result of a murder but part of an extravagant fraud contrived between the man and his wife. The 'dead alive', as the newspaper termed him 'had some Exchequer suits upon him' which his wife could plead to have waived after his death, following which the man could be 'resurrected'.

This is clearly an atypical case. However, the newspaper's description of neighbours' concern and suspicion at 'the indelicacy of so early an interment' is

⁸⁷ Misson also noted of the body, 'They let it lye three or four Days in this Condition; which Time they allow, as well as to give the dead Person an Opportunity of coming to Life again, if his Soul has not quite left his Body, as to prepare Mourning, and the Ceremonies of the Funeral.' See Misson, *Memoirs*, p. 90.

⁸⁸ *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Friday, September 27, 1799

⁸⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 426

indicative of wider attitudes towards the dead body and the memory of the deceased. Such attitudes demonstrate that allowing the body to remain above ground before burial was, in addition to being a precautionary measure, a means of paying respect to the memory of the deceased and acknowledging their passing. However, keeping the body too long above ground was also considered improper: allowing the body to decay and become noxious in its coffin was just as disrespectful to the deceased, and as distressing to the bereaved and public sensibility, as too swift a burial.

If a double or triple lidded coffin, or a lead coffin, was within the budget of the bereaved it would have been possible to allow a longer interval between death and burial without the unpleasant consequences of decomposition becoming so noticeable. This longer interval was often necessary if an elaborate funeral was planned, or if the body was to be transported elsewhere for burial. In these cases the body might well be intended for viewing, which would have necessitated some form of embalming or preservation. Such practices were therefore limited to the elite, royalty or other persons of renown. The time between death and burial might also be extended for other reasons at the lower end of the social spectrum; as will be discussed below, towards the very end of the period in question the time between death and burial among the urban poor could easily extend to ten or fourteen days, sometimes more.

The limited spread of the undertaking trade and its varied nature meant that the majority of bodies would have remained in the home until the funeral. Whilst awaiting their coffin they would either have been laid out on the bed, or possibly on a table. The size of the deceased's home would dictate the exact place in which the corpse lay, and therefore the level of proximity between the living and the dead. Those who were able to devote a room to the body, discontinuing its use until the body was removed for burial, would do so. Poorer members of society without the space to do this would have to keep the body where the ordinary activities of everyday life continued. Julie-Marie Strange has argued that proximity to the sick and deceased was a particularly important part of working class culture in the late nineteenth century and part

of very strongly held notions of 'decency' among the lower classes and, as will be shown below, this also seem to be applicable to the culture of the poor in the long eighteenth century.⁹⁰

In some cases bodies were watched by individuals employed for that purpose. Both men and women performed the task.⁹¹ However, watching does not seem to have been very common, the body usually being left locked in a separate room if one was available.⁹² Why it was important to keep the body close but not necessarily important to actually be around it is very unclear. Equally unclear is why the task seems usually to have been undertaken by hired outsiders rather than family or friends. However, although the body was typically left alone, the coffin, if it had been delivered, would remain open in order that the body could be viewed, and would remain open until immediately before burial.⁹³ This, the fact that bodies were not necessarily coffined immediately after death, and the fact that widespread coffin burial significantly predates the eighteenth century means that Clare Gittings' assertion that coffin burial is a sign of contemporary fear of the dead body and a desire to reduce exposure to it must be rejected.⁹⁴

Awaiting burial at an undertaker's was usually reserved for the very wealthy and socially elite, those who had died in poverty, or those who had died in either suspicious or obviously criminal circumstances. The Company of Upholders, who provided funerals to the elite in the early eighteenth century, offered a hall in which bodies could 'lie in state' in grand surroundings. By the 1730s their monopoly on these grand funerals had been eroded and other undertakers were offering similar services, including facilities for the housing of

⁹⁰ Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty*, pp. 44, 47, 50, 66, 80, 82

⁹¹ Bristol's Redcliffe Pit Quaker Burial Ground employed their male grave digger, Joseph Moore, to watch bodies. See BRO/SF/R2/3, Burial records for the Redcliffe Pit and Rosemary Street burial grounds. Legg arranged for bodies to be watched only twice. In one case a woman performed the task, in the other a man. See TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg.

⁹² Henry Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares; or, the Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle, 1725), p. 16

⁹³ Litten, 'The Funeral Trade', p. 49. See also, for example, *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), September 1825, trial of Patrick Welch, Ellen Lyons (t18250915-42), in which, after her body was washed, Mary Welch was placed in her coffin. The lid was placed on top, but not nailed down, so that those who wished could view her before burial.

⁹⁴ Clare Gittings, 'Sacred and Secular: 1558-1660' in Jupp & Gittings, *Death in England*, p. 157

the body. For example, in 1724 an undertaker named Jonathan Kendall advertised his shop as providing a place where bodies could lie 'without the Expence of a Hall.'⁹⁵ Mr Legg had such a facility although 'use of The Room' is only listed twice in the sample used.⁹⁶ It is to be presumed, despite a lack of evidence, that many undertakers who provided for the wealthy continued to offer spaces where bodies could lie in state in suitably grand surroundings. In contrast, although the service was offered among other undertakers, it appears to have been utilised relatively rarely by the middling and lower classes. Edwin Chadwick's 1843 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* noted that undertakers sometimes took the bodies of 'respectable persons from the country, who die at an hotel or inn, or in apartments...until the coffins are made, and they can be conveyed to the residence of their family, or their vaults in the country,' implying that under normal circumstances the practice was not otherwise common among this sector of society.⁹⁷

It is not surprising that the middling classes, who would not have been taxed by the need to devote a room of the house to the corpse, did not make routine use of this particular undertakers' service. However, despite the typically limited space they had available in their homes, the poor also seem to have resorted to undertakers only when one of their number died away from home. According to Chadwick's *Report*, if undertakers held bodies on their premises or in their homes they were often the bodies of those who had died at workhouses or hospitals but whose relatives desired a decent, that is not a pauper's, burial. It is likely that cost was a factor in these considerations, but it also seems to be attributable to a particularly strong desire to keep the body close before burial. The housing of bodies away from the place in which they died was not, therefore, a matter of routine and cannot even be correlated directly with lack of

⁹⁵ *Daily Journal*, Monday, June 8, 1724. See also *Penny Post or The Morning Advertiser*, Monday, April 8, 1751: the body of a Charles Hay lay in state at an undertaker's, and was attended by a large number of noblemen. Dr Archibald Cannon also lay at an undertaker's until his burial, as did the Duke of Devonshire. See *London Evening Post*, Saturday, June 9, 1753; *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Friday, October 19, 1764. The Upholders will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

⁹⁶ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg

⁹⁷ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 93

space in the home; among the majority of society keeping the body in the home was normal, and even desirable, practice.

The explanation for this is perhaps because the majority of bodies belonging to non-elite persons housed away from the home were those of murder victims, suicides and the unidentified.⁹⁸ For instance, a 1782 London newspaper advertisement notified the public that the body of an unknown woman found in the Serpentine should, if they recognised the description of her clothing and possessions given, go to a particular undertaker's to view her remains.⁹⁹ In other cases, bodies would be held in 'dead houses', also known as 'bone houses', described in Chadwick's report as the 'customary receptacle for suicides, deserted or relationless, or, as they are sometimes termed, "God-forsaken people."' ¹⁰⁰ These places were often connected to churches, with most urban parishes, and probably most rural areas, having such a place.¹⁰¹ An account of a coroner's inquest in the village of Aston, near Birmingham, in 1839, contained a brief description of a dead house, which was located in a corner of

⁹⁸ The body of Ann Bond, whose husband was suspected of her murder, was held at an undertaker's to be examined, presumably by a coroner. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1798, trial of John Bond (t17981024-7). The body of Louis Bartolomichi was also taken to the house of an undertaker. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), May 1800, trial of John Wilson (t18000528-39). *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1828, trial of William Chelton (t18280221-282) also mentions a body being kept in an undertaker's 'shop' until its funeral. However, the body of Elizabeth Chaplin was left in her home over night until a coroner's jury was held the following day. The day after that the undertaker was allowed to visit the body and measure it for its coffin. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), December 1812, trial of John Chaplin (t18121202-32).

⁹⁹ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Wednesday, April 3, 1782

¹⁰⁰ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 93

¹⁰¹ See for example: *The Times*, Saturday, September 24, 1808 reported that the victims of a fire were taken to Covent Garden bone-house to be identified, although the severity of their burns made this a difficult task; *The Times*, Friday, May 15, 1818 reported that two men found in the New River, which emptied into the Thames, 'were carried to the bone-house, under Islington church, where, in the course of the day, they were each recognized by their friends'; *The Times*, Thursday, July 12, 1827 mentions a dead house in Hackney; *The Times*, Tuesday, August 26, 1828 reported that the remains of a drowned woman were taken to a 'parochial bone-house' in the Limehouse area; *The Times*, Friday, December 18, 1835 mentions a dead house in 'Poplar Church-yard'; *The Times*, Wednesday, August 25, 1841 mentions one in Wapping churchyard; *The Times*, Friday, March 12, 1819 reported that a suicide found in the river was 'conveyed in a shell to the dead-house of St Olave's'; *The Times*, Wednesday, August 21, 1850 reported that the body of 'a foreigner' who shot himself through the heart in a clump of bushes in Kensington gardens was taken to the Kensington parish dead house; *The Times*, Wednesday, October 13, 1841 mentions a dead house at Newington church; *The Times*, Wednesday, July 06, 1842 mentions a dead house at St Dunstan's; *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, June 20, 1761 mentions one at St Martin's in the Fields. Several accounts mention a bone house at St John's church, Waterloo-road. See *The Times*, Friday, July 05, 1844; *The Times*, Wednesday, August 09, 1837; *The Times*, Monday, April 26, 1841; *The Times*, Wednesday, December 06, 1837.

the churchyard. ‘The “bone-house” at Aston Church,’ it explained simply, ‘is not one of those places called “charnel-houses”, but an outbuilding in the corner of the church-yard, for the reception of corpses on peculiar occasions,’ although its primary function was ‘as a depository for the sexton’s tools.’¹⁰² In other cases the places used to house bodies were located in the vaults of churches. ‘Dead houses’ can also be found connected to workhouses and hospitals during the early nineteenth century.¹⁰³ In fact, the vast majority of sources mentioning these places date from that period and it cannot be said with certainty how long such places had existed.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that similar places on church land had long been used informally for sheltering the dead. Even during the early nineteenth century, when references to dead houses are common, the frequency of their usage in each locality would have been low and there is no suggestion in the sources that at this time there existed places devoted solely to the purpose of housing the unclaimed dead.¹⁰⁵ Rather, ‘dead house’ was a term which became attached to buildings, or rooms within buildings, over time, despite these places often having other functions for which they were employed more frequently.

There are earlier instances of the kind of bodies later held in dead houses being left in other public places, specifically public houses, and therefore unconnected to a church or on consecrated ground. In 1690 the body of a man who died whilst on a journey from Oxford to Wheatley was kept at an inn until

¹⁰² *The Times*, Monday, December 23, 1839

¹⁰³ In 1842, the dead newborn child of Jane Elizabeth Anscombe was visited by an undertaker, who put it in a shell and took it to the workhouse ‘dead house’. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), April 1842, trial of Jane Elizabeth Anscone (t18420404-1305). In the same year the body of another dead child was brought to a workhouse by policemen to be placed in the dead-house, which was managed by an undertaker. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), August 1842, trial of Sarah Stroud (t18420822-2419). Workhouse dead houses are also mentioned in slightly earlier, pre-New Poor Law accounts, as are dead houses attached to hospitals. See *The Times*, Friday, March 20, 1818; *The Times*, Tuesday, February 10, 1829; *The Times*, Thursday, April 23, 1829; *The Times*, Friday, May 29, 1829.

¹⁰⁴ Some earlier examples exist. For instance, a body found in a London street in 1769 was ‘carried to the bone-house to be owned’ before a coroner’s inquest. See *Lloyd’s Evening Post*, Wednesday, January 25, 1769.

¹⁰⁵ It is possible, however, that some were more commonly used than others. The location of St John’s Waterloo Road, built in 1824 at the south end of Waterloo Bridge, may well account for it being mentioned so frequently in early nineteenth century newspapers. Many of the other examples of dead houses found are also located in riverside areas.

he could be brought back to Oxford.¹⁰⁶ Public houses continued to be used in this way even when dead houses were known. In 1828 the body of a man crushed to death by earth while digging a sewer was taken to a public house until the coroner's inquest could be held, while in 1838 the bodies of two murdered individuals turned away from the dead house at Hampstead workhouse were taken to the skittle ground of a local pub.¹⁰⁷ Public houses might also be used to house bodies being transported long distances to their place of burial overnight. Therefore, although patchy, the sources do support the idea that keeping the body in the home was practiced among all social classes, even among the poor where the practice frequently resulted in serious illness or death due to exposure to the decomposing remains. It was a sign of affection and respect, and another way in which the bereaved could come to terms with the death, as well as a means of demonstrating this respect to the wider community. Housing the body elsewhere seems, in most cases, to have been a last resort used only in certain circumstances, even when these places were part of church property, the practice otherwise being associated with bodies without connections, alone and unloved.¹⁰⁸

Despite this, Chadwick, and other reforming groups, called for a change in practice regarding the housing of the dead in the 1840s. Among the poor lack of money, rather than the need to arrange an extravagant ceremony, could result in an unavoidable delay in burial. Edwin Chadwick's 1843 *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* detailed the problem of the retention of bodies in the homes of the poor, finding that many bodies remained unburied for over a week, in some cases close to two weeks, and occasionally even longer. This was particularly problematic given that the majority of the poor lived in single rooms in which large numbers of people ate, slept and sometimes worked. They were, furthermore, often poorly ventilated

¹⁰⁶ James Tyrrell to John Locke, 1 January 1690 (Letter 1227). *The Correspondence of John Locke: Volume 3: Letters nos. 849–1241* ed. E. S. De Beer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978. In *Electronic Enlightenment*, ed. Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford: version 1.3, January. 2009. Consulted 11 February 2009 http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/lockjoOU0030766_1key001cor.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, Wednesday, September 10, 1828; *The Times*, Monday, September 03, 1838.

¹⁰⁸ Dislike of the body being kept at a distance is also apparent in attitudes to burial. This idea will be explored in chapter seven.

but typically well heated by large fires. Chadwick's *Report* contained testimonies of various medial officers and undertakers describing how, prior to coffining, bodies would be left in bed while the family slept on the floor, or left on boards or shutters borrowed from neighbours and laid upon trestles or chairs.¹⁰⁹ One undertaker, Mr Wild, testified that in cases of rapid decomposition, coffins would have to be tapped to release the liquids that accumulated within them. He expressed concern that the process attracted animals, especially maggots, and that children routinely played around coffins and the vermin they attracted. Another undertaker, Mr Jeffreys of Whitechapel, reported that 'we every week see them kept until the bodies are nearly putrid: sometimes they have run away almost through the coffin.'¹¹⁰ Those who performed burials attested 'that the smell from the coffin is frequently powerfully offensive, and that it is by no means an uncommon occurrence that the decomposing matter escapes from it, and in the streets, and in the church, and in the church-yard, runs down over the shoulders of the bearers.'¹¹¹ The great value placed upon a 'decent' burial, and avoidance of a 'pauper' burial under the New Poor Law, seems to have made all these circumstances tolerable and worthwhile.

Postponement of burial in such cases was often attributed to the very limited hours churches allocated for burial. By the 1840s most parishes offered only a few hours each week, usually on a Sunday, during which clergy would be available to perform burial services, perhaps partly as a result of the working hours of the poor and the preference for quiet processions, to be discussed below. This restriction, combined with the problem of gathering sufficient funds, meant that those dying in the latter half of the week would usually have to wait until the following Sunday for burial.¹¹² Extended extremely close proximity to the dead as they decomposed was clearly dangerous to health and Chadwick called for the establishment of 'reception houses' modelled on those

¹⁰⁹ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, pp. 34-5, 38-9

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-5

already in use in parts of Germany, which were essentially formalised, purpose-built dead houses located at various points around the city where the dead could be kept in sanitary conditions away from the living.¹¹³ The use of reception houses was also advocated by proponents of cemetery establishment during the next decade, probably on the basis of Chadwick's ideas, and in part because they could be conveniently located in places where the frequent passing of funeral procession would be of less inconvenience than it was in the central parts of the city.¹¹⁴

There was some difference of opinion on the likely reactions of the poor to the reception house system. Among the testimonies of the various clergy and medical practitioners on whom Chadwick called for evidence on the subject, several stated that 'the large majority of the poor' exhibited 'affectionate attentions' to the deceased, and were often 'loth to part' with the body.¹¹⁵ The poor's respect for the dead also extended to their ideas regarding the funeral, at which they felt it was important that all family and friends attend. Mr Wild testified that at least five couples were desired as mourners by the poor.¹¹⁶ The strength of this belief could exacerbate delays in burial until all the desired guests, on some occasions a very large number of people, were able to arrange to attend.¹¹⁷

However, opinion on the emotional attachment of the poor to the dead was not unanimous. Chadwick himself rejected commonly held ideas regarding the difficulty of removing the dead to reception houses on the grounds of attachment to the body, and to custom, and his opinions were shared by others who felt that there would be no difficulty in getting to the poor to comply with a new, regulated system of managing dead bodies.¹¹⁸ Such individuals rejected the idea that the poor felt any attachment to the dead, identifying a complete indifference caused by overexposure to bodies leading to a more general

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 90-1

¹¹⁴ GL/Pam. 370, *Extramural Burial: The Three Schemes* (London, 1850), pp. 16-9 & 22

¹¹⁵ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 32

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 47

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 94

erosion of morality among the class.¹¹⁹ One informant stated that the retention of the corpse 'has a very debasing effect on the morals of this class of the community, making especially the rising generation so familiar with death that their feelings are not hurt by it.'¹²⁰ Another condemned it as a 'moral evil', the presence of the corpse meaning that 'familiarity soon succeeds, and respect disappears'.¹²¹ This current of opinion was also repeated by the advocates of extramural burial mentioned above, who felt removing the dead from the spaces of the living would play a part in 'refining and elevating' the minds of the lower classes.¹²² Whether and how the poor were emotionally attached to the bodies of the deceased is impossible to judge satisfactorily, but it is clear that they held their own very strong views on the 'decent' way to dispose of and commemorate the dead.

Although present in debates on the subject of exposure to the dead, the issue of emotional attachment and concerns regarding the moral effects of being around the corpse were very much secondary to sanitary issues and the desire to improve standards of health and living conditions among the poor. However, although burial outside of urban areas eventually became law on sanitary grounds, little was done to change practices surrounding the housing of the body before burial. A Bill was proposed to the House of Commons in 1842, but it was agreed that 'the measures proposed for creating such establishments would not diminish, but would rather diffuse, and might even aggravate the evils intended to be remedied.'¹²³ In 1847-8 'A Bill for Promoting the Public Health' allowed local boards of health to 'provide, fit up, and make bye laws with respect to the management and charges for the use of rooms or premises in which corpses may be received and decently and carefully kept previous to interment' to prevent 'the manifold evils occasioned by the retention of the dead in the dwellings of the poor', but only 'if they shall think

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 35

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 40-1

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 44. For a further example see pp. 45-6.

¹²² GL/Pam. 370, *Extramural Burial*, p. 22

¹²³ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 96

fit'.¹²⁴ The issue received little legislative attention, and little public attention, in comparison to the topic of burial and there is no evidence of reception houses being established. In fact, as Julie-Marie Strange has demonstrated, leaving the body in the home, even if it meant leaving it in bed or on a table, continued well into the early twentieth century among the poor and formed an important part of working class cultures of grief, marking respect and communal solidarity.¹²⁵ Furthermore, although the Victorian middle classes continued to view such a high degree of proximity with the dead as inappropriate and dangerous to health and morals, they too continued to keep the dead in the home, albeit in a separate room.

Therefore, the presence of the body between death and burial remained desirable among all social classes, even though ideas about the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate proximity varied significantly. Proximity to the body was, like its appropriate laying-out, a key component in demonstrating respect and 'decency' even though, also as with laying-out, it involved a delicate balance between social and cultural expectations and time pressures imposed by the physical facts of death. To be too far from the body, or to send a body that had died at home away, went against ideas about the most respectful and socially acceptable way to honour the deceased and their memory, even if the body could be housed on consecrated ground. The importance attached to the continued presence of the body after death is also a mark of the need to adjust to and accept bereavement. This is not to say that the presence of the corpse was pleasant or enjoyable; it is likely to have been upsetting; it was noted in Chadwick's report that 'instances sometimes occur of persons of respectable condition in life who cannot bear the painful impressions produced by the long continued presence of the corpse in the house, and who quit it, and return to attend the funeral.'¹²⁶ However, as the statement makes

¹²⁴ GL/S 393, Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts*, p. 64. It refers to the following law: 11 & 12 Vict. C. 63, s. 81.

¹²⁵ Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty*, p. 80

¹²⁶ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 93

clear, this was unusual, and most people accepted, even desired, to remain close to the dead.¹²⁷

MARKS OF DEATH

It was primarily through behaviour, remaining present and maintaining the appropriate level of proximity, according to the conventions of one's class, that respect for the dead was demonstrated; the sources hold little suggestion of any widespread expectation that the spaces in which the dead awaited burial should be marked out through their appearance. However, decoration of the place in which a body lay, whether at home or at an undertaker's, and of places associated with the deceased was practiced in some cases, usually among the wealthy.

For example, when in 1701 William Lewis Anwyl was removed from his home 'to Mr Evans, Undertaker of Funerals, at his House in the Strand...he lay in State for several days in a State-Room hung with Velvet, and several Rooms hung with Cloath.'¹²⁸ Similarly, after arriving in England from Italy in 1736 the Duke of Buckingham lay in state in his home for six days in 'a magnificent Bed of State placed within an Alcove' of a room 'hung with Velvet'. The bed was surrounded by 'the Trophies of Honour proper to his Grace's Quality' and constantly attended by 'six Mutes and a Page of Honour'. There was 'besides the Room of State, three Chambers and the great Hall hung in Mourning.'¹²⁹ Lying in state in such opulence remained the norm among the elite throughout the period in question, unlike the extended and elaborate decoration of the home in mourning, to be discussed in chapter three. The only description of members of the non-elite erecting any kind of 'decoration' around the body relate to London's Irish community. Several testimonies included in Chadwick's *Report* made reference to Irish families purchasing white calico to

¹²⁷ It also hints at the class-based difference in attitudes towards the dead and sensitivity to their presence proposed by some sanitary reformers, as outlined above.

¹²⁸ *Post Boy* (1695), Saturday, February 8, 1701

¹²⁹ *London Evening Post*, Saturday, January 10, 1736

hang above the corpse, placing a cross at the corpse's head and candles around it, when they were able to afford it, in accordance with Catholic practice.¹³⁰

There is some evidence of the use of indicators of death outside the home. Some early sources mention the use of hatchments, heraldic signs, being placed above the doors of houses which had suffered a bereavement.¹³¹ However, the prevalence and longevity of this practice cannot be determined from the available sources. Other external signs of bereavement included the closing of shutters or drawing of curtains during the day, symbolising quiet, darkness and retirement from public life, echoing the symbolic meaning of mourning clothing. However, the only example of this found dates from the 1840s, making it very difficult to comment on its history and frequency.¹³² The closing of shutters or drawing of curtains might also be a sign of respect demonstrated during the passing of a funeral procession, as would the closing of shops. For example, upon the funeral of Lord Hill in Shrewsbury in 1842, although a few of the shops in the town opened by agreement of 'the principal mercers and drapers', most remained closed.¹³³ Shops were also shut during Sir Joshua Reynolds' funeral procession in 1792.¹³⁴

Equally little information survives regarding the appearance of places associated with the dead, but not necessarily containing them. The shops of undertakers who dealt with the wealthy would almost certainly have been decorated in a way that clearly displayed their subject of business and encouraged customers to purchase, or hire, their goods and services. As Claire Walsh has demonstrated, decoration and display were important means of attracting customers and marketing products and services in shops for the wealthy. Although less evidence exists for the use of these techniques in shops frequented by the middling or lower classes, she argues that they appear to

¹³⁰ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, pp. 34-5, 38

¹³¹ See for example *London Chronicle*, Saturday, July 11, 1778.

¹³² 'The Story of a Feather', *Punch, or the London Charivari* (London, England), Saturday, July 29, 1843. One source mentions a door knocker being bound with a 'glove or old stocking' to muffle their sound during an individual's illness, and it is possible that this may also have been done after a death. See *Funeral-Discipline: Or, The Character of Strip-Corps the Dead-Monger* (London, 1725), p. 5.

¹³³ 'Burial of Lord Hill', *John Bull*, Saturday, December 17, 1842

¹³⁴ *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, Monday, March 5, 1792

have used many of the same principles.¹³⁵ Those sources which allow reconstruction of undertakers' premises present a mixed picture as to their interior and exterior appearance and how far they reflected, and were expected to reflect, the subject of their business. For example, one London probate document offers a glimpse inside the shop of a small but successful undertaker named John Bird of St Ann's, Westminster. At his death in 1787 his premises contained:

A Vauze Lamp Shade Pulleys and Burner (broke) a three flap counter Wainscot top three Drawers and a Painted counter covered with Green Baize, A Glass Case next the Door two Shelves Sliding Sashes and one Drawer underneath, A Glass case with Shelves and Sliding Sashes and four Drawers and Doors underneath, A Ditto at the back of the Shop and four small Drawers and a Cup Board, A Barometer and Thermometer Sliding Sashes as the back Window, two Ditto in the Front Window, two Shop Stools A Chair and two Patent Lamps¹³⁶

In other words, it was probably very much like many other modest shops run by tradesmen with small but comfortably profitable businesses. There do not appear to have been any particular objects or images in the shop associated with death other than the stock, although it is possible that the interior may have been decorated in colours associated with mourning or with objects or images pertaining to funerals. In the face it presented to the world, undertaking was therefore much like any other trade and did not mark itself out any more than was necessary.

The second description of an undertaker's premises, also from a probate document roughly contemporary to that of John Bird, details the premises of Mary Ann Carter, a broker and undertaker in the parish of St Leonard, Shoreditch, whose shop was of a rather Dickensian eccentricity. Although her home sounds like it was very well appointed and comfortable, her shop was full of things that she held in her capacity as a broker. These included a very large amount of furniture of varying types, from drawers and wardrobes to card tables, as well as a bird cage, chimney hooks, 'two Bath Stoves', various

¹³⁵ Claire Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of Design History* 8:3 (1995), pp. 157, 169

¹³⁶ TNA/PROB 31/761/154, Inventory of John Bird, undertaker, 1787

locks and hinges, 'two pr. of sugar nippers', a musket, five fenders, a frying pan, various dressing glasses, a chocolate pot, an old mattress, 'about three pound of curled Hair', a fishnet and two umbrellas. It is not clear whether she conducted her undertaking business from the same shop, but it seems that she must have done.¹³⁷ The sheer quantity of stock in trade relating to funeral provision recorded in the probate documents, including very large quantities of coffins and wooden boards, suggests that her trade was extensive and therefore that the surroundings cannot be explained away as a result of undertaking being only a minor sideline for Carter.¹³⁸ It seems most likely that the location of the shop in the insalubrious parish of Shoreditch may have influenced the shop's organisation and allowed toleration of an arrangement which would not have been acceptable to wealthier and more discerning clients.¹³⁹

Mr Sowerberry, undertaker in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, does have some decoration related specifically to death. His shop, which is really a glorified workshop, has coffins lined up against the walls, while on the floor are 'Coffin-plates, elm-chips, bright-headed nails, and shreds of black cloth... [On] the wall behind the counter was...a lively representation of two mutes in very stiff neck-cloths, on duty at a large private door, with a hearse drawn by four black steeds approaching in the distance.'¹⁴⁰ This combination of shop and workshop is probably more typical of smaller undertakers who catered for more modest funerals. The images on the walls depict funerals somewhat grander than those Sowerberry would really have catered for. It is unclear whether Dickens' description of them is intended to be purely humorous, reflecting the greed and self-importance of the stereotypical undertaker, who will be discussed in chapter four, or whether it is representative of a particular type of undertakers' premises. It is not uncommon to find depictions of funerals on undertakers' trade cards, and so it may well be that similar images hung in shops.

¹³⁷ TNA/PROB 31/775/295, Inventory of Mary Anne Carter, undertaker, 1788

¹³⁸ Ibid. At her death Mary Ann Carter had the largest amount of stock in trade of all the undertakers to be found in PCC records of the period in question.

¹³⁹ That her clientele was likely to have been poorer individuals is supported by the fact that much of her stock in trade consisted of cheaper, ready-made coffins.

¹⁴⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p. 28

As Julian Litten has noted, the external appearance of undertakers' shops is as uncertain as their interiors. It would seem that, as with the interior, there was often little to distinguish them from other shops apart from the shop sign. Signs were often coffin-shaped during the first half of the eighteenth century, as can be seen in Hogarth's *Gin Lane*, and on a number of earlier undertakers' trade cards.¹⁴¹ However, signs would have been a less prominent part of shops' identity, in London at least, from 1764 when shop signs were banned. Some undertakers also had hatchments displayed 'at the door'.¹⁴² Litten has also argued, despite demonstrating the use of frank signage, that in London most shops were located just off main streets, making them easily accessible but discreet, implying that death and/or its use as a source of profit were expected to be kept out of sight.¹⁴³ Such a location would be common for shops which included workshops. However, the addresses given by undertakers in London, Bristol and York trade directories certainly do not support the suggestion that undertakers were positioned away from larger thoroughfares; in each city large numbers of undertakers were scattered throughout the main central streets in plain view. In York several were opportunistically located in the streets near the Infirmary.

Therefore, although no clear image of the appearance of undertakers' premises can be drawn from these sources, it does seem that there was little expectation that these spaces should make particular aesthetic concessions to the business conducted within them, or conform in their appearance with wider mourning trends, with the exception of shops catering for the very wealthy. Although they might, like Mr Sowerberry, display funereal images, this was probably the most reference to their subject of business that most undertakers would make in decorative terms. Otherwise, their premises differed little from those of other traders. The example of Mr Sowerberry demonstrates that the shops of many undertakers, particularly those with smaller businesses and

¹⁴¹ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 7

¹⁴² *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), February 1774, trial of John Clark, John Warren, Mark Brown (t17740216-21)

¹⁴³ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 7

operating in smaller towns, might have been little more than workshops, and remind us in turn that with undertakers being relatively rare in national terms for much of the period in question; most people would simply have visited carpenters or other woodworkers at their workshop to order coffins, and obtained any other items required from other individual traders.

In sum, places in which the dead were either physically or symbolically present do not appear to have been singled out in their appearance as a matter of course and were neither disguised nor advertised. Most important was that the space in which the body was kept was suitably located and that those in that space behaved in an appropriate manner. Once again, we find that wider social expectations rather than religion informed the body's treatment between death and burial.

THE 'WAKE'

Appropriate behaviour was also expected at gatherings immediately prior to the funeral, when guests would assemble at the home of the deceased, view the body and partake of wine and other refreshments.

Prior to the Reformation 'waking' the corpse during the night before its burial was customary, and would typically involve food, drink and various games. Wakes as occasions for heavy drinking and revelry persisted after the Reformation. Clare Gittings has argued that waking the corpse was largely finished in the south by 1600, although in the north of England it continued with prayers but also food, games and plays.¹⁴⁴ These practices continued in rural areas through the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. In 1725 Henry Bourne complained of

that Watching of the Vulgar, which is a Scene of Sport and Drinking and Lewdness[.] Watching at that Time with a dear Friend, is the last Kindness and Respect we can shew him; and how unfriendly is it, to change it into Negligence and too great Resignation? How unchristian, instead of a

¹⁴⁴ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 105-6. See also Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 427.

becoming Sorrow and decent Gravity, to put on an unbecoming Joy and undecent Pastime.¹⁴⁵

In his 1777 commentary on Bourne's earlier work John Brand noted with a hint of horror that some such gatherings still existed, and resembled 'antient Bacchanalian Orgies'.¹⁴⁶ A more sedate 'wake' held in the Oxfordshire village of Chinnor in 1829 was described, with some disdain, by a local doctor;

The lower part of the house was filled with guests among whom spiced ale, and cake were freely distributed. The coffin with its lid partly uncovered so as to exhibit the face of the deceased, was placed in the upper room, which was also filled with guests, chiefly women who were supplied also with ale and cake and many of whom were smoking tobacco. The nearest relatives of the deceased sat at the head of the coffin and received contributions from those who came to take a farewell look at the departed. These donations, I was informed, are to defray the expences attending the funeral. I always considered these practices objectionable. They often lead to gross intemperance, and generally unfit the mind for the solemnities of death and the grave.¹⁴⁷

The majority of opinion, particularly in urban areas, considered such practices disorderly and disrespectful to the dead, as well as superstitious, combining elements of popery and paganism.¹⁴⁸ The only sizeable urban group likely to have marked deaths and funerals in this way would have been the Irish, where they were present.¹⁴⁹

Even so, funerals continued to be associated with a communal gathering which, although not necessarily completely sombre or sober, was a more sedate version of the older style of wake. It does not seem to have had a particular name: the term 'wake', or 'lyke-wake', associated with the rowdier customs described above, was not used.¹⁵⁰ Although few sources have been found describing the nature of these gatherings, the information they present is

¹⁴⁵ Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares*, p. 16

¹⁴⁶ John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1777), p. 27

¹⁴⁷ YCA/Acc100/D1, pp. 32-3

¹⁴⁸ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 428

¹⁴⁹ These gatherings could be large and potentially disorderly. For example, at the gathering after the execution of a member of the McGinnis family in 1766 'a great Number of Constables attended to prevent any Disturbance that might happen from an Assembly of near 500 Persons.' See *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, June 21, 1766.

¹⁵⁰ The term 'lyke-wake', or 'like-wake', continued to be used to refer to the custom of waking in northern England, Scotland and Ireland. John Brand in *Observations on Popular Antiquities* refers to it, unusually, as a 'lake-wake' on page 21.

sufficient to establish their key elements and to determine that they changed little in nature of the course of the long eighteenth century.

Rather than assembling the evening before the funeral and celebrating through the night as at the wake, guests would congregate at the home of the deceased shortly before the funeral. Drinks such as wine and beer, and often foods such as cooked meats and cakes, would be provided. There was often a similar gathering following the funeral. If the body lay at an undertaker's, and they were charged with the funeral's organisation, it seems unlikely that food would be consumed there, a gathering after the funeral being more probable in these cases. In 1719 Misson described the custom of gathering before the funeral and viewing the body among the middling classes as follows:

A little before the Company is set in Order for the March, they lay the Body into the Coffin upon two Stools, in a Room, where all that please may go and see it...The Relations and chief Mourners are in a Chamber apart, with their more intimate Friends; and the rest of the Guests are dispersed in several Rooms about the House.¹⁵¹

He also described the kind of refreshment typically offered to guests: 'Before they set out, and after they return, it is usual to present the guests with something to drink, either red or white Wine, boil'd with Sugar and Cinnamon, or some other such Liquor: Every one drinks two or three Cups.'¹⁵² At the funerals of the less well off refreshments would likely be confined to drink.

Although no longer inclined to raucousness, urban funeral gatherings were not necessarily completely staid. A 1775 newspaper account describing the funeral of a master carpenter indicates that they might be treated as celebrations. It recounted how the master carpenter, who had expected his death imminently,

earnestly requested...good entertainment for the company that were to attend at his funeral; particularly two legs of mutton, and two plumb puddings, to be eaten off his coffin, which was accordingly complied with; and after taking a little refreshment they deposited his remains in the earth, and they returned

¹⁵¹ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 90-1

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 91

to his house again, cleared the dishes, and with plenty of strong beer, pipes and tobacco, spent a jovial evening.¹⁵³

The fact that this event merited mention in a newspaper suggests that it was somewhat unusual in its celebratory atmosphere and informality, for instance the instruction that the food be laid out on the deceased's coffin, which are reminiscent of the older style of wake. Despite this, the description is not accompanied by any condemnation, suggesting the possibility that a variety of ways of commemorating the deceased and marking their burial existed and that a degree of festivity before and after funerals was not necessarily unusual or considered fundamentally improper.

It was therefore customary across the country in both urban and rural areas to gather prior to a funeral in order to celebrate the life of the deceased and mark their departure from society and this world. The sources consulted are able only to give a firm insight into the key features of these gatherings: viewing the body, consuming refreshments and the preparation of mourners for the funeral itself. Attendance at these gatherings and appropriate behaviour during them were yet further ways in which respect for the deceased was demonstrated, and were particularly important as they marked the final farewell of the body before it was consigned to the ground. However, they took on a variety of characters dependant on various social and cultural factors.

CONCLUSION

Much of what has been ascertained about the preparation of the corpse and attitudes towards the dead body is not unique to the eighteenth century, indeed most of it is timeless. Although the sources available are limited, it has nonetheless been possible to sketch the key elements in the process of laying-out and housing the dead body, and in the process suggest several modifications to existing thought on the subject. Physical decay was an accepted and undisguised feature of death, and although being around and

¹⁵³ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, October 12, 1775

viewing the dead body was unlikely to have been enjoyable, it was not something which terrified or disgusted people to the extent that they wanted to distance themselves from it. In fact, being around the body for several days after death and keeping it somewhere close were duties owed to the deceased and the bereaved. The key components of the body's preparation and care were largely unchanged. It mattered little who handled and laid-out the body as long as they demonstrated a suitable degree of reverence. The performance of the appropriate laying-out rituals and provision of the essentials required for burial, such as the shroud and coffin, were considered due to all, whatever their wealth or social position. The notion of decency underlying all aspects of the body's treatment was an essentially secular one, although it was inevitably broadly influenced by fundamental Christian principles. Importantly, 'decent' treatment of the body was as important for its reflection on the bereaved and those who handled and were around it as it was an act of humanity.

There were few limits to exposure to the dead, although women were most likely to handle the body. More important than who had contact with the body, or whether the place in which it was kept was specially altered to reflect the body's presence, was how people treated it and behaved around it. The period between death and burial did not experience the same degree of privatisation as historians have argued occurred with the deathbed and the funeral, remaining a time when a potentially large number of people might have access to the body. The emergence of undertaking made little impact on the essential features of this process, and so the automatic equation of undertakers with the removal of the dead from the hands of non-professionals into the control of a formal system of management simply is not supported by eighteenth-century sources. Even so, the emergence of undertakers was an important development of the eighteenth century, and the statements made so far regarding the nature of their business and their relatively limited national presence will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

THE UNDERTAKING TRADE

INTRODUCTION

Undertakers and their trade have received little attention from historians, with the entire body of work concerning undertaking consisting of just a few brief treatments.¹⁵⁴ Although they present useful information these articles and chapters, largely concerning the structure and organisation of the trade, are insufficiently connected to the wider historiography of death and do little to integrate undertakers into their wider social, cultural or economic context. The existing literature is also based upon a relatively limited body of sources, primarily the business ledgers of undertakers, few of which survive from the eighteenth century, and trade cards. Whilst these are extremely useful, there is also much information to be found in newspapers, trade directories, undertakers' probate accounts and a range of printed literature, all of which add significantly to the existing picture of the trade. So too does consideration of cities other than London; although as the birth place of the English undertaking trade London naturally provides the greatest quantity of relevant sources, this chapter draws on materials from Bristol and York to both support and question existing interpretations of the trade.

The following chapters will integrate this additional information with the conclusions drawn in existing studies, revising, broadening and deepening understanding of the origins and evolution of the undertaking trade during the first one hundred and fifty or so years of its existence. In this chapter the origins, structure and operation of the trade will be considered in detail, building upon the work of Julian Litten and Paul S. Fritz. It will be shown that

¹⁵⁴ Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade'; Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry'; Litten, 'The English Funeral'; Litten, 'The Funeral Trade'. Philippe Ariès says very little about undertakers.

although the principle of individuals from whom all necessary funeral items could be purchased was not new, its development into a distinct trade did mark a new stage in the co-ordination and formalisation of provision for the dead and their disposal. It will show that the trade functioned on the same model as other contemporary trades and that it was very much integrated with the wider commercial community, and will also demonstrate the national uniformity of the trade's structure, which existed despite the different times at which it appeared in different cities. It will also show that many people were involved with the trade directly and indirectly, and that there is no evidence of the stigmatisation of those involved with death in this way. The subsequent chapter will then investigate the nature of eighteenth-century funerals and the role of undertakers in determining their form, before chapter four assesses why undertaking emerged, how and why it spread in the way that it did and how contemporaries viewed the trade in death.

ORIGINS

Litten and Fritz have both detailed the early origins of the undertaking trade. These lie in the College of Arms, which until the later seventeenth century had enjoyed responsibility for the organisation and management of noble and royal heraldic funerals, a position with which it had been entrusted from the days of the early Tudors. It set the fee scale of these funerals, as well as the varying degrees of elaboration allowed for each of the ranks for whom it catered. The College enjoyed a relatively brief period of success, and its hold over the death rituals of the elite declined over the course of the seventeenth century. This decline, beginning in the early 1600s and exacerbated by the Civil War and following Interregnum, was reversed during the rule of Charles II, who restored the College in 1660. Its resurgence was brief. The College was dealt a severe blow when William III refused to renew its royal commission, and was further weakened when in 1693 its privilege to register the births and deaths of the nobility was retracted. Instead the government assumed this role,

instituting a charge for the registration of all births, marriages and burials, not only those of the nobility, and kept the profits. In so doing they deprived the College of one of their most lucrative sources of income.¹⁵⁵ The College did, however, remain in control of royal funerals until 1751, when the funeral of Frederick Prince of Wales was arranged by an undertaker named Mr Harcourt.¹⁵⁶

The College faced competition from outsiders seeking to provide some or all of the services required for heraldic funerals during the seventeenth century, in particular from the 1660s onwards.¹⁵⁷ Sir William Dugdale, himself a herald, was arranging and marshalling funerals independently in 1667.¹⁵⁸ However, Sir William did not call himself an undertaker, an appellation which does not seem to have appeared until some point in the 1670s. Why this name in particular should have been adopted, and where its origins lie, are unclear. It is to be assumed that it was a somewhat generic name applied to the coordinators of death as it was applied to those in charge of publishing ventures, building works and so forth, who so frequently appeared in contemporary newspapers. Early references to undertakers tend to call them 'undertakers of funerals' or 'undertakers for funerals' in order to make this distinction clear, although by the early eighteenth-century undertakers were becoming familiar enough, in London at least, not to require this qualification. One of the first self-styled undertakers known to us by name, and one of the most commonly mentioned by those discussing undertaking, is William Boyce, whose trade card has been dated by Litten to c.1680.¹⁵⁹ Litten and Fritz argue that the number of undertakers' trade cards in existence for this period suggests that Boyce, along with the other oft-cited undertakers of the period c.1670-1720, such as William Grinly, Eleazer Malory, Arthur Granger and John Clarke, were a relatively

¹⁵⁵ Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade', p. 244

¹⁵⁶ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 4. Litten notes that between 1775 and 1935 royal funerals were undertaken by Messrs Banting. See Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Clare Gittings mentions an earlier case, that of Robert Kirby, who was imprisoned in Marshalsea in 1624 for working at funerals without the consent of the College. See Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 93.

¹⁵⁸ Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade', pp. 242-3

¹⁵⁹ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 3

small proportion of the actual number of persons providing some or all of the necessary funerary articles, and managing funerals, independent of the College by the early decades of the eighteenth century.¹⁶⁰ This observation is also based in part upon the claim of a pamphlet published in 1698 that ‘twenty or thirty of those sort of Men’, i.e. undertakers, were in existence at that time.¹⁶¹

The College’s resentment of intrusion into funeral provision was strong, and led it to attempt prosecution on several occasions in the Court of Chivalry, for instance in the 1691 case of Charles Domville. Domville was a cheese maker who also furnished and marshalled funerals, and was charged with supplying heraldry without the College’s permission. However, the College lost the case, and its subsequent appeal to the Committee of Privileges.¹⁶² Also in the 1690s, the College brought a case against Randle Holmes for organising a funeral without its involvement. He was a painter of banners for the College, but did not call himself an undertaker, even though the term was by then in use.¹⁶³ The case of Holmes, and that of Sir William Dugdale, demonstrates that the competition faced by the College was not only external, but could also be internal. There is one case, however, in which the College cooperated with a rival, one Litten has suggested may have been an employee given the fact that he was an heraldic painter; William Russell, another of the oft-cited early undertakers, struck a deal with the College in 1689 agreeing that members of the College could attend the funerals he performed, and for which he supplied coffins, palls, heraldic devices, hearses, coaches, mourning gloves, and black material independently of the College.¹⁶⁴

However, the College’s attacks on external and internal competitors had no effect, and by the early eighteenth century the majority of the nobility unconcernedly bypassed the significantly weakened College when it came to

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 4; Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, p. 243.

¹⁶¹ T. T. Merchant, *Some General Considerations Offered, Relating to our Present Trade* (London, 1698), p. 7. As only fairly large and wealthy businesses could have afforded trade cards Litten and Fritz’s statements also imply that a number of more modest tradesmen were also offering undertaking services at this early date.

¹⁶² Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, p. 244

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 242-3

¹⁶⁴ Litten, ‘The English Funeral’, pp. 3-4; Fritz, ‘The Undertaking Trade’, p. 242.

making funeral arrangements, actively choosing to employ the newly emerged group of traders in death.

COMPOSITION

The willingness of the nobility to ignore the College of Arms was bound up with wider changes in the social structure and economy, changes which chapter four will discuss in full in relation to the widespread adoption of the heraldic funeral form previously reserved for the nobility. For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to state that the dominance of the heraldic form demonstrates that undertakers' work was new only in the sense that it provided elite-style funerals to a wider market; the actual form and appearance of the funerals they provided was not new. The same can be said of the way in which undertakers operated. They were essentially middlemen, sourcing all the requisite materials from a diverse network of suppliers and, if required, making practical arrangements as to transport, burial location, and the date and time of the funeral. In this respect they were little different from the College and so, as Fritz points out, making too sharp a distinction between undertakers and their predecessors is problematic. The College had always assumed a primarily organisational role, obtaining the various materials they required from a wide variety of tradesmen, including upholsterers, merchant tailors and coffin makers. That they often employed outsiders to fulfil their obligations to noble clients is illustrated by the cases of Randle Holmes and William Russell, mentioned above, both heraldic painters employed by the College. Fritz also suggests that the early heraldic funerals of the sixteenth century were often organised largely by executors, who sourced the items they required from a variety of tradesmen, while the College simply provided heraldic devices and organised the order and form of the procession. It also seems that later on the College still devolved the supply of coffins, palls, mourners' cloaks and so forth to tradesmen, and remained primarily concerned with ceremonial forms.¹⁶⁵ The

¹⁶⁵ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 4

idea that one man outside the College could act as a middleman from whom all funeral items could be bought or hired was also not a novel one; Fritz cites the case of well-known merchant-tailor and diarist Henry Machyn, who in the 1550s supplied a range of funeral equipage for heraldic funerals.¹⁶⁶ However, whether he supplied only the College or whether he also dealt with executors is not detailed in his diary. Undertakers' dependence on other tradesmen who, in many cases, did not produce or sell items specifically for funerals or the dead, illustrates the important point that undertaking was not a trade apart. Its reliance upon other trades is evidence both of the fact that it functioned in the same way as other trades, and of its integration into the wider economy and network of trade.¹⁶⁷ It involved a large number of people, both directly and indirectly, who were not singled out or stigmatised in any way for their connection with death and the dead. Nonetheless, the wider presence of undertaking as a defined trade which formalised and, to some extent, centralised provision for the dead was a new and important development. This section will detail the variety of trades in which undertakers could be found and with which they had contact, and the nation-wide homogeneity of these trends.

Undertaking, involvement in which was not restricted by any form of guild or other organisation, was recognised as a business opportunity by a number of tradesmen and craftsmen. By 1700 it had attracted the interest of the Upholders, or Upholsterers, who dominated provision of elite funerals from the last few years of the seventeenth century until around 1730. They were able to do this because the nature of their everyday trade made them particularly well-placed to supply the kind, and quality, of funeral and mourning equipage desired by the upper echelons of society during the early eighteenth century, in particular 'sett mourning' or the practice of re-decorating the home in mourning colours

¹⁶⁶ Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade', p. 242

¹⁶⁷ Subcontracting, traditionally important in the English economy, continued to play a significant role in many trades during the eighteenth century. See Giorgio Riello, 'Strategies and Boundaries: Subcontracting and the London Trades in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Enterprise and Society* 9:2 (2008), pp. 243, 245-6, 257. Michael Sonenscher has also demonstrated how important the division of labour was in eighteenth century hat manufacture. See Michael Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth Century France* (London: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 23-5, 44.

after a death. Their everyday business involved the making and/or selling of furniture, as well as the supply of various items for interior decoration, such as wallpaper and curtains. Some dealt only in raw materials, while others employed tradesmen to make their produce, and over the course of the century the trade's remit became ever wider.¹⁶⁸ Newspaper advertisements and accounts of the funerals that they performed give an indication of the range of goods and services the Upholders provided, as well as the clientele they served. One of the earliest mentions of the guild's activities in the capacity of funeral furnishers can be found in a 1699 edition of the *Flying News* when they advertised 'Sett Mourning', along with 'the upper part of Exeter Exchange, and a large house in Leaden-hall street...where is Accommodation both for Funerals and lying in State.' They offered these services to those 'either in City or Country', indicating that they provided for nobility across England and Wales and could be called upon to manage the funerals of the elite whether or not they had died whilst in London.¹⁶⁹ A later advertisement of 1711 gave a more detailed description of their stock and services, which included 'all things fit for furnishing Funerals, [such] as large fine Velvet Palls, Cloaks, large Candlesticks, Sconces, &c. with a large Quantity of black and grey Cloth fit for furnishing of Sett Mournings, and a great part of the same fine and fit to make Wearing Apparel, with several fine grey Cloth Beds.'¹⁷⁰

Despite the difference in the dates at which undertakers appeared in different parts of the country, there was very little national variation in the basic structure of the trade. The Upholders embody two key features of the way in which the undertaking trade functioned during this period. Firstly, the majority were essentially middlemen sourcing goods from a wide variety of suppliers on behalf of the bereaved. An excellent example of such a middleman and the kind of web that existed between tradesmen who supplied the necessary items for

¹⁶⁸ GL/Fo. Pam. 9134, J. F. Houston, *Feathbedds and Flock Bedds: Notes on the History of the Worshipful Company of Upholders of the City of London* (1995), pp. 14-5

¹⁶⁹ *Flying News or The Post Master*, Tuesday, October 17 1699

¹⁷⁰ *Daily Courant*, Wednesday, October 3, 1711

funerals, directly and indirectly, is Richard Carpender.¹⁷¹ His account ledger is devoted to records of his purchases from other tradesmen and shows that Carpender relied upon the coffin maker Mr Gladman to supply coffins in a variety of sizes, styles, and with single or double lids. Mr John Loddington was his feather supplier, providing mostly black, but occasionally white, ostrich feathers. Carpender had several glove suppliers, including Mrs Anne Bunting and Mr Purslow. The gloves bought could be of 'kyd', lace, lamb, shammy, crape, or 'Danziek', and were usually black or white, although occasionally they might be tan. Gloves were supplied for men, women and children. Carpender also sourced gloves from Messieurs Sedgwick & Comp., who also provided material. Mr Seawell & Comp. also provided various types of material, including crape and sarsnet, while Mr D. Mesman provided mostly 'Allamode'. Mr John Gainsborough provided him with superfine crape and Mr Robert Ellis, Mr George Male, Mr John Desclaux, and Mr Thomas Brown also provided Carpender with material. Mr Humslow was employed for sewing various palls. Mr Edward Wallington, a wax chandler, provided large amounts of candles, branches and tapers. Carpender also relied upon a variety of metal workers, including Mr Nowell, a coffin plate maker, who also made handles, 'bullrings' and 'drops'; Mr James Wigley, an engraver; Mr White, a founder who supplied various types of nails and handles; and Mr Goodwin, a 'plummer', who provided and soldered lead where necessary and in some cases manufactured lead coffins. Mrs Ware, a herald painter, was also employed to paint escutcheons, shields and banners.¹⁷² Carpender's ledger spans the 1730s and 1740s and is one of the very few sets of undertakers' records surviving from the long eighteenth century. Nonetheless, it serves as a very good example of the range of trades connected to undertaking and the way in which the trade operated throughout the period in question, as will be shown.

¹⁷¹ Carpender has also been cited as an exemplary 'middleman' by Litten and Fritz. See Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 248.

¹⁷² GL/Ms 05871, Purchase ledgers of Richard Carpender, undertaker

Diversification was often a necessity for the eighteenth-century tradesman and undertaking seems to have been a particularly common choice of sideline business, probably because so many different trades were able to contribute some proportion of the many items that might be required for funerals, as Carpenter's ledgers indicate.¹⁷³ The use of undertaking as an additional, rather than primary, source of income is the second common characteristic of undertaking in the long eighteenth century and the second similarity between the Upholders and undertakers, the majority of whom were not engaged solely in undertaking. Analysis of London, Bristol and York trade directories reveals very clear nation-wide patterns in the trades in which undertakers could be found, as well as highlighting differences in the rate and extent of their spread across England.¹⁷⁴ The remainder of this section will examine these patterns, creating a more detailed picture of undertakers' relationship to other trades.

In York undertakers do not appear in trade directories until 1828. They next appear in 1830, but after that do not appear again until 1849 and then again in 1851. It is only in 1851 that significant numbers of undertakers are listed; the 1828-9 directory features five, the 1830 only three and the 1849 just two, while the 1851 lists thirty. In order to allow meaningful analysis of undertaking in the city the results from all four directories have been included in this analysis, even though they reach a decade beyond the period covered by this thesis. Analysis of Bristol trade directories has also been extended to this later date in order to balance the results, although undertakers can be found in the city's first trade directory, published in 1775, and appear in every one of the seventeen directories surviving from the period up to 1851. As the task of sifting through every available London directory of the period in question would have been too time-consuming only those available, and therefore readily searchable, on Eighteenth Century Collections Online have been utilised. Despite offering very uneven coverage, largely limited to the latter half

¹⁷³ Nancy Cox, *The Complete Tradesman: A Study of Retailing, 1550-1820* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 216

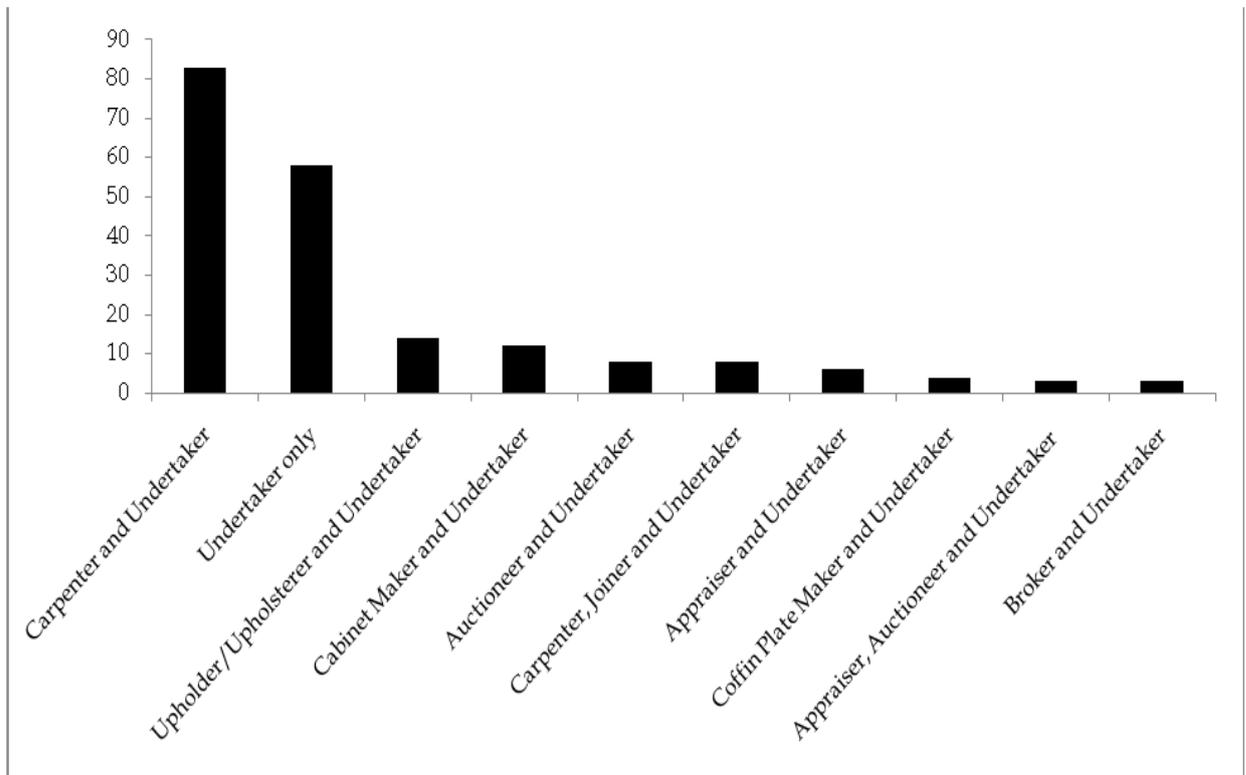
¹⁷⁴ The different times at which undertakers appeared in English cities and the reasons for the rate and nature of their spread will be discussed in chapter three.

of the eighteenth century, the results from the London trade directories found on ECCO accord fully with those of Bristol and York. These remarkably clear patterns suggest that the overall picture trade directories provide is essentially accurate and representative of undertaking across England. This is in spite of the imbalance in the temporal coverage and quantity of data available for each city, and the fact that they are naturally only partial records of trade at any one time, with many tradesmen either not featuring in their pages or possibly omitting sideline occupations where these formed only a small proportion of their income.¹⁷⁵

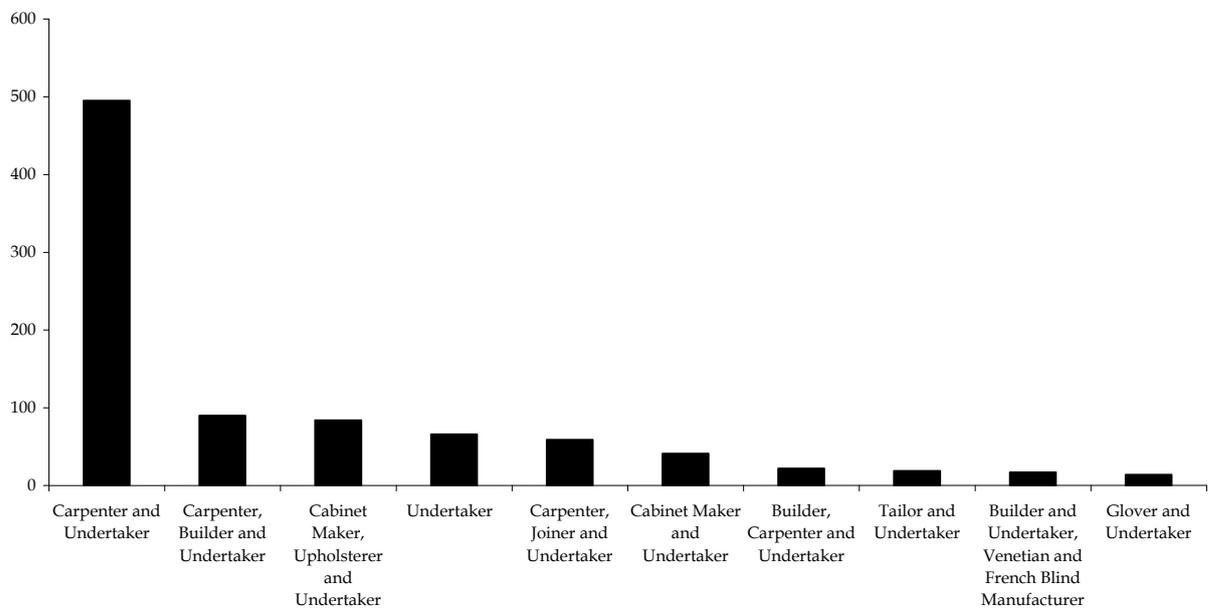
Those who listed themselves as undertakers were typically connected with some form of woodworking, most often carpentry, cabinet making or joinery. This is to be expected given that coffins were the most important funeral necessity, used by all social classes, and that the upholsters had lost their dominance as funeral providers in the period covered by the following tables. These show the most commonly recurring occupational title groupings in which undertaking appeared in London, Bristol and York trade directories. In the cases of London and Bristol only the ten most common are included, while in the case of York every occupational description involving undertaking is shown.

¹⁷⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, urban communities retained parochial tendencies and many tradesmen, including undertakers, may have felt it simply unnecessary to advertise their services in directories. Perhaps perversely, this may have been particularly common in London, especially towards the latter end of the period in question, where contemporary comments, to be discussed in the following chapter indicate that far more individuals offered funeral services on an essentially opportunistic basis than were listed in directories.

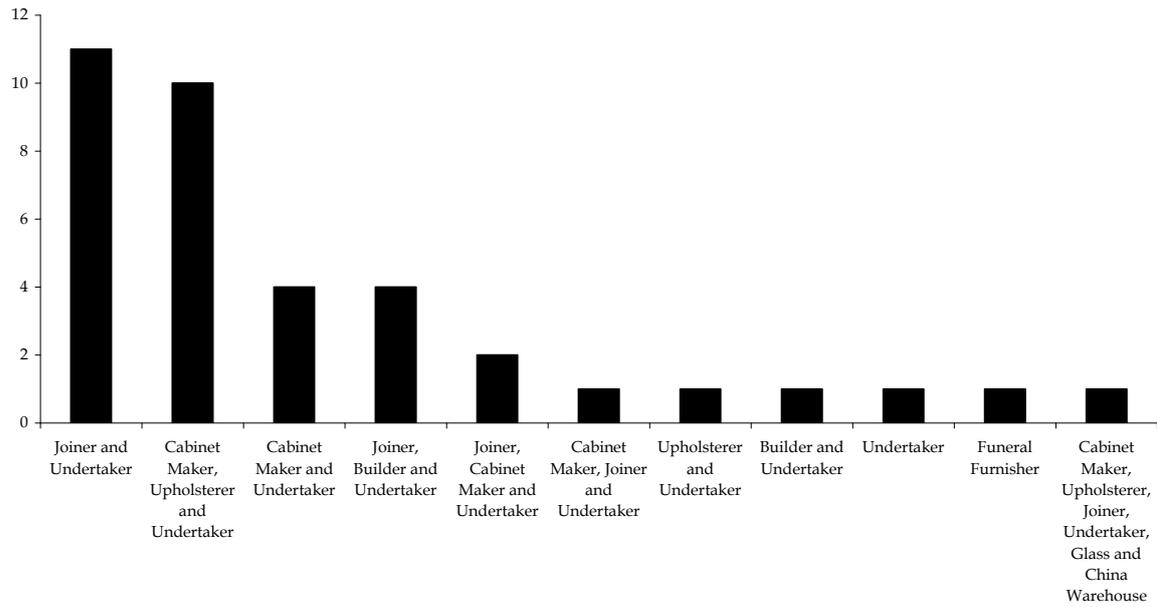
Most commonly recurring occupational titles including undertaking in London trade directories 1745-1829



Most commonly recurring occupational titles including undertaking in Bristol trade directories 1775-1851

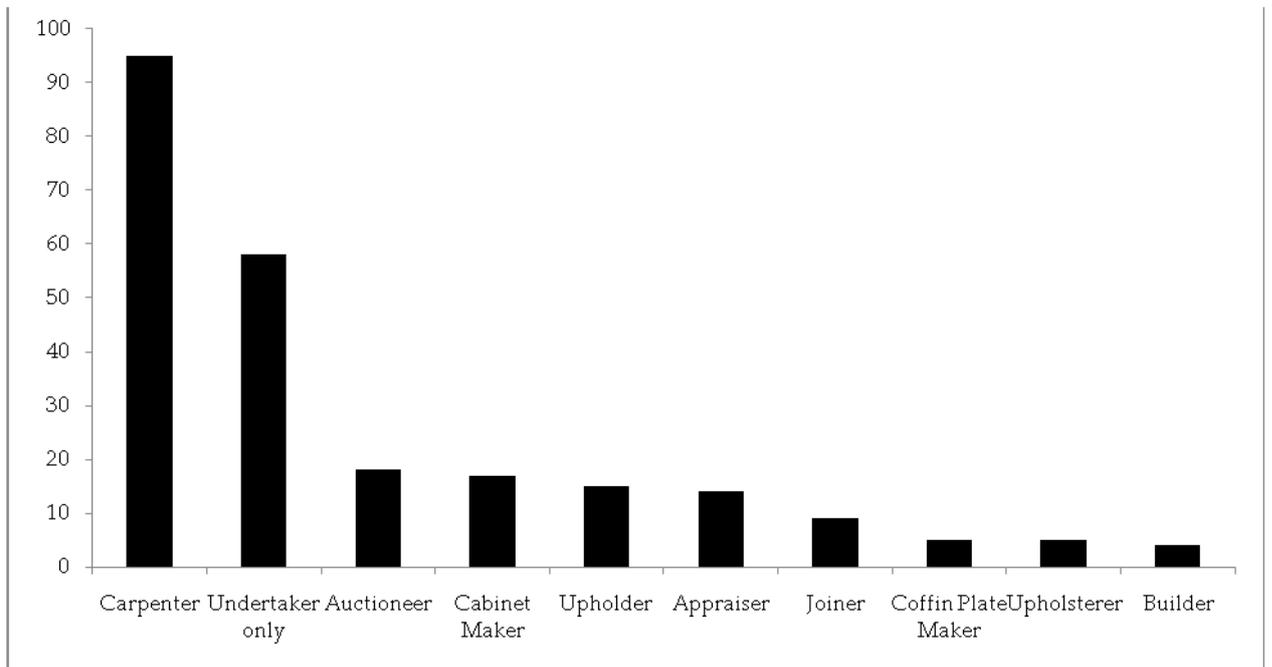


Occupational titles including undertaking in York trade directories 1828-1851

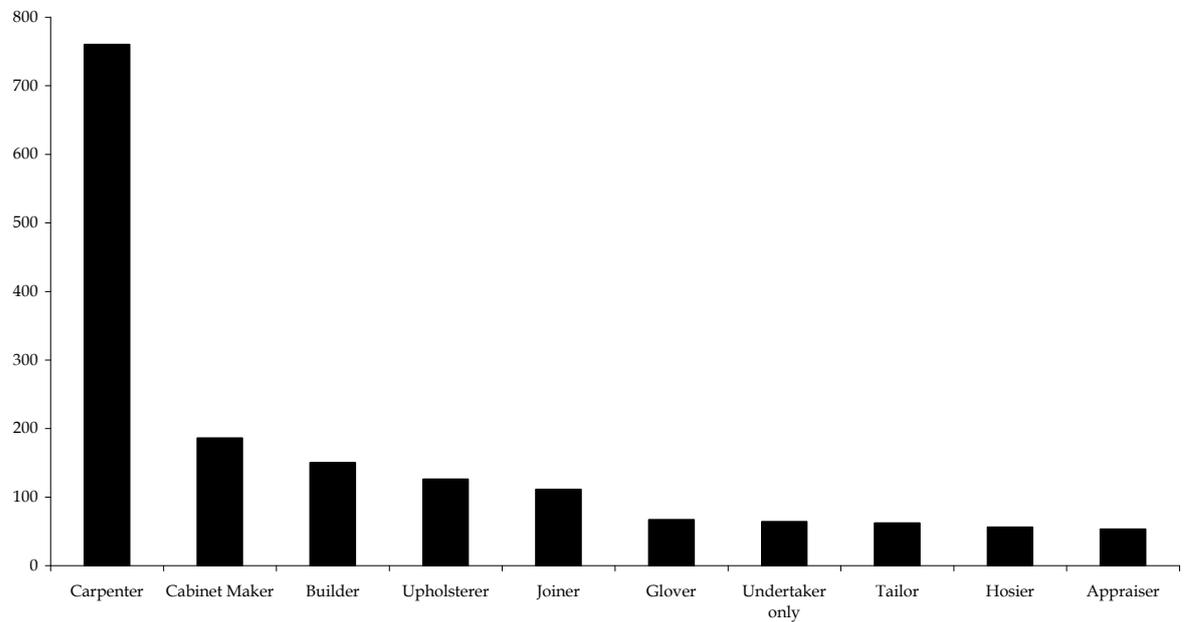


Although woodworking was predominant in all cities, carpentry was most common in London and Bristol while joinery and cabinet making featured most strongly in York. This, and the other patterns present in undertaking-related trades, is even clearer if we look at the frequency with which individual trades recur alongside undertaking in directories, rather than at the recurrence of particular groups of trades as occupational titles. These tables have been compiled by simply tallying the instances different trades feature alongside undertaking in all available directories for the period in question. They have not been divided by year as there are no significant variations in the times at which certain trades appear most frequently.

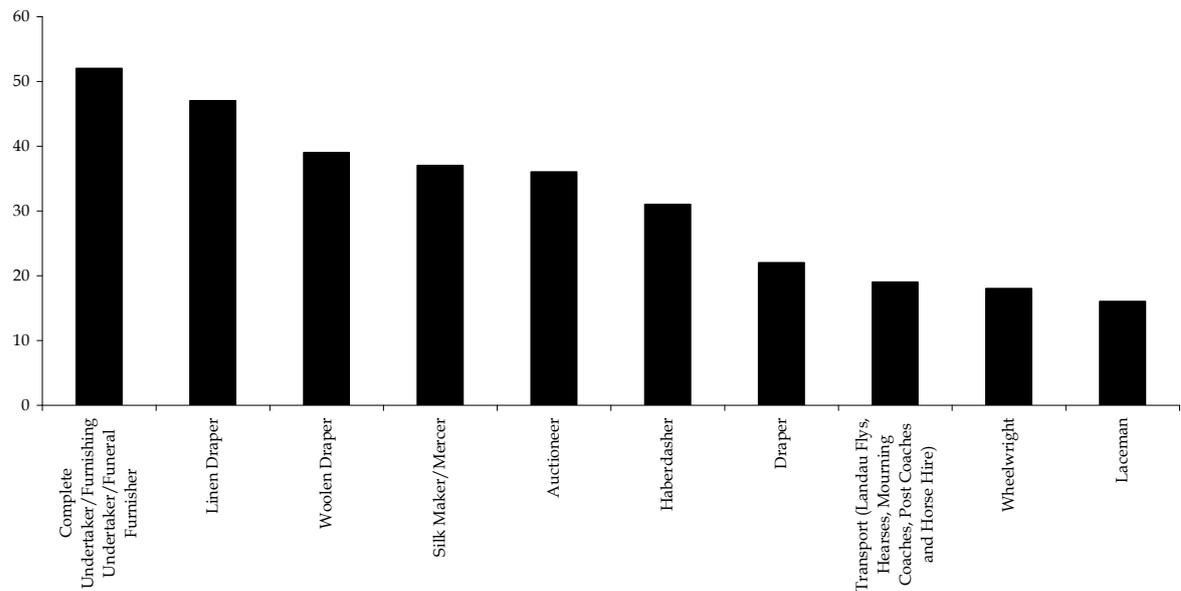
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in London trade directories 1745-1829



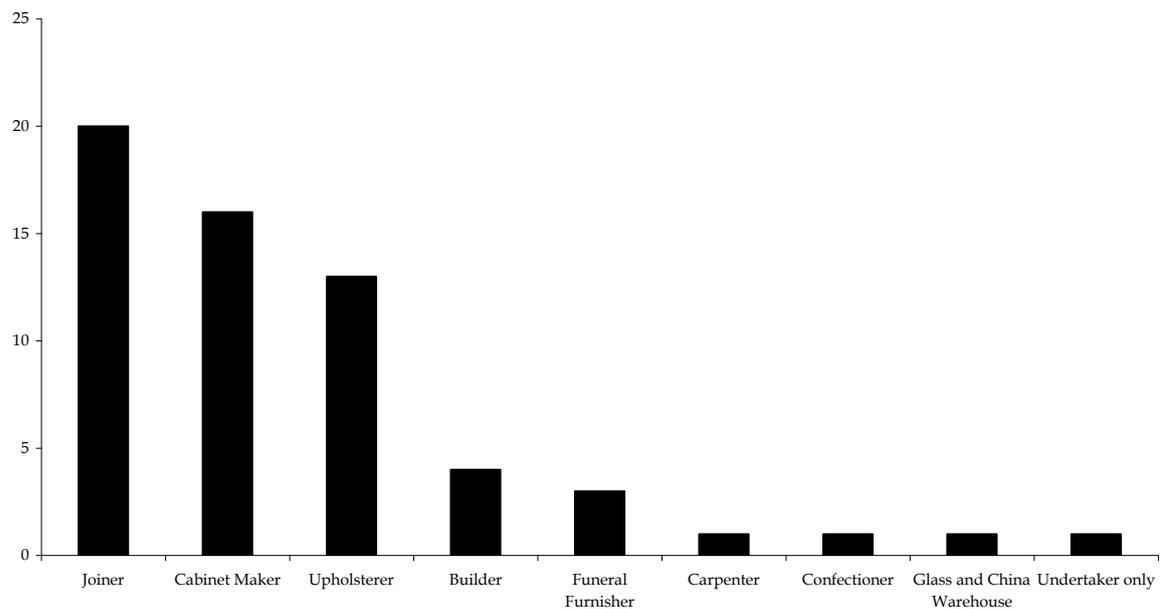
Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in Bristol trade directories 1775-1851, 1-10



Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in Bristol trade directories 1775-1828, 11-20



Frequency of occupations found alongside undertaking in York trade directories, 1818-1851



In addition to carpentry and joinery, cabinet making appears most frequently among the woodworking trades found in all cities. A variety of other timber-related trades can be found in both London and Bristol directories. For instance ships' joiners, timber merchants and box, chest and trunk makers appear in each city, while wheelwrights, chair makers and hoopers are listed in Bristol. The difference in the type of woodworking trades in each city is likely to be a

reflection of each city's wider character. While London and Bristol were nationally and globally important trading centres with large ports full of wooden ships, York was a regional centre whose primary function was as a centre of administration and society. York may therefore have had relatively greater demand for finer woodworking skills. Furthermore, London and Bristol grew at a far greater rate than York, which is also likely to have contributed to the larger number of craftsmen with carpentry and construction skills. This link between undertaking and construction-related trades is also apparent in the number of building and decorating trades with which undertaking was associated. 'Builder' is among the five most commonly occurring occupational titles which appear alongside undertaking in Bristol and York, and eleventh most common in London. In addition, Bristol directories feature plumbers, glaziers, plasterers and paper hangers who engaged in undertaking.

Also related to those involved in decoration were the upholsters, or upholsterers, who feature in the top five most commonly occurring trades in each city, indicating their continued role in the trade. They are in turn connected to the body of undertakers who were engaged in cloth or clothing-related trades. Glover, tailor, hosier, linen draper, woollen draper and silk mercer all feature in the top twenty most commonly occurring trades in Bristol, and other fabric-related trades listed in that city include mercer, habit maker, breeches maker, outfitter and shirt maker. In London 'glover' is thirteenth in the list of most commonly recurring associated trades, and haberdashers, hatters, hosiers, linen drapers and slops sellers, even a whalebone-cutter, each appear once. The most significant trend among the fabric-related trades in London is the presence of burial crape and other mourning-related material suppliers: a total of seven times. Although this is not in itself a significant number it indicates that in London a greater degree of specialisation was possible in death-related trades.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ It might be taken to indicate that the practice of mourning, which will be discussed in the following chapter, was more common in the capital, this should not be exaggerated: mourning was certainly practiced outside of London and mourning needs would simply have been met by general cloth tradesmen.

Therefore, although the occurrence of these trades is far lower than the woodworking trades, they nonetheless form a clear sub-group. The relatively infrequent formal involvement of these tradesmen in undertaking does not correlate with the frequency with which material and clothing were employed in funerals, or the increasing popularity of mourning clothing. As the discussion of the Legg undertaker ledgers in the following chapter will show, and as Richard Carpender's ledgers also demonstrate, a variety of materials were employed to make shrouds, line and cover coffins, and to make palls, mourners' cloaks, gloves and hatbands, amongst other items. Although palls and mourners' cloaks were usually rented rather than purchased the other items listed would have been purchased outright, as would mourning clothing. This therefore suggests that in most cases cloth and apparel tradesmen would simply have supplied undertakers, or the bereaved in person, having little direct involvement with funeral provision or organisation. Establishments providing solely for mourning clothing, quite separate from undertaking businesses, began to appear in the late eighteenth century and by the second quarter of the nineteenth century were increasingly common.

London and Bristol directories show that individuals engaged in undertaking could also be involved in a wide variety of other trades in addition to those already listed. In some cases these occupations were connected with death. For example, appraisers, auctioneers, house agents and furniture brokers, who would have been involved in the disposal of the belongings of deceased persons, can be found among those providing undertaking services, most notably in London where they feature among the top five most commonly associated trades. In other cases, providing for funerals was a natural extension of existing trade, as in the case of providers of hearses and mourning coaches, who are the eighteenth most commonly appearing trade associated with undertaking in the city, or providers of feathers, coffin plates and coffin furniture, who featured several times in London directories.

However, a number of tradesmen who would not otherwise have had a natural association with death can also be found involved in undertaking.

Many of these were connected with food and drink provision; grocers, wine and spirit dealers, victuallers and inn keepers all appear in Bristol directories, albeit in very small numbers.¹⁷⁷ The York directories also include a confectioner. There are in addition a very small scattering of other occupations with no obvious connection to funeral provision in the Bristol directories, such as writing master and circulating library owner, while in York we find a glass dealer. A very important group who have not yet been mentioned are those who engaged solely in undertaking. These tradesmen will be considered as part of the following discussion regarding the structure and functioning of the undertaking trade.

A final point to address is that of gender. The vast majority of undertakers in trade directories whose gender is ascertainable from their names are men. However, women were involved in various aspects of the trade and funeral provision, from coffin making and undertaking generally to engraving, coffin plate making and heraldic painting.¹⁷⁸ In some cases they worked in partnership with their sons.¹⁷⁹ Although the number of female undertakers in trade directories is small, insurance records suggest a greater number of female

¹⁷⁷ Porter brewer or porter house owner appear 5 times, inn or tavern keepers appear 4 times, victuallers and wine and spirit dealers each appear 3 times, while grocers and tea dealers each appear twice. A hop dealer and a peel maker are also listed.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Butcher, Builder and Undertaker, was listed in *Wakefield's Merchant and Tradesman's General Directory for London, Westminster, Borough of Southwark and Twenty-Two Miles Circular from St. Paul's, for the Year 1794* (London, 1794); Sarah Hunt, Carpenter and Undertaker, in *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory, for the Year 1841* (Bristol, 1841); Elizabeth Preater, Carpenter Joiner and Undertaker, in *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory, for the Year 1841* (Bristol, 1841); Ann Shew, Undertaker and Engraver, in *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory, for the Year 1815* (Bristol, 1815); Mary Horsfall, Funeral Furnisher, in *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory and Topography of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire* (Manchester & London, 1849) and Francis White & Co., *General Directory and Topography of Kingston-upon-Hull and the City of York* (Hull, 1851); Rachel Richardson, Upholsterer and Funeral Furnisher, in *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory and Topography of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire* (Manchester & London, 1849); and Jane Sedgewick, Cabinet Maker and Undertaker, in Francis White & Co., *General Directory and Topography of Kingston-upon-Hull and the City of York...* (1851).

¹⁷⁹ Ann Frances & Son were listed as Undertakers in *The New History, Survey and Description of the City and Suburbs of Bristol* (Bristol, 1794), while Elizabeth Carpenter & Son were listed as Undertakers in *Bailey's British Directory* (London, 1794), and *Wakefield's Merchant and Tradesman's General Directory for London, Westminster, Borough of Southwark and Twenty-Two Miles Circular from St. Paul's, for the Year 1794* (London, 1794). In one instance there is direct evidence of a woman taking over her husband's business on her own; *Mathews's Annual Bristol Directory, for the Year 1835* (Bristol, 1835) listed a William Woodman, Carpenter and Undertaker, living at 3 Old Park Hill, while in the 1841 Mathews's directory a Mrs Woodman, living at the same address, was listed as a Carpenter, Undertaker and Ship Joiner.

undertakers, many with workshops adjoining their properties.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately insufficient information about their individual businesses survives to allow the identification of any gender-related issues pertaining to the operation or structure of the undertaking trade.

In sum, undertakers differed little in essence from the College and the Upholders, acting as middlemen and typically using undertaking as a sideline business. They were a diverse group of tradesmen, and women, whose primary occupations reflected the many components of the heraldic-style funeral, but who nonetheless displayed a very significant degree of homogeneity in their general occupation and trade background despite the difference in the times at which they emerged nationwide. Importantly, in their role as commercial coordinators of provision for the dead with commercial premises, as described in the previous chapter, they gave death a recognisable public face and even contributed to its greater visibility.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

Although it is relatively simple to draw broad conclusions about the kinds of tradesmen who engaged in undertaking and what it was in the nature of funerals that encouraged their involvement, it is harder to formulate a clear picture of the structure of the trade. Litten has suggested that during the eighteenth century undertaking was composed of three main branches: coffin-making, undertaking and funeral furnishing. According to his theory, the coffin-maker would mainly have produced coffins to sell on to the undertaker and funeral furnisher, although either might make their own coffins, while the undertaker was a middleman who would source the materials for and perform funerals at the lower to middling end of the social scale. Funeral furnishers held all the goods required for funerals in their own establishment and provided for

¹⁸⁰ See for example the following insurance records: LMA/MS/11936/463/899768; LMA/MS/11936/451/856278; LMA/MS/11936/493/993600; LMA/MS/11936/490/989807; LMA/MS/11936/479/966870; LMA/MS/11963/521/1078734; LMA/MS/11936/515/1063592; LMA/MS/11936/542/1196474; LMA/MS/11936/547/1204913; LMA/MS/11936/552/1226452.

the better off.¹⁸¹ However, this model is too neat and requires a number of qualifications in light of both the information presented thus far and additional sources. These show that for much of the eighteenth century the trade was more fluid in structure and varied in composition than Litten argues to the point that the idea of a definable, tiered structure is somewhat problematic. The following discussion assesses the groups defined by Litten, adding to and qualifying some of his arguments in order to highlight the mutability of the different groups of tradesmen involved in undertaking, their interrelationships and the development of these groups over time.

To the level of coffin maker should be added the significant body of diverse tradesmen who also supplied undertakers, and bereaved individuals, with necessary items but who did not involve themselves in organising funerals in any way. As Carpenter's ledgers show, and trade directories also suggest, this was a large and varied group including fabric and feather suppliers, glovemen and metal workers, amongst others. This casual, peripheral involvement in funeral provision is also suggested by comments regarding the unpopular and short-lived tax of retail shops, in force between 1785 and 1789; in 1785, the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* reported that 'Among other grievances arising to the community from the partiality with which the taxes of the present Minister are laid on, none feel more severely than the undertakers, many of whom, who do not keep open shop, are nevertheless obliged to pay a shop tax, some above ten pounds yearly for dealing out gloves at funerals.'¹⁸²

The diversity of undertakers proper should also be appreciated. They could be engaged in a variety of trades, with undertaking forming either an occasional sideline or a significant proportion of their business. Some might work solely as undertakers: contrary to Litten's statement, the term was not only applied to those who catered for the lower and middling end of the social scale. Nor would they necessarily be present at the funeral itself. The involvement of undertakers in arranging funerals varied widely, and many

¹⁸¹ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 7

¹⁸² Mui & Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, p. 73; *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Tuesday, September 27, 1785.

would merely provide the necessary items without organising time of burial or presiding over the funeral procession. Those for whom undertaking formed a significant part, or the sole subject, of their business would have kept a variety of stock, either for sale or for hire, on site. The numbers of such people were not insignificant. In both London and Bristol individuals who derived their whole income from undertaking, according to trade directories, stood at around one sixth of the total number of undertakers listed: of the 265 separate individuals or partnerships involved in undertaking listed in London directories 58 called themselves simply 'undertakers' at one time or another, while in Bristol that figure stands at 66 of 322. We have no way of knowing exactly what these individuals kept in stock, but it seems safe to assume that they would have been able to provide most, if not all, of the necessary funeral items and services themselves. Here we see a blurring between Litten's undertaker and funeral furnisher. Furthermore, people acting as funeral furnishers according to Litten's definition existed long before that term appeared in the later eighteenth century, the earliest example of such a body being the Upholders, who were in turn modelled on the College of Arms, although they were certainly a much larger body and catered for a far grander clientele than was likely among other proto-furnishers.

Funeral furnishing might also be achieved through warehouses, an important development in eighteenth-century retailing. Warehouses were not as we understand them today, but shops where goods could be bought at low prices, usually by tradesmen but in some cases also by the general public. They began to appear in provincial areas in the 1760s and by the following decade were appearing in large numbers, as evidenced by the numerous advertisements to be found in contemporary newspapers for warehouses offering childbed linen, carpets, fabrics, and other items.¹⁸³ A 1775 advertisement informed undertakers that a warehouse had opened near Mansion House in London for 'various Sorts of Coffin-Furniture, and all Materials for Funerals; Upholsterers, Carpenters, Country Shopkeepers, and all others concerned in the Trade', demonstrating

¹⁸³ Mui & Mui, *Shops and Shopkeeping*, p. 64

how easily various tradesmen could obtain the necessary items for funerals without even relying upon other tradesmen.¹⁸⁴ A few years earlier an advertisement for a coffin warehouse had appeared in a Dublin newspaper offering a wide variety of ready-made coffins, the availability of which was intended to prevent 'all those delays and inconveniences that so frequently happened, for want of so useful an undertaking.' They also noted that as the coffin making business had proved so successful, they were expanding into 'other branches in the funeral way.'¹⁸⁵

There is evidence that the spread of furnishing warehouses, and individual funeral furnishers, altered the operation and structure of the trade and to some degree simplified the relations between those who were involved in funeral supply, directly or indirectly. Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain: A Supplementary Report on the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* (1843) included an investigation into the cost of funerals which demonstrated that the structure of the undertaking trade had assumed, in London at least, a clearly defined hierarchical structure by the mid-nineteenth century. One undertaker named Mr Dix explained that he frequently performed funerals 'three deep: that is, I do it for one person, who does it for another who does it for the relatives of the deceased, he being the first person applied to.' Chadwick concluded that the supply of 'funeral goods and services' was primarily controlled by 'second or third parties living in the immediate neighbourhood' who went to furnishing undertakers to obtain the necessary goods.¹⁸⁶ He estimated that there were actually only sixty tradesmen who 'compete with each other in furnishing the supplies to a multitude of inferior tradesmen, probably exceeding 1000, amongst who the excessive profits arising from extortionate charges are thus

¹⁸⁴ *Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, March 9, 1775

¹⁸⁵ *Dublin Mercury* (1766), Thursday, March 9, 1769. Certain specialist warehouses also existed. Litten mentions warehouses in Southwark, Whitechapel, Limehouse and Spitalfields. Southwark specialised in coffin furniture, Limehouse and Whitechapel in wholesale coffin manufacture and upholstering. These places were located close to docks and places of metal working, in the case of Southwark, and timber in other two. Spitalfields specialised in cloth, and was bordered by Whitechapel. See Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 52

irregularly distributed.’¹⁸⁷ As Mr Dix testified, ‘Everybody calls himself an undertaker. The numerous men employed as bearers become undertakers, although they have never done anything until they have got the job. I have known one of these men get a new suit of clothes out of the funeral of one decent mechanic,’ this profitability explaining the attraction.¹⁸⁸ Chadwick lamented the result of this greed, noting that the *Post Office Directory* for 1843 listed a total of 730 individuals involved in undertaking, but that ‘much larger numbers than are named in the Directory retain the insignia of undertakers in their shop-windows, for the sake of the profits of one or two funerals a-year’.¹⁸⁹ This quantity of undertakers was, he pointed out, completely disproportionate to the 114 deaths which occurred daily in London.¹⁹⁰ The increasingly well-defined internal structure outlined by this source suggests a change in undertaking that made the middleman status of the majority of undertakers, and the trade’s status as a largely secondary source of income, more pronounced, giving control over supply within the trade to a smaller number of funeral furnishers.

However, although the web of supply that made up the undertaking trade became more defined and, in some ways, streamlined over the course of the long eighteenth century, we have insufficient sources to determine whether the picture of the trade presented in Chadwick’s *Report* is fully representative of the early nineteenth century, or of places other than London, or at what point undertaking can be said to have become a hierarchical trade in the capital. It cannot be known, for example, whether Bristol’s ‘complete’ undertakers and funeral furnishers effectively controlled a similar system in that city by the 1800s, or whether undertakers in York would have operated in that way. Moreover, it must be emphasised that despite developing a more regular structure, undertaking was still characterised by flexibility and diversity. By the

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50

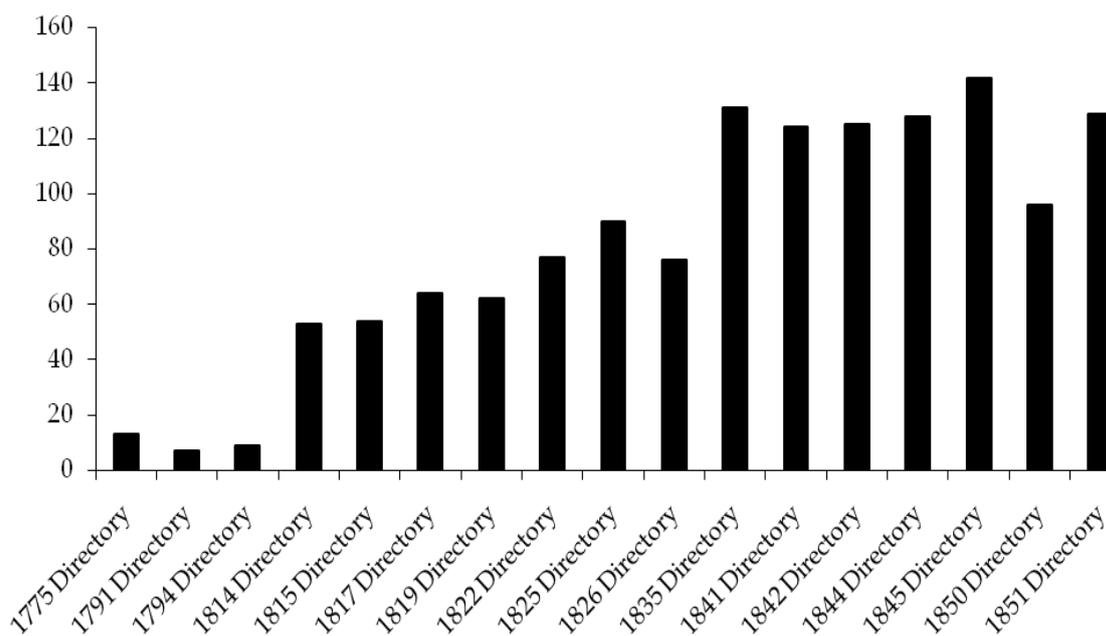
¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53. The 1843 Directory listed the following: 275 undertakers; 258 undertakers and carpenters; 56 undertakers and cabinet makers; 51 undertakers and builders; 34 undertakers and upholsterers; 25 undertakers and appraisers; 19 undertakers and auctioneers; 7 undertakers and house agents; 3 undertakers and fancy cabinet makers; and 2 undertakers and packaging-case makers.

early nineteenth century an even larger number of diverse tradesmen dabbled in the business of funeral provision to varying degrees, in accordance with the nature and extent of their other sources of income. In fact, if we judge by Chadwick's report, the emergence of an increasingly centralised system of funeral supply, which was in turn the product of wider changes in retailing and trade over the course of the long eighteenth century, meant that the trade had become even more opportunistic by the nineteenth century than it had been during the eighteenth. As such, Litten's three tier-model, derived largely from the information gathered by Chadwick, can only be applied to London in the early nineteenth century, and then with some qualifications.

We must conclude that the term undertaker was loose and mutable and the trade fundamentally opportunistic. Involvement with undertaking was flexible, and trade directories show that tradesmen's descriptions of themselves changed year on year, their involvement with undertaking fluctuating between casual and more serious and liable to begin or end at any time. Although, as acknowledged, trade directories are not completely reliable measures of trade and were not utilised by every tradesman each year, Bristol directories, the most consistent set of these sources utilised, show that the vast majority of individuals involved in undertaking appeared only once over the period studied. Even so, numbers of individuals involved in undertaking per year was relatively stable, as the following graph demonstrates, suggesting that demand was met by an ever-changing group of suppliers.

Number of undertakers in Bristol trade directories by year



The vagueness of the term undertaker is further compounded by the problem that for all those who listed themselves as such many would have been involved only occasionally in funerals themselves, just as many with an active involvement may well not have called themselves undertakers at all. Undertakers never had their own guild, and without a set of rules defining the trade anyone could legitimately advertise themselves as an undertaker, or be involved in the trade without using that title.¹⁹¹ It was not until 1905 that a professional body, the British Undertakers Association, was established and with it centralised standards and codes of conduct, printed as *The Undertaker's Handbook Containing Cemetery Fees and Regulations, Hours of Removal from Hospitals, Registrar's Addresses, Districts and Hours of Attendance*. Undertakers had attempted to establish their own central organisation very early in the eighteenth century. The *Daily Post* reported in May 1720 that preparations were being made for the creation of a co-partnership of undertakers, and in June of that year 'The Managers of the Undertaking for the furnishing of Funerals to any Part of Great Britain' notified the public of a general meeting to be held 'on

¹⁹¹ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 4

Affairs of Importance' at the Cross-Keys tavern in Corn-hill.¹⁹² Those who did not attend the meeting were given a second opportunity to present their receipts for making a deed of settlement later in the month.¹⁹³ However, the company was not mentioned in the press again, and at no point do the advertisements make clear who was involved in coordinating the venture and exactly what kind of operation it was intended to be. There seems to have been a second attempt to form some kind of central body in 1730, when it was noted that 'a new Company for managing Funerals is erecting in this City, composed of various Kinds of Tradesmen', although this company too was never mentioned thereafter.¹⁹⁴

Julian Litten presents a different story regarding attempts to form a professional organisation for undertakers. He states that the College of Arms hindered 'the grant of a new Charter to the Upholders Company in 1722', although he does not say why or how, forcing a group of undertakers to form their own 'livery company'. This would suggest that the College had more power, and that their resentment of those depriving them of their involvement in elite funerals continued for longer, than Litten or Fritz argue elsewhere, although without further sources it is impossible to investigate this issue. This livery company called itself the 'United Company of Undertakers' and had its own trade card designed in anticipation of recognition, but was never admitted at the Guildhall. None the less, the Company of Upholders supported those of its members involved in funeral arrangement and by the mid-1730s was providing them with blank funeral invitations for their customers.¹⁹⁵ The 'United Company' gave its address as a house on the corner of Southampton Street, Holborn, which was the home of Robert Legg Senior, an upholder, appraiser and undertaker whose ledgers were discussed in the previous chapter. Litten suggests that the group was just 'a co-operative of local Bloomsbury undertakers', although it would seem that the name they had

¹⁹² *Daily Post*, Saturday, May 14, 1720; *Daily Post*, Wednesday, June 8, 1720; *Daily Post*, Thursday, June 9, 1720; *Daily Post*, Wednesday, June 15, 1720.

¹⁹³ *Daily Post*, Tuesday, June 14, 1720

¹⁹⁴ *London Evening Post*, Saturday, January 24, 1730

¹⁹⁵ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 5

chosen survived; in 1770 the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* ran an advertisement for the funeral stock of Mrs Elizabeth Barber, which included palls, velvets, sconces, candlesticks, various cloaks, gowns, silk dresses, various cloth and hangings, burial and hatband crape, seven hundred pairs of gloves, coffin nails and a hundred coffins, all of which was described as being, 'late the stock of the United Company of Undertakers'.¹⁹⁶ Regrettably, without further sources mentioning such an organisation the significance of the appellation and its recurrence after such a span of years cannot be determined.

The difficulties of defining and labelling undertakers are even more pronounced when we considered provincial 'undertakers', who were certainly present in all but name far more widely than trade directories suggest. This is also indicated by the reference to 'Country Shopkeepers' in the warehouse advertisement quoted above. An example of such an individual is well-known shopkeeper and diarist Thomas Turner. Turner was a typical provincial shopkeeper, stocking a wide array of items for the local community and with contacts that allowed him to source many more items as and when required: he provided groceries, a wide variety of fabrics, haberdashery and millinery supplies, readymade clothes, medicines and many other household items, to name but a few.¹⁹⁷ Providing for funerals was simply another one of his many occupations. His diary records him sourcing shrouds, food and wine for 'wakes' and arranging favours, usually gloves, and occasionally hatbands, as well as 'serving' funerals, i.e. accompanying the body to the church.¹⁹⁸ Very much like London undertakers then, Turner acted as a middleman who engaged in undertaking as a sideline business, providing for and occasionally attending funerals, doing so because he was already in a position in which he could readily obtain the necessary funeral items.

Individuals like Turner, operating to all intents and purposes as undertakers, even if they were not called undertakers, would certainly have existed in a

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5; *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, Saturday, May 19, 1770.

¹⁹⁷ Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, p. xxi

¹⁹⁸ See for example, Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner*, pp. 6-7, 18, 23, 62, 77-9, 95, 98-9, 101, 184, 202, 215-6, 223, 234, 279-80, 284, 294.

number of other smaller towns and villages in England, although probably concentrated in the 'southern zone' as defined by Mui and Mui, in particular the south east. This reinforces the fluidity of the notion of 'undertaking' and the difficulty of defining undertakers which, in turn, is related to the fact that the way in which undertakers operated was essentially only a formalised and, to some degree, centralised, version of the practice of previous centuries; in many ways there was no clear line demarcating old and new practice, a fact also reflected in the combination of old and new in funeral form nationwide, to be discussed in the following chapter.

In conclusion, undertaking during the long eighteenth century was a varied trade in which anyone could participate. It was a product of the nature of trade at the time, and depended heavily on other trades in order to function. Its structure was loose and subject to local variations, and its operation flexible and varied. Death was a subject of business in which many people might have a part, a part which was frequently casual, flexible, opportunistic and even indirect.

EMPLOYEES

The use of the term 'undertaker' in the singular gives the impression that despite having connections with many other tradesmen, undertakers operated alone. In fact, as in any other trade, a variety of others might work alongside undertakers, from shop assistants and apprentices to men employed at funerals. This would almost certainly have been the case whatever the extent and nature of an individual's involvement in funeral provision, as even the manufacture of individual items such as coffins or gloves would commonly have involved the assistance of, or have been delegated to, employees or co-workers. It is important to stress that the business of death was not a solitary pursuit. Although undertaking represents a form of specialisation, the indistinct boundary between it and other trades meant that involvement with funeral provision, direct and indirect, formal and informal, was diffused among

a wide range of people. Not only were many undertakers primarily employed in other trades, but so were their various employees. In addition to those directly involved in funerals were the tradesmen who supplied undertakers but did not themselves provide for funerals, and who would also have had employees assisting them with the sale and/or manufacture of goods such as coffins, gloves, fabrics and feathers, as well as those who were employed solely to play a part in funeral processions. The provision of items required for funerals, and in some cases the organisation of funerals, could therefore involve a very wide range of people who were not necessarily connected to the deceased. Attitudes towards the involvement of these strangers in the preparation and disposal of the dead will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. This section seeks only to summarise the range of individuals employed by undertakers and their roles.

Evidence for undertakers' employees appears in newspapers, printed literature, criminal trials and apprenticeship indentures. In London the first record of an undertaker's apprentice found dates from 1721, when Thomas Woodgate was discharged from the service of Valentine Dickins of St Margaret Westminster, described as an 'undertaker for Funerals'.¹⁹⁹ Another such petition exists from 1724 when Thomas Heythorne was discharged following the death of his master, Isaac Stevens, also of St Margaret Westminster.²⁰⁰ Apprentices were commonly employed by London undertakers and references to them appear throughout the period in question.²⁰¹ A case from 1820 involves children from a charity school.²⁰² The first source pertaining to undertakers'

¹⁹⁹ GL/MJ/SP/1721, Termination of apprenticeship between Valentine Dickins, undertaker, and Thomas Woodgate

²⁰⁰ GL/WJ/SP/1724, Termination of apprenticeship between Isaac Stevens, undertaker, and Thomas Heythorne

²⁰¹ In 1727 Thomas Morris was discharged from the service of Thomas Woodgate, undertaker, of St Margarets Westminster. See GL/MJ/SP/1727. In 1737 James Butler was discharged from the service of Elizabeth Harrison of Mariner Square, carpenter and undertaker. See GL/MJ/SP/1737/12/36-38. In 1739 Charles Everitt petitioned to leave his master Thomas Woodgate, 'coffin maker and undertaker' of St Margaret's for a new master. See GL/WJ/SP/1739/01/01-02. In 1809 Alexander Gow of Mercer Street, Long Acre, St Martin in the Fields, a cabinet maker, upholsterer and undertaker charged his fifteen year old apprentice Horatius Walker with misbehaviour. See GL/MJ/SP/1809/MAY/002. These documents constitute all of the undertakers' apprentices found in London in the course of research for this thesis, but are certainly only a small proportion of the actual number.

²⁰² GL/Ms10618, Letter re. Undertakers' apprentices, 1820

apprentices in Bristol dates from 1825, although it is almost certain that Bristolian undertakers were employing apprentices long before this date.²⁰³ Further evidence of apprenticeship among tradesmen who included undertaking among their business activities comes from sources mentioning journeyman undertakers. They are mentioned only once in printed literature, but appear in four Old Bailey trials dating from 1742, 1777, 1796 and 1835.²⁰⁴ In most cases these journeymen were not solely undertakers, but were involved in other woodworking trades typically associated with undertaking, suggesting that they would engage in coffin-making as an additional source of income when required. The trials mention a 'journeyman cabinet maker' frequently employed by undertakers, 'a journeyman upholsterer and undertaker' and one 'journeyman undertaker'.²⁰⁵ In the final case the precise occupation of the journeyman is not stated, but he is described as being employed for eight years by an undertaker.²⁰⁶

Apprentices and others employed in undertakers' shops or workshops could have a variety of responsibilities. These would include the manufacture or preparation of items such as coffins, and sometimes shrouds, and general shop work.²⁰⁷ Aspects of the remit of an undertaker's employee are suggested by a 1757 newspaper advertisement in which 'a Young Man, 22 Years of Age, who writes a good Hand, and understands Arithmetick and Measuring' advertised

²⁰³ BRO/14971/6. Joseph Gibbs, aged twenty one, was made apprentice to John Parnell, a Carpenter, Ship and House Joiner and Undertaker of Bristol for the duration of three years.

²⁰⁴ Richard Campbell noted in 1747 that undertakers were, 'generally Carpenter, or Herald-Painters besides; and they only employ, as Journeymen, a Set of Men whom they have picked up, possessed of a sober Countenance, and a solemn melancholly Face, whom they pay at so much a Jobb.' See R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London, 1747), p. 230. Campbell is referring specifically to the hired mourners, or mutes, who might be employed for grander funerals. His use of the word to refer to these individuals is unusual, as they were very unlikely to have been journeymen. His statement that undertakers usually worked alone except for employing men to work at funerals is also erroneous, as this section demonstrates.

²⁰⁵ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), Ordinary of Newgate's Account, 7 April 1742 (OA17420407); *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), June 1796, trial of Mary Nott (t17960622-6); *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), May 1777, trial of John Paul (t17770514-26).

²⁰⁶ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), September 1835, trial of Thomas Meays (t18350921-2104)

²⁰⁷ Shroud manufacturers seldom appear in the sources consulted. The only examples found within them are as follows: the 1757 trial of Sarah Pank, in which she was indicted for stealing crape from her employees, is described as having 'worked for them by the week at shroud making, at their own house.' See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1757, trial of Sarah Pank (t17571026-29).

himself as willing to, 'serve any Tradesman as a Shopman, or to look after any Merchant's Wood-Yard, &c.'²⁰⁸ As interested parties were directed to an undertaker for references, it is to be assumed that the young man had been working for this undertaker, assisting in coffin manufacture and general shop keeping and accounting.

Another important responsibility of the undertakers' employee would be the sourcing and collection of items from other tradesmen. The fundamental role of the latter in the way in which undertakers operated illustrates how the many connections between undertakers and other tradesmen worked in practice. Undertaking's reliance on the conveyance of items and messages is evidenced in trials for theft and forgery in the Old Bailey. For example, in 1775 James and Henry Hammond, glovers and importers of crape, prosecuted Barnwell Males for ordering three packets of crape on the pretence that the fabric was for an undertaker and regular customer named Mr Skinner, when his real intention was theft.²⁰⁹ Samuel Crace was indicted in 1807 for stealing a pall from an undertaker's shop. He was able to obtain it easily, walking away with it by telling the undertaker's wife that the undertaker had been supposed to deliver it to him but had forgotten, while in 1826 Ann Field was indicted for forging a note asking for hat bands and silk gloves from an undertaker with the intention of stealing them.²¹⁰ These cases also make clear that it was not always undertakers' employees who were charged with the collection and delivery of items, but that the bereaved themselves would often bear the responsibility of collecting items ordered for funerals. This in turn is further evidence for the often limited involvement of undertakers in funeral provision and organisation:

²⁰⁸ *Daily Advertiser*, Monday, March 14, 1757

²⁰⁹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), September 1775, trial of Barnwell Males (t17750913-97)

²¹⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), April 1807, trial of Samuel Crace (t18070408-68); *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), October 1826, trial of Anne Field (t18261026-84). A further example is as follows: in 1831 Job Davis went to a mercer's pretending to be an undertaker's servant along with a man pretending to be a carpenter and undertaker, and ordered a quantity of cloth which he attempted to take from the shop, promising to pay on credit. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), April 1831, trial of Job Davis (t18310407-14). Yet another very similar case is that of William Wilson in 1837. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), January 1837, trial of William Wilson (t18370130-668).

many would not visit the home of the deceased, let alone be directly involved with the funeral.

In addition to permanent employees involved in the everyday activities of the undertaker's shop and/or workshop were those employed specifically for funerals, such as mutes and pages used in more elaborate funeral processions. These may have been drawn from the undertaker's permanent staff, but there is some indication that they could also be employed on an occasional basis. Not only would these men be involved in the procession, but they might also be present at the home of the deceased, stood at the door or around the coffin during the 'wake'. Significantly, as chapter four will show, although there was no complaint about the principle of undertaking and the involvement of outsiders in funeral organisation, attendance at the funeral itself could be a more sensitive issue.

Undertaking was therefore reliant on a range of employees. Their position as the link between undertakers and other tradesmen, relaying messages and collecting supplies, demonstrate their importance to the functioning of the trade and the part they played in creating a 'public face' of death.

CONCLUSION

Litten has concluded that, 'in the main, the average undertaker was little more than a speculative carpenter or joiner who, by direct contact with the metalworking and soft furnishing trades...was able to buy in all that was required to furnish a funeral.'²¹¹ The statement is very broadly correct, but disguises the fact that undertakers and the way in which they operated during the long eighteenth century were at once straightforward and complex, as analysis of a range of sources has demonstrated. Involvement with funeral provision was unrestricted and encouraged by the fact that it relied upon such a variety of individual components. These features meant that undertaking was a business which functioned very much as a part of the wider economy and in

²¹¹ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 7

the same ways as other trades of the time. This indicates in turn that there was no stigma attached to involvement with death, which was seen as a legitimate subject of business and source of income. Analysis of sources from outside the capital has demonstrated that despite the trade's slow spread across the country its essential elements were remarkably uniform.

This chapter has been concerned with establishing the basic details concerning the way in which the undertaking trade functioned, establishing the important role of a number of trades in its operation. The following chapter will go into greater detail about the nature of the funerals they provided, as well as considering those organised without undertakers' involvement, further demonstrating undertakers' role in creating a new public 'face' or presence of death, and arguing that they had a role in the development of a new material culture and visual language of death. It will contrast this with a discussion of the development of mourning practice over the period, which evolved with little input from undertakers.

FUNERALS AND MOURNING

INTRODUCTION

Funerals marked the dead body's transition from the living world above ground to the subterranean world of the dead. Reformed theology had curtailed the funeral service and prayers for the dead, putting the dead and their spiritual status beyond the influence of the living and in so doing removing the possibility for ritual to have any effect on the status of the deceased's soul. Despite this, funerals remained religious ceremonies conducted by a member of the clergy and it was expected that they should take place in a church or churchyard, with burial also taking place in consecrated ground.²¹² However, the funeral service and the ritual of depositing the body in the ground were the only point at which religion directly and explicitly informed the treatment of the dead body: as demonstrated, up to that point religion did not dictate handling of the corpse in anything but a general sense. Instead broader, primarily secular, standards, including that of 'decency', acted to determine its treatment. This is also true of funerals' appearance and mourning practices, which will be the focus of this chapter.

Like the preparation and housing of the body, funeral processions were a ritualised practicality. However, while the preparation of the body did not change, funeral form was much more closely linked to a variety of contemporary developments and changed in accordance with them. Funerals, or specifically funeral processions, brought the deceased and the bereaved into public space, and historians have traditionally placed heaviest emphasis on

²¹² Dissenters, as well as Anglicans, continued to leave funerals in the charge of their ministers and to conduct both funerals and burials in religious, although unconsecrated, spaces. Only a very few groups with extreme puritan convictions ever took reformed theology to its logical conclusion and buried with little or no ritual whatsoever, and this practice largely disappeared after the Restoration. Even Quakers tended to bury in specially established urban burial grounds and perform some sort of service for their dead.

their cost and use as statements of material wealth and social status in their analysis of funerals' form and function, acknowledging their individual and communal significance.²¹³ As David Cressy summarises, 'the transportation of the dead was a civil affair, balancing the estate and circumstance of the deceased with the social and cultural concerns of the living.'²¹⁴ In the case of heraldic funerals, this was an explicit intention, the funeral procession composed according to precedent and precisely ordered to reflect the status of the deceased and the social relationship of each mourner to them. Funerals have, in turn, been seen as a means of affirming the social order and its continuation in the face of its disruption by death.²¹⁵ Mourning, as well as being an expression of grief, also communicated information regarding both the deceased and the bereaved, including social status and wealth. Mourning clothing, which developed a strict system of observance based upon the position of the bereaved to the deceased, for example wife or son, also had the function of reinforcing familial relationships and the centrality of the family to one's social position and identity.

This thesis does not seek to challenge these existing views of the meaning and purpose of funerals or mourning. However, it does seek to build upon them in specific relation to the long eighteenth century, and the particular social and cultural expectations by which they were determined. Prior to the long eighteenth century the funerals of all but the nobility had been relatively simple affairs featuring little ornamentation, while mourning in any of its forms was not practiced outside that class. Although detailed examination of seventeenth-century funerals of ordinary people and their components are relatively limited, they suggest that for most people funerals were simple affairs. However, from the latter decades of the seventeenth century the heraldic funerals, and mourning protocol, previously reserved for the nobility were adopted by an

²¹³ Vanessa Harding, 'Whose Body?: A Study of Attitudes Towards the Dead Body in Early Modern Paris' in Gordon & Marshall, *The Place of the Dead*, p. 180; Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation', p. 221; Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 33.

²¹⁴ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 436

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 421

ever wider section of society as the College of Arms, who regulated heraldic usage and practice among the titled, became an increasingly impotent force, and a new economic and social structure began emerging. The following chapter will examine in detail just why these changes occurred. This chapter limits itself to discussing the nature of these changes and is structured as follows: the first section outlines the appearance of heraldic funerals; the second, the wider adoption of this form; the third briefly considers the significance of pauper funerals; the fourth wider social conventions influencing funeral form and attendance; and the final section, mourning practices. The chapter will show that a new commercial material culture of death emerged during the long eighteenth century, developing a defined shape and character that built upon foundations laid in the seventeenth century, and it will argue that the emergence of a specialist trade catering for the new culture of mourning was just as significant a development of the long eighteenth century as the undertaking trade.²¹⁶

HERALDIC FUNERALS

Instituted in the Tudor period heraldic funerals were a privilege, and a requirement, among the nobility. Their form was strictly determined by protocols regulated by the College of Arms. The order of the procession, the roles of those involved and the heraldry displayed were all designed to reflect the social position of the deceased and their relationship to fellow nobility, often at the expense of familial and even spousal relationships. As the next chapter will explain in greater detail, the authority of the College of Arms was short-lived and by the seventeenth century nobility increasingly ignored or bypassed the College in funereal, and many other, matters. Heraldic funerals continued, but were instead co-ordinated by the undertakers who began emerging in London in the later seventeenth century and who, as demonstrated

²¹⁶ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 176, 219

in the previous chapter, were those whose existing occupations and experience made them best-suited to provide the articles required by the heraldic style.

The heraldic funerals provided by undertakers for those who had traditionally been accustomed to them varied little from those arranged by the College of Arms. The body, which would have lain in state in suitably grand surroundings until the day of the funeral, sometimes flanked by hired mutes, was transported to its place of burial with an elaborate procession, this procession and its many components being the defining feature of the heraldic funeral. The coffin would be preceded by mutes and pages, various forms of heraldry borne by men on foot and on horseback, and possibly by an undertaker and even musicians. The coffin itself was transported on a horse-drawn hearse bearing heraldic emblems and perhaps accompanied by more mutes. It was followed by more heraldic display and the mourners, who were selected and ordered by connections of lineage and title. These mourners might number into the hundreds and would travel in carriages, possibly accompanied by yet more mutes or pages. Funeral guests and those employed as attendants would be dressed in mourning, and even horses would be adorned with plumes of feathers on their heads and other suitably funereal accessories. These funeral processions were therefore bold statements of social position, of individual wealth and of the broader status quo, reinforcing the position held by the deceased and the continuation of their family and of the nobility in spite of the loss of one of their members.

Early eighteenth-century descriptions of contemporary noble funerals performed by undertakers illustrate the key elements of the heraldic style and the form taken by the funeral procession very well. For instance, in 1714 the *Post Boy* newspaper described the funeral of Sir William Hodges, Bart., which included a procession of fifty mourning coaches, an array of heraldry and three hundred horses, some mounted but the majority pulling carriages in sixes. In addition, during the procession through the city 'the Guns in the River' were fired each minute, and were fired again one hour after the procession had

finished.²¹⁷ Similarly grand were the following funerals, all of which were held in 1721. Lady Theophila Ingoldsby was carried from her home in Kensington, where she had lain in state, in a hearse 'richly adorned with all the proper Garments of Heraldry, drawn with six Horses; the Horsemen carrying all the trophies of Honour, according to her Dignity, with Pages of Honour attending all the Coaches through all the Towns to Cranford,' where she was buried with her ancestors.²¹⁸ In addition to the usual lengthy procession of horses and mourners the funeral of the Earl of Stanhope, managed by undertaker Thomas Arne, included drums covered with black material on which was beaten a death march, 'Trumpeters sounding a Funeral Symphony', and various sections of the military marching in 'Mourning Hat-bands, Scarves and Shammy Gloves', the muzzles of their weapons pointed downwards.²¹⁹ Sir John Shaw, Bart., lay in state at the Upholders Hall and was then carried to Eltham, 'with the King's Trumpets attending, and all the Trophies of Honour.'²²⁰ The Earl of Warwick's procession was held at night, a fashion to be discussed below, and included eight hundred candles to light the way.²²¹

Elite funerals, as well as those of renowned public figures, continued in this manner throughout the long eighteenth century. For example, in 1792 the Duke of Buckingham's funeral included the same features as the earlier funerals described. Ahead of the body went various groups of musicians, heraldic emblems, horsemen, a British flag and the undertaker. The coffin lay in an

²¹⁷ *Post Boy* (1695), Tuesday, August 10, 1714

²¹⁸ *Post Boy* (1695), Tuesday, August 8, 1721

²¹⁹ *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, February 8, 1721; *Daily Post*, Friday, February 17, 1721; *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, Saturday, February 18, 1721. Arne was the Master of the Company of Upholders in 1703. He was father to Thomas Augustine Arne, the composer, and Robert Arne, singer and actor. See GL/Fo. Pam. 9134, Houston, *Feathbedds and Flock Bedds*, p. 20; Lesley Wade Soule, 'Arne family (per. 1682–1808)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/70961>, accessed 2 March 2009].

²²⁰ *Flying Post or The Post Master*, Tuesday, December 19, 1721. They also interred the Duke of Schonburg, *Post Boy* (1695), Tuesday, August 4, 1719; the wife of a William Smith, *St James's Journal*, Thursday, July 26, 1722; the Bishop of London, *British Journal* (1722), Saturday, April 20, 1723; the Archbishop of York, *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, May 6, 1724; 'an eminent New England Merchant' named Samuel Appleton, who died of the smallpox and was much praised in the *Daily Post*, Saturday, December 21, 1728; Revd. Mr King, a relation of the Lord Chancellor, *Daily Post*, Monday, April 14, 1729; Thomas Wentworth Watson, Esq., brother of the Earl of Rockingham, who they interred in York Cathedral 'with much funeral State and Solemnity, great Numbers of Gentry, and about 70 of the Clergy attending his hearse', *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, Saturday, November 2, 1723; Admiral Hosier, *British Journal* (1722), Saturday, January 13, 1728, and certainly many others.

²²¹ *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, August 23, 1721; *Daily Post*, Tuesday, August 29, 1721.

'open chariot' drawn by horses and adorned with feathers and further heraldry. It was flanked by men on horseback dressed in mourning and followed by eighteen pages, more heraldry, the chief mourner and coaches containing the nobility in order of rank with pages at each of their doors.²²² The funerals of the elite therefore witnessed little change during the long eighteenth century, other than the fact they were arranged and performed by undertakers instead of the College of Arms, retaining their heraldic form and the message it had traditionally communicated.

Elements of heraldic display accompanied the bodies of the elite even when they were transported long distances to their place of burial, for instance if they had died in London but were to be buried alongside family in the region of their country homes. Although Julian Litten has argued that the offers of London undertakers to perform funerals in any part of the country were rarely taken up, in fact there is evidence that it was commonplace for more illustrious clients to be transported significant distances.²²³ The later ledgers of undertaker Richard Carpender give the costs associated with his horse, whose journeys, it is to be presumed, indicate the undertaker having travelled in order to perform funerals, or possibly to collect bodies and bring them back to London. They show that in the early 1760s he travelled widely in and around London, including to Watford, Marlow and Harrow, as well as to Kent, Winchester, Oxfordshire, Cambridge, Northamptonshire, Shrewsbury, Yorkshire and Wales.²²⁴ Earlier examples also exist of bodies being transported from London to Cambridge, Warwickshire, Suffolk and Yorkshire.²²⁵

When transported across the country, bodies were carried in hearses, accompanied by undertakers and their assistants. If the journey took more than a day the corpse was kept overnight in a public house, typically in a room hung with black cloth.²²⁶ The same was done when bodies of the elite required

²²² *Old Whig or The Consistent Protestant*, Thursday, February 5, 1736

²²³ Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 4

²²⁴ GL/Ms05871, Purchase ledgers of Richard Carpender, undertaker

²²⁵ *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, May 6, 1724; *Daily Post*, Monday, April 14, 1729; *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, October 21, 1724.

²²⁶ See for example TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 4, pp. 221, 248.

collection prior to lying in state, for instance if they died abroad. For example, when the body of the Duke of Marlborough arrived on English soil in 1758 it lay in state for a day at Gravesend before being processed up to Shooter's Hill, where it again lay in state and was again processed before the hearse was decorated 'with the proper Funeral Ornaments', after which it continued on to Blenheim, a journey which took several more days. The *London Evening Post*, which reported these details, also informed its readers that 'At every Stage a Room hung with Black, and properly illuminated, was prepared for the solemn Reception of the Corpse.'²²⁷ Heraldic processions, albeit in reduced form, were therefore a sight which rural as well as urban communities would have experienced.

The sight of heraldic funerals was intended to be striking, and they always drew the attention for which they were designed. Some of this attention was inspired by the reverence which they were intended to inspire, some by a simple sense of curiosity: like other events which, although familiar, were relatively infrequent, for example public executions, elite funerals, the pomp surrounding them and perhaps even the sight of members of the nobility in their carriages, were spectacles which punctuated the routine of everyday life. Some capitalised upon the impressive nature of elite funerals, and those of particularly well-known public figures, by offering well-positioned seating to those who could afford it. For example, a 1722 advertisement offered

Convenient Scaffolding for seeing the procession of the late Duke of Marlborough's Funeral...built under the House next to the West-End of St. Margaret's Church-yard...being the most commodious Place for seeing the whole Procession on Foot, from the Place of getting out of the Coaches to the Entrance into the Abbey. Places may be had at very reasonable Rates, and a Room for Refreshments, if desired. Attendance will be given at the Place of Scaffolding.²²⁸

Conversely, there is also evidence that among some of the population attendance at elite funerals was motivated by outright disrespect for the elite and all that the heraldic funeral symbolised. This was not unique to the

²²⁷ *London Evening Post*, Saturday, November 18, 1758

²²⁸ *Daily Courant*, Thursday, August 9, 1722

eighteenth century, as Cressy also notes that elite funerals of the preceding centuries were not always orderly.²²⁹ In 1725 two men were found guilty of stealing escutcheons from a hearse, 'The which [prosecution]', the *Evening Post* commented, 'tis thought, will effectually put an End to that mobbish and scandalous Practice, that hath hitherto too much prevail'd, the Persons concern'd in performing Funerals being resolved for the future to prosecute such Offenders with the utmost Severity.'²³⁰ John Latimer, in his historical account of Bristol, also noted that at one 1737 funeral in the city much of the procession's grandeur was removed by crowds on the way.²³¹ Chadwick too mentioned the often disorderly behaviour of the 'mob' at funerals in his 1843 *Report*, although it referred to non-elite funerals.²³² The first example indicates that, during the early part of the eighteenth century at least, it was not uncommon for elite funerals to inspire the opposite sentiment of that which they intended among certain sections of society, while the second shows this phenomenon was not confined to London. Chadwick's comment indicates that such behaviour was confined neither to the earlier part of the period in question, nor even to the elite. However, without any other sources referring to the 'mobbing' of elite or plebeian funerals few firm conclusions about the frequency of or reasons for this practice can be drawn.

In part to avoid attention, positive or negative, and in part to avoid the strictures imposed by College protocols, during the earlier part of the period in question some members of the nobility chose to conduct their funerals at night by torch or candle light.²³³ Originating in the practice of Scottish courtiers, night funerals increased in popularity during the later seventeenth century, despite having being banned by Charles I.²³⁴ They could also be cheaper, although this was not necessarily the reason for choosing them.²³⁵ By the early eighteenth century they were also popular among the middling classes, although declining

²²⁹ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 446

²³⁰ *Evening Post*, Tuesday, October 12, 1725

²³¹ John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (np, 1893), p. 208

²³² Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 80

²³³ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 166, 188, 191-2

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-91, 200

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-6

among the nobility. They remained popular in provincial areas until the middle of the eighteenth century.²³⁶ Night funerals could be more intimate than traditional heraldic funerals owing to the reduced number of mourners and the increased privacy, but not necessarily. For example, in 1717 Lady Hodges was processed from her house in a hearse accompanied by thirty two branches of wax candles. The hearse was followed by the chief mourners, whose trains were supported by seven people; two heralds at arms; the mourners; and the Spanish ambassador and his retinue, who attended in recognition of that fact that she was born in Spain. They in turn were followed by nobility and gentry in mourning. Overall the procession included 300 coaches and was lighted by 500 lighted torches, and was surely as spectacular as a daytime funeral.²³⁷

Therefore, despite the alteration in how and by whom they were organised, heraldic funerals continued to be the norm, indeed to be expected, among the nobility, and changed little in their appearance or their intended meaning during the eighteenth century. Although there is evidence they did not always engender the regard desired, nothing about the heraldic form and its meaning was the subject of intentional or sustained overt challenge, despite the decline of the College of Arms.

THE SPREAD OF HERALDIC FORM

However, although not intended as such, the wider adoption of heraldic funeral form did constitute a significant, if gradually evolving, challenge to the heraldic form's significance. As it came to be used as the blueprint for all funerals, it would permanently alter definitions of 'decency' in relation to funeral ritual, and give rise to a new material culture of death and associated commercial providers.

Prior to the start of our period bodies were carried to their place of burial in a communal coffin, either on a communal bier or on the shoulders of bearers. Both the coffin and the bier were owned by the parish in whose churchyard the

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189

²³⁷ *Weekly Journal or Saturday's Post*, Saturday, May 18, 1717

deceased was to be buried. Once at the place of burial, the body was removed from the coffin and buried in just its shroud. In its order and essential components, the funeral procession would have been a very much reduced version of that enjoyed by the nobility; ahead of the coffin travelled the minister who would perform the burial and behind it would be mourners on foot. The coffin was covered by a pall, also usually the property of the parish, supported by pall bearers who walked alongside the coffin bearers.²³⁸

The limited quantity of ‘accessories’ required for such funerals were therefore in the hands of the church, for whom they provided a small but steady income. Their role in providing for funerals was significantly reduced as individual coffins became the norm for all classes, a development which occurred prior to the emergence of undertakers, and would be reduced further still as undertakers increasingly took over the role of hiring out palls.²³⁹ Naturally, the church remained absolutely central to the performance of the funeral service and the committal of the body. However, although it does not appear to have attracted contemporary comment, the effective removal of the church from the position of funeral supplier and its replacement by commercial providers was a very significant change in funeral ritual of the long eighteenth century.²⁴⁰

Elements of almost all the essential features of elite funerals were adopted over the course of the long eighteenth century, including more elaborate coffins, the use of mutes and other hired mourners in the procession, mourners in mourning clothing and favours such as gloves for mourners. In some cases

²³⁸ In 1719 Misson observed that ‘The Parish has always three or four Mortuary Cloths of different Prices, to furnish those who are at the Charge of the Interment. These Cloths, which they call Palls, are some of black Velvet, others of Cloth with an Edge of white Linnen or Silk a Foot broad, or thereabouts: For a Batchellor or Maid, or for a Woman that dies in Child-bed, the Pall is white. This spread over the Coffin, and is so broad, that the six or eight Men that carry the Body are quite hid beneath it to their Waste; and the corners and Sides of it hang down low enough to be born by those who, according to Custom, are invited for that Purpose.’ See Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 91-2.

²³⁹ As undertakers appeared later in certain parts of the country, for example Yorkshire, we naturally find that references to parish palls in these areas continue into the later part of the eighteenth century. In the York parish of Holy Trinity Micklegate a ‘coffin cloth’, or ‘burial cloth’, first mentioned in 1683, remained listed among the parish’s belongings in 1754. See BOR/PR/Y/HTM/18, Churchwardens’ accounts, pp. 4 & 101. The terriers of St Michael-le-Belfrey suggest that its burial cloth remained in use until the 1770s. See BOR/PR/Y/MB/35, Churchwardens’ accounts. In the York parish of St John, Ousebridge references to its ‘coffin cloth’, first made in 1708, can be found as late as 1809. See the following churchwardens’ accounts: BOR/PR/Y/J/18; BOR/PR/Y/J/19.

²⁴⁰ It is even more significant when considered alongside the effective removal of the church’s control over urban burial space, which also resulted in a loss of income. This will be discussed in chapter seven.

actual heraldry was used, even when the deceased was not technically entitled to it, although in most cases heraldry was absent. When it was used it was not always employed correctly or systematically, and seems in some cases to have become mere aesthetic detail.²⁴¹ The use of the term 'heraldic form' here therefore refers to the material elements and processional form of true heraldic funerals. Although there was naturally a significant degree of variation in how and to what extent heraldic elements were adopted depending upon budget and a variety of other individual considerations, a few examples, chosen at random, are sufficient to illustrate the kind of heraldic elements used in the funerals of non-nobles of various degrees of wealth and to give an impression of the appearance of these processions.

The 1821 bill for one anonymous Bristolian's funeral, totalling 12/ 10s, included the following:

5ft 9 by 18 Elm coffin covered with fine black cloth ornamented with the best black nails a florid plate with Inscription 4 pair of Angel handles with fripes(?) and 6 dozen ornaments, lined and ruffled within a fine Shroud Cap and Pillow	3-10-0 0-13-0
a Mattress for the Coffin	0-5-0
Use of a Best Pall	0-7-4
Use of 7 Cloaks	0-7-0
Use of 2 Hoods and Scarves	0-3-0
6 Best Crape and 1 Silk Hatband	2-2-0
11 Pair of Kid gloves	2-2-6
2 Porters in Proper Dresses	0-12-0
3 Hatbands for Ditto and Attender	0-6-6
4 Men to Bear the Corpse	0-8-0
Paid for dues and grave digger	1-7-0
Paid for Searchers and Mens Beer	0-3-0
Attendance at the Funeral	0-3-6 ²⁴²

Naturally, such a funeral was affordable only to the wealthier middling sort. However, as the following examples from Mr Legg's ledgers show, many

²⁴¹ For instance excavations at St Bride's church, London, showed that coffin plates shaped according to heraldic rules were used, including shields for men, lozenges for spinsters and ovals for married women, but that they were often used without regard for their original significance, for instance ovals being used for men. See Theya Molleson & Margaret Cox, *The Spitalfields Project, Volume Two*, p. 200

²⁴² BRO/31224/13/18(a), Anonymous funeral bill 1821

similar elements were also available at lower prices and at a much earlier date.

In May 1716 *3l 17s* bought the following funeral for an unnamed child:

A Child's Elm Coffin Covered wth fine Cloath Silverd	0-16-0
Plate 2 Paire of Silverd Chacet handles Lynd & Ruffled wth fine Crape and Finished wth 3 rows of best Silverd Nailes	
A Supfine Shroud Sheet Pillow & gloves	0-8-0
6 Paire of weo best wt kid gloves at 2/2	0-13-0
For use of a Velvet Pall	0-2-6
A mourning Coach and Paire of horses	0-5-0
Paide Parrish Dutys	0-11-6
Paide for An Affidavit	0-1-0 ²⁴³

In August of the same year, just *1l 12s 2d* bought a not dissimilar funeral for Col.(?) Cope:

An Elm Coffin Covered wth fine Cloath bayes a Silver'd Plate 2 Paire of handles lynd wth fine Crape Ruffled, & finished wth 3 rows of Silver'd Nails	0-8-0
A Fine Shroud and Pillow	0-3-6
A Mourning Coach	0-5-0
Paid the Parrish Duty	0-9-2
2 Men in Black wth flambeaux	0-2-0
For use of a Velvet Pall	0-2-6
Paid for an Affidavit	0-1-0 ²⁴⁴

Two neat pictorial representations of funerals including heraldic elements, one conducted on foot and the other using a horse-drawn hearse and mourners' carriages, can be found on the trade card of Thomas Eyre. (Figures 2 and 3) They clearly illustrate the more elaborate decoration of the coffin using heraldry and feathers, the cloaks and hats or scarves of the mourners, and the plumes used to decorate horses, as well as the general order of processions.

²⁴³ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 2, p. 121

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 79



Figures 2 and 3. Details from the trade card of Thomas Eyre, Undertaker, 356 Oxford Street (c. 1784) Heal Collection 124.25 © Trustees of the British Museum

The examples given so far all come from undertakers' accounts. However, 'heraldic' elements were not supplied solely by undertakers, or necessarily in areas in which undertakers operated. Evidence for this comes largely from diaries and personal documents, most of which come from Yorkshire. For example, the records of the wealthy Gray family of York reinforce the absence of undertakers in that city until a very late date and the continued role of family and executors in the organisation of funerals, even when they were elaborate. When William Gray Senior acted as executor for a William Hopwood in 1782 the arrangements for the funeral were made with a number of individual tradesmen. They do mention Mr Shibblewhite, described as an 'undertaker', to whom Gray paid £5 9s for unspecified services, although this individual does not appear in any other York sources. It is to be assumed that at least part of the amount paid to him would have been for the coffin. However, he does not seem to have been an undertaker in the sense of an individual who organised funerals, as the making of the shroud, the burial fees, the cost of gloves and of crape, the cost of the hearse and the turnpike fees, the cost of sending messengers to inform relatives of the funeral arrangements, and of dinner for these relations, are all listed and paid for separately.²⁴⁵ In areas without undertakers responsibility for co-ordinating funerals therefore remained with family and/or executors who made the many arrangements and sourced the

²⁴⁵ YCA/Acc. 24/A1, Ledgers of William Gray Snr, p. 48

necessary items from various suppliers by themselves, as they would have done in previous centuries.

Unfortunately, no other accounts of York funerals have been found so conclusions cannot be drawn as to the nature of middling and lower class funerals and the extent to which heraldic form might have been adopted in smaller cities or in the north of the England. However, there are some small indications that some elements of elite practice travelled far beyond London, and far beyond the areas in which undertakers operated. The funerals described by Arthur Jessop, a gentleman from Honely in the West Yorkshire parish of Almondby, mention that the funeral of Mr John Lockwood was conducted 'by candlelight' in 1730, in the style of a night funeral.²⁴⁶ Although this is only one aspect of elite practice, it is very likely that other elements were also known and practiced by the populations of small towns and rural areas, even if they may have been a few decades behind urban fashions.

This raises the very important point that heraldic form was not inextricably connected with undertakers, and that aspects of it spread faster and further than undertakers themselves. Comparison of Bristol and York sources in the previous chapter clearly showed the gradual nature of undertakers' spread across the country. Although the trade flourished in London at an early date, and was utilised there by a wide portion of the social spectrum, undertaking took time to emerge in other cities, even populous and wealthy Bristol, Britain's second city for much of the long eighteenth century. In smaller cities and northern areas its appearance was even tardier, as in York. This latter fact is surprising as, although York was in the 'northern zone', defined by Mui and Mui as the area north of the line between Somerset and Lincolnshire, in which shops were far fewer, it conformed to metropolitan rather than provincial patterns of trade owing to its status as the social centre of the north.²⁴⁷ In fact, Mui and Mui have singled out both York and Bristol as cities particularly well-

²⁴⁶ C. E. Whiting (ed.), *Two Yorkshire Diaries: The Diary of Arthur Jessop and Ralph Ward's Journal*, The Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series Vol. CXVII (Gateshead on Tyne; Northumberland Press Ltd., 1952), p. 10

²⁴⁷ Mui and Mui, *Shops and Shop Keeping*, p. 42; *Ibid.*, p. 122.

supplied with speciality shops supplying luxury goods to the gentry, and argued that patterns of trade in these cities were very much like those of London, with the exception that London had a greater proportion of grocers and tea dealers.²⁴⁸ Why this should be so; why undertakers were an exception to wider patterns of commerce in this way when, as demonstrated in chapter two, in others they conformed completely; and why the convenience they offered to all levels of society was insufficient to encourage and accelerate their spread, is unclear. It is likely to be an indication that aspects of the new material culture of death, although widely present, were only partially adopted, meaning that traditional means of purchasing funeral items and co-ordinating the ritual remained convenient, even when the composition and appearance of that ritual had changed. They cannot, therefore, simply be correlated with certain social and economic conditions, an issue to be discussed further in the following chapter.

During the long eighteenth century, there therefore existed a broad spectrum of funeral form combining elements of traditional and heraldic-derived customs that may well have varied by locality. There was no clear line demarcating old and new funeral form, which evolved gradually and at a varied pace across England over the course of the long eighteenth century. It was also very likely the case that as part of this, a new system of demarcating or communicating aspects of individual and social identity and status would have developed, dictating which heraldic elements were adopted by certain individuals and certain social groups and in what way, in the process being given a new significance that overrode, or joined, their original meaning. The new material culture of death is therefore likely to have had greater nuances and subtleties than detailed in the sources examined here.

In sum, if we compare funerals across the social scale we can see that they contained the same basic elements: a procession headed by at least one person, followed by the body in a coffin covered by a pall, which was in turn followed by mourners. The difference lay in the outward appearance of each: the degree

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 122

of ornamentation of the coffin, the clothing of the mourners, the number of people involved in the procession and their roles. Funerals underwent a gradual process of elaboration, although this process was not confined to areas in which undertakers existed and was therefore independent of specialist suppliers. A variety of funeral forms and ways of arranging them therefore co-existed in England during the long eighteenth century. The point made in the previous chapter must therefore be re-emphasised: undertakers were new in the sense that they offered a more widely available means of centralising funeral provision, removing that task from the hands of the bereaved or executors. However, they were not new in their structure or operation, obtaining funeral items from a variety of tradesmen, as many continued to do in a number of areas. Equally, heraldic funeral form was not in itself new, simply more widely available. Nonetheless, although the essential components of funerals and processions retained a strong degree of continuity, the aesthetic changes to them, made in line with heraldic tradition, marked the undermining of the traditional symbolism and purpose of heraldic form and the privilege it communicated, contributing to the creation of a new material and commercial culture, and therefore a new visual language, of death. As the following chapter will discuss in more detail, this led to the evolution of notions of 'decency' as it applied to funerals.

PAUPER FUNERALS

Certain basic standards of 'decency' remained unaltered. These dictated that a respectful funeral was due to the deceased of all classes, whether in the city or in the country, and whether or not undertakers were involved in any capacity. If the expense of even the most basic funeral was too great for the finances of the deceased or their family and friends to bear, the parish would be called upon to meet the cost, and until the introduction of the New Poor Law in 1834 parishes provided fairly generously for their residents.

Amongst payments listed in the accounts of parish Overseers of the Poor for medicines, clothes, shoes, poorhouse bills, rent, the nursing of the sick, postage and even sedan chairs for those unable to walk, are included records of funeral expenses. Parishes could grant anything from a few shillings to several pounds. For example, the York parish of Holy Trinity Goodramgate granted 6s 3d of parish money for the funeral of Richard Lowther in 1797, but £2 5s for the 1803 funeral of Richard Hayes. Unfortunately, exactly what these allowances covered is seldom detailed, apart from the occasional very slightly more specific entry, for instance the following from November 1807: 'Eliz Mason's funeral. Coffin, Fees etc...1l 13s 9d'.²⁴⁹

A little more information as to exactly what parishes provided for their inhabitants' funerals can be found in some of the entries for the Overseers book for the parish of St John Delpike, also in York. In 1780, for example, the parish paid for a coffin, burial fees, a pint of wine, a quart of ale, and a pound of cheese for the funeral of an unnamed child, emphasising, as shown in chapter one, that the 'decent' treatment of the dead extended beyond the procession and interment, but also encompassed the ritual of the 'wake.' In some cases, other costs are also recorded. For instance, in 1785 £1 18s 1d was expended on the funeral of someone named Armstrong, miscellaneous expenses comprising of 8s 9d, the coffin costing 10s, burial fees 3s 11d, outstanding rent 13s, and for the sale of the deceased's possessions 3s. Similarly, and in the same year, the funeral of someone named Hick amounted to £1 17s 6d, that amount encompassing 6s 7d of miscellaneous expenses, 10s for the coffin, 3s 11d for the burial, 2s for a nurse, 1l 2s on outstanding rent, and 3s on selling the deceased's goods.²⁵⁰ It is notable that the overall amounts provided for these funerals, although not all devoted to the funeral itself, are similar to the amount expended upon the funerals of non-paupers, specifically that of Col. Cope discussed above.

²⁴⁹ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/17, Overseers of the Poor accounts, Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York

²⁵⁰ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/18, Overseers of the Poor accounts, Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York

How far the funerals of the poor were affected by the aesthetic changes outlined above is unknown. It is clear, however, that although even the most expensive of these funerals was still modest, and a significant proportion of the money allowed appears frequently to have been dedicated to ordering the affairs of the deceased rather than to the funeral itself, the fact that it was thought proper to provide a little more than just the barest minimum for the poor is a powerful demonstration of the contemporary belief in 'decency', the fact it dictated that respect should be accorded to all in death and that this conviction was blind to social status or the other changes which took place in death ritual.²⁵¹

MOURNERS

Having discussed the external appearance of funerals, we will now move on to examine funeral attendees. Although they naturally varied widely in their number and in their relation to the deceased their presence was, in some times and places, governed by certain aesthetic and social conventions. Although these were only partially influenced by the material culture of death, they were an important aspect of funeral ritual. This section will first examine the custom of wearing mourning at funerals, before examining the limited but suggestive evidence for exclusion from funerals on grounds of gender.

The place of mourners in the funeral procession was behind the coffin. As the French traveller and author Francis Maximilian Misson explained, 'The Relations in close Mourning [the principal mourners], and all the guests two and two' followed the deceased either on foot or in mourning carriages.²⁵² 'Principal' mourners, who were determined by familial or other personal connections, rather than social standing as in elite heraldic funerals, were the only ones who wore mourning. Other mourners would simply have worn their

²⁵¹ This concurs with the conclusions of Elizabeth Hurren and Steve King, who have found that paupers were well provided for and that a strong sense of both 'decency' and entitlement to 'decent' burial existed among the poor and local authorities alike prior to the introduction of the New Poor Law and, to some extent, afterwards. See Elizabeth Hurren & Steve King, ' "Begging for a burial": Form, function and conflict in nineteenth-century pauper burial', *Social History*, 30:3 (2005), 321-41, esp. pp. 329-30.

²⁵² Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 92-3

normal clothes, possibly making some gesture towards mourning through choice of darker or otherwise muted colours if they possessed such garments. If they were to wear items of mourning, mourners would don them at the 'wake'. If the items were supplied by an undertaker, and he and his employees were to be involved in the funeral itself, he and/or his assistants would assist the mourners in dressing.²⁵³ As with funeral form more generally, their clothing was derived from heraldic style. Women might wear scarves on their heads while men wore 'weepers', hatbands that trailed down their backs. Both sexes wore cloaks.



Figure 4. Detail from the trade card of Thomas Nicholl, Coffin Maker and Undertaker, Auctioneer, Appraiser & Sworn Exchange Broker, No. 17 Duke Street, West Smithfield (n.d.) Heal Collection 124.54 © Trustees of the British Museum

Whether this distinction was made at the funerals of the lower classes is unknown, although it is likely that, even if they were not marked out by their appearance, those closest to the deceased would travel immediately behind the coffin.

As Figure 4, a detail from the trade card of Thomas Nicholl's, shows, at certain funerals white rather than black would be worn by pall bearers and

²⁵³ See for example *E. Johnson's British Gazetteer and Sunday Monitor*, Sunday, May 5, 1799. In Charles's Dickens *Martin Chuzzlewit* the mourners dressed in their cloaks at the home of Anthony Chuzzlewit before his funeral while cakes and wine were eaten. See Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 315.

used for certain funeral ornaments, such as feathers, handkerchiefs, pall edging and parts of the uniforms of the porters or mutes. White indicated that the deceased was a child, unmarried woman, bachelor or woman who had died in childbed. It was often the case that the peers of these individuals would act as pall bearers, as in the above image.²⁵⁴ This was therefore an additional aspect of the deceased's social and familial status which, along with wealth and so forth, could be communicated by funeral processions.

The proportion of funerals at which some form of mourning would be worn, how many individuals would wear this clothing and how many guests would be 'principal' mourners is unclear. The ledgers of Mr Legg show that cloaks were worn at forty four of the seventy funerals analysed, approximately 63%. At seventeen of these funerals between one and four cloaks were hired, at ten funerals between five and ten, and at eleven funerals between eleven and fifteen cloaks. The hire of more than fifteen was unusual. Hoods were provided for only three funerals and scarves for only four, although hatbands, all of them crape, were provided for twenty nine funerals. They seldom numbered more than twenty, although in one instance sixty six hatbands were provided.²⁵⁵

While useful, this information is far from sufficient to answer the questions listed regarding the frequency and extent to which mourning was worn at funerals, not least because the funerals compared come from just one source which covers a very limited period and only one place. We can only assume that, overall, the practice of wearing mourning at funerals was more common among wealthier people but that over the course of the century it became more widespread, while numbers of principal mourners varied based on individual circumstances. The overall number of mourners inevitably varied widely and as this was dependent on so many individual circumstances it seems a somewhat moot point to debate.

Attendance at funerals was, in some cases, regulated by invitations, or 'tickets'. Misson described the process of notifying the desired funeral guests as

²⁵⁴ Thomas Turner's diary records that at the funeral of a four year old girl other children were invited to hold up her pall. See Turner, *The Diary of Thomas Turner 1754-1765*, p. 216.

²⁵⁵ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 2

follows; 'They send the beadle with a List of such Friends and Relations as they have a Mind to invite; and sometimes they have printed Tickets, which they leave at their houses.'²⁵⁶ In the sample taken from Mr Legg's ledgers tickets were issued on eleven occasions, numbering anywhere between six and forty, and appear to have been delivered by one of Mr Legg's employees rather than a beadle or other local official.²⁵⁷ Like heraldic style funerals, invitations, or at least the practice of limiting guests by inviting them in some other way, were not confined to areas in which undertakers operated; the Yorkshire gentleman Arthur Jessop peevishly noted in his diary several occasions on which he was not invited to local funerals.²⁵⁸

However, although examples of ticket use can be found across the period in question (see Figures 5 and 6) they are rare and no firm judgement can be made as to the frequency of their use, by whom they were used, whether any conditions or conventions were attached to their use and distribution or why they came into use in the first place.²⁵⁹ More generally, how guests were selected, and if they were indeed selected, at the funerals of those outside the middling and upper classes, how people were invited or notified of a funeral and whether this process changed over the course of the long eighteenth century are questions to which the sources consulted provide no answer.

²⁵⁶ Misson, *Memoirs*, p. 90

²⁵⁷ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 2

²⁵⁸ See for example Whiting, *Two Yorkshire Diaries*, pp. 79 & 93.

²⁵⁹ Those tickets which have been found are best used in conjunction with the many undertakers' trade cards in existence as a means of gauging changes in the visual imagery surrounding death, which shifted from frank depictions of death and decay to symbolic neo-classical representations of bereavement and representation of mourners in which the dead body is completely absent.



Figure 5. Invitation to the funeral of Revd Mr John Postlethwayt (1713) GL/C22.26



Figure 6. Invitation to the funeral of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1792) © Trustees of the British Museum

While evidence for the use of tickets is scarce, there is a little more evidence that limitations were placed on attendance on the grounds of gender. However,

the sources do not support the frequently made assumption that this was a blanket custom during the long eighteenth century. Instead, they present a varied picture which indicates that while the custom of excluding women from funerals did exist, it cannot be said to characterise all places or the whole of the period in question. Most notably, it does not apply to the funerals of females. For instance, in 1730 the *Daily Post* reported that 'two Gentlewomen had their Pockets cut off in the Church-yard, as the Corpse was carrying in the Church' at the funeral of a Mrs Fellows.²⁶⁰ At the 1735 funeral of Mrs Plympton, the wife of an undertaker, both men and women attended: '23 Men in long Black Cloaks leading as many Women-Relations... follow'd the Corpse.'²⁶¹

Men and women can also be seen together in the procession depicted on the trade card of R. Lancefield (Figure 7). This may be the funeral of a woman who had died in childbed, given the man and the small child at the head of the procession and the white edge to the pall.



Figure 7. Detail from the trade card of R. Lancefield, Carpenter & Undertaker, No. 15 Great Chapel Street, Soho (1838) Heal Collection 124. 45 © Trustees of the British Museum

The practice of excluding women from funerals, which Pat Jalland has suggested occurred on the grounds that they could not control their feelings, seems to have been limited to women of the middle and upper classes in certain towns and cities, predominantly during the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁶² That the practice was not nation-wide is suggested by Faith Gray's surprise when she was told by her husband in 1816 that 'In London females

²⁶⁰ *Daily Post*, Friday, October 23, 1730

²⁶¹ *London Evening Post*, Tuesday, September 23, 1735

²⁶² Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, p. 221

never attend' funerals, indicating that in the Gray's home town of York there were no such restrictions.²⁶³ The view that women of the middle and upper classes were unable to cope with the emotion of a funeral was almost certainly the result of broader changes in ideas about femininity and female behaviour, women increasingly being seen as innocent, weak and child-like. Although there is little evidence regarding the gender of attendees at lower class funerals, it is unlikely that they were influenced by these ideas. Therefore, where females were excluded from funerals, it was not on grounds of exposure to death and the dead, but rather the result of concerns arising from broader notions of 'decency' relating to public behaviour and composure.

Evidence also exists demonstrating that the custom of gender division at funerals could, at some times and in some places, exclude men from attendance. Two such examples have been found. Misson's *Memoirs* include the following observation: 'Note, No Men ever go to Womens Burials, nor the Women to the Mens.'²⁶⁴ No further mention of this particular variant on gender-based funeral attendance has been found, nor is it supported by the visual evidence found, but that is not to say that it was not practiced by some sections of society in the earlier part of the eighteenth century of which Misson was writing. The second example comes in the shape of James Boswell who, writing of his wife's death in Scotland in 1789 noted that it was 'not customary...for a husband to attend his wife's funeral', although he 'resolved, if I possibly could, to do her the last honours myself, and...*was* able to go through with it very decently.'²⁶⁵ His reference to decency suggests that the custom he described was, like the prohibition levelled against women, also related to social conventions discouraging the expression of excessive emotion. Unfortunately, the sources discussed here form the sum total of information regarding male exclusion from funerals found in the sources consulted, and one comes from outside

²⁶³ YCA/Acc5&6: D1b, Diaries and accounts of Faith Gray, p. 56

²⁶⁴ Misson, *Memoirs*, p. 91

²⁶⁵ James Boswell to William Johnston Temple, 3 July 1789 (Letter 265), *Letters of James Boswell: Volume II: 8 January 1778–19 May 1795*, ed. Chauncey Brewster Tinker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924) in *Electronic Enlightenment*, ed. Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford: version 1.3, January 2009. [http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/boswjaOU0020373_1key001cor, accessed 11 February 2009]

England, meaning that making firm conclusions as to the practice is impossible. Even so, it is clear that funeral exclusion on grounds of gender was a not uncommon or unknown practice during the long eighteenth century.

The main group of people excluded from funerals of the period, at least those of the well-off, were the poor. It had been traditional for them to receive food and alms at the funerals of those who could afford it, but this practice dwindled during the early part of the eighteenth century. According to Ralph Houlbrooke this was related to changes in the means by which charity was distributed; money was increasingly given to the poor via bequests made in wills rather than through doles at funerals, although it is possible that this change was made precisely in order to prevent them from attending funerals and leaving them as family occasions.²⁶⁶ Unfortunately, without any sources discussing the issue among those utilised, we can only speculate as to other reasons which may have contributed to the diminished presence of the poor at funerals.

Therefore, although we have evidence that funeral processions were regulated through their order and the attire of mourners, and that certain groups could be excluded from funerals, it is insufficient to paint a clear picture of the conventions which governed participation in funerals, and more research in the area is required. Despite this, it clear that these customs were an important part of contemporary standards of 'decency'.

MOURNING

Along with the adoption of heraldic funeral elements, the spread of elite-derived mourning practice and the specialist trade which supplied it was a crucial feature of eighteenth century death ritual. In some senses it was a more significant development as, although funerals were an existing feature of everyday life among all classes, only the elite bereaved were ever marked out by mourning clothing, or expressed mourning in their domestic spaces in any

²⁶⁶ Houlbrooke, 'The Age of Decency' in Jupp & Gittings, *Death in England*, p. 192. Money was given to the poor at only ten percent of the funerals in the sample of Mr Legg's ledgers. See TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 2.

way. Mourning gave not only the bereaved, but also the dead, a greater social presence. However, although it was an equally significant development, we know less about mourning's emergence, spread, evolution and the details of the operation of the trade which grew up around it than we do about undertakers and heraldic-style funerals. This section will outline what can be determined from the sources consulted. It will look first at tokens of remembrance commonly distributed at funerals, a long-standing feature of mourning practice, before looking at domestic mourning and mourning clothing.

FAVOURS

Funeral favours were distributed on the occasion of a death, primarily at funerals but also, providing they were not perishable, to family and friends who were unable to attend them. They were part of a wider culture of memorialisation which grew significantly, particularly during the latter half of the period in question, and reached its apogee during the Victorian era. However, discussion here is restricted specifically to favours related to funerals.

The use of certain symbolic plants at funerals long pre-dated the eighteenth century, and continued during its early decades. How common the use of plants was is unclear, but they were almost always evergreens, symbolic of the immortality of the soul. However, although the folklorist Henry Bourne mentioned the use of ivy, laurel, bay and rosemary in previous centuries, only rosemary is mentioned in the eighteenth century sources consulted.²⁶⁷ Plants were usually carried by mourners, rosemary having the additional benefit of helping combat the smell of decay. According to Misson, 'When they are ready to set out, they nail up the Coffin, and a Servant presents the Company with Sprigs of Rosemary: Every one takes a Sprig, and carries it in his Hand 'till the Body is put into the Grave, at which Time they all throw their Sprigs in after it.'²⁶⁸ The account ledgers of the undertaker Mr Legg feature several payments for rosemary.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares*, p. 19

²⁶⁸ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 90-1

²⁶⁹ See the Ledgers of Mr Legg: TNA/C112/48, Book 1, p. 147; TNA/C112/48, Book 4, p. 233.

In addition to such transient items, more permanent mementos were often distributed. Clare Gittings has noted that favours of lace or ribbon might be given at sixteenth and seventeenth century funerals, and there is mention of 'Favers of figuerd Love ribin' given out at the funeral of Mrs Margaret Powell, performed by Mr Legg in 1723.²⁷⁰ However, this is the only mention of the custom found and so it appears that, like the use of plants, it may have petered out during the early 1700s.

Conversely, gloves of various colours and materials, which had been a common favour given at the funerals of the elite and gentry during the seventeenth century, continued to be given to men and women throughout the eighteenth century. The same is true of hatbands²⁷¹ and mourning rings. As with funeral invitations, the style of these rings altered over the course of the eighteenth century, moving from representations of skeletal remains, which were common in the seventeenth century and continued well into the first half of the eighteenth century, to symbolic neo-classical imagery (Figures 8 and 9). Many rings from the later eighteenth century onwards featured no images, and bore only the name or initials of the deceased and often their age, as well, perhaps, the dates of their death and birth (see Figure 10). Many could be distinguished from other rings by being partly or wholly black, although their appearance could vary widely.



²⁷⁰ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 160; TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 1, p. 226.

²⁷¹ Misson, *Memoirs*, pp. 92-3

Figure 8. Mourning ring with internal inscription reading 'Eliz. Nicholas obt 4 Mar. 1732 aet. 22'
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Figure 9. Mourning ring (1810-11), V&A/M.10-1973



Figure 10. Mourning ring for Betty Savory, died 1798 aged 86, V&A/M.161-1962

The distribution of mourning rings was naturally confined to the gentry and wealthier middling classes, while gloves were affordable to a larger portion of society. Hatbands too were common tokens among both classes, and were also most affordable for the less wealthy.

Whether there were any particular conventions directing who received favours, and what kind they were most likely to be given, is unclear. Whatever the nature of the favour, plants excepted, they acted as important mementos of

the deceased and were a significant part of the material culture of death. Indeed, they were more permanent reminders of the deceased than the forms of mourning to be discussed below.

SETT MOURNING

During the early eighteenth century the practice of 'sett' mourning continued to be practiced by the nobility. Sett mourning involved draping certain rooms of the deceased's home in black fabric, as well as replacing some or all of the furniture in these rooms with black alternatives. It was therefore a powerful expression of the absence of the deceased from their home and the places inhabited by those they left behind. However, although it was a feature of private spaces, it was applied to their most public areas, indicating that it was also intended as a public statement to some degree. It was listed foremost among the services offered by the Company of Upholders in a 1699 advertisement for their services in which they informed 'the Nobility and Persons of all Quality' that they had 'furnish'd themselves with all Sorts of Mourning, as Beds, Chairs, Hangings, and all other Accommodations for Funerals', demonstrating its important place in the death rituals of the elite, perhaps even indicating that it was as crucial a part of 'decent' commemoration as a grand funeral.²⁷² It is also significant that, unlike mourning clothing, it was specifically associated with and supplied by undertakers. Costs for domestic mourning feature frequently in Mr Legg's ledgers, in some cases listed as part of funeral costs and in other cases listed separately. Sett mourning hangings and furniture were hired, rather than purchased, and so returned to undertakers at the mourning's conclusion.²⁷³

Sett mourning could involve an almost complete redecoration of rooms. In February 1717, the Right Honourable Lady Fengall had '2 Rooms of Sett Mourning hung deep with black Cloath & Black bed. Tester. Cornishes & head board. 8 Back stools. 4 square Stools & Black Hearth and angell rod to the bed to

²⁷² *Flying News or The Post Master*, Tuesday, October 17, 1699

²⁷³ For example TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 1, p. 145

Continue 12 Months for 31l 6s 0d'.²⁷⁴ In October 1723 the house of the Right Honourable Lady Katherine Edwins in Conduit Street, London, had a new set of grey bed linen, new curtains hung, six chairs and 2 stools covered in black cloth and new black tables. The walls were also hung with seven breadths of hangings. All of this was just in the bedroom. In the dining room eleven breadths of hangings were put up, six new curtains and three curtain rods installed, eleven chairs re-covered and two black tables purchased, while in the parlour four new curtains were hung. In addition to this, the cost for the 'Exchange of the Light grey Mourning' was included, bringing the total cost to £37 10s.²⁷⁵ This exchange of mourning demonstrates that, as with mourning clothing, there was a time-based gradation of mourning symbolised by a reduction in the intensity of colour from black to grey. However, it is the only example found mentioning an exchange, so it is unclear to what degree the duration and stages of domestic mourning decoration were formalised. Floor coverings were also a common cost included in sett mourning. In one instance sett mourning extended to 'a Sove[sic] grate, fender Shovel & Tongs, poker', this probably being because the original fire furniture was reflective, and only dull metal was permitted during mourning.²⁷⁶ This is a further similarity between domestic mourning and mourning clothing, where items such as buttons, buckles and also swords were expected to have dull surfaces.

Both the town and country homes of the deceased would be hung with mourning. In 1713 the dining room, drawing room and halls of the Earl of Chesterfield's Derbyshire home were hung with mourning. It took two men nine days to complete the task, at a cost of just under £40.²⁷⁷ The largest sum spent on sett mourning in the account books consulted was for the Earl of Halifax in October 1726. Almost six hundred and fifty yards of material for wall hangings, curtains, the recovering of chairs and new bedding, were purchased at a total of £105.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 12

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 226. For further examples of sett mourning see Ibid., pp. 227-8.

²⁷⁶ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 4, p. 179

²⁷⁷ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, Book 2, p. 47

²⁷⁸ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, Book 4, p. 50

Such extreme displays of mourning appear to have declined during the 1730s and 1740s. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this change in mourning practice, as no reference to its rise and decline is made in the sources consulted. It is possible that there was a link between the dominance of upholders in funeral and mourning provision from the later seventeenth century to the 1730s, as they were not only well equipped to provide for heraldic funerals but also for the furniture and fabrics required for sett mourning. Once sett mourning declined, so too did the upholders' dominant role in providing for elite and gentry funerals. However, insufficient information is present in the sources consulted to further assess this possible connection. Furthermore, this possible correlation still does not answer the question of why the practice ceases to appear in sources. Furthermore, although it fades from records, it is not clear that it died out completely. Domestic mourning may well have continued in simplified form among the nobility and spread to middling, although it would have been very much secondary to the wearing of mourning clothing. If this was the case, then it developed in the opposite manner to mourning clothing, which became increasingly elaborate and more rigidly structured, and permeated a far greater portion of society.

MOURNING CLOTHING

Although both sett mourning and mourning clothing expressed loss and absence, sett mourning was applied to a family space from which the deceased had departed. In contrast, mourning clothing expressed bereavement upon the body, marking it out as a more personal, individual experience, and giving both the deceased and bereaved a greater social presence which acted as a far more public form of memorialisation. Prior to our period mourning clothing had been confined to the elite, the rest of society only adopting any show of mourning when a public, or general, mourning was announced. However, as with funerals, elite practice came to be adopted by a far greater portion of the population over the course of the eighteenth century, and a clearly defined system of mourning developed, to be catered for by a specialist trade quite separate from undertakers.

Court mourning, the adoption of mourning by the royal court on the occasion of the death of a member of the royal family, or one of their relations, was a long-established practice which continued throughout the long eighteenth century. It was a fairly frequent occurrence. For example, a book containing the Lord Chamberlain's orders for court mourning for the period 9th March 1773-28th Nov 1827 shows that, on average, the royal family and court went into mourning two or three times each year for periods ranging from a few days to a month. Naturally, upon the death of the British monarch mourning was much longer. The orders given by the Lord Chamberlain were very exact, specifying not only the colour, but also the fabric of the clothing to be worn, as well as the colour and nature of accessories such as fans and swords. They also prescribed the point at which the first stage of 'deep mourning' was to be exchanged for 'second mourning', when some colour was allowed. With the exception of some subtle changes in fabric specification the mourning ordered changed very little over the period covered by the Lord Chamberlain's book.²⁷⁹

The following Lord Chamberlain's order from November 1828, issued on the death of the Queen Dowager of Wurtemberg, sister to the King, illustrates the specificity of these orders and the stages of mourning well; 'The Ladies to wear black silk, fringed or plain linen, white gloves, black or white shoes, fans and tippetts, white necklaces and ear-rings. Undress, white or grey lustrings, tables, or damasks. The Gentlemen to wear black, full-trimmed, fringed or plain linen, black swords and buckles. Undress, grey frock.' This was for the first week of mourning. Mourning during the second, and final, week was as follows; 'The Ladies to wear black silk or velvet, coloured ribbons, fans and tippetts. The Gentlemen to continue in black, full trimmed, and to wear coloured swords and buckles.'²⁸⁰ The second stage of mourning was therefore characterised by a gradual reintroduction of colour, usually grey or purple, into the monochrome palette of 'deep' mourning. Despite its' being specifically confined to courtiers,

²⁷⁹ TNA/LC5/199, Lord Chamberlain's book of orders for mourning, 1773-1827

²⁸⁰ 'Change of Court Mourning', *John Bull*, Monday, November 17, 1828, p. 367

it was from the early 1700s onwards adopted by members of the gentry and, later, middling classes, as the next chapter will detail.

In some cases a 'general' or 'public' mourning was ordered. These too occurred upon the occasion of the death of a member of the royal family, although usually only the monarch or their immediate relations. Public mourning demonstrated proper patriotic feeling and reinforced a sense of national identity and belonging. At these times the whole population was expected to don some sign of mourning on their person. Although among the poor in particular tokens such as a black scarf around the hat were considered sufficient, general mourning wear became increasingly elaborate.²⁸¹ Notifications of general mourning were not, therefore, accompanied by the same detailed instructions as to attire and duration as court mournings. As *The Ladies' Monthly Museum* noted in 1828, 'General mourning is of so heterogeneous nature, that we will not undertake to explain it; it is black, to be sure, at first, but without awaiting the order of change, it very soon becomes mere fancy mourning.'²⁸² In 1849 *The Lady's Newspaper* also noted that 'General mourning is usually less deep, and admits of more variety than family mourning; but still sombre black must be the predominant hue, though partially enlivened with lavender, or, occasionally, with white.'²⁸³ Both excerpts show that general mourning too was characterised by stages and degrees which allowed the gradual re-adoption of colour.

The extent to which mourning was adopted might depend upon public affection for the deceased. Upon the death of William IV, *John Bull* described the general mourning as follows;

yesterday being, pursuant to the Royal order, the first day of mourning, the metropolis and its environs presented an interesting but most melancholy aspect, fully testifying the regret of the nation for the loss of their Sovereign. The mourning is said to be deeper than any other Court mourning...since the decease of Princess Charlotte. No class of lace, blonde, or fancy article has been adopted to relieve the sombre appearance and, notwithstanding

²⁸¹ *Liverpool Mercury etc*, Friday, January 23, 1835

²⁸² 'Mourning for the Queen of Wurtemberg', *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*, Saturday, November 01, 1828, p. 295

²⁸³ 'The Parish and London Fashions', *The Lady's Newspaper*, Saturday, December 15, 1849, p. 335

the heat of the weather, heavy black bonnets with deep crape trimmings are used in the fashionable circles. With the gentlemen, black coats and white trousers seem to be the favourite costume.²⁸⁴

In addition to these long standing forms of mourning, the eighteenth century witnessed the growth of private mourning, and by the accession of Queen Victoria it was a well-established custom among the middling classes. It was worn by both adults and children. The nature and regulation of private mourning clothing was directly derived from the court practice outlined above, and very similar to the private mourning of the elite of previous centuries. Its stages and degrees were very clearly defined and strictly adhered to. Like court and general mourning it was divided into stages and, as with court mourning, its length was determined by the relationship of the bereaved to the deceased, being longer the closer that relationship was. Houlbrooke gives these as one year for spouses, six months for parents or parents in law and three months for siblings. He does not mention the duration of mourning for sons or daughters.²⁸⁵ The colours and adornments considered appropriate to its various stages were also taken from court practice, as the following description from an 1827 issue of *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* demonstrates;

There are three different kinds of mourning: deep mourning, consisting of bombazine or crape gowns without any trimming: a black shawl, a fichu of black crape, a cap, or a bonnet of crape, made close, plain, and very simple, a crape veil; gloves, shoes and stockings, all black: no jewels, except, perhaps, occasionally, a buckle of polished steel for the girdle or belt. The next is second mourning: a silk dress, trimmed; a fichu of flosse-gauze, a white crape hat, or one of silk, or of black velvet; after a week or two, pearl ornaments. Last stage of second mourning: dresses made of black and white materials, such as ginghams, Indian taffeties; a mixture of grey and light lapis-blue. A white dress with a sash and ribbons in black; scarf or shawl of the same hue: hat of grey silk, or a white hat with black, or light grey flowers. At this close of mourning ladies often appear at balls. The dress should then be of white silk or gauze, trimmed with white flowers, without foliage, such as the tuberose; this mourning finishes with brilliant or pearl ornaments. Widows should not curl nor shew their hair during the time of their close mourning, which generally lasts three months.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ 'General Mourning', *John Bull*, Sunday, June 25, 1837, p. 312

²⁸⁵ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 249

²⁸⁶ 'The Lady's Manual. Chapter VIII. The Art of Dress', quoted in *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, Saturday, December 01, 1827, p. 276

It is significant that the details and styles of mourning clothing often featured in women's magazines, showing that female mourning in particular had come to be influenced by fashion and the commercialised provision for death ritual, and turned into statements of social position and wealth as well as, or even, some contemporaries feared, instead of grief. At what point this development occurred is unclear; the only source found relating to private mourning prior to the early nineteenth century dates from the late seventeenth century, leaving a very large gap in our knowledge which requires attention in future research. A 1696 portrait of the Countess of Salisbury in mourning for her husband suggests that mourning at this time was far less obviously dictated by contemporary fashions, and that it was far plainer and more modest than even the deepest stages of mourning during the early 1800s (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Anon, 'The Countess of Salisbury' (1696) © Trustees of the British Museum

It is certain at least that guides to fashionable mourning style can be found in magazines from the later eighteenth century onwards.²⁸⁷ As in the above example, the details given were often very specific, and went beyond merely describing the stages of mourning. Many also gave specific instructions depending upon the activities for which they would be worn. These included morning dress, carriage dress, walking dress and evening dress.²⁸⁸ In some instances illustrations were included as guides and inspirations to readers, as in the following examples, which also demonstrate their division by activity, as well as their strong influence by wider contemporary fashions, which contrast markedly with the above image of the Countess of Salisbury.



²⁸⁷ In 1789, in a column entitled 'Parisian Modes' *The Times* gave details of 'Ladies' First Half Mourning Dress' and 'Ladies' Second Half Mourning Dress'. See *The Times*, 22 August 1789. In 1819 *The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser* featured a description of London fashions for walking and evening dress during half-mourning. See *The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, Tuesday, January 12, 1819. Similarly in 1820 *Jackson's Oxford Journal* featured detailed descriptions of mourning fashions for carriage and evening dress. See *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Saturday, February 5, 1820.

²⁸⁸ See for example *The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, Tuesday, January 12, 1819; *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, Saturday, February 5, 1820; *Liverpool Mercury etc*, Friday, February 11, 1820; *The Lady's Magazine*, June 1830, p. 389.

Figure 12. 'Evening Mourning Costume & Morning Deshabille', *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*, Saturday, September 01, 1821, p. 168



Figure 13. 'Dinner Dress', 'Evening Dress' & 'Untitled', *The Lady's Magazine*, June, 1830, p. 389



Figure 14. 'General Mourning Fashions', *The Lady's Newspaper*, Saturday, December 15, 1849, p. 335

The last image demonstrates that in the 'fashionable circles' described by *John Bull* above, the adoption of general mourning could be as complete, and fashion conscious, as private mourning.

Mourning's relationship to fashion is also made abundantly clear in contemporary newspaper advertisements for specialised mourning suppliers and establishments, which were the equivalent of undertakers. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century advertisements for mourning clothing, not just for women, but also for families and households, started appearing in newspapers and magazines. For instance, an advertisement for 'New and Fashionable Silks, Family Mourning, &c.' described the 'extensive assortment of new, elegant, and fashionable Silks adapted to the Season, Nets, Italian Muslins, plain and figured Gauzes, &c with Lustres, Poplins, and Satins, Crapes, Bombazeens, and every article for Court and Family Mourning, all of superior make' offered by Joseph Snuggs, 'mercier and Manufacturer to her Majesty'.²⁸⁹

Although the establishment and its products were explicitly directed at the nobility and gentry, similar places existed for the middling sort, and also held an extensive range of goods. A number of shops, often describing themselves as warehouses, appeared to meet the demand for mourning.²⁹⁰ Although warehouses, which were in fact shops where articles could be purchased at lower prices, were often reserved for tradesmen buying supplies, they could also be used by the general public. This was certainly the case with warehouses offering mourning-related supplies which often advertised themselves directly to consumers rather than suppliers. They almost certainly catered for a range of incomes, although the most famous of all the mourning warehouses, Jay's, also known as The London General Mourning Warehouse, located on London's Regent Street, was directed at the wealthy. They marketed themselves on the

²⁸⁹ 'New and Fashionable Silks, Family Mourning, &c.', *La Belle Assemble; or, Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*, Monday, October 01, 1810, p. 18

²⁹⁰ For example, Miss Ingram's Childbed and Mourning Warehouse. See *The Times*, August 12 1820; *The Times*, August 10 1821. The latter advert offered 'Mourning Caps, turbans, frills, handkerchiefs, &c., the largest and cheapest assortment to be seen at any one house, is at Mrs. Ingram's Millinery and Childbed Linen Warehouse, No. 30, City-road, near Finsbury-square.'

grounds of convenience, also a feature of undertakers although they did not advertise it as openly, as the following 1845 advertisement illustrates;

The managers of the above establishment beg leave to call the attention of ladies to its peculiar utility and to its advantages. It was for a long period a source of inconvenience and regret, on occasions when mourning attire was required, that its purchasers were at such a time compelled to the painful necessity of proceeding from shop to shop in search of each distinct article of dress. This evil is most completely obliterated at the London General Mourning Warehouse, where every description of mourning...can be purchased at the most reasonable prices.²⁹¹

Just how wide a range of goods they offered, and how elaborate mourning had become, can be seen in another of their advertisements, which offered mourning suitable for 'every degree of relationship and condition'. They also offered 'every article requisite for Family, Complimentary, and Servants' Mourning', as all household employees were expected to adopt some sign of mourning in sympathy with the family they served.²⁹²

PUBLIC NOTICE !
NICHOLAS JAY AND COMPANY
respectfully invite attention to
THE METROPOLITAN MOURNING WAREHOUSE,
where a New Selection of **FAMILY and HOUSEHOLD MOURNING**, suitable to every degree of relationship and condition, is now open to inspection.
The Proprietors, having had many years' experience in the trade, feel satisfied that they are enabled to supply the Nobility, Gentry, and Public, with every article requisite for Family, Complimentary, and Servants' Mourning on such terms as will entitle them to hope for a liberal share of that Patronage which it will be their constant study to deserve.
The **STOCK** consists of choice **SILKS**, of every description ;
Paramattas, Alpacas, Cobourgs, French Merinos, French Twills, Orleans, Hosiery, Gloves, Ribbons, &c.
The Show-rooms contain **MANTLES and MILLINERY**, in every variety, and of the newest design ;
JEWELLERY, COLLARS, CUFFS, and FLOWERS ; with an assortment of **READY-MADE SKIRTS** in **SILK, PARAMATTA, ALPACA, COBURG, MERINO**, etc.
Observe the Address—No. 187, OXFORD-STREET, between DUKE-STREET and ORCHARD-STREET.
NICHOLAS JAY AND CO.

Figure 15. 'Advertisement for Jay's Mourning Warehouse', *Le Follet: Journal du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c.*, Wednesday, May 01, 1850

²⁹¹ *The Times*, Saturday, November 1, 1845, p. 9

²⁹² 'The Metropolitan Mourning Warehouse', *Le Follet: Journal du Grand Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts &c.*, Wednesday, May 01, 1850. The company expressed similar sentiments in an earlier advert of 1843. It read; 'Even in the present advanced age of refinement and improvement, when the wonderful and colossal strides made by every art, science, and profession towards perfection ceases to elicit surprise, the feeling and thought that could have suggested the forming an establishment of the above description ought at all events to meet with the approbation and encouragement of the public. When, it is naturally to be supposed, that the persons labouring under the affliction of a family bereavement, and who, the sorrow and depression consequent on such an occasion renders unfit just then for the bustle of business, and (when so many other duties claim consideration) of running about from shop to shop will end in the choicely selected and well arranged stock of Messrs. Jay and Co., 247, Regent-street, every requisite article at the view, and at very moderate prices.' See 'Family Mourning Establishment', *The Satirist; or, the Censor of the Times*, Sunday, April 30, 1843, p. 144

A number of establishments similar to Jay's existed in the same locality: Pugh & Co. and Cooke & Company were located on Regent Street, while Howell & James, Todd & Morrison's and Dovey & Co. could be found on Oxford Street.²⁹³ The fact that so many could exist simultaneously in the same area indicates how widespread, and how elaborate, the custom of mourning had become by the end of our period.

The establishment of private mourning as a custom among the middling classes was a very significant addition to the visual and material culture of death during the long eighteenth century. Although it did not permeate society quite as far as heraldic funeral elements, the custom of private mourning nonetheless became an ingrained part of contemporary culture, and would continue to be so into the early twentieth century. The industry that grew up to serve it was a development as significant as the spread of undertaking, and the custom of private mourning as significant as the spread of heraldic-style funerals. Although sources are scant for the period before 1800, private mourning appears to have begun spreading by the second half or third of the 1700s, and by the latter decades of the century specialist suppliers emerged to meet demand for mourning apparel and accessories. In their operation and rationale these suppliers were similar to undertakers; like undertakers, the proprietors of mourning establishments were middlemen of a sort and, as in the Jay's advertisement quoted above, promoted themselves on the grounds of convenience.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the form taken by funerals during the long eighteenth century and highlighted the very significant growth in mourning practice during that period. In proving the significant role which mourning

²⁹³ 'Singular Mourning Movement of Melancholy Shopmen', *The Satirist; or, the True Censor of the Times*, Sunday, October 17, 1847, p. 67. An advert for Messrs. Cook & Co's Parisian and family mourning warehouse at 246-248 Regent-street, also located at 62 East-street Brighton, can be found in *The Times* Thursday, Oct 04, 1849, p. 8.

came to assume in death ritual of the period, it has qualified the automatic association of undertakers with eighteenth-century death practices and the changes which occurred therein, showing that an almost entirely separate but similarly structured trade grew up alongside them to serve the bereaved in the period following the funeral. It has also shown that Fritz's assertion that 'burial had become a viable commodity, and the undertaker stood ready to meet the demands of the wealthy middle class, first in London, then in the larger provincial centres, and, later in the eighteenth century, in the provincial towns, villages, and rural areas,' is rather too neat and does not adequately account for the spread of undertaking, or mourning.²⁹⁴ Although the new material culture of death developed partially in tandem with specialist suppliers, both mourning and, in particular heraldic style funerals, spread faster and further than undertakers and mourning warehouses. Neither spread evenly across the country, demonstrating that specialist suppliers were not necessary to the new material culture of death which, in turn, cannot therefore be correlated absolutely with wealth or 'class', nor with degrees of urbanisation.

It has been demonstrated that the forms taken by funerals and mourning practice were drawn from elite custom and gradually commercialised which, in the case of funerals, removed existing suppliers, both the College of Arms and the Church, from their traditional roles. The wider adoption and commercialisation of elite custom gave rise to a new material culture of death. In the case of funerals, this led to the elaboration of their existing form, while in the case of mourning it introduced a new aspect of death ritual into society at large, giving the bereaved, and indeed the deceased, a more visible presence and identity. In adopting practices whose meaning originally derived from their limited usage by the elite, the wider populace was challenging and altering their original meaning, and creating a new model for the 'decent' funeral. This did not alter the traditional functions of either funerals or mourning, but created a new spectrum of display through which could be communicated aspects of individual and communal identity and status.

²⁹⁴ Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade', p. 246

Nonetheless, some contemporaries feared that their increasingly commercial nature left too much room for them to be manipulated, particularly in the interests of personal appearance and fashion, a force whose role has been demonstrated in relation to mourning clothing. The following chapter will demonstrate just why and how these changes came about and explain contemporaries' reactions to them in the context of the growth of an increasingly mobile and affluent society, which was the originator and the consumer of the new material culture of death.

CHANGE AND 'DECENCY'

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most neglected aspects of histories of undertaking and mourning are: the reasons for their emergence; how this took place; why they took the aesthetic and material form they did; and, in particular, contemporaries' views of these phenomena, their explanations for them and the insight these provide into broader attitudes towards death and the dead body. Those theories which have been put forward to explain changes in death ritual, all of which relate solely to undertaking, remain unsubstantiated by archival research or by integration with the wider historiography of the eighteenth century. Building upon the previous two chapters' discussion of the way in which undertaking functioned and the changing nature of funerary and mourning practice, as well as chapter one's examination of attitudes towards the dead body, this chapter will examine contemporary and current views of the new material culture of death and its commercial nature. These will ultimately be combined to provide a new theory to explain these phenomena and answer the above questions.

The first section will outline the existing historiography of the developments under discussion, which pertains solely to the emergence of undertaking. The second section will then discuss contemporaries' reactions to and explanations of the emergence of undertakers, the spread of heraldic-style funerals and the adoption of court-derived mourning practice, whose involvement with commercial forces heightened existing fears for the body and memory of the dead. The final section will present a more detailed explanation for these changes than has yet been made, discussing the factors which facilitated their emergence and determined their form, and addressing the roles of social standing, wealth and 'decency' in this process. As part of this it will explore the

ways that the new material culture of death problematised expectations about death ritual. It will also continue to emphasise the following: firstly, that, while very significant, on a national scale the new material culture of death co-existed with simpler and more traditional forms of ritual and ritual provision which, country-wide, remained more common; secondly, that the historiographical emphasis on change, and the inextricable connection between change and undertakers, is therefore somewhat misleading.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Existing explanations of the practices and developments discussed in the previous chapters are scant, in many cases non-existent. In fact, only undertaking has a historiography as such. This section will examine the main currents present in that historiography and discuss their relative merits, establishing the key themes on which subsequent sections will build.

Sociologist Glennys Howarth proposes a sweeping theory of undertaking stretching from the eighteenth century to the twentieth in which she suggests that increased social mobility prompted by the industrial revolution meant that fewer people and less time were available to organise funerals independently, and so undertakers were a necessary development, an argument also made by historian Clare Gittings.²⁹⁵ Howarth further suggests that the disruption of social ties resulting from these changes led to the threat of social instability and disorder, which was combated by undertakers' structured and controlled approach to death. She also connects undertakers with an emerging current of individualism, a further view shared with Gittings.²⁹⁶ Howarth relates this emerging individualism to a post-reformation decline in beliefs in the afterlife to argue that death rituals surrounding the 'care and protection of the corpse' and the need to 'mark and mourn loss' became more important, and that

²⁹⁵ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 100

²⁹⁶ Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry', p. 120; Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 100.

undertakers catered for this desire for display, a desire also observed by Gittings.²⁹⁷

Many of these ideas require some qualification. Undertakers and mourning establishments certainly came to market themselves on the grounds of convenience, as shown in the previous chapter. In addition, as will be shown in the final section of this chapter, changing social structures and urbanisation are certainly relevant to the emergence and spread of undertaking, although in ways different to those suggested by Howarth and Gittings. However, the idea that without undertakers there would have been no one available to arrange the disposal of the body is more questionable. Indeed, as has been shown, and as this chapter will continue to emphasise, most people arranged the care of the body and its funeral without the assistance of undertakers. Although social mobility in the sense of both movement between social strata and movement across the country were features of eighteenth-century life, it is not at all clear that they resulted in the widespread development of impersonal, 'time poor' communities, even in urban areas. While plenty of examples of friendless strangers and immigrants from Britain or the continent who had to be buried on the parish might be found in English cities of the period, urban areas remained sub-divided into parishes and broader localities in which a pronounced sense of local and parochial community persisted.²⁹⁸

It is therefore somewhat of an exaggeration to paint the period as one in which social ties were put under serious and widespread stress. Rather, this was one of the cumulative effects of the industrial revolution's gathering momentum which were to be felt more strongly in the mid-to-late nineteenth century; as stated in the introduction, too strong an emphasis on change paints a misleading portrait of the long eighteenth century. Howarth's contention that undertakers brought a greater degree of control to the handling of death and the dead is also questionable in relation to the eighteenth century given the

²⁹⁷ Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry', p. 121; Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 100.

²⁹⁸ The continued importance of local and parochial identity will also be demonstrated in relation to burial in the following chapter.

extent to which informality characterised the employment and actions of undertakers for much of the period, a feature of undertaking demonstrated in chapter two. As such, although it is possible that Howarth's arguments may be applicable in some respects to the nineteenth century, in particular its latter half, they are over-simplistic and, when applied to the eighteenth century, anachronistic.

The thesis of individualism raised by Howarth, and employed heavily by Ariès and also Gittings, is always problematic and difficult to either support or deny categorically. The spread of more elaborate funerals certainly does not appear to have been a means for the bereaved to better cope with death, challenging the assertion that elaborate funerals were a response to, and substitution for, beliefs in the afterlife or, as Howarth and Gittings imply, a decline in the belief that the living could continue to influence or have any form of contact with the deceased after death. Contemporary responses to the changing nature of death ritual do betray a fear that individual concerns might obscure the true purpose of those rituals, but in fact the main factor in determining the form these rituals took and people's adherence to them was a desire to conform to collectively defined and maintained 'custom', as the final section will demonstrate.

Zigarovich and Gittings have also related undertakers to the theory of a growing dislike and even fear of death and the body, again echoing Ariès, arguing that a professional group was required to take over this increasingly intolerable task.²⁹⁹ However, as demonstrated in chapter one, there is little evidence of such a development in attitudes. Conversely, Ruth Richardson has argued that fear *for* the dead body during the heyday of bodysnatching, which she gives as the period 1750-1832, contributed in part to undertakers' spread.³⁰⁰ There is certainly evidence of some undertakers capitalising on these genuine fears and offering supposedly secure methods of burial, but only some.³⁰¹ In

²⁹⁹ Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, pp. 13-4, 100, 102; Zigarovich, 'Preserved Remains', p. 72.

³⁰⁰ Ruth Richardson, 'Why was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?' in Ralph Houlbrooke (ed.), *Death, Ritual and Bereavement* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 105

³⁰¹ Advertisements for so-called 'patent coffins', which advertisers claimed were impenetrable once sealed, can be found in a number of contemporary newspapers dating from the later eighteenth and early

any case, these were beyond the reach of most incomes and the vast majority continued to be buried in wooden or lead coffins. However, perhaps the main criticism that can be made of Richardson's theory is that the greater part of undertakers' provisions, and customers' desires, were of a ritual and aesthetic nature, which could hardly have had any effect on the vulnerability of a body once in the ground.

Even so, although her reasoning is questionable, Richardson is correct to raise the issue of fear for the dead. As we saw in chapter one, it was quietly omnipresent among contemporaries. It was also expressed more overtly in sources pertaining to the new material culture of death, although it was death's involvement in commerce, rather than the sinister spectre of unscrupulous anatomists and their henchmen, which gave rise to this concern.

Social mobility between social strata, mentioned by Howarth, and more specifically the rise of the middling sort and the concomitant development of a mercantile, rather than a feudal, economy, has been identified by Paul S. Fritz as the force behind undertakers' emergence and spread.³⁰² Jolene Zigarovich has also adopted a class-based approach, arguing that undertakers emerged in part to meet the aristocracy's desire to imitate the royal tradition of embalming.³⁰³ As embalming was rare and often practiced by individuals outside the undertaking trade it cannot be viewed as a significant contributing factor to undertakers' emergence.³⁰⁴ However, the idea of social emulation, typically connected to the middling and their rise, were both key to contemporaries' understanding of the new material culture of death.

nineteenth century. See for example: *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Friday, November 11, 1796; *The Times*, Friday, December 23, 1796, p. 2; *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, December 29, 1796; *True Briton* (1793), Monday, January 2, 1797; *Whitehall Evening Post* (1770), Saturday, February 3, 1798; *Morning Chronicle*, Saturday, February 17, 1798; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Thursday, March 22, 1798; *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, December 12, 1799; *The Times*, Saturday, Nov 11, 1820, p. 4. These sources and the patent coffins they advertise will be discussed in greater detail in chapter eight in relation to body snatching and the status of interred remains.

³⁰² Fritz, 'The Undertaking Trade', p. 246

³⁰³ Zigarovich, 'Preserved Remains', p. 68

³⁰⁴ For example, a 1709 advert for embalming services makes no mention of undertakers, although it boasted not of preserving a body before burial but of disinterring it some time after burial and reducing it to 'Sweetness entire'. See the *Post Boy* (1695), Tuesday, September 13, 1709.

Therefore, as the following sections will demonstrate, of all the theories put forward regarding undertaking to date, it is fear for the dead and the treatment of their remains, and the effects of the rise of the middling sort, including emulation of elite culture, which accord with the sources examined and which can be combined with current issues in the historiography of the eighteenth century to explain not only undertaking, but also the other phenomena under discussion. The former theme features most strongly in the following section, the latter is dominant in the third.

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PERSPECTIVE

Contemporaries' concerns pertaining to the new material culture of death and its connection to commercial forces centred on concern for the deceased's physical remains and their memory, and the fear that sincere and 'decent' commemoration could too easily be subsumed by self-interest, financial and otherwise. The key concerns regarding 'decent' behaviour, or lack of it, expressed through the significant body of sources which comment on aspects of death ritual relate to the following three issues: undertakers' behaviour in soliciting custom and preparing bodies; the behaviour of clergy and others working under the auspices of the church, as well as that of undertakers and their employees at funerals; and the bereaved and mourning custom. Importantly, sources seldom express fundamental objections to the key elements of the new material culture of death. Rather, it was the potential for abuse presented by commercial and material elements that fuelled comment and criticism. The attitudes expressed in the sources to be examined therefore reinforce the contemporary stress placed upon 'decency' in all things, not only as it applied to treatment of the dead body, but also as it pertained to the nature of its disposal and commemoration.

The source body to be discussed is composed of newspapers, journals, magazines, plays and images. Many are of a satirical nature, treating changes in death ritual with ridicule, contempt, concern or a combination of the three.

Sources dealing with those connected to death and the dead in a satirical vein were present throughout the period in question, and display a striking continuity over time, particularly in their use of stereotypes and caricatures of groups and individuals. The strongest and most consistent of these stereotyped characters was that of the undertaker, but stereotyped undertakers' employees, doctors, sextons, clergymen and bereaved relations also appeared frequently.

Satire is a powerful medium through which to tackle often pressing and uncomfortable issues, as well as being a more light-hearted genre, and it was used extensively in both capacities throughout the long eighteenth century. Treating their concerns with humour allowed contemporaries to minimise their discomfort while also allowing more serious comment on behaviour considered indecent, disrespectful or otherwise improper. Stereotypes too function as a means of neatly reducing potentially threatening groups and actions into manageable, and often more easily dismissible, characterisations. These oversimplified exaggerations of certain groups or places usually form because of some feeling of difference or otherness associated with a fear of intrusion, or a perceived threat to established communities or ways of behaving. They arise not from a judgement of their object in its own right, but form in opposition to the norms of the society or group which creates them. Therefore, as Frank Felsenstein has shown, stereotypes can be used to explore 'manifestations of the established prejudices and values that characterise a given society', as they reveal more about those who create them than about their object.³⁰⁵ Thus, although they are naturally exaggerated and partial, and we have no evidence for the way audiences received them, the sources of a satirical nature to be examined nonetheless give a very valuable insight into attitudes towards the dead and also, as the subsequent section will show, the cultural impact of changes in death ritual and the changing nature of eighteenth-century society as a whole.

³⁰⁵ Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 12

UNDERTAKERS

Although some undertakers were well-regarded, even considered 'eminent', when they were mentioned in print, or represented visually, it was typically in rather less flattering and usually satirical terms.³⁰⁶ A strongly negative stereotype of undertakers emerged fully-formed in the early decades of the trade's existence and persisted with remarkable uniformity and consistency throughout the long eighteenth century. Although the concept of making money from death was not fundamentally problematic, according as it did with contemporary economic sensibilities, one of the key currents running through contemporary satire and other commentaries was the feeling that undertakers did not always go about their business in a way that was sufficiently respectful to the dead and bereaved. The frequently repeated soubriquets of 'Dead-Monger' and 'Flesh-Monger', often used in place of 'undertaker', vividly illustrate undertakers' association with monetary gain, the use of the term 'monger' hinting that the result of this obsession with money was a casual disregard for the value of human life and lack of respect for human dignity.³⁰⁷ In short, as this section will demonstrate, the stereotypical undertaker failed to strike the correct balance between profit and propriety.

Perhaps the best illustration of both the stereotypical undertaker and the themes that characterised his portrayal, as well as the early date at which the stereotype appeared fully-formed, is a twelve page poem entitled *Funeral-Discipline: or, The Character of Strip-Corps the Dead-Monger*, which was first published in 1701.³⁰⁸ The undertaker Strip-Corps is so money hungry that he cuts corners wherever possible in order to achieve maximum profit for minimum expenditure. The poem begins with Strip-Corps promoting his assistant Paul Meagre for his thriftiness, noting that, 'For he that would Post-haste to Riches be running,/To One Grain of Justice must use Two of Cunning.'³⁰⁹ Putting this idea into practice, instead of using good quality and

³⁰⁶ *Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, June 24, 1731; *London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, Tuesday, June 8, 1736.

³⁰⁷ *Original Weekly Journal*, Saturday, December 21, 1717; *Daily Journal*, Tuesday, February 18, 1724.

³⁰⁸ *Post Boy* (1695), Tuesday, December 23, 1701

³⁰⁹ *Funeral-Discipline: Or, The Character of Strip-Corps the Dead-Monger* (London, 1725), pp. 4-5

expensive wood ash to line the coffin of the deceased gentleman he has been called to prepare for burial, Strip-Corps simply uses sawdust and coal-ash from the kitchen fire, a mixture described as 'Dunghilly Gleaning'.³¹⁰ Shutting himself and his servant away in the gentleman's bedroom to avoid detection by his valet, the undertaker does not fulfil his promise to embalm the body of his distinguished client with exotic substances according to ancient Egyptian tradition, but instead simply scents the room with a few drops of perfume.³¹¹ The body is then unceremoniously tossed into the coffin 'with a Jerk' and the lid nailed on, but not before Strip-Corps has lived up to his name by removing, with much undignified tugging, the gentleman's wedding ring. Before flinging the body into the coffin, Strip-Corps also removes the shroud in which he had originally laid out the gentleman some days previously, and which we are informed has been used twenty nine times before, and will continue to be re-used. The body is therefore left naked in the coffin on top of the 'Dunghill of Rubbish' with which it was lined.³¹²

Undertakers' intemperate and excessive desire for profit was represented in satire not only by their miserliness, but by their insatiable appetite for death. As one satirical newspaper article observed, 'Profit was the Undertaker's idol'.³¹³ Their hunger for death was associated with their keeping greedy eyes glued to the homes of people known to be weak or unwell, especially the wealthy. An example of such an undertaker is Mr Sable in Richard Steele's *The Funeral* which appeared in the same year as the tale of Strip-Corps. Both appear to have served as blueprints for later satires, many of which were little more than thinly disguised copies or even outright plagiarisms of these early works, *The Funeral* in particular, which was reprinted at regular intervals during the long eighteenth century. Sable keeps his own so-called 'Dooms-day-Book' in which he has written the name of every man of quality, along with their ailments and

³¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 3-4, 6

³¹¹ Ibid., pp. 7-8

³¹² Ibid., p. 8. These practices are particularly exaggerated given that even embalmed bodies would be available for viewing, as described in chapter one.

³¹³ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Monday, November 10, 1783

when he expects them to die.³¹⁴ In the play's prologue, Steele describes undertakers as 'a Sett of People who live in Impatient hopes to see Us out of the World, a Flock of Ravens that attend this Numerous City for their Carkases.'³¹⁵ Similarly, in another satirical tale, an undertaker is described as 'a Grave-Jobber, a Humane [sic!] Raven, one that us'd to smell Death, and croak at the Door a Week aforehand.'³¹⁶ Another fictional undertaker, Mr Coffin, who features in a brief satirical sketch of 1787, notes himself that he is 'seldom found guilty of being too late'.³¹⁷ This theme is echoed in the epithets 'Carrion-Hunter' and 'death hunter' which, like 'Dead-Monger', were often used satirically in place of the term undertaker, and is illustrated in the print 'Undertakers in at the Death!!' (Figure 16), in which an undertaker and a clergyman are seen racing towards a man almost, but not yet, dead.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Richard Steele, *The Funeral: or, Grief A-La-Mode* (London, 1710), p. 28

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3

³¹⁶ *Review of the Affairs of France*, Tuesday, August 1, 1704

³¹⁷ *The Berwick Museum; Or, Monthly Literary Intelligencer* (Berwick, 1787), vol. 3, p. 510. The same story can also be found, under the title 'The Undertaker and the Valet' in *Town and Country Magazine, or, Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment*, 19 (October, 1787) p. 439 and *Walker's Hibernian Magazine, or, Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge* (December, 1787) p. 655.

³¹⁸ *Original Weekly Journal*, Saturday, December 21, 1717; *Connoisseur*, Thursday, October 24, 1754, p. 230. The fictional Mr Coffin, who aptly describes himself as 'a man of no ceremony', goes so far as to bribe the valet of a dying man in order that he be chosen to perform his master's funeral, and gleefully informs this valet of an occasion when, having heard a rival had secured a funeral commission for a dying gentleman, he waited in that gentleman's coalhole in order that he be first present after the death and thus able to take the commission for himself. After two days and nights of waiting he finally heard noises from the house suggesting that the man was nearing his end. Sneaking out of the coal hole he went up to the bedroom, where he found the man was in fact still clinging to life. Undeterred, his response was to actually hasten the man's death while no one else was present, after which he immediately 'whipt' out his ruler, described as his 'pocket companion', and began measuring the corpse for its coffin. At least on this occasion Coffin waited until the man had expired to measure him, even if it was he who had ultimately killed him; the valet of the gentleman with whom he is currently conversing has to struggle to restrain Coffin from going to measure his master immediately, imploring, 'you'd not be so lost to feeling, as to take his measure before he's dead?' The tale ends with Mr Coffin making enquiries into another potential funeral by asking, 'and if you please...to give me a sight of your master, I'll soon determine the number of hours he has to live, only by grasping his windpipe a little'. Coffin even goes so far as to argue that it makes little difference to the dying if they end their lives sooner rather than later. In fact, he defends his actions on the occasion in question as caring and concerned; 'out of pure humanity, I scientifically pressed [his throat] a little, and the poor gentleman gave it up very quietly.' See *The Berwick Museum*, pp. 511-2.



Figure 16. R. Newton, 'Undertakers in at the Death!!' (1794) © The Trustees of the British Museum

An even more extreme portrayal of undertakers' disregard for the value of human life, and their impatience with custom, can be found in a mock letter of 1709 purporting to be from the Master of the Company of Upholders in which all people, referred to as 'this vast Number of dead Bodies, that go putrefying up and down the Streets', are viewed as potential corpses who may as well get their burials over with. In it the alleged Master complains that business would be left in a poor state, 'if it shall be left to every dead man's discretion not to be buried till he sees his Time'.³¹⁹

The results of undertakers' miserly and grasping business practices were, according to many satires of the trade, a comfortable and indulgent personal life. A vignette depicting 'the Undertaker's Club-Feast [and] the Method of their obtaining and managing of Funerals' described the ways in which these men profited at the expense of the bereaved, and their growing fat on those

³¹⁹*Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff*, Thursday, November 24, 1709. Similarly, in Steele's *The Funeral*, whose plot revolves around the mistaken belief that the character Lord Brumpton has died, the undertaker Mr Sable tries to persuade the still living Lord that he should submit to preparation for burial despite still being alive. Sable says he will not be put off claiming his money and that he 'must do according to my Orders, Cut you up, and Embalm you... You don't consider the Charges I have been at already.' See Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 27.

profits.³²⁰ In some satires undertakers face the consequence of their greed and lack of emotional connection with their object of business. It was occasionally noted that undertakers themselves would ultimately be taken by death, whom they had until that point served, along with which comes the implied moral judgement that one cannot take one's money to the grave, this moral tone demonstrating that more overtly religious aspects of 'decency' played some part in the development of the undertaker stereotype and its denunciation of greed.³²¹ In other more light-hearted examples undertakers are treated to their comeuppance in this life. A presumably fictional story of a dying man who chose to beat a lingering undertaker at his own game was printed in the *Original Weekly Journal* in 1717, the date again emphasising the early appearance and subsequent consistency of the stereotype. It recounted a prank played by an 'Indispos'd' gentleman whose house had received a number of unwelcome visits from an impatient undertaker. Hearing of this, the gentleman 'ordered his Servants the next time this earnest Enquirer after his Health came to the House to Satisfie him he was dead.' On his next visit, the happy undertaker proceeded to march upstairs where he found the gentleman under a sheet. However, as he began to measure the body for its coffin 'the Corps made so sudden a Resurrection as frightened the Undertaker almost out of that little Witt he had: And with his Oaken truncheon [which had been hidden beside the bed in anticipation] so handsomely Dress'd the Undertaker that he made his way down the Stairs a little faster than he did up them.'³²²

³²⁰ The vignette was advertised as featuring in a book entitled *A Trip through London: Containing Observations on Men and Things*, which also contained various other sketches of activities intended to humorously illustrate the degenerate state of London and its morals, such as its large population of thieves and tricksters, the poor state of the roads, the large quantities of foreigners 'yearly imported' and its numerous ill-behaved Welsh footmen. See *Daily Post*, Monday November 20, 1727. Another example of such an undertaker is Dickens' creation Mr Mould, who enjoys gazing upon his possessions in his comfortable and well-appointed home. See Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 390.

³²¹ Edward Trapp Pilgrim, 'On an Undertaker', *Poetical Trifles, Written on Various Subjects, Serious and Comic* (London, 1785), pp. 58-9; *Yorick's Jest*s (London, 1783), p. 115.

³²² *Original Weekly Journal*, Saturday, December 21, 1717. A similar story can be found in *World* (1753), Thursday, Dec 18, 1755, p. 930. This same letter can be found in *Weekly Miscellany; or, Instructive Entertainer*, 7:182 (March 24, 1777), p.594. Another similar example, entitled 'The Undertaker Overtaken', can be found in *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, November 14, 1824, p. 361.

Eighteenth century depictions of undertakers were clearly exaggerated. However, this exaggeration and the humour it inspired only thinly disguise what was evidently a very real concern with the proper and 'decent' treatment of the dead body and appropriate respect for human life, a concern which chapter one has already documented in relation to factual sources. The threat posed by undertakers, and the problem which stereotypes and satires of them sought to defend against, was that their financial motivation, far higher than that of others who might be involved in preparing the body for burial, made them likely to become greedy and corrupt, leading them to abuse their position of power over vulnerable dead bodies. While the basic standards of 'decency' and morality perceived to be open to attack were not standards unique to the eighteenth century, the emergence of a trade catering specifically for the dead, even though in most cases undertakers were not involved in the bodies' preparation, sharpened and focused attention regarding these issues onto that particular group, giving them symbolic significance out of proportion with their actual role. The fact that the stereotypical undertaker endured throughout the period in question, undergoing so little change during that time, indicates the issue's perennial importance. In addition, the fact that the concerns expressed were not fundamentally unique to the eighteenth century demonstrates that satirisation of those involved in death ritual sheds light on continuity of belief, as well as attitudes to change.

Concerns at the moral repercussions of dealing with the vulnerable in a financially motivated capacity applied not only to undertakers, nor only to the dead. The similarity between the stereotypical undertaker and the stereotypical doctor reminds us of the important fact that the satirisation of particular trades and social groups was part of a much wider tradition, and demonstrates the role 'decency' played in determining attitudes throughout eighteenth-century society, not only in relation to the dead. A number of stereotypical depictions of undertakers also featured stereotypical medical practitioners. Like undertakers, medical practitioners were individuals unconnected to the deceased but judged

to have the potential to exploit their position, and thus abuse the people with whom they dealt, as a result of their greed.

Physicians and quacks alike were often characterised as worsening rather than improving health.³²³ One 1784 letter to a newspaper noted that, 'the healing art has unfortunately given rise to multitudes of undertakers, as the daily destruction of the soundest constitutions too fatally evinceth.'³²⁴ Their preoccupation with profit, rather than care or cure, led stereotypical medical practitioners, like stereotypical undertakers, to flock around the sick. They were in turn frequently presented as undertakers' allies in callous and calculated profiteering, the physician from illness, and the undertaker from death, often caused or hastened by physicians' attentions.³²⁵ One satirically hyperbolic letter from an undertaker to a physician who has retired to the country has the undertaker begging the physician to return to town, arguing that

unassisted nature will never employ a thousandth part of our business...You see, sir, the necessity of your restoring yourself to the publick, since business so stagnates without you; neither will the intemperance of the times, the sedulity of the apothecaries, war, pestilence, and famine, suffice for our purpose, if you continue in the country.³²⁶

In conducting their often mutually beneficial business practices, undertakers and medical practitioners were therefore both presented as greedy and possessed of a reckless disregard for life and human dignity. Indeed, like

³²³ Roy Porter, *Quacks: Fakers and Charlatans in English Medicine* (Stroud: Tempus, 2001), p. 55; Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 30. Medical practitioners' deadly reputation is also reflected in Hogarth's *Company of Undertakers*. Julian Litten has erroneously stated that the picture is a depiction of a group of undertakers, drawn at the time when there was discussion of forming a United Company of Undertakers. See Litten, 'The English Funeral', p. 5. In fact, it depicts a number of famous contemporary medical practitioners, physicians in the lower part of the picture, and three well-known 'quacks' at the top. Their association with death is made explicit, not only in the title of the piece. Firstly, they are depicted within an heraldic device, a form whose intricacies were well known to former heraldic painter Hogarth. The picture is also black bordered and features crossed bones at its base, underneath which is written *Et Plurima Mortis Imago*, meaning 'everywhere the image of death'. The physicians have 'mock-solemn expressions', a feature which echoes the feigned sorrow typically ascribed to undertakers, to be discussed further below. See Fiona Haslam, *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 54-5. For a detailed analysis of the image and precise meaning of the heraldic format see pp. 52-66.

³²⁴ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, November 18, 1784

³²⁵ Dorothy Porter & Roy Porter, *Patient's Progress: Doctors and Doctoring in Eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 54

³²⁶ *The Nonpareil; or, The Quintessence of Wit and Humour* (London, 1757), pp. 81-2

undertakers, medical men were typically rather blasé about the boundary between life and death. Many satires involving undertakers and medical men comment on undertakers' use of newspapers to monitor the health of London's wealthy population, and the problems caused by newspapers' premature death notices. Vulture-like undertakers often blame the press for raising their hopes, that blame often being passed in turn to physicians and their willingness to classify any terminal patient from whom they cannot extract any further profit as dead. For instance, Mr Coffin had only visited the house of the supposedly dying gentleman, as described above, because of a death notice printed in a newspaper. Coffin is informed by the valet that "the physical tribe have only three-fourths done him over yet". Coffin responds, "Well, well...that softens the matter, my good friend- if the faculty have been tampering with, I may expect him soon," and says that the faculty are "very steady promoters of our branch...[w]hen the pulse won't yield a fee, as we call it in the way of business."³²⁷ This last comment clearly demonstrates that this lack of feeling was seen to be a result of the use of death as a means of making money.³²⁸

Visual sources also depict the association made between doctors, undertakers and death. The sinister trio feature most explicitly in the print 'Three Friends Going on a Visit' (Figure 17).

³²⁷ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Friday, August 31, 1787

³²⁸ These examples constitute only a few of those which exhibit very similar narrative and themes. For instance, in the comic play *The Suicide*, which was recounted as follows in the *London Chronicle*; 'Act IV. The Undertaker comes to solicit the Funeral. This is an excellent Scene. Though the Man is not dead, he says he must soon be wanted, as the Doctor and Apothecary have been there.' See *London Chronicle*, Saturday, July 11, 1778. Another instance can be found in *Physic in Danger*, in which undertakers are described as having been, 'long Friends, constant Attendants, and faithful Adherents to the Faculty of Physicians', and as owing their existence to them. Undertakers, it goes on, 'have always waited on [medical practitioners] as their Shadows; they are no sooner called, than we prepare the Coffin, Shroud, and other Implements belonging to the Pomp of Death; and we are seldom disappointed'. See *Physic in Danger; Being the Complaint of the Company of Undertakers, against the Doctors T___, C___, and D___*. (London, 1746), p. 3. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, although the undertaker Mr Mould often pretends not to know the local doctor at funerals, Dickens informs us that in reality they live nearby and often work together. See Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 315. See also the satirical stories and comments in the following publications: *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Friday, May 16, 1777; *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, Monday, February 18, 1782; *Morning Chronicle*, Friday, December 20, 1793; *Punch*, Saturday, October 02, 1847, p. 128; *The Satirist; or, the True Censor of the Times*, Saturday, October 28, 1848, p. 465.



Figure 17. Anon, 'Three Friends Going on a Visit' (1796) © The Trustees of the British Museum

They are also connected in 'The Way to Save Trouble' (1796) (Figure 18) in which we see a sick man talking to his servant, behind whom wait an apothecary, a doctor, an undertaker, a sexton and a grave digger. The caption underneath reads: 'Who have you brought here? I sent you for the Apothecary! - I know you did, Master, but I thought if you had the Apothecary, you'd soon want the Doctor, and if the Doctor you'd soon have the Undertaker, and then of course the Sexton and Grave Digger, so to save trouble I've brought them all together!!!'



Figure 18. Anon, 'The Way to Save Trouble' (1796) © The Trustees of the British Museum

Equally disturbing to contemporaries was the association of medical men and undertakers, as well as grave diggers and sextons, with body snatching, associations which, as chapter six will demonstrate, were not without foundation.³²⁹

A final common factor which underlined contemporary satirisation of both undertakers and medical men was their perceived lack of professionalism and

³²⁹ On several occasions undertakers were involved in skirmishes at the gallows over the bodies of the hanged on the grounds that the 'mob' believed them to be in the anatomists' pay. At the hanging of John Shephard, 'an Undertaker, who waited near the Gallows with a Hearse, to have carry'd the Body immediately to St Sepulchre's, where a Grave was already made for it, was greatly insulted by the Rabble, the Bailiff having artfully given it out, that the Undertaker was employ'd by the Surgeons.' It emerged that in fact, it was the bailiff who was employed by the surgeons and had tried to deflect attention away from himself. See *Evening Post* (1709), Tuesday, November 17, 1724 and *Daily Journal*, Wednesday, November 18, 1724. A similar incident occurred at another hanging, when an undertaker who had been employed to deal with the bodies of two men due to be executed was, 'set upon by a Mob near Tyburn, who pretended the man was going to sell the bodies to the Surgeons, and used him so cruelly that his life [was] despaired of.' See *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Wednesday, July 26, 1769.

Fewer fictional examples exist, although the connection is made at a surprisingly early date in Steele's *The Funeral* in which a grave digger informs the undertaker Sable: 'I carry'd home to your House the Shroud the Gentleman was buried in last Night; I could not get his Ring off very easily, therefore I brought the Finger and all; and Sir, the Sexton gives his service to you, and desires to know whether you'd have any Bodies remov'd or not: if not, he'll let 'em lie in their Graves a week longer.' Fear of grave robbing prompts the Widow Brumpton to order Sable to bury the Lord deep, as, 'she had heard such Stories of the Wicked Sextons taking up People' for the purpose of dissection. See Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 6.

regulation. As discussed in chapter two, undertakers had no guild or other professional association regulating the activities of members or defining their roles, while quacks and trained medical professionals alike were associated with ignorance, ineptitude and incompetence.³³⁰ We are told in *Physic in Danger* that, 'there is little else necessary to equip a Man for a Physical Campaign, than a long Wig, a grave Countenance, a few hard Names of Drugs and Poisons, a neat Chariot, and the Opinion of some two or three fashionable Families.'³³¹ Quacks too were seen to rely on showmanship and flagrant advertising, rather than medical ability, for their success.³³² A similar accusation regarding the requirements for operation in the undertaking trade, that is little skill but an ability to play a part and create the right impression, was made by Richard Campbell; '[undertakers] are a hard-hearted Generation, and require more Money than Brains to conduct their Business; I know no one Qualification peculiarly necessary to them, except it is a steady, demure, and melancholy Countenance at Command'.³³³ In fact, Glennys Howarth has argued that one of the ways in which undertakers attempted to improve their reputation during the twentieth century was by instituting a system of training for those involved in funeral organisation in order to establish the trade as a skilled profession.³³⁴ Fear for the vulnerable individuals in society, sick, dying or dead, who might become the target of opportunistic mercenaries was therefore in part the result of a feeling of lack of control over those charged with their care.

However, despite their heightening of pre-existing uneasiness concerning the treatment of the vulnerable, both undertakers and medical practitioners were employed in ever greater numbers over the long eighteenth century, and both would eventually become central to the treatment of the sick and the dead. Fears for the exploitation or mistreatment of the vulnerable, either as a result of preoccupation with profit or lack of training and regulation, were therefore not

³³⁰ Although societies regulating the activities of surgeons, physicians and apothecaries existed, they did not exert a high degree of control over the practices of those acting in these capacities. See Porter, *Quacks*, pp. 34-6.

³³¹ *Physic in Danger*, p. 5

³³² Porter, *Quacks*, p. 53

³³³ Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, p. 230

³³⁴ Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry', p. 127

strong enough to dissuade contemporaries from entrusting undertakers and medical men with the care of their loved ones' bodies; they were seldom complemented by factual reports of the kind of behaviour typical of these stereotyped characters, unlike complaints regarding the clergy, to be discussed below. Nonetheless, these stereotypes and their persistence indicate the continued relevance of the timeless belief that whoever was around a body, whether in a professional or personal capacity, was expected to respond and behave in a 'decent', respectful, restrained and composed manner, sensitive to the dignity of the deceased.

FUNERALS

Satires implicated the purely monetary connection between undertakers and the deceased not only in the potential physical mistreatment of the body, but also in the disrespect of the deceased's memory through the ill-behaviour of undertakers and their employees at funerals. Even the clergy, bound by spiritual duty to perform their ministry in a suitable manner, could be criticised on these grounds. In both cases, money and greed were often identified as the root cause.

Unlike the sources discussed above, those expressing concern at the clergy's negligence relate to actual, apparently relatively common, grievances, rather than more abstract fears. Contemporary newspapers not infrequently featured accounts in which the lateness of the clergy and their lack of due care in the execution of their duties were criticised. Although parishes' rules relating to burial became increasingly strict, limiting the hours at which burial could take place and insisting on punctuality from undertakers and the bereaved on pain of a fine for tardiness, it seems not have been uncommon for funeral parties to arrive at churches only to find either no minister present or even no grave waiting, forcing the party to wait for hours for the funeral to take place.³³⁵ It

³³⁵ In one case, a clergyman refused to bury a body as it had been brought outside of the stipulated hours of burial and the fine for late burial had not been paid. See *Public Advertiser*, Friday, October 22, 1773. *Public Ledger*, Thursday, October 24, 1765; *Public Advertiser*, Friday, October 22, 1773; *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, February 2, 1775; *Public Ledger*, Thursday, October 24, 1765. Another similar situation was reported when the widow of a murdered constable attempted to have him buried, but found it almost impossible to arrange with the church, despite the fact that ' "the mangled body of her husband

was noted in 1775 that, 'the Remissness of the established Clergy in the Performance of their sacred Office, has long been a Subject of Complaint', and that it had extended from the higher to the lower offices; it reported that a family had gone to bury a relation, but found no grave dug and no member of the clergy present. The undertaker's men, who had paid the burial fees and informed the church of the time of the service, had to dig the grave themselves.³³⁶ At least one case exists of an undertaker attempting to prosecute a member of the clergy for failing to attend a funeral. However, the only thing that was proved, rather to the detriment of his case, was 'indecent language on the part of the undertaker', behaviour which was also recorded at another trial where an undertaker was accused of swearing in church during a funeral service.³³⁷

Scuffles between undertakers and clergy could, in some cases, be caused by the church's resentment of undertakers' infringement upon the church's traditional, and profitable, role in dealing with death, which included the renting of a communal pall and the collection of burial fees, as described in the previous chapter. Although it continued to receive burial fees until urban burial was outlawed, something which some clergy also vehemently opposed on the grounds of lost income, the church resented the usurpation of its role in the provision for burial rituals. The following case is one such example. In 1728 an undertaker prosecuted the parish of Clerkenwell because, at a funeral he had performed, 'the Parish Officer [pulled] his Pall off the Corps, pretending an Order of Vestry for not admitting any Pall to enter the Church, unless

was now grown so offensive as to render an early interment absolutely necessary"'. See *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Monday, May 17, 1784.

³³⁶ *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, February 2, 1775. Dickens included a scene depicting the shortcomings of the clergy in cases of pauper burial in *Oliver Twist*. The clergyman appointed to perform the funeral has stipulated that the funeral party arrive on time for the burial, causing Sowerberry the undertaker to hurry the procession along at an indecent speed. Despite this, they arrive to find the clergyman absent and the mourning party is forced to wait in the rain, the coffin lying on the ground beside the grave, 'while the ragged boys, whom the spectacle had attracted into the churchyard, played a noisy game at hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin.' After an hour's wait the clergyman arrives, pulling on his surplice as he came. He then, reads 'as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four minutes', and leaves. See Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, pp. 34-5.

³³⁷ *General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, Monday, May 24, 1779; *World* (1787), Friday, February 29, 1788.

belonging to the Parish'. The case was found for the plaintiff, and the Justice admonished the Parish Officer, declaring that, 'Tumults and Riots at Funeral Solemnities were abominable, and must be put an End to, and that Parishes had no Right to force any Person to pay for Palls, or use them against their Will'.³³⁸ On another occasion a similar dispute was brought to court by an undertaker against Simon Avery of St Dunstan's Stepney 'for [Avery] forcibly taking 11s. for the Use of a Pall' belonging to the church, even though the undertaker had brought his own. The case was again found in favour of the plaintiff.³³⁹ In response to such cases, some parishes took action to ensure the continued use of their own palls. For instance, a vestry meeting of St Margaret's Westminster agreed that the parish pall, formerly 10s for each funeral, would be made 5s, 'for the Benefit of the Poor of the Parish' and that, 'a printed Order, specifying the same, should be affixed on the Church Doors, to prevent the Imposition of Undertakers...[I]t is believ'd other Parishes will follow their Example.'³⁴⁰

It was not only palls which caused tension between undertakers and the church. In 1775 an undertaker complained to the Lord Mayor of London that he had been 'violently assaulted...in the Christian-like office of burying the dead' by a gravedigger, who complained that he had been doing the job all his life and did not appreciate the undertaker infringing 'on his privilege' by employing 'strangers to carry a corps to the grave which he had dug [when he] was of right entitled to carry the deceased to the church-yard'.³⁴¹ Therefore, clergy and others involved in administering the church's responsibilities to the dead were not just feared but known to cause indignity to the dead either through neglecting or protecting their duties. These were in turn profit-related, again indicating the corrupting potential of commercial involvement in death.

Undertakers and their employees were considered just as culpable in their lack of propriety and sincerity at funerals, not only in their disputes with the clergy. Some such complaints were based on actual events. A letter entitled 'a

³³⁸ *London Evening Post*, Thursday, July 11, 1728

³³⁹ *Read's Weekly Journal Or British Gazetteer*, Saturday, December 12, 1730

³⁴⁰ *Daily Journal*, Saturday, August 22, 1730

³⁴¹ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Thursday, October 12, 1775

Reflection on the little Decorum generally observed at our publick Funerals' was sent to the *St James's Chronicle* in 1788 complaining of the 'very reprehensible' leisurely conduct of an undertaker and his men during a funeral procession. The author explained that during the procession, the undertaker forgot to provide the minister with hatband;

to remedy which a Person ran down the Street (just before the Procession) out of Breath, in order to overtake the Minister with one in his Hand flying in the Wind like a Pair of Colours. The Mutes who rode before, amused themselves with staring into every House they passed, while on Horseback, and when walking before the Corpse through the Church Yard, with pointing at the Gravestones, and making Walking Sticks of their processional Staves.- The Person who carried the Board of Feathers on his Head, by frequently turning it round to see where his Companions were, put me in Mind of an Italian Boy with a Board of Images.³⁴²

However, most comments pertaining to this issue were expressed through satire. The most common complaint in these sources was that undertakers and their employees were little concerned with the solemnity of funerals, treating them instead as festive occasions on which they might indulge in plentiful food and drink. For instance, the funeral procession having been appropriately organised, the tale of Strip-Corps concludes with him taking a swig of alcohol.³⁴³ At the funeral of Anthony Chuzzlewit, Dickens describes the indulgence of the undertaker and his men, noting that the chief mourner had once been 'a tender plant...but from constant blowing in the fat atmosphere of funerals, had run to seed.'³⁴⁴ The engraving 'Undertaker's regaling themselves at Death's Door', that is the door of a Robert Death's tavern, shows gluttonous, drunken undertakers and their employees disporting themselves with women. (Figure 19) The caption beneath it, a quote from Robert Blair's poem *The Grave* (1743), reads 'But see the well-plum'd hearse comes nodding on/Stately and slow, and properly attended/By the whole sable tribe, that painful watch/The

³⁴² *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Saturday, August 23, 1788

³⁴³ *Funeral-Discipline*, p. 12

³⁴⁴ Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 314

sick man's door; and live upon the dead,/ By letting out their persons by the hour/To mimic sorrow, when the heart's not sad.'³⁴⁵



Figure 19. 'Undertakers regaling themselves at Death's Door Battersea Rise Surry' (1801), Collage Image Collection, GL/6735

Similarly, in *Martin Chuzzlewit* the day of the funeral sees, 'two mutes...at the house-door, looking as mournful as could be reasonably expected of men with such a thriving job in hand.'³⁴⁶ Mr Mould, the undertaker, is described as having 'a face in which a queer attempt at melancholy was at odds with a smirk of satisfaction'.³⁴⁷ After the funeral is over, it is very quickly forgotten; in the evening Mould dines at home and spends the evening at his club. The mourners and other hired men go to their favourite pub and, 'the hearse, after standing for a long time at the door of a roistering public-house, repaired to its

³⁴⁵ On occasion undertakers' employees were implicated in causing not just indignity to the dead, but also actual harm to the living as a result of their indulgence; it was reported in 1724 that, 'an Undertaker's Man having got drunk at some Funeral, came riding thro' Newgate-street in such a disorderly Manner, that he rid over a Carman, beat him down, and so sorely wounded him, that he languish'd till Saturday last then died.' See *Daily Journal*, Tuesday, February 18, 1724.

³⁴⁶ Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 313

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308

stables with the feathers inside and twelve red-nosed undertaker on the roof.’³⁴⁸ This connection between false sorrow and money was made in a newspaper writing at a time of high mortality. It noted, quoting from Steele, that, ‘even the *Mutes* find a difficulty in screwing their features to the decent degree of sorrow; for...“the more money they get to look *grave*, the more *merry* they are!”’³⁴⁹ However, even when sorrow was expressed by undertakers and their employees it was criticised for being feigned, their faces merely ‘professionally lengthened’ in return for money.³⁵⁰

Hired mourners were commonly employed at funerals of a grander nature, their job, as described in *The Grave*, ‘To mimic sorrow, when the heart’s not sad.’³⁵¹ The theatricality of hired mourners’ behaviour is dealt with in the tale of Strip-Corps, who admonishes those employees who do not live up to his expectations of their performance, and gives them instructions such as the following; ‘Suck in your thin jaws as if meagre with fretting,/ And Grieve, Sob, and Sigh like a Whore at a Meeting;/ And let your Department express as much Sorrow/As if you were sure to be hang’d all to morrow.’³⁵² In Steele’s *The Funeral* hired mourners are also described as having their appearance and expressions strictly vetted by the undertaker Sable, who tells his mourners to ‘put on your sad Looks, and walk by Me that I may sort you.’ He then arranges them so that those with the saddest faces are the most visible and nearest the corpse as it lies in the house, commenting ‘this Fellow has a good Mortal look, place him near the Corps [and] that Fellow almost in a Fright, that looks as if he were full of some strange misery, at the Entrance of the Hall.’³⁵³ He then berates one for looking too happy, and comments on another; ‘who can see such an horrid Ugly Phiz as that Fellow’s, and not be shock’d, offended, and kill’d of all

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318

³⁴⁹ *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Thursday, February 12, 1795

³⁵⁰ *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, February 28, 1789; Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, pp. 229-30.

³⁵¹ Robert Blair, *The Grave: A Poem* (1743)

³⁵² Another mourner who wears his hat cocked up instead of down is told that, ‘You’re a very fine Fellow to wait on a Hearse,/You mourn for a Dead Corpse, you mourn for my Arse.’ He is warned that if he does not look more melancholy he will be replaced. Another is instructed to look ‘Distress’t and Forlorn’, as Strip-Corps does not give them, ‘Wages to Laugh, but to Mourn’. Despite this, Strip-Corps himself, the ‘conductor’, shouts ‘loud as a Boatswain’ whilst arranging and inspecting the funeral procession.

Funeral-Discipline, pp. 9-10.

³⁵³ Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 5

Joy while he beholds it?³⁵⁴ Falsity in return for financial gain was therefore at the root of concerns regarding the physical appearance of paid mutes and mourners, who are often described as having been selected for their forlorn appearance, and not just their behaviour. Excessive imitations of correct sentiment, made additionally objectionable by their insincerity and theatricality, were therefore considered to be as disrespectful as more overt disregard.

The social origins of mourners were also a cause for concern among some contemporaries. Sable also makes reference to a concern with the social origins of hired mourners, calling his own 'ye stupid Rogues whom I have pick'd out of all the rubbish of Mankind, and fed for your Eminent worthlessness.'³⁵⁵ Strip-Corps's mourners are described as having been previously employed as rat poisoners and pimps.³⁵⁶ They are accompanied by other hired torch bearers from alms houses, hospitals and alley ways, some ill and diseased, and described as 'an Hundred old Cripples' and 'Vermin in Sholes'.³⁵⁷ The implication is clearly that the employment of such people, which would most commonly have been for the funerals of the wealthy, was undignified because of their low social origins, and because their lack of connection to the deceased made them liable to act inappropriately.

The problem of hired mourners' lack of connection to the deceased and, moreover, the fear that their performances might lead to them being confused with the bereaved, was also raised. In the tale of Strip-Corps, it is mentioned that mounted mourners are sometimes mistaken for relatives, and in fact Strip-Corps offers to teach his hired hands, 'to mourn...as if, 'twas the Corps of thy Father or Mother.'³⁵⁸ This concern was also expressed in a newspaper later in the century, which complained that the lamentations of hired mourners were frequently louder than those of the bereaved themselves, and were therefore always unconvincing.³⁵⁹ This supports the assertion made in the previous

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 5, 7

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 7

³⁵⁶ *Funeral-Discipline*, pp. 10-1

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 9

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4

³⁵⁹ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Tuesday, September 30, 1783

chapter that excessive displays of emotion at funerals were considered distasteful, as well as betraying a concern about the need for distinction and demarcation between different social groups, to be discussed further below. It may also point to an implicit contrast with others expected to demonstrate their social relationship to the deceased through mourning, such as members of a guild or occupational group.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, contemporaries expected respect for the deceased to be shown not only during the preparation of their body, but also during the rituals surrounding the body's interment. Both undertakers and the clergy were feared and even known to disrespect the dead through their misbehaviour during these ceremonies. In satirical portrayals of undertakers and their employees, and factual remonstrance against the clergy, the reason given for their inappropriate behaviour and lack of reverence was, like concerns surrounding the body's treatment, financial. Monetary motivations interfered with concentration on the meaning of these rituals, rendering them, in the eyes of some, quite meaningless other than as sources of profit.

THE BEREAVED AND MOURNING

Importantly, satirical criticism of undertakers' and hired mourners' lack of emotional investment in the ceremonies they performed often segued into criticism of those who hired them, the bereaved, who were also reprimanded satirically and seriously for lack of sincere attention to the dead, as well as exploitation of them in the interests of personal aggrandisement. Therefore it was not only those with a purely financial connection to the deceased, but also those who were personally connected to them, who were considered to have the motives to disrespect the dead by disregarding the true meaning of the rituals surrounding their burial. This sub-section will first examine the insincerity of the bereaved, as perceived by contemporaries, before examining attitudes towards mourning practice, looking first at public and then private mourning. The motives in each case were related to the second of our two themes: social position, in particular the middling and the idea of social emulation.

In Steele's *The Funeral*, whose primary critique was the lack of sorrow displayed by materialistic bereaved relations, rather than undertakers, the undertaker Sable is asked;

But is it not strangely contradictory, that Men can come to so open, so apparent an Hypocrisy, as in the Face of all the World, to hire profess'd Mourners to Grieve, Lament, and Follow in their stead, their nearest Relations; and suborn others to do by Art, what they themselves should be prompted to by Nature?³⁶⁰

Sable agrees, saying that the bereaved 'regard themselves *only* in all they Act for the Deceas'd; and the poor Dead are deliver'd to my Custody, to be Embalm'd, Slash'd, Cut, and Drag'd about; not to do them Honour, but to satisfy the Vanity or Interest of their Survivors.'³⁶¹ In this instance the bereaved were thus implicated very strongly not only in the disrespect, but also the physical abuse of the dead, more so than undertakers. The idea that the motivations of the bereaved when arranging funerals were selfish was not an uncommon one. This sentiment is implicit in Richard Campbell's semi-satirical description of the undertaking trade, dating from 1747, which judged the undertaker's job to be 'to furnish out the Funeral Solemnity, with as much Pomp and feigned Sorrow, as the Heirs or Successor of the Deceased chuse to purchase'.³⁶²

Satirists and, in particular, non-satirical commentators often connected self-interest and self-aggrandisement to the practice of wearing mourning, both in times of private bereavement and public mourning. As explained in the previous chapter, wearing mourning in private, and in sympathy, or emulation, of the court, had become quite common by at least the last third of the eighteenth century. However, contemporaries feared that mourning had become a matter of fashion rather than a sincere expression of grief.

The Lord Chamberlain's orders for court mourning often specified that the orders were intended solely for the court, and not for the public at large. For

³⁶⁰ Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 2

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2. My italics.

³⁶² Campbell, *The London Tradesman*, pp. 229-30

instance, in February 1827 *The Age* reprinted a command published at the death of Queen Charlotte so that the order for the court to go into mourning would not be misunderstood, thereby frustrating 'his majesty's most gracious consideration for the many thousand manufacturers of fancy articles of dress, whose employment is almost entirely suspended during a public mourning'. It stated;

"It is the intention of His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and that of the Royal Family, to continue their mourning for her late Majesty during the space of six months, but it is not expected or desired that other persons should appear in mourning, except at Court, after the expiration of six weeks from the day of her late majesty's demise."³⁶³

However, despite this, and other such announcements, members of the general public followed court mournings, often at length and at great expense to themselves, from the late eighteenth century onwards. *The Lady's Magazine* complained in 1789 that 'of late it has become the fashion; I call it the folly to put on black, whenever the death of any foreign prince or princesses make it necessary for our court, out of compliment, to go into mourning.'³⁶⁴ Several decades earlier, in 1777, *The Weekly Miscellany; or, Instructive Entertainer* had printed a comic story satirising a man who feared that he 'could not possibly appear at any public place in colours' while the court was in mourning, and so went to absurd lengths to obtain a fitting black coat.³⁶⁵ In fact, as early as 1715 it was complained that 'the Wear of Black Silks is now become more Universal than in any former Mournings, there being hardly a person of any tolerable Distinction that comes to London from any part of Great Britain but buys of them, that they may have access to the...drawing Rooms at Court.'³⁶⁶ The implication, to be discussed in full in the following section, was clearly that in imitating the court, people were attempting to appear of higher social rank. In

³⁶³ 'General Mourning for the Duke of York', *The Age*, Sunday, February 18, 1827, p. 56

³⁶⁴ *The Lady's Magazine*, 20 (London, 1789)

³⁶⁵ 'A Distressful Scene occasioned by a Court-Mourning', *Weekly Miscellany; or, Instructive Entertainer*, 9:217 (November 24, 1777), p.177

³⁶⁶ TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'Reasons humbly offered to the Rt Honble the Lords Commissioners of Trade & Plantations touching the Petition lately presented to His Majesty from the Corporation of Silk Weavers in the City of Canterbury' (1715), p. 2r

these instances, it was the gentry, and perhaps the upper middling into whom the gentry merged, who were implicated.

Even general mourning was bemoaned as insincere by a number of contemporaries, but typically on rather different grounds. Although, as the previous chapter demonstrated, general mourning wear could be just as elaborate, and as fashion-conscious, as private mourning, most comments regarding general mourning related its insincerity to the fact that it had become a social obligation. Participation in general mourning was more widespread than court mourning, the sources making clear that by the end of our period it was commonplace among all levels of the middling sort.

A few went so far as to suggest the complete cessation of general mourning on grounds of its 'Absurdity and inconvenience', arguing that 'prudence, good sense, and humanity, would suggest the abolition of a useless practice.'³⁶⁷ Others were more concerned that the weight of social expectation which had grown around general mourning by the early nineteenth century led to parodied expressions of grief driven not by sorrow or respect, but simply by custom. For instance, in 1830 *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* complained that, 'however excellent [the principle of general mournings] may be, we do not like them when they are forced upon us. This applies particularly to Public Mournings, for "the mockery of woe" becomes ten times a mockery if we are compelled to bear it about us by the public mandate of another.'³⁶⁸ Also acknowledging the role of wider social pressures, the *Liverpool Mercury &c.* noted upon the death of the Duke of Gloucester in 1835 that people did not want to 'appear singular or deficient' by not adopting some degree of mourning.³⁶⁹

Some proposed that if general mourning was to continue as a custom, it should be in a much reduced form, although whether these voices ultimately led to a change in practice after the period in question is unknown. *The*

³⁶⁷ *Liverpool Mercury etc.*, Friday, June 11, 1830. See also 'General Mourning', *Caledonian Mercury*, 10:169 (November 13, 1786), p.1.

³⁶⁸ 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, June 06, 1830

³⁶⁹ *Liverpool Mercury etc.*, Friday, January 23, 1835

Caledonian Mercury argued in 1830, acknowledging the problem of insincerity, that 'If there must be a symbol of General Mourning, for it is only symbolic of etiquette- not generally expressive of real woe- let the plan used in the Army and Navy be adopted in civil life- a piece of crape on the arm.'³⁷⁰ Similarly, in 1842 *The Penny Satirist* observed that 'The badge of mourning generally adopted by the ladies of New York, is a slip of black crape, tied in a knot and worn on the left wrist...This is a very great and a very sensible improvement on the English fashion, which often puts families to great expense at a time when they are least able to afford it.'³⁷¹

This comment highlights the commonly voiced concern that, having become a social obligation and a 'decency', the adoption of elaborate general mourning put the population to unnecessary expense. Such comments were, therefore, in the context of the sources examined thus far, critical and defensive in an unusual way, expressing fear not for the dead but for the living, and pointing out that they too could be victims of the new material culture of death. For example, in 1790 *Walkers Hibernian Magazine* opined that 'Public mourning for a royal death is a demand made by decency to a certain extent of abilities in sustaining the expence; those, whose narrow means shrink from that mark, are, in the language of common honesty, not only excused, but even forbidden to add to the solemnity of our streets, by putting on sables.'³⁷² Another article, published in *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* in 1828, argued, in sympathy with the reforms proposed above, that 'We have no doubt that considerable injury is done to the working classes by these mournings, and that it is highly desirable some alteration should be made, although, we think, it is still of importance that some means should be devised of manifesting the public feeling, when a melancholy occasion shall arise for its display.'³⁷³

³⁷⁰ *Caledonian Mercury*, Saturday, June 12, 1830

³⁷¹ It also noted that gentlemen typically wore a black piece of fabric on the left arm. *The Penny Satirist*, Saturday, June 18, 1842, p. 4

³⁷² 'On Public Mourning. In a Letter to a Friend', *Walker's Hibernian Magazine, or, Compendium of Entertaining Knowledge*, (November, 1790.), p. 434

³⁷³ 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, November 30, 1828

Widespread and extended adherence to general mournings were considered financially damaging not only to individuals' personal finances, but to the nation's tradesmen and the national economy as a whole, highlighting the place of death and its associated trades as part of wider social and economic life. This was particularly so in the early eighteenth century when participation in general mourning was limited to the gentry. The reason for this was the seasonal nature of urban fabric and clothing trades; the gentry and elite, on whose custom they relied, were in London for only part of the year. Public mournings reduced the amount and variety of material and readymade clothing being purchased, and did so over a long period of time. Therefore, if public mournings spanned those periods, an entire year's worth of trade, and a year's worth of investment, could be lost.³⁷⁴ One of several early eighteenth century petitions made to the King by silk weavers requesting the curtailment of public mournings included requests to end the mourning for Queen Anne on George I's birthday, rather than let them continue until 1st August as was planned: by August, the petitioners argued, the gentry would have retired to the country and would purchase no new clothes until the spring.³⁷⁵ Ending the mourning early would mean that the court and gentry would still be in town, and would 'not only buy Colour'd Silks for the Birth Day, But also provide themselves for the Rest of the Summer, and wear them at their Country Seats & all public places'.³⁷⁶ The effects of public mournings on British silk makers were exacerbated by the fact that they specialised in the production of coloured fabrics, with expertise in the production of black material lying abroad. A further problem specific to the silk weavers of Canterbury was the fact their primary produce, 'Rich Flower'd and Brocaded Silks' unsuitable for mourning dress, were consumed almost exclusively by the British market. As such, although the fairly regular demand for mourning garments might seem to be

³⁷⁴ BL/L.23.c.7(6), 'The Grievances of those concern'd in the Silk Trade, &c. Occasion'd by Frequent and Long Public Mournings' (1706), p. 2

³⁷⁵ TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'The humble Representation of the Merchts of London, Trading to Italy, concerning their Petition lately presented to His Majesty relating to Publick Mourning' (1715), p. 3r

³⁷⁶ TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'Reasons humbly offered to the Rt Honble the Lords Commissioners of Trade & Plantations touching the Petition lately presented to His Majesty from the Corporation of Silk Weavers in the City of Canterbury' (1715), p. 2v

something which should have been of benefit to material and clothing manufacturers, the silk industry was in fact lacking the skills necessary to respond to the demand.³⁷⁷

This early spate of concern as to the economic effects of general mournings requested they be shortened in order to protect livelihoods, and these requests were successful in effecting legislative change to shorten the period of general mournings in 1728.³⁷⁸ However, as participation in general mourning continued to become ever more widespread and elaborate, spreading beyond the gentry and through the middling sort, the tradesmen of a century later were forced to repeat the same requests for their further curtailment.³⁷⁹ However, as we have seen, there is no evidence that these requests had any real effect on the culture of general mourning.

³⁷⁷ TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'The humble Representation of the Merchts of London', p. 1v. The Canterbury weavers too complained that the materials used during mourning were often black velvets, 'Podesoyes', and mantuas, which did not employ the English, and requested that British material be used in the future manufacture of mourning. See TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'Reasons humbly offered to the Rt Honble the Lords Commissioners of Trade', pp. 1v, 3v.

³⁷⁸ See, for example, BL/L.23.c.7(6), 'The Grievances of those concern'd in the Silk Trade, &c.' (1706); TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'The Representation of the Silk Manufacturers In and about the City of London, in behalf of themselves & their Trade' (1715); TNA/PC 1/14/97, 'The humble Representation of the Merchts of London'; TNA, PC 1/14/97, 'Reasons humbly offered to the Rt Honble the Lords Commissioners of Trade'; TNA/PC 1/2/154, Order lifting the general mourning in consideration of silk weavers, 1709; TNA/PC 1/14/97, Petition of Board of Trade upon representation of the Turkey Company, etc regarding the Royal mourning, and report of the Council, 1715; TNA/Microfilm SP 36/9 folios 33-34, Patent request for new mourning crape, 1730.

³⁷⁹ The ill-effects of general mournings on trade were lamented in the following publications: *The Times*, December 11 1810; *The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, Tuesday, April 18, 1826; *The Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, October 16, 1828; *Caledonian Mercury*, Thursday, June 10, 1830; *Liverpool Mercury etc*, Friday, June 11, 1830; 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, November 30, 1828; 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, June 06, 1830; *The Times*, December 11 1810; *The Times*, June 4 1820; *The Times*, October 16 1828; *The Times*, August 10 1840.

It was reported in 1828 that 'A meeting of manufacturers and venders of fancy goods was held at the London Coffee-house, Ludgate-hill...at which it was agreed to present a petition to his Majesty, praying that he would be graciously pleased in future to shorten the term of general mourning which, it was urged, was extremely injurious to almost every branch of manufacturers engaged in the formation of fancy articles of dress, and threw out of employment many thousands of industrious artisans.' See 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, November 30, 1828.

An article in *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* makes clear that the problems presented to trade by general mournings were unchanged at this later date; 'Let a public mourning come when it may, it must unhinge all the arrangements and ordinary routine of trade, and occasion a great loss of interest upon capital...The fashions prepared for the spring, summer, autumn, or winter, are thrown out for the season, and must remain in warehouses to the next year, or be sold at a ruinous loss by those who cannot afford to let their capital lie idle.' See 'General Mourning', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, June 06, 1830.

Arguments against private mourning were a combination of the consumer-orientated economic arguments made against general mourning, and the concern regarding social emulation expressed in critiques of non-courtiers following court mournings. The argument that its elaboration could encourage its exploitation for personal gain, and for the purposes of fashion and self-adornment was made from an early date. For instance, in *The Funeral*, a friend of the widow Brumpton says, 'I Envy this Lady, the Beauty she'll appear in, in a Mourning Coach; 'twill so become her Complexion. I confess I my self mourn'd Two Years, for no other reason.'³⁸⁰ Similarly, a letter, printed in 1754 in the *Connoisseur*, complained that ' "the customary suits of solemn black", and other "trappings and signs of woe," ' were becoming 'a mere farce and matter of form only.'³⁸¹ Despite some families making great show of having themselves, their servants and even their coaches 'covered and lined with black', the author asked;

what is more common than for these dismal vehicles to wait at the doors of theatres, the opera-house, and other public places of diversion? Those who are carried in them are as little affected by their dismal appearance as the horses that draw them; and I once saw with great surprise an harlequin, a scaramouch, a shepherdess, and black satin devil, get into a mourning coach and go to a jubilee masquerade.³⁸²

Like general mourning, the expense to which it put the bereaved in the name of 'decency' and social obligation were also attacked, although, as with general mourning, this strand of criticism was limited to later decades. The fact that mourning had come to be linked with fashion created a vicious circle in which people felt compelled to spent large amounts of money. Acknowledging both the selfish intentions which were seen to lie behind some individuals' adoption of mourning, and the new standard of 'decency' they had created, *Cleave's Gazette of Variety* commented that

So extremely becoming and lady-like is the fashionable style of mourning, that, under the plea of paying greater respect to the memory of the dead,

³⁸⁰ Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 50

³⁸¹ *Connoisseur*, Thursday, October 24, 1754, p. 232

³⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3

it has become an object of ambition to wear it in its greatest excellence; and equally an object of dread, and source of humiliation, to be compelled to wear it in an inferior style.³⁸³

The same magazine noted that;

The fashion of the world has imposed upon this custom, as applies to females, certain restrictions, and additions so expensive in their nature, as to render it rather an article of luxury to wear genteel mourning, or that which is indicative of the deepest grief...but when the means of pecuniary expenditure are extremely small, and the materials for appearing properly in public have to be made up at home, and prepared for use in a very limited time, it is evident that greater regard to the sacredness of sorrow would suggest the desirableness of a less elaborate style of dress, or perhaps dress not absolutely new for the occasion.³⁸⁴

It further suggested that such clothing obscured the intended purpose of mourning not only through its elaboration, but because the preparation it required acted as a detraction from grieving, requiring a degree of activity 'wholly at variance with the silence and sanctity of a deep and solemn grief.'³⁸⁵

Therefore, as with undertakers and the funerals they provided, there was little fundamental objection to mourning, whether public or private. Most considered it right to demonstrate respect for the memory of the deceased, just as it was proper to respect their body during its preparation and disposal. However, the meaning of mourning was challenged by its wider availability, which made it liable to misuse for the communication of personal position and wealth rather than grief. Conversely, but partly as a result of the connection between mourning and fashion, mourning could also be made insincere by the social pressure to conform to its increasingly elaborate public and private forms, a theme which recurred frequently in contemporary commentary and which, importantly, sought to defend consumers of the new visual culture of death, rather than simply criticise them. The results of conformity to social pressure were considered disruptive even beyond the social, intruding upon the economic stability of the nation.

³⁸³ 'Taken from 'an excellent work just published': *The Women of England, their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* by Mrs Ellis.' See 'Wearing Mourning', *Cleave's Gazette of Variety*, Saturday, June 22, 1839, p. 4.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4

To conclude, the newly commercial and material character of death ritual played upon certain timeless fears relating to the indecent and disrespectful treatment of the dead, whether through abuse of their bodies or their memories. It gave new meaning to these fears because it presented more opportunities to exploit the dead in these ways, both to those with a purely financial connection to the deceased, and to those with familial or other social connections to them. The fact that so many of these concerns were expressed in satirical and fictional sources does not in any way detract from their importance. Rather, the fact that these issues were deemed worthy of attention in any context is an indicator that they were relevant, part of the constant but often unspoken concern with 'decency'. They also show that this concern with 'decency' was connected to changes in the social order and economy. The following section will consider the spread and nature of the middling sort and conceptions of 'decency' from both an eighteenth century and a current viewpoint in order to explain why the new material culture came about and developed as it did.

A NEW INTERPRETATION

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, death was very much a part of wider society, in particular through the various ways in which it was involved in trade, and during the long eighteenth century issues pertaining to trade were particularly closely intertwined with issues pertaining to the social structure. Although, as described in previous chapters, elements of the new material culture of death were available to a broad section of society, those who paid for undertakers to care for their dead, who purchased elaborate funerals, complete with hired mourners and the presence of the undertaker, and who wore elaborate mourning, private and public, i.e. those who paid for the practices which feature in the above sources, were the middling sort, specifically the upper middling, as well as the gentry. Their motivation was seen to be simply the emulation of their social 'superiors', the elite. Thus, the funeral and

mourning trades were very much a part of the wider commercial community not only in the way they operated, as outlined in chapter two, but also in the way they were perceived.

It is only in the sources relating to mourning practice, examined in the final sub-section, that we gain evidence of other strands of opinion and other explanations for the consumption of the new material culture of death beyond mere social emulation and self-aggrandisement. These sources acknowledge the great strength of the genuine desire to respect the dead, and to do so at any cost. From this perspective, the potential indignity that the dead might suffer owing to the elaboration of commercially supplied items used in death ritual was blamed upon unscrupulous commercial suppliers, as in other critiques, but the victims were not only the dead, but the bereaved, the consumers. Although these kinds of critiques were limited to the end of the period in question, the phenomena they describe are relevant to the period as a whole, demonstrating that concern with 'decency' could only be so strong and enduring because the importance of abiding by 'decent' standards, not only in relation to death and the dead, were so fundamental to contemporary society.

THE MIDDLE SORT

Although in the sources discussed above references to social position are implicit, in others pertaining to the new material culture of death they are far more overt and often forcefully derisive towards the middling. The mocking disparagement of the larger and newly solvent middling strata of society, in the eyes of their detractors grasping upstarts, shows that the adoption of customs previously confined to the elite and elements of the gentry by the middling sort was seen as both laughable folly, but also a challenge to the social order. This section outlines contemporaries' comments regarding death ritual as they related to social status, and compares them with current analyses of the changing social structure of the eighteenth century to determine the role played by the middling in the development of a new material culture of death.

Mocking comments regarding both the inferior social status of those who employed undertakers, and their appropriation of heraldic display and elite

custom, can be found in the satirical play *The Suicide* (1778) in which the undertaker 'extols the Dignity of pompous Funerals, saying he lately buried a Cheesemonger in Thames-street, where they were obliged to take down the [shop] Sign to put up the Hatchment.'³⁸⁶ A very similar story is told in a satirical letter of 1754, published in the *Connoisseur*, where the author noted that

As funerals are at present conducted, all distinction is lost among us; and there is no more difference between the duke and the dancing-master in the manner of their burial, than is to be found between their dust in the grave.³⁸⁷

Arguing that grand funerals should be performed only for the elite, the author continued to express distaste that things which were previously for 'the polite world only' had become a matter of common usage and form owing to 'the spirit of affecting the manners of the great'.³⁸⁸ The final sentence of the above quotation somewhat undermines his argument against natural social distinctions, indicating that ritual and material display should be limited according to one's social position, a view we will also encounter in the next section.

One of the earliest printed complaints made against the undertaking trade also included objections to the provision of grand funerals to those considered to be of too low a rank to merit them. The author of this complaint was primarily concerned with the likely detrimental impact on English trade resulting from undertakers' practice of hiring items such as palls and mourners' outfits. However, he complained in turn that the practice of hiring also meant

³⁸⁶ *London Chronicle*, Saturday, July 11, 1778, issue 3371

³⁸⁷ *Connoisseur*, Thursday, October 24, 1754, p. 230. The satirical story told in this letter was told by the author as follows: one night he met a grand funeral procession, and assumed it was for some eminent person. However, upon enquiry, he found that the funeral was not for anyone of rank, but for the cheesemonger Tom Taster, 'who had lain in state all the week at his house in *Thames-street*, and was going to be deposited with his ancestors in *White-chapel* burying-ground. This illustrious personage was, I believe, the first of his family, that ever thought of riding in a coach, living or dead...his widow however, for the honour of her family, was resolved at all events to *bury him handsomely*.' See pp. 229-30. The similarity between this story and that in *The Suicide* illustrates the important points that satires relating to undertaking were present throughout the period in question and that their content differed little over this time. The fact that the funeral described by the author is a night funeral, something which had faded from fashion in urban areas several decades before this letter was published, suggests an even earlier source from which the author derived his comments.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 230-1, 233

‘such Persons who were at great expenses in mourning for their Relations and Friends, may now, for a small matter, have all things fitted for that purpose’.³⁸⁹ The grandeur purchased by those of middling rank was also satirised in *The Funeral*, when the undertaker’s men arrive and inform the undertaker that they have been visiting the heralds on account of ‘Alderman Gathergrease’, for whom a herald has promised to invent a coat of arms the following day.³⁹⁰ Sable, the undertaker, responds; ‘Ah! Pox take some of our Cits; the first thing after their Death is to take care of their Birth. Pox! let Him bear a Pair of Stockings, he’s the first of his Family that ever wore one.’³⁹¹

The mention of heraldry in the above quotation from *The Funeral* accords both with contemporary opinions of the College and the fact that heraldry continued to be used at the funerals of those who were entitled to it, and those who were not, in spite of the College’s reputation, owing to its integral position within the heraldic style funeral. However, it was undertakers who increasingly provided this service in place of the heralds and in their untutored hands the complexities of heraldic symbolism and pageantry could be rendered into embarrassingly incorrect formations, even at the funerals of those whose titles warranted full heraldic display, as the following example shows. In 1721 a mocking and incredulous letter sent to the *London Journal* on the occasion of the funeral of Sir John Shaw directed a series of questions to the Company of Upholders, who had managed the funeral, asking, ‘if by quartering his first Lady, in the last Place of his Atchievement; (or Majesty Escutcheon, at the Head of the Corps in the State) [did they] not express her as his Mother; and by impaling her in a Side Escutcheon of the Same Atchievement as his Wife also?’, and in turn, ‘if by expressing that Lady as Sir John’s Wife and Mother, [did they] not declare him as guilty of Incest, in marrying his Mother?’³⁹² Importantly, in this source undertakers, rather than their clients, were mocked for their social ignorance, attributed to their inferior rank.

³⁸⁹ Merchant, *Some General Considerations*, p. 6

³⁹⁰ Steele, *The Funeral*, p. 5

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5

³⁹² *London Journal* (1720), Saturday, December 30, 1721

Indeed tradesmen, whether as suppliers or consumers, were often purposely singled out in contemporary comments, being considered, not incorrectly, to form a very significant proportion of the middling sort. The author of the *Connoisseur* commentary quoted above noted with scorn that 'many a worthy tradesman of *plebeian* extraction has been made a gentleman after his decease', and associated the debasing of mourning into 'a mere farce and matter of form only' with 'that ridiculous affectation among the middling sort of people which induces them to make a figure beyond their circumstances'.³⁹³ Similarly, although in reference to the wider adoption of court rather than private mourning, the author of a letter to the *London Evening Post* in 1760 asked, half with amused disbelief and half with contempt, 'When one is afraid to ask the Wife of a Tradesman whom she has lost of her Family; and after some Preparation endeavours to know whom she mourns for; how ridiculous is it to hear her explain herself, that we have lost one of the House of Austria?'³⁹⁴

However, although the middling and their consumption of material goods grew significantly over the course of the eighteenth century, contemporaries' view of the matter and the forces behind these changes was somewhat simplistic. We will now assess the nature of the middling sort and whether they can be given sole responsibility for encouraging the widespread commercial availability of elite forms of ritual.

The forces behind the growth of the middling and their connection to new commercial markets are both well illustrated by the circumstances surrounding the first aspect of the new material culture of death to appear and spread: undertaking. As discussed in chapter two, the concept of undertaking and the heraldic funeral form were taken from the College of Arms, which defined and attempted to maintain a strict system of social ranks. However, its authority was somewhat tenuous almost from its inception. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the College and its heralds had a reputation for inefficacy and financial self-interest. For example, in their capacity as regulators of arms

³⁹³ *Connoisseur*, Thursday, October 24, 1754, pp. 230-2

³⁹⁴ *London Evening Post*, Saturday, February 16, 1760

and their usage, heralds conducted periodic visitations to individual counties during which they were required to verify the lineages of arms-bearing families. However, in practice the heralds tended to be more interested in asserting their own authority through obtaining fees from those they visited.³⁹⁵ Conversely, they might also sell heraldry to the untitled. Such behaviour resulted in a diminished concern with the College's regulations regarding conduct, of which those pertaining to funerals were just one. In addition, the College's customs were already considered arcane by the later seventeenth-century, having changed little over time, and the strict protocols they were obliged to follow in organising funerals meant that they could take a long time to arrange.³⁹⁶

Most significant from our perspective is the fact that bypassing of the College was exacerbated by a marked decrease in the importance attached to lineage as a marker of social status, with fewer and fewer families bothering to respond to heralds' visitations.³⁹⁷ As Heal and Holmes observe, the early modern period saw persistent tensions between those who defended the traditional social order, and those who argued for recognition based upon individual, rather than ancestral, wealth and merit.³⁹⁸ They argue that these new ideas became particularly influential, and social mobility increasingly acceptable, from around 1660 onwards, which was also the point at which the first few undertakers began appearing.³⁹⁹ Undertakers' provision of heraldry and heraldic-style funerals to gentry who were technically not entitled to them was therefore a result of the College's loss of power, brought about by their poor reputation and the increasing irrelevance of their rigid rules in a society where social status was becoming more flexible. These circumstances left provision of grand funerals for the nobility open to other suppliers, and presented the

³⁹⁵ This was not true of every herald. Sir William Dugdale, mentioned in chapter two as an early undertaker, took his visitations duties very seriously. See Graham Parry, 'Dugdale, Sir William (1605–1686)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8186>, accessed 6 Feb 2009]

³⁹⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 451

³⁹⁷ Heal & Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales*, pp. 38-40

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-30

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40

opportunity for those outside the nobility, in these early stages the gentry in particular, to patronise these same suppliers and purchase from them a style of funeral previously reserved for the elite.

From this broad angle, the correlation between changes in the social order and the growth of commercially available, elite-derived death ritual provided by specialist suppliers appears clear, and indeed it is indisputable that undertaking was able to grow, and heraldic-style funerals spread, because of a climate in which trades catering for consumer goods and luxury items were emerging. This development was reciprocally connected to the emergence of a new, larger, middling strata and the wider distribution of wealth, which opened up new markets of both supply and demand. Growth in population, which began from the middle of the century onwards, the concentration of this growth in urban areas and the greater disposable income available at all levels of society throughout the century, assisted the process.⁴⁰⁰ These same conditions allowed the adoption and spread of court-derived mourning practice later in the century.

Nonetheless, although the middling indisputably fuelled the spread of undertaking, it must not be forgotten that it was the elite and gentry who first patronised undertakers and whose situation in relation to the College of Arms contributed significantly to their emergence. As the previous chapter demonstrated, undertakers were, in their earliest decades, essentially a replacement for the College of Arms, supplying heraldic funerals without the cumbersome and protracted formalities associated with the College. Just as important to point out is that the less affluent middling sort and possibly also the lower classes also availed themselves of undertakers' services, even in the earlier stages of the trade's development. The ledgers of Mr Legg, which cover the period 1713-1738, show that although he was a supplier and co-ordinator of expensive elite funerals, the majority of his business came from providing for simpler funerals of much more moderate, and sometimes very modest, cost; of the seventy funerals sampled, forty cost less than £5, eleven of those less than £1,

⁴⁰⁰ Mui & Mui, *Shops and Shop Keeping*, pp. 12-3

and ten cost between £5-10.⁴⁰¹ While these customers would purchase fewer, perhaps no, elements of heraldic origin, their utilisation of undertakers' services indicates that use of undertakers was determined by convenience in addition to wealth or status. In turn, it shows that the correlation between undertakers and the presence of the middling, and indeed of wealth in general, was not absolute; in fact, as we will see, the latter factor certainly did not automatically give rise to undertakers, or to specialist mourning suppliers.

In conclusion, we can correlate neither the presence of undertakers nor their client base with wealth in any absolute terms. While the middling had the foremost role in the growth of a more elaborate and commercial culture of death, the earliest developments towards this were encouraged by the elite and gentry, and the lower classes may also have contributed to its spread at an early date. The case is not as clear with specialist mourning suppliers as sources regarding these businesses and their clientele are far fewer, but here too the middling were surely a crucial force not only in its spread but in its emergence, although the gentry and elite would also have provided custom. However, as mourning clothing, unlike coffins, remained a relative luxury for most, the lower classes are unlikely to have played as much role in providing a significant, steady client base as may have done with undertakers. But, while the role of wealth and social status in the emergence of a new material culture of death has been established, its consumers' intent has yet to be questioned, and it is to this issue that this section now turns.

SUPPLY, DEMAND, DECENCY AND FORM

Although the middling were crucial to the evolution of the new material culture of death, it is not clear that the outcome of the relaxation of social boundaries, and the concomitant growth and diversification of commerce, was the wholesale imitation of elite custom by the 'nouveau riche' for the purposes of self-aggrandisement, and at the expense of 'decency'. This view of the middling sort and their social and cultural practices, once voiced as commonly by eighteenth-century historians as it had been among their objects of study,

⁴⁰¹ TNA/C112/48, Ledgers of Mr Legg, undertaker, Book 2

has become outmoded in recent years. For instance, Peter Earle, although recognising that the middling created their own culture, considers social emulation and ambition to have been their motivators, while Margaret Hunt has argued that although emulation existed, it was not universal, did not operate unchecked and was only one of many factors that motivated the middling.⁴⁰² In place of the previously accepted image of the middling sort as desperately imitating their social superiors is appearing a picture of a social group with an identity and aspirations clearly differentiated from those both above and beneath them on the social scale. A number of historians have shown that the middling were happy with their social status and demonstrated no particular desire to crudely ape their 'betters' at any cost.⁴⁰³ This sub-section will argue that a better explanation for the spread of the new material culture of death and the forms it took was the strength and pervasive influence of 'decency', pairing this concept with that of 'decorum' as discussed by John Styles and Amanda Vickery.

Styles and Vickery argue that a sense of 'decorum' governed the distinct sense of identity and consumption patterns of the middling. They observe that during the long eighteenth century the selection and purchase of material items, and discussion of consumption, were commonly determined by what was considered 'socially appropriate' and decorous, rather than what was most fashionable and luxurious. 'Decorum,' they explain, 'required at least a nominal acceptance of prevailing social distinctions and hierarchies. The rule of decorum decreed that different forms of conduct were appropriate to different stations in life, according to social rank, age, sex, and occupation. Inappropriate diversions from the rule of decorum were criticised as indecorous.'⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, despite some contemporaries' belief that the lower and middling social orders were becoming increasingly grasping and greedy, in reality a sense of what was fitting to particular people in particular circumstances was widespread,

⁴⁰² Earle, *The Making of the English Middle*, pp. 9-11; Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, pp. 2-5.

⁴⁰³ See for example Hunt, *The Middling Sort*; French, *The Middle Sort*.

⁴⁰⁴ John Styles and Amanda Vickery, 'Introduction' in Styles and Vickery, *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, pp. 16-7

especially among the middling. This acted to determine the form of the goods they consumed and to temper potentially over-ambitious aspirations.

The importance of 'decorum' in consumption patterns therefore echoes the great weight placed upon decency and conformity to social expectations demonstrated in relation to the care of dead body, and demonstrates that not only treatment of dead body, but also its disposal and commemoration, were governed by the same socially-mediated standards of behaviour. In fact, their emphasis on propriety and behaviour tailored to circumstances mean that in many respects these terms may even be considered synonymous.

However, these standards were naturally neither static nor uniform. The questions of what constituted 'decent' display, and how this should vary between social groups and strata, were contentious issues. Notions of 'decency', and contemporary fears regarding the blurring of social distinctions, coincided with wider contemporary debate concerning the value of pomp and the social and moral effects of luxury upon different social groups. As with concerns for the body and its respectful treatment, these similarly timeless issues acquired new significance in light of the social and economic changes of the long eighteenth century, one of which was the emergence of the new material culture of death and its availability to, or demand by, the middling sort, all of which challenged long-established distinctions in funeral and mourning ritual. These debates therefore highlight the diversity and contention of definitions of decency while simultaneously reinforcing the social importance of the concept in and beyond the eighteenth century, as well as demonstrating the range of responses which material items and display elicited.

Cressy dates the question of pomp versus modesty in funerals to the Middle Ages, and describes the efforts of seventeenth-century reformers to strike a 'balance between sumptuousness and simplicity, seeking on the one hand to show due respect for the departed, on the other hand to avoid superstitious ostentation and excess.'⁴⁰⁵ Throughout the long eighteenth century too we can find persons commenting on the merits of restraint, and the emptiness of

⁴⁰⁵Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, pp. 412-3

vanity, in funerary ritual, the issue of vanity indicating a moral element to the debate similar to that seen in critiques of undertakers' greed. In a 1743 letter to Hugh Bethel, Alexander Pope commented, 'I have no Vanity nor pleasure that does not stop short of the Grave. The Duchess of Buckingham has thought otherwise, who orderd all manner of Vanities for her own funeral, & a Sum of Money to be squanderd on it, which is but necessary to preserve from starving many poor people to whom she is indebted.'⁴⁰⁶ Similarly, in an 1806 letter to his second wife, Hester, Richard Brinsley Sheridan contrasted a 'particularly decent and affecting' funeral without coach or hearse in a small village with that of the deceased's sister, which involved 'a gaudy parade and show from Bristol to Wells Cathedral, where all the mob, high and low, were in the church surveying and surrounding the vault.'⁴⁰⁷

Many individuals specified that their own funerals be without ostentation. For example, John Locke specified in his 1704 will that he wished to be

buried as privately as possible...in a plain wooden Coffin not covered with Cloth or any otherwi: adorned that cost will better be laid out in covering the poor and therefore my Will is that instead thereof four honest poor labouring men of the Neighbourhood such as I (or for want of my doing it Dame Damaris Masham aforesaid) shall name shall each of them have a coat and pair of breeches of cloth a Hatt a pair of Shooes and Stockings which will be better than the vain wast of a covering and other ornaments on my Coffin.⁴⁰⁸

Steele's *The Funeral* voiced many of the objections made against pompous death ritual from a satirical perspective at length. It described the display of funerals provided by undertakers as 'wholly Needless and Insignificant' and

⁴⁰⁶ Alexander Pope to Hugh Bethel, 31 March 1743. *Correspondence of Alexander Pope: Volume IV: 1736–1744*, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956) in *Electronic Enlightenment*, ed. Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford: version 1.3, January 2009 [http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/popealOU0040445_1key001cor accessed 11 February 2009]

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Brinsley Sheridan to Hester Jane Sheridan, 15 January 1806 (Letter 561). *The Letters of Richard Brinsley Sheridan: Volume II [Letters 200–631]* ed. Cecil Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966) in *Electronic Enlightenment*, ed. Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford: version 1.3, January 2009 [http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/sherriOU0020256c_1key001cor accessed 11 February 2009]

⁴⁰⁸ Will and testament (1704) by John Locke, 26 September 1704. *The Correspondence of John Locke: Volume 8: Letters nos. 3287–3648* ed. E. S. De Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) in *Electronic Enlightenment*, ed. Robert McNamee et al. University of Oxford: version 1.3, January 2009 [http://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/lockjoOU0080419_1key001doc accessed 11 February 2009]

'quite foreign to our Intrinsic real Happiness'.⁴⁰⁹ Despite this, the play echoes the view glimpsed elsewhere that proper ceremony was due to 'the Best and Highest of Humane Race', but only to them, and should not be 'prostituted, and bestow'd upon such as have nothing in Common with Men, but their Mortality.'⁴¹⁰ This view was not uncommon, and attacks on pomp were often qualified by the idea that it was justified, in fact necessary, for the elite, and that the encroachment of the rest of society on this privilege was a challenge to the social order.

In contrast, debates concerning luxury questioned its detrimental effects in moral rather than class-based terms. They centred less on a clearly drawn line between those who were entitled to luxury and those who were not, but rather on the boundary between necessity and luxury which, given the growing presence and availability of material goods over the long eighteenth century, was constantly shifting.⁴¹¹ Nor did the debate see luxury and its availability as purely negative. As Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger have summarised, while luxury could be seen 'as a debilitating and corrosive social evil', 'Enlightenment culture adapted itself to luxury as a positive social force, viewing it with confidence as an instrument (and indication) of the progress of civilisation', as well as mark of refinement and sign of a healthy economy.⁴¹² Over time, these positive associations superseded the negative.⁴¹³ Furthermore, the luxury debate admitted of more nuance than that surrounding 'pomp' as contemporaries recognised that different qualities of goods were purchased by different social classes, and so defined luxury not only by the nature of the product, but also by the nature of responses to them and the reasoning behind their purchase.⁴¹⁴ They thus argued that items derived their meaning from the impetus behind their consumption, rather than their outward appearance. Therefore, as with some of the mourning-related sources examined above, the

⁴⁰⁹ Steele, *The Funeral*, pp. 2-3

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4

⁴¹¹ Maxine Berg & Elizabeth Eger, 'The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates' in Berg & Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 7

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 12

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13

existence of this debate supports the already acknowledged partiality of most of the sources examined in this chapter and indicates that contemporary opinion was of far greater range than indicated by most of the sources examined above or the debate surrounding pomp, and did not uniformly condemn consumers or consumption. Even more important, it also supports the argument that consumption was a more measured activity than suggested by theories of social emulation.

The ideas that consumption was determined by 'decency' and that this, rather than items' appearance, motivated their purchase, are both crucial to explaining the form taken by the new material culture of death. The use of elite form was not a sign of social emulation. Rather, these models, and perhaps also the funerals of guild members and other occupational groups, were the only ones of any material elaboration available, and their long-established symbolic value as statements of loss and respect for the dead gave them weight and sincerity. In this sense, heraldic funerals and court mourning were themselves customary and their wider use a means of conforming to 'decent' standards.

The commercial availability of elite forms of death ritual whose meaning originally derived from a very rigid pattern of social status and hierarchy was one of the most important changes related to death and the dead in the long eighteenth century, changing the outward form of funerals and creating a new culture of mourning. Although they continued to hold their original significance among the elite, these rituals also developed a new significance to the wider population which, in the eyes of contemporaries, was related purely to wealth and fashion, rather than rank, and undermined their 'true' meaning. Whatever the opinions of detractors, by the end of the period in question most accepted that the new material culture of death had created a new standard of 'decency' for funerary and mourning ritual. This, in turn, meant that for many, its adoption was a matter of maintaining one's 'face' by complying with social expectations or, in the words of one source quoted above, not wanting to appear 'singular or deficient.'⁴¹⁵ Nonetheless, at the same time, 'decency' as it

⁴¹⁵ *Liverpool Mercury etc* (Liverpool, England), Friday, January 23, 1835

applied to death ritual became gradually more elaborate as the long eighteenth century progressed until, at the end of our period, it came under attack from some who felt that the weight of social pressures to conform in funeral and mourning ritual were financially ruinous; 'decency' itself had become excessive.

Why attitudes towards the material culture of death should have reached a kind of crisis point at this time and how this was related to the contemporary climate is not clear from the sources. What does seem clear is that there was no apparent alteration in the nature of funeral or mourning practice as a result. The most plausible explanation for this seems again to be 'decency': for most, the simplification of death ritual would have equated with a diminishment of the respect they conveyed and they were therefore unwilling to simplify the rituals attached to their commemoration and disposal, despite the inflation of the costs associated with them, and despite the arguments of some that the elaboration of these rituals had the opposite effect of that intended, and acted to distract from their true purpose. As Edwin Chadwick noted, 'For all classes, what is deemed by them respectful interment is to be considered a necessity: and in general the expenditure beyond what is necessary to ensure such interment competes not with extravagancy, but with high moral obligations.'⁴¹⁶

In conclusion, custom was, for good or ill, a crucial force in determining the spread of the new material culture of death and the forms it took. Social emulation was undoubtedly present among a few, but stronger was a sense of propriety attached to gradually but continually evolving standards of 'decency', which were attached in turn to degrees of material display. Although the new material culture of death took elite forms, this may be explained simply by these forms having an existing significance as 'decent'. The spread of the new material culture of death can therefore be seen as a form of social emulation, but one motivated by a need to respect the dead and 'keep up appearances' by maintaining, rather than overinflating, one's social position in line with expectations of 'decency'.

⁴¹⁶ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 78

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have seen evidence both of contemporary perceptions of the new material culture of death and its various aspects, and established its origins and the forces which governed its emergence and spread. Neither material goods in general, nor the ritualisation of the burial and commemoration of the dead, were fundamentally objectionable to the majority of contemporaries. However, they brought to the fore and added new dimension to a number of long-standing concepts and currents of opinion and debate pertaining to the treatment, disposal and commemoration of the dead, all of which were given renewed significance in a period which witnessed significant social and economic change. Although 'decency' and commercial, material culture were not incompatible, the increasingly commercial nature of death ritual attracted concerns. Firstly, in relation to 'decency' in the treatment of the dead and the behaviour of those who came in contact with them; commercial concerns and the manifold potential intentions which could lie behind material display were seen to lay the dead, and even the bereaved, open to potential exploitation for gain, financial and social. Death's involvement with commercial culture and consumption led in turn to the targeting of those perceived to lie behind their proliferation, the middling, whose adoption of elite-derived forms of ritual contributed to the wider blurring of social boundaries connected to the shifting social structure.

The result of this was that the new material culture of death challenged the traditional meaning of ritual forms and led to the development of a new standard of 'decency' as it pertained to the dead. This new, more elaborate, standard was one of the most important death-related developments of the long eighteenth century. In fact, in the sense that it was more widespread than undertakers or mourning suppliers, it could be considered more significant. This lack of intrinsic correlation between the new material culture of death and specialist suppliers is important, as it demonstrates that its emergence was less straightforward than has previously been argued, and that the historiographical

connection between the eighteenth century, change in attitudes towards death and the dead, and undertakers is inaccurate; even though elite-derived forms of death ritual spread further than specialist suppliers, simpler funerals involving only some heraldic elements remained the norm, and mourning practice was limited to the urban population and the wealthy. As we have seen, treatment of the body itself was left virtually unchanged. Death in the long eighteenth century was characterised to a significant extent by continuity, despite the new developments it witnessed, and when it did occur that change was not bound either to undertakers or mourning suppliers.

PART TWO

PLACE OF BURIAL

INTRODUCTION

After their committal, the dead remained in very close physical proximity to the living. The second part of this thesis will demonstrate this and examine how treatment of the dead and the concept of 'decency' as applied to their remains, and memories, changed once the dead were below ground. A key theme of the following chapters is the flexibility and movement of remains and of the boundaries of burial spaces. Neither phenomenon was unique to the eighteenth century, but during the period both phenomena accelerated in a number of respects owing to population growth and its effects on the use, management and apportionment of urban space. The consequence was that by the close of our period the practice of burying the dead in towns had become insupportable and was nearing its end, marking a very significant change in the spatial position of the dead in English society. The long eighteenth century therefore marked the final stage of a practice which had existed in England for a millennium. However, although in hindsight the end of urban burial seems a logical and inevitable consequence of eighteenth-century conditions, contemporaries did not perceive the matter as such; the practice was so ingrained and so central to the social and cultural position of the dead that urban burial persisted long after it reached crisis point, with widespread and concerted efforts for reform coming only at the very end of the period in question.

The chapters in this part of the thesis will explore burial places' position within the urban landscape, their management and gradual overcrowding, relating these issues to the range of pressures brought to bear on the spaces of the dead by changes in living society, and the consequences of these changes

upon the status and treatment of human remains. It begins, however, by examining the meaning attached to burial grounds and the factors which determined burial within them.

A significant degree of continuity existed between pre- and post-reformation attitudes towards burial. Interment in and around churches continued, despite reformed theology deeming no place to be more sacred than another. By the eighteenth century the vast majority of burials took place in churchyards as they were cheaper than churches. They also had more available space, although this situation would become an increasingly relative one. Burial outside consecrated or otherwise religiously defined spaces was unthinkable to almost all denominations. Only Quakers, who rejected the idea of sacred ground, and individuals considered to have forfeited their right to Christian burial would be interred in unconsecrated ground, although even the latter could still be included. At this fundamental level the nature and place of burial were determined by a religious framework, more so, and more explicitly, than any aspect of the body's treatment either before or after interment.

However, the significance of burial grounds and, in particular, grave locations was more than just religious. As with funerals and their form, burial also communicated a number of secular statements regarding different aspects of identity, individual and communal, including social position and wealth. The importance of burial grounds and graves as sites of identity and memory was as important as their continued spiritual significance, and together these factors account for parish burial grounds' continued use in the face of theological and social changes. In arguing thus, the chapter challenges the arguments of Ralph Houlbrooke and Vanessa Harding, both of whom argue that by the early eighteenth century the importance attached to place of burial had diminished. Houlbrooke argues this on the basis of wills, which gradually ceased to specify desired grave location, while Harding, focusing on London, has pointed to the

fragmentation of traditional communities and increasing anonymity of urban areas as a key contributing factor.⁴¹⁷

Concentrating primarily on Anglican churchyards, but also considering church burial and the burial places of other denominations, this chapter will examine the overlapping sacred and secular significance of burial places and the factors which determined choice of burial location within them. It will also consider the attitudes towards human remains which the various features of these practices suggest. The available sources, largely limited to burial registers, maps and plans of graveyards and a small selection of vestry records and newspapers, are few and able to give only a broad picture of burial practice during the period. However, they suggest clear themes and concerns from which firm, if general, conclusions can be drawn.

RELIGION

This section will consider the role of religion in determining burial place and specific grave location. It will demonstrate the increase in denomination-specific burial grounds able to develop following the 1689 Act of Toleration, but will also show that burial was not necessarily determined by denomination; Anglican parish churchyards had been used by multiple denominations prior to 1689, and this continued during the long eighteenth century. In addition, it will be shown that Anglican burial places could be tolerant of those who were technically spiritual 'outcasts', but that, despite burial places' overall diversity, specific grave locations within them could reflect and perpetuate gradations of spiritual status. Prior to examining these issues, the religious significance of interment and the accompanying burial service will be considered.

⁴¹⁷ Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 131; Vanessa Harding, 'Burial on the Margin: Distance and Discrimination in Early Modern London' in Cox, *Grave Concerns*, pp. 9, 35-6, 54.

THE SERVICE

Burial services were usually conducted wherever the body was to be buried, meaning most were conducted in churchyards, as illustrated by Figures 20 and 21.



Figure 20. George Scharf , 'Old St Pancras Church; view inside the churchyard' (1818) © The Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 21. Francesco Bartolozzi, 'Burying the dead' (1792) © The Trustees of the British Museum

Figure 21 depicts the reading of the burial service, some form of which would have been read at almost every funeral, regardless of denomination.⁴¹⁸ If it were within the financial capabilities of the bereaved, an additional individual funeral sermon summarising and praising the deceased's character and deeds might be commissioned and read, a practice equally unconstrained by denomination. Many sermons were subsequently published as memorials, and encouragements to preparatory consideration of death.⁴¹⁹

The moment was of personal and social as well as spiritual significance, acting to adjust and reconsolidate disrupted communal and emotional bonds. Nonetheless, burial, the point at which the body was ritually transferred from the world of the living to the underground world of the dead, was shaped by religion more completely than any other aspect of the body's treatment before or after this pivotal moment. The focus of the burial service, and funeral sermons, was upon the spiritual: the destination of the soul, the deceased's piety in life and their preparedness for death. It was also a confirmation that the body itself was now empty, mere 'clay', its animating spirit departed, and an overall reinforcement of the relevant religious community's beliefs regarding death and the afterlife.

It was additionally, if more implicitly, a reinforcement of remains' lack of spiritual power and significance in Protestant theology, which dictated that their treatment could not affect the more important issue of the fate of the soul. As we will see, at the point of their disposal they had an emotional value, and the living a social obligation to treat them 'decently', which influenced the nature and place of their interment. However, in the long term their spiritual status, in conjunction with their movement over time as a result of both decay and overcrowding, contributed to a more casual attitude towards decayed remains, i.e. bones, and the shifting of emotional ties from the remains themselves and a specific grave to the general place of their interment. The

⁴¹⁸ Exceptions would be the strictest Quakers and sometimes paupers, as noted in section three of this chapter.

⁴¹⁹ Gittings, 'Sacred and Secular', p. 158; Houlbrooke, 'The Age of Decency', pp. 187-8.

resulting emphasis on the importance of abstract memory rather than physical remains, to be detailed in the final section of this chapter, seems the most likely explanation for the phenomena to be described in the following chapters, all of which indicate that once burial was complete, 'decent' treatment of the dead could constitute something more casual than we have hitherto seen.

DIVERSITY

As stated, virtually all burials were made in ground owned and defined by a religious group, whether or not this ground was consecrated. Most urban areas were divided into a number of Anglican parishes, each of which had its own church and associated burial ground, or grounds, used by the parish community. In addition to these existed a number of burial grounds belonging to other religious communities, Christian and non-Christian, all of which increased in number during the long eighteenth century.

Although some Quakers took Protestant theology to its logical conclusion and buried without ceremony, and in some cases without ministers in profane ground such as gardens or orchards, many buried in allocated burial places.⁴²⁰ Their views, the most stringent regarding death ritual among nonconformists, meant that they were the first dissenting group to establish their own burial places, in many cases doing so before 1689. In Bristol they had two grounds, Redcliffe Pit and the Friars Ground on Rosemary Street, while in York Quakers buried in a ground on Bishophill, purchased in 1667 and extended in 1823.⁴²¹ In Bristol, Baptists also established their own grounds at an early date, prior to the Act of Toleration. Like the Quakers, they had two burial grounds in the city. The first, located off Redcross Street, was established in 1683 and used only by the congregation of Broadmead chapel. The second, known as New Ground East, was established in 1722 and shared by both the Broadmead and the Pithay

⁴²⁰ D. J. Steel, *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy and Family History*, National Index of Parish Registers Volume 2 (London: Phillimore, 1973), pp. 507, 674-5, 677; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, p. 337.

⁴²¹ The Friars Ground was in use from 1700 until 1946. An 1948 compilation of all the burials made there estimates that about two hundred and fifty bodies were buried there between 1700-1808. See BRO/SF/R2/1(h), Burial records for the Redcliffe Pit and Rosemary Street burial grounds. For information on the Bishophill ground see Hugh Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1994), p. 129

chapel congregations.⁴²² Both Bristol and York also had Unitarian communities. A burial ground was acquired for Lewins Mead Chapel in Bristol in 1767, six years after it became full Unitarian, and the first burial took place there the following year.⁴²³ In York, however, although Unitarians had a chapel on St Saviourgate, established in 1692, it only became Unitarian in the early nineteenth century, having, like Lewins Mead, initially been Presbyterian,⁴²⁴ and very few people were buried there.⁴²⁵

The tiny numbers of people interred in the St Saviourgate chapel indicate that the majority of the Presbyterian and later Unitarian congregations were buried in Anglican grounds. This was common among smaller non-Anglican communities, many of whom did not establish their own burial places until later in the eighteenth century, and reflected the practice of previous centuries, when alternatives for all nonconformists were far fewer.⁴²⁶ For instance, Bristol had a small Congregationalist/Independent community who established their own place of worship, Brunswick Chapel, in 1834. It had its own vaults, but only five to ten were buried each year for the first few decades after its establishment.⁴²⁷ These modest numbers of deaths, which would have been even fewer in previous decades, could therefore be easily absorbed by Anglican burial places. Bristol's Huguenot population, well-established even prior to 1689, had long worshipped and buried with Anglicans. Methodists too typically buried in Anglican parish churches, where they also tended to be baptised and married, as most Methodists were Anglican until 1790.⁴²⁸ In some cases their own ministers were permitted to conduct these services.⁴²⁹ For instance, in Bristol Wesley's early congregation worshipped at St James's parish church. They later established the New Room in which to worship, and in 1792 the Portland Street Chapel was opened, reflecting the establishment of Methodism

⁴²² BRO/Bd/RS/4

⁴²³ BRO/39461/BG/2, Lewins Mead burial register; Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol*, p. 372.

⁴²⁴ Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, p. 146

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁴²⁶ Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death*, p. 466; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family*, pp. 336-7.

⁴²⁷ BRO/38038/6, Burial register of Brunswick Congregational Chapel

⁴²⁸ Steel, *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy*, p. 508

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 568

as a separate denomination, rather than additional aspect of Anglicanism, several years earlier. The New Room had no burial place attached, but at Portland Street they buried in the vaults from 1793, and in the churchyard from 1821.⁴³⁰

Even Catholics were buried in Anglican grounds, given that their own religious practices, and therefore the existence of Catholic churches and burial grounds, were illegal until 1792.⁴³¹ York's Catholic population buried their dead in the ground of Holy Trinity Micklegate parish until establishing their own burial place in 1825.⁴³² In Bristol Catholics worshipped in St Joseph's, opened in 1790. It is unknown where their burials took place. The primary non-Christian community present in eighteenth-century England were the Jews, who gradually started returning to the British Isles during the period. In Bristol they began to return from around 1740.⁴³³ According to Judith Samuel they established a synagogue in 1756 and by 1759 a burial ground in the parish of St Philip & St Jacob which came to be known as Barton Road Cemetery, although other contemporary sources suggest that the burial ground may have been established earlier, between 1740 and 1750.⁴³⁴ York did not have any non-Christian places of worship or burial during our period.

England during the long eighteenth century was therefore a place of religious plurality, and a significant degree of religious tolerance, in which non-Anglican burial places increased in number but Anglican grounds also served as resting places for the dead of a variety of denominations. The sources consulted do not suggest that this was fundamentally problematic or controversial, although this issue is deserving of further research.

⁴³⁰ BRO/21780/21/a(i), Portland Street burial registers

⁴³¹ Steel, *Sources for Nonconformist Genealogy*, p. 509

⁴³² Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, pp. 140-1

⁴³³ Judith Samuel, *Jews in Bristol: The History of the Jewish Community in Bristol from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1997), p. 45

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 74; John Browning and Henry Baker, 'The Number of People in the City of Bristol, Calculated from the Burials for Ten Years Successive, and Also from the Number of Houses; By John Browning, Esq; Of Barton-Hill Near Bristol: Communicated by Henry Baker, F. R. S.', *Philosophical Transactions (1683-1775)*, Vol. 48, (1753 - 1754), pp. 217-220.

'OUTCASTS'

Parish churchyards accepted not only non-Anglicans, but also those who might technically be deemed outside the Christian community by virtue of their actions or some other aspect of their social or spiritual status, for example criminals or the unbaptised. It is sometimes stated that when admitted into consecrated ground such individuals were confined to the least spiritually desirable area, traditionally considered to be the north side owing to its association with malevolent forces. This practice certainly existed.⁴³⁵ However, just how rigidly the line between those deemed either worthy or unworthy of Christian burial was drawn in different times and places is unclear, as is the prevalence of burying the 'unworthy' on the north side of churchyards. It was almost certainly less likely in urban areas where communities were more diverse and space at a premium.

However, although individuals of questionable spiritual status might be accepted into churchyards, their bodies could still be marked or punished for their actions. Although not in line with theological conceptions of the body, discussed above, it remained a feature of 'popular' religion in town as well as country throughout the long eighteenth century. For example, as late as 1834 the body of a man who murdered a woman and her four children before killing himself was buried in the poor ground of the London parish of St James, Clerkenwell, *The Times* reporting that 'in lieu of the old custom of driving a stake through the body', the body was removed from its coffin by the graveside by two men, who held it 'horizontally over the grave, when they gave it a turn, and it fell to the bottom, with the face downwards...When the earth was partly put over the body, one of the assistants struck the earth immediately over the deceased's skull many times, as hard as he could, with a large iron mallet, with a view, as we understood, to smash the head.'⁴³⁶

Therefore, although Anglican grounds appear to have been inclusive and tolerant overall, the burial of 'outcasts' could be carried out in a way which

⁴³⁵ For example, after his execution in 1777 the body of a Mr Dodd, convicted of forgery, was buried near Uxbridge 'on the north side of the church.' See *General Evening Post*, Thursday, July 10, 1777.

⁴³⁶ *The Times*, Tuesday, September 16, 1834, p. 3

reflected their inferior spiritual status and punished them for it, either through place of burial or, in some cases, upon their body. Both of these practices demonstrate, almost uniquely among the sources used in this thesis, that different layers of religious belief regarding death, the body and the afterlife co-existed in eighteenth-century England, a very important topic worthy of future investigation.

CHURCH BURIAL

With the exception of beliefs associated with the north side of the churchyard, whose prevalence and provenance is unclear, churchyards do not seem to have been understood through a hierarchy of desirability correlated to the greater or lesser spiritual value of certain areas within them. In contrast, burial within the fabric of a place of worship and the specific location of one's grave therein was a particularly explicit demonstration not only of one's belonging to a religious community, but also of personal piety and individual spiritual status.

These factors contributed to the popularity of church burial, a practice dating to the early middle ages, and meant that by the eighteenth century space was limited and annual numbers of church burials per parish typically low. For example, the York parish of St Martin-cum-Gregory averaged four to six burials per year during the period, these numbers falling off even further by the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴³⁷ Similarly, during the early part of the eighteenth century St John, Ousebridge, also in York, buried on average between five and seven bodies in the body of its church each year, but by the 1760s numbers had fallen to just one or two per year.⁴³⁸ In some parishes, the structural instability caused by repeated disruption of the church fabric in the process of making graves contributed to the practice waning, or being banned altogether. In 1732 St Stephens, Bristol, found that the structure of their church was being undermined by the number of graves it contained, which were numerous because the parish's charge for church burials was low. However, in

⁴³⁷ BOR/PR/Y/MG/20, Churchwardens' accounts of St Martin-cum-Gregory, York

⁴³⁸ BOR/PR/Y/J/18, Churchwardens' accounts of St John, Ousebridge, York

response they simply raised their prices, and did not actually ban the practice until 1763.⁴³⁹

This example illustrates that the cost of burial within churches was usually high and therefore a good source of revenue for parishes, this presumably explaining why St Stephens persisted with the practice long after it became problematic. Unlike the uniform cost of churchyard burial, church burial cost more the closer to the altar one was placed. In addition to these costs was that of 'breaking the ground', a considerable undertaking involving the removal and subsequent replacement of sections of the church's floor and reinforcement of the vault beneath, which was often more expensive than burial itself.⁴⁴⁰

As Coster and Spicer have observed, sacred space was often 'sub-divided in ways that reflected and reinforced the nature of the social order', conferring upon these spaces various forms and degrees of meaning beyond the spiritual, a phenomenon clearly visible in burial practice, in particular burial within churches.⁴⁴¹ Just as 'outcasts' might be relegated to positions deemed to have least spiritual value, the elite were able to monopolise the most spiritually desirable positions and so, while diverse and inclusive, burial places, in particular churches, also reflected the social hierarchy and secular aspects of identity.

In sum, during the long eighteenth century virtually all people would be buried with religious ceremony and in ground specifically allocated and ritually defined by religious institutions and communities, and as such the disposal of the dead took place in a fundamentally religious context, both physically and in a more abstract spiritual sense. This was not necessarily determined by denomination, as Anglican parish grounds acted as the resting places for a variety of nonconformists and even non-Protestants. Spiritual considerations could also determine specific grave location within these places,

⁴³⁹ Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol*, pp. 182-3

⁴⁴⁰ BRO/P/St.Aug/V/1/(b), Vestry minutes of St. Augustine-the-Less, Bristol, p. 142

⁴⁴¹ Will Coster & Andrew Spicer, 'Introduction: the Dimensions of Sacred Space in Reformation Europe' in Will Coster & Andrew Spicer (eds), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 9; Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 146.

particularly in the cases of 'outcasts' and those who chose church burial. However, the latter instance also demonstrates that other, secular, factors influenced and were inseparable from the meaning attached to both burial places in general and specific grave locations, and thus that religion was only one aspect of their meaning and the components of identity expressed through them.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

In most burial grounds individuals were at liberty to choose any grave location they pleased, providing that the desired space was not already full, that it was affordable to them and that they were not of a social position which removed the decision from their hands. We have already seen how this process worked in relation to spiritual considerations. This section will demonstrate the concomitant role of secular factors. Principal among the secular expressions of identity expressed through burial places and grave locations was a sense of belonging to a family and to a parish. The former tended to determine grave location, while the latter could be expressed through both grave location and burial ground. As with religion, the evidence we have for these phenomena is derived from sources which reveal exclusion as well as inclusion, lack of choice as well as freedom of choice, and which therefore provide further evidence that burial places and grave locations reflected the structure of living society.

FAMILY

The sources examined reveal a trend towards the deliberate choice of burial place and grave location based upon family ties during the eighteenth century, a trend also observed by Clare Gittings.⁴⁴² The sources also indicate that this applied to all burial places regardless of denomination or class.

One of the clearest examples of the tendency to be buried with loved ones is the burial register of Howlands Road burial ground, a private ground in Bristol which operated during the first half of the nineteenth century. The number of

⁴⁴² Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 87

burials made in each plot ranged from one to seventeen, but was on average between six and ten.⁴⁴³ Many plots were dominated by particular family names, some completely. In most cases at least half, although more often the majority or all, of the individuals with shared names were infants or children under the age of ten.⁴⁴⁴ Where adults were also buried with them they were either of an age suggesting that they were parents or, more commonly, grandparents.⁴⁴⁵ It is striking that most burials were of individuals under ten or over fifty, reflecting overall mortality patterns. In some cases, parents seem to have died first, and their children later.⁴⁴⁶ In others, it would appear that adult children whose parents and infant siblings were buried earlier in the period chose to be buried alongside them.⁴⁴⁷ The burial of couples, often elderly, is also shown, occasionally alongside individuals who appear to be their adult children.⁴⁴⁸ Dissenters' burial grounds such as those belonging to Lewins Mead Unitarian Chapel and the Quaker Redcliffe Pit burial ground, both in Bristol, also indicate a preference for burial with or near family, and, in the case of the former, of the burial of infants and children together.⁴⁴⁹

The importance of burial with relations is further emphasised by the existence of faculties granting the movement of interred remains from their original places of burial to different locations, either within the same burial ground, between different parts of the country, or even to different countries altogether.⁴⁵⁰ These requests could come at any time from months to years after death had taken place, indicating that the importance of proximity to family in death was not confined to the period immediately after death, did not lessen over time and could make those to whom it was affordable go to the somewhat

⁴⁴³ BRO/11930/1, Register of Howlands Road burial ground, C1; C2

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., A12; A13; A17; B6; B7; CC14; DD9; DD12; EE4

⁴⁴⁵ For example Ibid., A3; C20; D15; E9; E18; AA7; CC11.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., E15

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., AA11; DD3

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., BB6; BB7

⁴⁴⁹ BRO/39461/R/2(a), Burial register of Lewins Mead Chapel; BRO/40804/1, Plan of the Friends' Burial Ground.

⁴⁵⁰ See the following documents pertaining to the Honey Pen Hill burial ground of St Andrew, Clifton, Bristol: BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/2; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/3; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/6; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/11; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/12(b). See also the following faculties for the removal of bodies from burial grounds in the Diocese of York: BOR/Reg. 35, f. 122v; BOR/Reg. 38, f. 225r; BOR/Reg. 41A, p. 97; BOR/Reg. 44, pp. 656-7; BOR/Reg. 44, pp. 875-6; BOR/Reg. 44, pp. 799-80; BOR/Reg. 39, ff 2r-v, 5v-6r.

extreme measure of disinterring and transporting remains over sometimes very long distances.⁴⁵¹ There is also some evidence for the reflection of extended family ties in burial location. The Howlands Road register includes cases where individuals with the same surname were buried in one place, but whose dates of birth and death make it either impossible or very unlikely that they were generations of the same immediate family, implying they could well have been extended family.

Although the trend for burial with or near family was not absolute, the sources nonetheless suggest that, overall, it was the dominant factor in grave choice, secular or sacred, for all classes and denominations during the eighteenth century, reflecting the crucial role of the family as a structural unit and locus of individual and collective identity in contemporary society. The trend for infant siblings to be buried together is particularly notable. Although in part a reflection of the high infant mortality rates of the period, it is also a powerful statement of the affective nature of family relationships and the value of infants and children in eighteenth-century society.

It also demonstrates that the importance of proximity to the deceased to family and friends was not only a feature of attitudes towards the dead body before burial, but that it dictated that in death the remains of relatives would rest together. As such, we can see that, although from a theological perspective physical remains held little intrinsic significance, their burial location held an enduring emotional importance which endured over time.

'STRANGERS'

It has been demonstrated that burial choice was not necessarily free for those considered to have put themselves outside of the spiritual community, with the potential existing either for their exclusion or inclusion according to a spiritually determined hierarchy of space. Similar potential restrictions on the burial grounds and grave locations available to 'strangers', non-members of a given parish community, also existed.

⁴⁵¹ See the following faculties for the removal of bodies to and from the Honey Pen Hill burial ground of St Andrew, Clifton. Bristol: BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/9; BRO/ P/St A/ChW/4/10; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/8.

In theory, the deterrence, if not outright exclusion, of non-parishioners was widespread in the form of steep burial fees, usually double the normal rate. There is also some evidence that certain parishes sought not only to enforce these fees, but also to limit 'strangers' to particular areas of their burial grounds. For instance, in 1806 St Olave in York resolved to strictly adhere to an order of 1792 setting the price of burial for non-parishioners at the rather princely sum of one guinea. At the same time, they resolved to enforce another lapsed measure, dating from at least 1742, which decreed that 'strangers' should only be buried in the east end of the churchyard in an area reserved for that purpose. Exceptions were to be allowed only if the deceased had relatives buried elsewhere in the ground, in which case they were permitted to join them.⁴⁵²

The first resolution was considered too strict for implementation, indicating acceptance, although perhaps not welcoming, of non-parishioners. Whether the parish followed through with the second is unknown. What is clear is that their tolerance of non-parishioners continued to be tested, and in 1822 the parish again turned its attention to 'strangers', deciding that the burial of people dying in other parishes was unlawful and so prohibiting the burial of 'strangers' completely. Their reasons, not made clear in 1806, were that with the current increase in the parish's own population admittance of outsiders stretched their already limited burial capacity.⁴⁵³

With the exception of one Bristol source, dating from 1746, which also mentions the limitation of strangers to the east side of the churchyard, no similar sources have been found, and so no firm conclusions as to attitudes towards 'strangers' can be drawn.⁴⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the concept of 'strangers' and the attitude of St Olave offer several insights into the significance of parochial identity. Firstly, they show that the distinction between parishioners and 'strangers' continued into the long eighteenth century and therefore that, despite changes to the social structure and urban environment, parochial

⁴⁵² BOR/PR/Y/OL/18, Churchwardens' accounts of St Olave, York

⁴⁵³ BOR/PR/Y/OL/19, Churchwardens' accounts of St Olave, York

⁴⁵⁴ BRO/P/XCh/V/1(b), Vestry minutes of Christ Church, Bristol

identities remained strong.⁴⁵⁵ This could even extend to the physical separation of the two groups, although the significance of the eastern part of churchyards is unclear. As chapter seven will show, the continued importance of parochial identity is also suggested by opposition to extramural burial. However, the example of St Olave equally demonstrates that for much of the period this separation remained a theoretical one. Additional fees for 'strangers' were not usually enforced, nor was separate burial, indicating once again that Anglican burial grounds tolerated diversity. Furthermore, the parish's policies and intentions acknowledge the primacy of family ties in grave selection, and therefore identity, over parish allegiance, as well as the important fact that family attachments crossed parish lines. As St Olave made clear, their desires to reassert the line between parishioners and 'strangers' was a means to reduce the number of bodies parishes received, 'strangers' evidently being the most easily definable, and perhaps most numerous, group who could be targeted for exclusion in the interests of space-saving.

In sum, although the sources consulted offer limited information, it does not seem unreasonable to make several generalisations from them. We can confidently state that, if possible, burial in one's own parish was highly desirable and would be willingly forfeited only in favour of family ties. However, although parish identity was important, it did not influence burial location absolutely and, for a variety of reasons, individuals might be buried in parishes other than their own. They were, by and large, accepted in these grounds. However, population growth put pressure on available space and forced some parishes to exclude certain groups, among whom 'strangers' were easily definable. The same was also true of paupers, although their exclusion, linked to a wider social status and identity, could have a more punitive aspect.

PAUPERS

Like 'strangers', paupers buried at the expense of their parish were a clearly defined group who, as pressures on space became more acute, were liable to be

⁴⁵⁵ The work of Keith Snell on grave stone inscriptions supports this idea. See K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 454–495.

singled out either for burial in predetermined locations, which took the form of communal graves, or for exclusion into designated parish 'poor grounds', or other burial grounds with more space. Although these practices were largely confined to the capital, they represent the starkest way in which social status could act as a limiting or excluding factor in burial. Their significance was compounded by the fact that paupers were more numerous than 'outcasts' or 'strangers', and had a distinct position in wider society, defined by various social, administrative and cultural factors. These factors, combined with exclusionary burial practice, acted to mutually reinforce one another and contributed to the development of an ascribed impersonal and inferior collective identity, an identity in stark contrast to self-ascribed and desired familial and parochial identities.

It has already been demonstrated that graves were commonly shared during the long eighteenth century, as in previous centuries. However, this was usually a matter of choice, typically based upon an existing connection between the bodies in life. In contrast to this was the communal burial of paupers' bodies either in pits or specific 'poor grounds'. Pauper pits had their origins in plague pits, which continued to be used in times of epidemic into the seventeenth century, but do not seem to have been used in this way during the eighteenth century; instead, epidemic victims were given individual graves either within churchyards or in special burial grounds established for the purpose, such as York's Cholera Ground.⁴⁵⁶ References to communal burial pits for the poor can be traced back to the 1720s in London, where they appear to have been most common throughout the period in question.⁴⁵⁷ Poor grounds would also have been most common in the capital, but the date of their emergence is unknown.

Both pits and separate grounds, which appear to have been composed of pits rather than graves, attracted negative attention on sanitary grounds. For example, in 1765 an inhabitant of St Martin's Lane in London, whose home

⁴⁵⁶ This is in contrast to Paris, for example, where the use of large communal burial pits, regularly emptied and the remains stored in charnel houses, was commonplace. See Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 64-5, 69.

⁴⁵⁷ Dorothy George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century* (1925), p. 353, quoted in Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 64.

adjoined a poor ground, informed the *Public Advertiser* that 'Into this place are daily brought several dead Bodies, which are there left in the Ground, inclosed in Shells, as close as they can possible be laid to each other, with no other covering than a few Boards placed over the Mouth of the Grave, neither dust or earth being thrown upon them,' and without any service being performed over them.⁴⁵⁸ In 1774 another newspaper complainant described the practice in similar terms. In a letter regarding unsanitary burial practices, he argued that

the greatest Evil is what are called Parish or Poor's Graves: These are Pits capable of holding three or four coffins abreast, and about seven in Depth, and are always kept open till they are full, and the Tops are covered over with Earth; and then another Pit about the same size is dug on the Side of it, leaving the Sides of the former Coffins still exposed; and thus you may say these Graves are always open.⁴⁵⁹

These descriptions also accord with those of George Alfred Walker, who in 1839 recorded pits kept open for four weeks until filled with seventeen or eighteen bodies packed in without soil.⁴⁶⁰

However, while sanitary issues were prominent in these complaints, they also indicate concern for the 'decent' treatment of the dead, who should be committed with religious ceremony and fully interred in the earth. These concerns accord with standards of 'decency', as they applied to burial, already identified: although remains did not hold a spiritual value, they nonetheless deserved a Christian burial and full transferral from the living world above ground to that of the dead below before their remains suffered the indignity of public decay.

Evidence for the existence of pauper pits in Bristol might tenuously be drawn from the Howlands Road burial register discussed above. In it, amongst the graves dominated by families, were several in which there were no shared names. Significantly, these highly diverse graves also seem to be the most populous, one containing seventeen bodies. It is not unthinkable that they

⁴⁵⁸ *Public Advertiser*, Monday, August 5, 1765

⁴⁵⁹ *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, April 21, 1774

⁴⁶⁰ George Alfred Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (London, 1839) repr. Kessinger Publishing 2003, p. 139

indicate large communal graves which, in an intramural burial place such as Howlands Road, seem unlikely to have been used for any group other than the poor.⁴⁶¹ Other than this, no evidence has been found indicating the use of communal graves or the existence of separate burial grounds for the poor in Bristol or York. Some Bristol parishes seem to have used the burial ground of St Peters workhouse for the burial of paupers, although whether they used pits is unknown. For example, St Stephen's paid St Peters hospital to bury parish paupers in the 1840s, a time at which pressure on space from population growth was most acute.⁴⁶²

There is evidence for the exclusion of the poor in other ways in these cities. One Bristol source indicates that the parish of St Ewen excluded the poor from their churchyard in July 1778 'for the time being', although they granted them the full cost of burial in another location.⁴⁶³ Their reasoning for this decision is not specified, but it most probably indicates a lack of space caused or exacerbated by a large number of paupers in the parish. This example, and the practice of sending paupers to be buried in the workhouse burial ground, illustrate particularly clearly that, like 'strangers', paupers were a readily distinguishable group who could easily be diverted from primary parish grounds. However, they also show that, although excluded, parishes continued to provide financially for their poor, even spending additional money to secure them burial places.

Attitudes to paupers as expressed through burial, and in wider society, were therefore somewhat mixed. While parishes provided for their funerals fairly generously, as seen in chapter three, paupers were the first to suffer from measures to save on burial space. At best, this resulted in their confinement in separate grounds which retained some connection to their parish and therefore parochial identity. At worst, it meant their burial in institutional grounds

⁴⁶¹ BRO/11930/1, Register of Howlands Road burial ground, C4; C7; B20; D10; D18

⁴⁶² BRO/P/St.S/ChW/1(a), Churchwardens' accounts of St Stephen, Bristol

⁴⁶³ They agreed 'That whenever any application in future shall be made for the above purpose, the Churchwarden for the time being shall and may allow and pay unto such person or persons so applying the whole Expence attending such Burial in any other place that shall be tho^t. convenient for that purpose.' See BRO/P/St.E.V/2, Vestry minutes of St Ewen, Bristol.

and/or in conditions which scarcely conformed to 'decent' standards, even to the extent that some paupers were not accorded the burial service. These measures, whether deliberately or otherwise, had a strongly punitive character which contributed to and reinforced wider notions of paupers' inferiority, an attitude towards the poor which would be more fully realised in the Victorian era. They were the first and the most likely to suffer from the effects of overcrowding, to be discussed fully in chapter seven, just as the strictures of the New Poor Law and restricted burial times led to the long-term retention of decaying remains becoming commonplace among them, as shown in chapter one.

A number of questions remain regarding pauper burial: it cannot be said how common these phenomena were nationwide, whether communal pits and poor grounds were reserved solely for those buried on the parish, or whether those buried on the parish had to be buried in these ways and places. Despite this, it is clear that the exclusion of paupers was more absolute, more widespread and of longer standing than that of 'strangers' or 'outcasts'. The means and places of burial discussed were impersonal, at best according the poor a place in parish ground, albeit of inferior status, and conditions often failed to meet basic standards of 'decency'. The position of paupers is yet another indication that those at the lower ends of the social hierarchy were most likely to be marginalised and have their freedom of choice in burial location taken away from them. The result in this particular case was the creation of an identity which was related more to class and financial status than to personally significant factors such as family and community.

This section has demonstrated that just as parishes were far more than religious communities, so their burial grounds reflected not only spiritual belonging but also secular aspects of social position. As in the case of spiritual considerations, they did so by drawing lines between different groups. However, for the most part these appear to have been enforced only in times of strain on space, indicating once again that Anglican churchyards in particular

appear to have been on the whole inclusive and tolerant spaces reflecting the variety and hierarchy of living society. The position of paupers, however, was both a very significant exception to the idea of inclusion and one of the most obvious proofs for the reflection of social status through place and manner of burial. Both through inclusion and exclusion burial places reflected society in microcosm, communicating aspects of spiritual status, social status and wealth, communal and family belonging. The issue of family is particularly important in demonstrating that underground, as well as above it, proximity to loved ones was considered desirable and that human remains retained an important emotional significance, while the treatment of some paupers shows that once underground and away from the protection of the living, remains were not always treated decently.

INDIVIDUATION AND IMPERMANENCE

This section will further explore the ambiguous treatment and meaning of remains. In contrast to the statements of primarily collective identity made through both chosen and allocated grounds and graves considered hitherto, it will examine the expression of individuality through memorialisation. As part of this, the nature, extent and duration of remains' and memories' attachment to places, and the attitudes towards the dead and their remains which they reveal, will be considered.

Memorialisation was fairly limited during the eighteenth century. Descriptions of burial grounds indicate that, at least by the end of the period in question, they often contained significant numbers of memorials. For instance, the York directory for 1843 observed that the 'extensive' churchyard of St Mary Bishophill the Elder 'abounds with tombstones', and that the 'spacious' churchyard of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, as 'well filled with tombstones'.⁴⁶⁴ However, even if numerous, a churchyard's gravestones and other monuments would represent only a small proportion of the bodies buried therein, not only

⁴⁶⁴ *City of York Directory* (Hull, 1843), pp. 141-3

because many parish churchyards contained centuries of bodies, but because even simple memorials were expensive if made of stone, and significant additional charges were levied for their erection. Unsurprisingly, John Brand noted in 1777 that 'The Custom of laying flat *Stones* in our Churches and Church-yards...on which are inscribed Epitaphs containing the Name, Age, Character, &c.' were confined to 'the Graves of better Sort of Persons'.⁴⁶⁵ Whether memorials, like heraldic-style funerals and court-derived mourning, became more affordable and desirable to people beyond the elite over the course of the eighteenth century, constituting another feature of the new material culture of death, cannot be ascertained, as few parish documents include records of payments for monuments other than those erected in churches.

The presence and even the size and appearance of memorials were controlled by parishes, whose attitudes towards memorials varied.⁴⁶⁶ Some parishes periodically reacted against unauthorised memorials. For instance, in 1760, in response to gravestones placed in their churchyard without 'any legal authority (the same being prejudicial and inconvenient)', the Yorkshire parish of Flockton removed the stones to the edges of their yard.⁴⁶⁷ Other parishes appear to have had unconditional objections to any churchyard monument. For example, also in 1760, All Saints North Street parish in York ordered the removal of all gravestones from the churchyard into the body of the church, an unusual measure not documented in any other source consulted.⁴⁶⁸ Nonetheless, authorised or otherwise, when present memorials would be retained and treated with care, even if they were moved. For example, fearing that the demolition of the old church in St Andrew's, Bristol, would damage the stones standing in the yard, they were taken down and reinstated after the building

⁴⁶⁵ Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, p. 37

⁴⁶⁶ BOR/P/St.Aug/V/1(b), Vestry minutes of St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol, p. 143; BOR/P/St.J/V/1/7, Vestry minutes of St John the Baptist, Bristol, p. 225.

⁴⁶⁷ BOR/Fac. Bk. 1, pp. 322-3, Faculty for the removal of grave stones in Flockton churchyard

⁴⁶⁸ BOR/PR/Y/ASN/11, Churchwardens' accounts of All Saints, North Street, York

was complete.⁴⁶⁹ Even fragmented memorials would be retained and cared for; in November 1735, St James, Bristol, ordered that grave stones broken by trees felled by high winds be collected and the pieces with inscriptions kept and 'laid down'.⁴⁷⁰ The importance of memorials is reinforced by angry reactions to their damage through vandalism, to be detailed in the following chapter.

Less permanent forms of memorialisation, such as flowers, also existed, but their prevalence is unclear. Henry Bourne, discussing the 'Custom of *strawing Flowers upon the Graves of their departed Friends*' in 1725, judged the practice 'harmless and innocent', implying that it was objectionable to some, most likely on the grounds that, as the dead were beyond the reach of the living and their spiritual status unalterable, such practices were unnecessary and perhaps even superstitious. Possibly for the same reason, visiting graves also appears to have been uncommon, at least until the early nineteenth century, when references to it increase. For example, when the lease of St Michael-le-Belfry's burial ground, York, ended in the 1850s, the feoffees were instructed to allow the friends and relatives of the deceased to 'inspect their graves...at all reasonable times'.⁴⁷¹ However, although visiting does not appear to have been commonplace, certain measures to ensure the long-term preservation of graves might be taken; John Brand, noted that fencing graves around with 'Osiers, &c.', that is wicker rods, was customary in parts of southern England, quoting John Gay's 'Dirge' to illustrate the point; ' "With Wicker Rods we fenc'd her Tomb around,/To ward from Man and Beast the hallow'd Ground;/Lest her new Grave the Parson's Cattle raze,/For both his Horse and Cow the Church-yard graze." '472

Therefore, most individuals did not have their presence below ground reflected above. Memories of them remained abstract and associated not with specific, demarcated grave plots, but with general locations, which often had collective, most likely familial, significance. However, when memorials were

⁴⁶⁹ BRO, P/St A/ChW/4/12(a), Faculty for the establishment and consecration of a new church for St Andrew, Clifton, Bristol

⁴⁷⁰ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/6, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol

⁴⁷¹ BOR/PR/Y/MB/39, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York, pp. 77-8

⁴⁷² Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, p. 37. The verse thus also illustrates the other uses to which burial ground might be put, and the disruption that graves and remains might face, issues to be discussed in the following chapter.

present it was expected that they be treated with respect and preserved as long as their inscription, and therefore the individual, remained legible. This practice also demonstrates the importance of remembrance and role of memory in determining the individual and collective significance of a place. In addition, it reinforces the fact that memories could easily become detached from a specific grave location, and therefore from remains themselves, especially over time, and attached instead to a more general area, perhaps the burial ground as a whole, or to a memorial.

This detachment of memories from remains was part of the flexible and ambiguous position of remains in the long eighteenth century. It was caused not only by the relative lack of specific grave markers above ground, and the movement of those which did exist, but also by the movement of remains below ground. This was inevitable in grounds which, in many cases, contained centuries of dead and which, by the long eighteenth century, were receiving ever greater numbers of bodies. In addition, the process of making, and finding space for, new graves frequently resulted in the disturbance of those already buried and bones being brought to the surface, these being subsequently reburied in other parts of the churchyard. In this sense, burial grounds had a life and momentum of their own. These, and other practices which altered the position of and even unearthed remains, will be discussed further in the following two chapters. For the purposes of this section, it is sufficient simply to emphasise that movement, impermanence and even exhumation were routine in eighteenth-century burial places and were compatible with standards of 'decency', provided that remains and memorials were treated respectfully and retained within consecrated space. These processes were accelerated by population growth and the subsequent overcrowding of burial grounds. Their flexibility, in conjunction with their lack of spiritual status, meant that attachment to remains was somewhat ambiguous and waned over time, while memories, attached to stones, approximate locations or to grounds as a whole, could endure longer.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated the many forms and overlapping layers of meaning which could be attached to burial grounds, grave locations and manner of burial. They reflected spiritual and secular, individual and communal concerns, a significant degree of diversity and tolerance, and some striking instances of exclusion; as Will Coster and Andrew Spicer have also demonstrated, burial places mirrored 'both the mutuality and inequalities between the living.'⁴⁷³ The factors which determined burial location also reveal an ambivalent attitude towards human remains. On one hand, despite their lack of spiritual significance, they held an emotional value, and the desire to be close to loved ones extended even after death. However, as memorialisation was relatively uncommon, this attachment could often shift from the remains themselves, whose location was likely to become difficult to pin-point over time, to a more general area with a symbolic connection to the memory of deceased individuals or groups. In fact, acceptance of the long-term impermanence and movement, even unearthing, of remains was a fundamental part of contemporary understanding and experience of remains and was not necessarily incompatible with standards of 'decency' although, as the following chapters will show, conditions increasingly fell short of these standards as overcrowding intensified. The following chapter will also show that flexibility was just as key to burial grounds' position in the urban landscape.

⁴⁷³ Coster & Spicer, 'Introduction', pp. 10-1

BOUNDARIES

INTRODUCTION

Despite their status as consecrated spaces reserved for the interment and commemoration of the dead, burial grounds were only tenuously divided from the secular urban spaces by which they were surrounded, both physically and in terms of their usage and treatment. This was particularly true of parish churchyards which, like churches themselves, had acted as social spaces and centres for a variety of secular activity in both town and country since at least the thirteenth century.⁴⁷⁴ Churchyards could be places of commerce, celebration, business and leisure and, although David Dymond has argued that their use in these ways was relatively rare during the eighteenth century, this chapter will show that churchyards continued to attract a variety of activities during this period.⁴⁷⁵ They retained their openness and were very much integrated into urban life and urban space, often simply by virtue of their casual use as thoroughfares and meeting places. They were also functional spaces, due in large part to the fact that they were often the largest open spaces available in increasingly densely packed urban areas. These facts contributed to rather than detracted from the symbolic value they held as places of burial; to be buried in one's parish churchyard was, in many ways, to be buried at the heart of its secular, as much as its spiritual, activity. The permeability of churchyards' boundaries therefore indicates that a high level of proximity to the dead was not confined to the brief period they spent above ground, but continued after their interment.

The flexibility of the spaces of the dead extended to the physical alteration of their boundaries, on the one hand in response to the needs of the living, and, on

⁴⁷⁴ David Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 50:3 (1999), p. 468. Such practices are also mentioned in Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁵ Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', pp. 483-5, 489-90

the other, in response to their own growing populations, emphasising further their position within busy and expanding urban communities and demonstrating that population growth and urban improvement forced change in a way that would, ultimately, make urban burial untenable. Churchyard alterations inevitably led to the movement of remains, and therefore contributed to their impermanence and to the separation of memory from remains, as discussed in the previous chapter. Furthermore, burial places' interaction with the wider, profane urban environment makes clear that impermanence and, in particular, compromise were central features of urban sacred space in general and that the sacred and profane co-existed as closely as the living and the dead.

This chapter will first examine the various secular activities carried out in churchyards, before examining their adaptation to the needs of the living and the dead. It will consider further the notion of 'decency' in these contexts, and in relation to the treatment and status of remains, contrasting this with attitudes towards body snatching in order to mark out the contemporary spectrum of attitudes towards the buried dead.

SECULAR USES

This section will explore the various activities for which burial places were used other than the interment of the dead. The evidence for their secular use is somewhat paradoxical. Much of it comes in the form of complaints and condemnations which refer to secular activities as 'nuisances.' 'Nuisance' was a legal term defined as ' "an actionable annoyance which interferes with the ability of another to use or enjoy his land" ', and as such the status of a thing or activity as a 'nuisance' was often related more to where it occurred than to its intrinsic nature, as was the case with most of the activities to be discussed.⁴⁷⁶ However, such complaints were relatively infrequent, and successful and

⁴⁷⁶ Quoted in Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England 1600-1770* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 19; *Ibid.*, p. 21.

concerted action against them apparently even rarer. In some instances certain activities were even sanctioned. Although there is some evidence for a change in attitudes towards the end of the period in question, the overall attitude towards secular usage of burial spaces was one of tolerance and, providing they did not disturb the dead or cause injury to the fabric of churchyards or churches, moderate forms of secular usage were compatible with standards of 'decency' as they applied to places of burial.

This section will enter into examination of secular activities by considering more exceptional activities, focusing in particular upon St James' fair, Bristol, which illustrates many key features of churchyards' nature and usage. It will then move on to consider these features in relation to various 'everyday' activities, and conclude by explaining the presence and acceptance of secular activities, as well as emerging signs of opposition, in the context of broader attitudes toward public spaces and parochial administrative structures. Throughout, the lack of clear boundaries between the spaces of the dead and everyday urban life will be emphasised.

MARKETS AND FAIRS

Most markets and fairs were removed from churchyards in the later twelfth century, although in some smaller provincial towns and rural areas they continued into and beyond the long eighteenth century.⁴⁷⁷ For instance, Dymond cites the holding of five annual fairs during 1749 in the churchyard of Llangernyw, Denbighshire, where from 'temporary stalls pedlars sold earthenware, wooden utensils and wool, while butchers hung meat in the church-porch'; the holding of fairs in Worcestershire and Yorkshire churchyards; and even a market in All Saints' churchyard in Northampton, which persisted until the early nineteenth century.⁴⁷⁸ It is likely that these activities were always more common in smaller towns and rural areas as most urban graveyards would have been too small to accommodate the markets, fairs and other communal activities, such as sports and games, described by

⁴⁷⁷ Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', p. 475-6, 490-2

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 475

Dymond.⁴⁷⁹ Only two similar examples from the cities under consideration in this chapter were found, both in Bristol. The first, mentioned in passing in a 1794 survey of the city, is the hosting of 'a sort of revel...on Easter an whitmondays' in the churchyard of St John the Baptist to which 'vast numbers of young people flock from Bristol.'⁴⁸⁰ However, no further mention of this event has been found.

Far better documented is the fair which had taken place in the city parish of St James since 1283.⁴⁸¹ This fair was not held in the churchyard proper, but immediately adjacent to ground used for burial, a common response to the widespread removal of fairs and markets from churchyards during the later twelfth century.⁴⁸² However, the area into which the fair was moved was also called 'the churchyard', indicating that the term did not necessarily apply solely to consecrated burial space.⁴⁸³ This extension of the term 'churchyard' to areas surrounding consecrated land appears to have been commonplace. For instance, properties located in the streets surrounding churchyards were typically described as 'in the church yard'. This is a very clear reinforcement of the lack of firm demarcation between burial places and ground used for secular purposes, and a strong indication that churchyards were not viewed as separate from their surroundings despite their spiritual status and use for burial. It also demonstrates their status as urban landmarks, the fact that this could define the areas beyond their boundaries and therefore their position as significant parochial and city-wide focal points.

The fluidity of the boundary between St James' burial space and the area used for its fair was even more evident in practice than in terminology. The fair was a very large and very busy event where, amongst the many stalls and their diverse wares, Bristolians and others from further afield could enjoy an array of boisterous entertainments. In the 1790s they included 'wild beasts and birds, wax-work, wire-dancing, tumbling, ballancing, puppets,...conjuration, [and]

⁴⁷⁹ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 52-3

⁴⁸⁰ *The New History, Survey and Description of the City and Suburbs of Bristol* (Bristol, 1794), p. 70

⁴⁸¹ BRO/P/St J/F/33, pp. 9, 53 & 55

⁴⁸² Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', p. 473

⁴⁸³ BRO/P/St J/ F/34; BRO/P/St J/F/35.

magic and mummery of all sorts, recommended by merry-andrews, buffoons, drums, trumpets, French-horns, fiddles, rattles and vociferation,' while in 1819 they included 'Horsemanship', pantomimes, a 'fat child', an 'albino child', 'Air Bathing', 'Flying Coaches' and a live seal.⁴⁸⁴ A number of early nineteenth century sources indicate that some of these distinctly profane amusements strayed from the 'churchyard' into the burial ground. For instance, in 1804 'the Flying Coaches in the Church Yard at the time of the Fair,' owned by Mr Lodge, were removed on this account.⁴⁸⁵

This lack of distinction, evident in both theory and usage, was addressed in a series of parish vestry meetings in 1806, which determined to better demarcate the 'Sepulchral ground' from the surrounding 'churchyard' area.⁴⁸⁶ Soon after, a series of posts 'to shew the Bounds of the Burial Ground' were erected by the churchwardens, and the vestry 'Resolved also that we will not in any future Year suffer any Booths, or standings to be built above or on the North side of the said Boundary, nor will we suffer any Goods Wares or Merchandize to be exposed for sale on the said Burial Ground.'⁴⁸⁷ However, although action was taken to remove certain activities from the 'sepulchral' ground, as in the case of the 'Flying Coaches', it was not necessarily accompanied by punishment or condemnation of any sort. Indeed, Mr Lodge was actually compensated for the lost earnings resulting from his amusement's removal, despite the fact the Bishop himself had 'Inhibited [it] as improper.'⁴⁸⁸

A casual attitude towards the boundary between the 'sepulchral' ground and its surroundings was indubitably a long-standing feature of the fair. These early steps towards changing the usage and, by implication, understanding of the burial area and the treatment of the dead therefore indicate a turn in the tide of opinion. Indeed, the fair was ultimately stopped in 1837. As we will see, this is just one of a small but suggestive group of indications that towards the end of

⁴⁸⁴ *The New History, Survey and Description*, p. 42; BRO/P/St J/F/10, p. 15.

⁴⁸⁵ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/8, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, p. 32

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32

our period a new concept of 'decency' as applied to burial places, which disapproved of their use for activities other than burial, was emerging.

Therefore, although the presence of markets and fairs in churchyards was somewhat exceptional in the eighteenth century, the examples of St James' 'churchyard' and its fair provide very clear illustrations of the blurred boundaries between burial places and the spaces around them in contemporary perception and usage, and of the fact that these perceptions were beginning to change. The following sections will demonstrate these characteristics and attitudes in relation to more commonplace activities.

TRADE AND DOMESTIC USAGE

Churchyards frequently hosted quotidian trade and domestic activities. Their prevalence is often suggested by documents pertaining to the establishment of new burial grounds which, evidently in response to past experience, specifically prohibited them. For instance, when the York parish of St Michael-le-Belfry re-leased a small ground adjoining the Minster in 1736, it was specifically stipulated that the land was not to be used for the storage of building materials, or as a workplace for Carpenters or Masons.⁴⁸⁹ Churchyards could also be used for the storage of other items, even vehicles; in 1765 St Michael-le-Belfry's vestry ordered that 'if any person or persons shall for the future...lodge any Carriage or other neusance thereon, they shall be prosecuted at the expence of the Parish,' indicating that they had some trouble meeting the above obligation to keep the yard clear.⁴⁹⁰

The parish's records also provide evidence for burial places' domestic use. Their additional burial ground was re-leased not only with the stipulation that it was not to be used for work or storage, but that no nails or spikes should be inserted into the bordering Cathedral wall from which 'to fix Cords to for Whitening or Drying Cloths'.⁴⁹¹ Churchyards' use for drying laundry seems to have been very common and, like storage, was clearly related to the rarity of private and public open space available elsewhere in towns and cities. This is

⁴⁸⁹ BOR/PR/Y/MB/35, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

⁴⁹⁰ BOR/PR/Y/MB/36, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

⁴⁹¹ BOR/PR/Y/MB/35, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

well illustrated by Figure 22, which also reminds us that churchyards were not always surrounded by streets, but also by houses, an issue to be discussed later in the chapter.

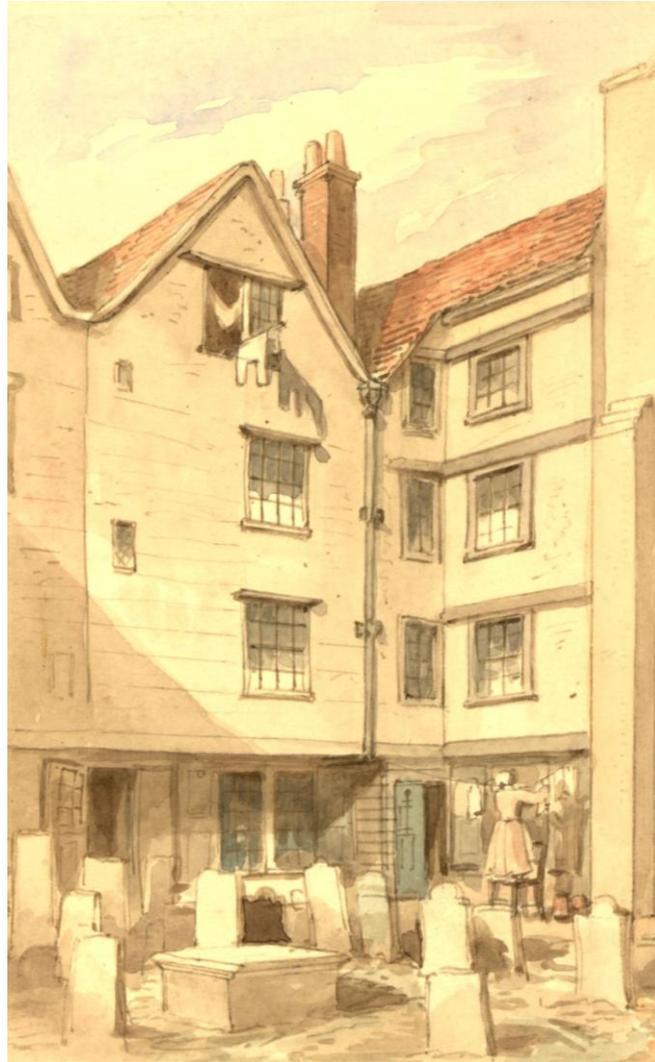


Figure 22. J. Finlay, 'View of an old house on the north side of St Bartholomew's Churchyard, said to be the house where Milton lived' (1846) © The Trustees of the British Museum

However, parishes did not always discourage such activities. St James, Bristol, whose large and central churchyard was ideally suited for such a space-consuming activity, not only permitted drying laundry, but made special provision for it. In 1732, evidently in response to a long-standing custom, the vestry ordered that posts be erected 'in the Green Splot(?) of this Parish Churchyard, in order to fasten Lines to hang Cloathes on to.' They specified that this provision was made to 'prevent the trees being damaged by having the lines affixed to them,' although it was also a source of profit; later the same year

it was noted that the posts, which 'the Vestry has lately put upp... for Drying of Cloathes', were available at the rate of half a penny per post.⁴⁹² How long the provision of laundry posts persisted after this date is unknown, but they were no longer present by 1789. Even so, the churchyard was still being used to dry laundry at this point; the following year its lamp posts were repaired and repainted as 'great Injury has heretofore been done to them by the hanging Cloaths upon Lines fastened thereto w^{ch} Lines and Cloaths are likewise a great nuisance to passengers & the occasion of many Indecencies committed in the Church Yard.' The nature of these 'indeencies' was unspecified, but the inconvenience of the practice was great enough that the parish chose to prohibit the hanging of laundry in the churchyard, ordering that 'No lines shall be fastened to the said post nor any Cloaths hang out to dry in the Church Yard- & that the Bell Man do give Notice of this order & likewise that boards be put up for the same purpose & that the Sexton do see that the same be complied with.'⁴⁹³ Interestingly, not only St James' churchyard but the exterior of the church itself were being used to dry laundry in this period; the vestry resolved in 1789 'That no Cloaths be suffer'd to be dried upon the leads of the Church.'⁴⁹⁴

St James' churchyard was also used for carpet beating, a further domestic use to which churchyards were commonly subject. As with laundry drying in 1790, in 1808 the vestry took decisive action against the practice and 'Ordered that notice be given to be written on boards forbidding persons...beating Carpets thereon, or committing other nusances in and about the [churchyard].'⁴⁹⁵ Similarly, in the previous year, Christ Church parish, also in Bristol, 'Ordered that it be not permitted in future that any Carpets be beaten in the Church Yard.'⁴⁹⁶ St James' practice of announcing vestry decisions regarding churchyard use on boards is an important additional illustration of the parish's central location and the fact its large and open churchyard was not only

⁴⁹² BRO/P/St.J/V/1/6, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol

⁴⁹³ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/7, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, p. 234

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 225

⁴⁹⁵ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/8, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, pp. 125-6

⁴⁹⁶ BRO/P/XCh/V/1(c), Vestry minutes of Christ Church, Bristol

important and familiar to its parishioners, but to Bristolians in general and many from further afield.

The use of churchyards and other burial places for trade and domestic activities therefore indicates their incorporation into the wider urban environment, a factor which contributed to their symbolic value as places of communal and individual identity, and thus to their desirability as places of burial. Therefore, the secular use of burial space by the living, and their position within the parish and community, acted to shape the significance they had as places of the dead, demonstrating that their various uses and functions were not incompatible but mutually reinforcing.

ACCESS

Burial places' integration with the urban environment and their position in the wider community are also well illustrated by their less specific day-to-day use as passing and gathering places and points of access. However, as with other activities, these could be regarded as a 'nuisance', particularly where they resulted in vandalism or the dumping of rubbish, problems which prompted some to call for the public's exclusion from churchyards. This growing intolerance can in turn be correlated with, and partially explained by, expanding populations and the correspondingly greater likelihood of 'nuisances' occurring, illustrating one way in which churchyards' traditional uses and position in the urban environment were problematised by population growth.

St James, Bristol, although somewhat exceptional in its size and the volume of traffic in and around its burial area, can again be used to illustrate key aspects of churchyards' usage and the responses it provoked. In 1813 its vestry desired its enclosure, concerned that its position as 'the leading Thoroughfare from large and populous Districts within the said Parish and the adjoining [and rapidly expanding] Parish of St Paul to the interior and central parts of the City of Bristol and great part of its Suburbs' meant that 'great numbers of persons' were 'constantly passing [through it] Day and Night.' They supported their case

with a more detailed, and very indignant, description of the various unwelcome activities being carried out in the burial space;

several useless and unnecessary Paths or Footways have been made in and through the interior of the said Church Yard which not only occupy considerable spaces of Ground which are thereby lost as Burial Ground to the most populous Parish in Bristol but also afford plausible pretence for disorderly persons to have unlimited Access to such interior parts of the said Church Yard at all hours of the Night.

In addition to causing general annoyance, these 'disorderly persons' also engaged in vandalism, and tomb stones and monuments had been 'much injured by the many idle and mischievous people frequenting and hovering there.' The vestry concluded that 'the said Church Yard is thereby become a Nuisance and Scandal to the Neighbourhood and to all well disposed persons passing and repassing there.'⁴⁹⁷ This comment indicates that problems were caused by a minority and that the principle of public access to the churchyard had not become fundamentally objectionable, demonstrating in turn that changing responses to churchyard usage and the increasing desire for their better separation from their surrounding were as much pragmatic as they were the result of changing notions of 'decency.' It is also one of the first indications seen thus far that the emerging current of intolerance of secular activities and accessibility was related to population growth and urban expansion, the increased volume of traffic, and therefore increased likelihood of 'nuisances', problematising churchyards' central positions and long-standing forms of usage.

Occasionally singled out among those who caused 'nuisances' in churchyards were children, in particular young boys, and animals. Some parishes went so far as to pay to have children kept out. In 1789 St James paid one shilling to 'a Man for Assisting Newby to keep the boys out of the Churchyard', while St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, which also had a very large, although less central, churchyard, paid five shillings to 'Mr Lard for keeping away the Boys from

⁴⁹⁷ BRO/P/St J/ChW/17, Faculty for enclosing the churchyard of St James, Bristol

Ch.Yd.' in 1797.⁴⁹⁸ Similarly, in October 1782 the parish of John the Baptist, Bristol, looked into the cost of repairing their churchyard wall, 'It being represented to this Vestry that the Wall of the Church Yard of this Parish being too low towards St. John Street and Tower(?) Lane so that Boys and idle People frequently get over the same and commit many Depridations in the Church Yard.'⁴⁹⁹ It may also be that the presence of children motivated St James' vestry to order in 1808 'that notice be given to be written on boards forbidding persons playing on the Burial ground or Church Yard.'⁵⁰⁰ The use of churchyards by children, and this mention of 'playing', indicates the use of churchyards not only as passing and informal gathering places but also as places for leisure and sport, more commonly a feature of rural churchyards.

Animal access was a perennial problem, and could also lead to the appointment of individuals to deter livestock. In Bristol, Temple parish and the Baptist ground at Redcross Street both had problems with parishioners pasturing animals in their burial grounds, and in 1728 the parish of St Peter noted that an agreement had been made with Mr Stir(?) 'that he will not for the future bring any Horse through the Church Yard.'⁵⁰¹ In 1783 St James appointed an assistant to their sexton, one of whose duties was to 'take as much care of the Church Yard as possible may be, by keeping the Gates locked & hindering all kinds of Cattle from Grasing there,' in addition to preventing 'every other indecency from being committed therein.'⁵⁰² In 1789 their vestry similarly ordered 'That the Church Yard be kept clear of Pigs & all other nuisances.'⁵⁰³ As well as being potentially damaging to the ground and to monuments, the presence of animals could be made more problematic in grounds where burials were overcrowded and therefore made closer to the surface, a phenomenon to be described in the following chapter; in 1817 the inhabitants of Christchurch,

⁴⁹⁸ BRO/P/St.J/ChW/1(e), Churchwardens' accounts of St James, Bristol; BRO/P/St.MR/ChW/1(h), Churchwardens' accounts of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, p. 63r.

⁴⁹⁹ BRO/P/St.JB/V/1(c), Vestry minutes of St John the Baptist, Bristol

⁵⁰⁰ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/8, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, pp. 125-6

⁵⁰¹ Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol*, p. 249; BRO/Bd/RS/8(a), Records of Redcross Street burial ground; BRO/P/St.PE/V/1(a), Vestry minutes of St Peter, Bristol, p. 6.

⁵⁰² BRO/P/St.J/V/1/7, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, p. 170

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 225

Surrey complained that ‘the public Foot-path...leaves the present Church-Yard exposed to every kind of trespass; and Swine have actually been seen therein, feeding on Human Flesh.’⁵⁰⁴

Churchyards’ accessibility could prove just as problematic when they were surrounded by buildings rather than, or as well as, streets. These buildings, which could include pubs, stables, warehouses, dwelling houses and tenement buildings, not infrequently had the adjoining churchyard as a point of access, sometimes the only one.⁵⁰⁵ An additional problem in such churchyards was the erection of unauthorised secular structures or additional points of access such as doors and cellar or trap doors.⁵⁰⁶ These were typically associated with surrounding domestic dwellings whose occupants encroached upon consecrated land in the course of adding to or augmenting their properties. An undated Improvement Act from the parish of St Michael, Bristol, illustrates particularly clearly that such problems were shared by sacred and secular spaces alike, and that the two were in many ways indistinguishable; among the ‘nuisances’ it prohibited were ‘Porches,...Dung Holes, Posts, Rails, Steps projecting on the Footways...Steps and Doors leading down to Cellars and Vaults out of such Footways, and also all Trees and other Encroachments, Obstructions, and Annoyances whatsoever.’⁵⁰⁷

The same Act also demonstrates the similarity between churchyards and their surroundings in relation to rubbish dumping. Passages forbidding the dumping of ‘Ashes, or any Dirt, Muck, Dung, Soil, Filth, Rubbish, Refuse or Garden Stuff, Blood, Offal, Carrion, or any other offensive Matter or Thing’, clearly echo

⁵⁰⁴ GL/Fo. ‘Observations in favour of enlarging the churchyard of Christchurch, Surry’ (c. 1817), Pam. 235, 1r

⁵⁰⁵ BRO/P/St P&J/PI/6(a)i-iii, Plans of Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol, burial ground; BRO/P/St P&J/PI/6(b), Plans of Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol, burial ground; BRO/P/St T/PI/1, Plan of St Thomas, Bristol., Burial ground; BRO/P/St T/PI/1, Plan of St Thomas, Bristol, burial ground; BRO, EP/A/22/St N/1, Map of St Nicholas, Bristol, burial ground.

Other churchyards partially or completely surrounded by buildings were St Martin-le-Grand in York, and in Bristol St Nicholas, Sts Philip & Jacob, St Thomas, Christ Church and St Stephens. See Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, p. 77 and the following burial ground maps and plans: BRO/EP/A/22/St N/1; BRO, P/St P&J/PI/6(a)i-iii; BRO, P/St P&J/PI/6(b); BRO/P/St T/PI/1; BRO, P/St S/PM/1(a), p. 1.

⁵⁰⁶ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13, Churchwardens’ accounts of Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York; BRO/P/St.J/V/1/8, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, pp. 326-7.

⁵⁰⁷ BRO/P/StM/PM/5 (c), ‘An Act for Removing and Preventing Encroachments, Obstructions, Annoyances, and other Nuisance, within the City of Bristol, and the Liberties thereof....’ (n.d.), p. 2

orders pertaining specifically to churchyards, further demonstrating that in use, function and treatment churchyards and their surroundings were essentially the same in many ways.⁵⁰⁸ For instance, an 1816 Act regarding the establishment of a second additional burial ground for the parish of St Andrew's, Bristol, dedicated a section to outlining measures 'to prevent Nuisances near the Church or Church Yard,' ordering that

if any Person or Persons shall place or lay any Rubbish, Stones, Soil, Manure, Litter, Compost or Dung, or other similar Nuisance Matter or Thing...in or upon any of the Church Yards or Burial Grounds...or the Walls Rails or Fences surrounding the same...every Person or Persons so offending, shall for every such Offence forfeit and pay any Sum not exceeding Five Pounds.⁵⁰⁹

Parish records illustrate that neither of these lists was simply a formulaic catalogue of all the conceivable kinds of materials which might be dumped in churchyards. For instance, Sts Philip and Jacob, Bristol, noted in 1778 that people were 'placing iron and other things' opposite the north side of the churchyard 'and by that means forcing all carriages over to the other side of the way, which puts pressure on the wall and puts it in danger of falling,' while in 1774 part of the churchyard of St Saviour, York, had been walled off and 'made use of as a Dunghill & consequently become a Nuisance & liable to be indicted.'⁵¹⁰

For a particularly extreme example of both rubbish dumping, and the disruption of consecrated ground and vandalism of monuments, we can again turn to the parish of St James, Bristol, which suffered repeated 'nuisances' both in their 'sepulchral' ground and the surrounding 'churchyard' over a twenty year period at the hands of one man. In 1744 Mr Job Gardiner dug up 'the spur' of the church tower, in the process taking down two monuments in the churchyard. In 1746 proceedings were taken against him when he once again removed several tombstones from the churchyard, obstructed 'the Digging

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 7

⁵⁰⁹ BRO/P/St A/ChW/8/4, Royal assent for rebuilding the church of St Stephen, Bristol, and establishing a new churchyard, p. 31

⁵¹⁰ BRO/P/St.P&J/V/2, Vestry minutes of Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol; BOR/PR/Y/SAV/23, Vestry minutes of St Saviour, York.

Graves in the said Churchyard' and conveyed 'Shutes from his house into such Churchyard', amongst 'other Grievances & Nusances by him Committed.' A few years later, in 1749, the parish was planning to take him to court again for 'turning a Watercourse through the Churchyard and other Neusances', and the following year Gardiner's actions again resulted in the obstruction of burial. In 1754 he began building a new house, which encroached in several places onto parish land.⁵¹¹ It appears that the building remained unfinished five years later, when the vestry 'Ordered...that the Churchwardens cause a quantity of Rubbish to be halled sufficient to fill up & remove the Nuisance occasioned by Mr Gardners Building in the Church-Yard', indicating that he had left some sort of hole therein.⁵¹² Gardiner continued to cause problems even after his death, having left his house incomplete. In 1764 'a certain quantity of Earth & Rubbish' lingered near the unfinished building, which, the vestry noted, had been erected 'upon Land supposed to belong to the Parish Church Yard and since suffered to go to decay & ruin & thereby become a Public Nuisance to the Parishioners.' The primary object of the vestry's complaint on this occasion was that part of the affected area had 'for several Months had been made use of for a necessary house or place of Easement'.⁵¹³

We have already seen that, in addition to announcements and written agreements prohibiting 'nuisances', parishes could seek to enclose their burial places to combat unwanted access and/or its unwanted consequences. An angry resolution from the vestry and minister of York's Holy Trinity Goodramgate parish, made in 1766, is an example of such a measure, and raises several important points regarding continuity and change in attitudes towards churchyards, in addition to demonstrating the various forms of churchyards' treatment and usage discussed in this sub-section. The resolution stated that

Whereas very great and Scandalous Offences and Abuses have been committed in the Old Church Yard of St Trinity in Goodramgate to the dishonour of the House of God, and the disgust and Greif of all good

⁵¹¹ BRO/P/St.J/V/1/6, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol

⁵¹² BRO/P/St.J/V/1/7, Vestry minutes of St James, Bristol, p. 2

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 36

Christians, it is therefore resolved by the Minister and Vestry...in Order to remove and Prevent those great Evils for the future, that the Church Yard shall no longer be a common thorough fair, as it has been for some years last past.

It ordered that walls be erected around the churchyard and all entrances into it 'be kept locked Always Except when Divine Service is Performed at the Said Church, that all doors and Casements (of private Houses) which open into the Church-Yard be Stopped up, and never hereafter Opened.' They also specified that the churchyard should 'always be kept Clean and free from Profane and common uses' and threatened 'any Person [who] Shall presume to violate the wholesome Orders hereby given by breaking down any Fence (wall Door, or other) or by casting dirt or filth into the Church Yard or by any other unlawful Action or Deed' with prosecution.⁵¹⁴

The churchyard was accordingly enclosed, but the measure proved controversial. In 1769 some parishioners objected to their exclusion from the area and claimed right of access to a footpath crossing the yard.⁵¹⁵ The outcome of the dispute is uncertain, but its existence demonstrates that parishes and parishioners did not always share the same views of the proper and 'decent' use of churchyards.⁵¹⁶

The same difference of opinion is visible elsewhere. For instance, the decision to close churchyards except during 'business hours' is mentioned more frequently in the latter part of the period in question, and the purchase of locks and padlocks for churchyards becomes more noticeable in parish account books from the 1790s onwards.⁵¹⁷ It is likely that this does reflect a growth in 'nuisance' activity although, as seen in St James' 1813 request for enclosure, this

⁵¹⁴ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, York. Similarly, in an attempt to make their churchyard more private the Bristol parish of Sts Philip and Jacob resolved in 1778 to enclose it, erect doors at the entrance, block the stiles allowing access and line the footpath crossing the yard with iron railings to prevent access to the burial space. Whether these measures were implemented is unknown. In accepting continued access in this way they were a little less restrictive than Holy Trinity Goodramgate. See BRO/P/St.P&J/V/2, Vestry minutes of Sts Philip & Jacob, Bristol. For other examples of the restriction of access see BOR/Fac. Bk. 2, p. 305; BOR/PR/Y/HTM/122, Vestry minutes of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, York.

⁵¹⁵ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, York

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ See for example the following churchwardens' accounts of York parishes: BOR/PR/Y/CR/13 in 1832; BOR/PR/Y/CU/24 in 1827; BOR/PR/Y/J/18 in 1793; BOR/PR/Y/M.Bp.S/172 in 1812; BOR/PR/Y/OL/18 in 1798 and 1803; BOR/PR/Y/MS/27 in 1807.

is almost certainly a proportional increase resulting from growing populations rather than a general alteration in public behaviour. It is also likely that the effects of nuisance behaviour were compounded by the growing problem of overcrowding of the dead themselves, which meant that public access was more likely to result in 'indecent' conditions that disturbed graves and even remains, as in the Surrey parish of Christ Church.⁵¹⁸ This again indicates that action against 'nuisances' was as much a pragmatic measure as an indication that 'decency' was coming to indicate the more exclusive use of churchyards for the dead. However, just as Holy Trinity Goodramgate faced opposition to their closure, so too did other parishes, with some closed churchyards even being reopened in the face of public demand for access to well-established routes, thus indicating that churchyards and access to them, particularly to footpaths and other thoroughfares, remained important to local communities.⁵¹⁹

Importantly, not all intrusions into churchyard space necessarily faced objection or removal by parish vestries. Many examples exist of structures or points of access allowed to stay, often in return for annual rents. For example, in 1774 Mr Charles Brown agreed to pay one shilling yearly to Christ Church, Bristol 'in consideration of his being permitted to open a Doorway into the Chyard & to set up a small shelf for the reception of his window shutters.'⁵²⁰ In 1700 the parish of St Martin cum Gregory, York, was charging rent to Mr Dawson whose chimney stood in the churchyard and, in 1746, was in dispute with Thomas Lambert over a path to his house which ran over the churchyard. He was eventually allowed a door in the churchyard wall and a path to his home.⁵²¹ Similarly, in 1765 St Mary Bishophill Senior, also in York, allowed William Newstaed to make a door in the wall from his garden into the

⁵¹⁸ In contrast, in 1815 the parish of St Martin-le-Belfry, York, had problems regarding access into their *own* churchyard caused by a quarrelsome Mr Bearpark who, after a protracted dispute, guaranteed the parish free access into the churchyard 'without further Molestation for ever' for the rather outrageous sum of £25. See BOR/PR/Y/MB/37, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York.

⁵¹⁹ In 1840 complaints were made regarding the 'Locking Up' of Hampstead churchyard. It was noted that Paddington churchyard had been closed in a similar manner, and that public complaint had led to its reopening. See *The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot*, Sunday, June 21, 1840.

⁵²⁰ BRO/P/XCh/V/1(b), Vestry minutes of Christ Church, Bristol

⁵²¹ BOR/PR/Y/MG/20, Churchwardens' accounts of St Martin-cum-Gregory, York

churchyard.⁵²² Lambert and Newstead were charged only token peppercorn rents. Considering that churchyard access was so often considered a 'nuisance', and that additional income was a boon to all parishes, acceptance of these structures and the nominal or token fees charged as rent are surprising. With nothing to gain by allowing them, we can only conclude that such intrusions were a further form of accepted churchyard usage. In addition, these responses demonstrate that the opinion of vestries and parishioners were not always opposed, further reinforcing the fact that acceptance of secular use was the dominant current of opinion. However, all the examples here are of early date and it is possible that attitudes changed as time passed in line with the changes outlined in the following subsection.

A further point to be taken from the example of Holy Trinity Goodramgate is that, whether or not parishes opposed the accessibility or secular use of their burial land, they rarely did so in such vehement or overtly morally or religious terms. This absence is particularly surprising given that 'nuisances' could be moral in nature, for instance bawdy houses or ale houses.⁵²³ It suggests, once again, that the overall balance of opinion among vestries and parishioners during the long eighteenth century was that churchyards' accessibility and resulting use, as described in this section, were normal and 'decent' provided they caused no damage or disruption. Even where they did, they were discussed in terms of the more general language of 'decency' which implied, but did not stress, spiritual concerns.

The example of Holy Trinity emphasises that whether or not they were successful, measures to alter churchyards' accessibility or usage required repetition. It appears that either access was eventually allowed, or that any enclosure which existed decayed over time, as in 1817 the parish's vestry resolved that 'in consequence of the bad and disgraceful state of the Church Yard some measures ought to be adopted for fencing and improving the same' and, a few months later, agreed, as before, that the churchyard be inaccessible

⁵²² BOR/PR/Y/M.Bp.S/172, Churchwardens' accounts of St Mary Bishophill Senior

⁵²³ Cockayne, *Hubbub*, pp. 19-20

at all times other than those of service. Some decades earlier, the parish had had problems with the encroachment of buildings on their burial ground, in contravention of their resolution; in 1791 they requested that Mrs Mary Hornby 'take Notice that you take down the door and Posts out of your Wall adjoining and Opening into the Churchyard and sufficiently make up the said Door Stead.'⁵²⁴ These examples illustrate the very important point that the 'nuisances' here outlined were of a perennial and cyclical nature, and that attitudes towards burial places and the perception of and action against 'nuisances' was varied and inconstant. They also point to the effect of various features of parochial administration to be discussed in the following section, including the changing composition of vestries over time and the effects of individuals' characters and beliefs.

The final, crucial, point to mention is that in all discussions of 'nuisances' (and actions against them) the dead are conspicuous by their absence. As with religious considerations, their presence was implied by the use of the word 'decency', although even this was used relatively infrequently in relation to 'nuisances', that word being of a similarly and perhaps sufficiently catch-all nature. We hear of the dead only indirectly in occasional references to monuments, whose damage was taken seriously, in line with the importance attached to the memory of the dead, supporting the argument made in chapter five that 'decency' in relation to the dead constituted leaving their remains undisturbed until fully decomposed. We must therefore conclude that as secular usage very rarely involved the disruption of or any form of contact with remains, so concerns regarding 'nuisances', if and when they were expressed, typically concentrated on their inconvenience to the living.

This sub-section has shown, perhaps even more clearly than those previous, the completeness of the integration between the spaces of the living and the dead, the profane and the sacred. Although churchyards' use as spaces for the dead marked them out amongst the wider urban environment, for the most part it did not in any way single them out for special treatment and they

⁵²⁴ BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, York

performed a variety of functions in addition to that of burial place, all of which were essentially compatible with the presence of the dead and reinforced their significance as parishioners' final resting place. Continuity of behaviour and attitudes is the dominant tone of the period as a whole, although some evidence for a desire to separate the places of the dead from their surrounding has been seen. However, this seems to have been only partially in response to an emerging current of belief viewing them as incompatible with non-spiritual activities; it was in large part a response to the essentially logistical problem of increased population, a force whose effects will be explored in more detail in the second section of this chapter.

CONTEXT

This section will explore why activities defined as 'nuisances' were only occasionally treated as such, in the process establishing why churchyards were used and viewed in the way they were. It will do so through examination of parochial administrative structures and contemporary understanding of public urban spaces, and by reinforcing the attachment of the notion of 'decency' to the remains of the dead.

It has been observed that parishes' responses to 'nuisances' were uneven and sporadic, these problems recurring throughout the long eighteenth century. Part of the reason for this lies in the nature of parish office holders. As they were elected, the tenure of individuals within them was limited and could easily result in a 'short-term memory' that accounts for the unevenness of responses to 'nuisances' both between different, and within individual, parishes. This, combined with the potential for individual personalities and individual or collective interests to sway a parish's priorities during any given period, goes a significant way towards accounting for the inconstant and even somewhat ambivalent attitudes discussed. This is evidenced not only in responses to 'nuisances' but also through parish's general management of their churchyards; entries for 'removing', 'cleaning' or 'leading' various forms of rubbish from churchyards, as well as for levelling, mowing, weeding, tidying, sowing grass seed, and maintaining walls, fences and doorways, demonstrate

that the extent to which parishes cared for and maintained their churchyards varied widely and fluctuated over time, with periods of frequent attention alternating with years or decades with no records of maintenance.⁵²⁵

It is also significant that almost all of the sources describing and either condemning or accepting 'nuisances' have been found in parish accounts. They scarcely appear in the public domain, for instance in newspapers, further reinforcing the fact that, for the most part, these 'nuisances' do not seem to have been nuisances at all; the activities described in this section were both unremarkable and essentially acceptable to contemporaries, whether parish officials or parishioners.

This attitude is attributable to wider contemporary understanding and usage of public spaces, urban and rural. As Emma Griffin has demonstrated, public spaces, such as streets, squares and village greens, were legitimately used for a variety of activities, including recreations, during the long eighteenth century.⁵²⁶ Their use in these ways was increasingly challenged by local authorities seeking to limit the uses of public spaces, in particular by removing unofficial plebeian activities, a process connected to that of urban improvement and its desire to rationalise urban space.⁵²⁷ It was also connected to the growing desire to 'civilise' urban spaces in the interests of the morals of the lower classes, a desire which, as we have seen in relation to the body before burial in

⁵²⁵ For examples of tidying, mowing and levelling see the following churchwardens' accounts of Bristol and York parishes: BOR/PR/Y/J/18; BOR/PR/Y/J/19; BOR/PR/Y/MB/35; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13; BOR/PR/Y/MG/21 in 1798, 1800, 1803, 1806, 1812, 1822; BRO/P/St.Aug/ChW/1(d); BRO/P/St.A/V1/3, p. 148, 249, 486; BRO/P/St.MR/ChW/1(h), pp. 104r, 114r; BRO/P/St.M/ChW/1(c).

For examples of sowing grass seed see the following churchwardens' accounts of York and Bristol parishes: BOR/PR/Y/ASN/11 in 1797 and 1798; BOR/PR/Y/ASN/12 in 1825; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/14 in 1833-4; BOR/PR/Y/HTM/18 in 1768; BRO/P/St.A/V1/3, p. 473; BRO/P/XCh/ChW/1(f); BRO/P/St.M/ChW/1(c).

For examples of maintenance see the account books of various York and Bristol parishes, including BOR/PR/Y/M.Bp.S/172; BOR/PR/Y/MC/59; BOR/PR/Y/MAUR/17; BOR/PR/Y/MB/35; BOR/PR/Y/ASN/11 in 1758, 1761 and 1819; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13 in 1789 and 1809; BOR/PR/Y/MARG/30 in 1840; BOR/PR/Y/MCS/18; See for example BOR/PR/Y/ASN/10 in 1693; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/12, pp. 799 & 825; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13 in 1746; BOR/PR/Y/HTM/18 in 1753 and 1765; BOR/PR/Y/HTM/19 in 1797; BOR/PR/Y/MCS/18 in 1748; BOR/PR/Y/MCS/19 in 1781; BOR/PR/Y/MCS/18 in 1773 and 1776; BRO/P/St.Aug/V1/1(b), p. 344; BRO/P/XCh/ChW/1(d); BRO/P/St.J/V1/7, pp. 31, 233; BRO/P/St.J/ChW/1(e); BRO/P/StJB/V1/1(d); BRO/P/St.MR/ChW/1(h), p. 88r and 92 r; BRO/P/St.M/ChW/1(c); BRO/P/St.S/ChW/1(a); BRO/P/St.A/V1/2, pp. 54, 164, 166; BRO/P/XCh/ChW/1(f); BRO/P/St.M/ChW/1(d); BRO/P/St.S/ChW/1(a).

⁵²⁶ Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p. 57

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82

the private spaces of the poor and, as the following chapter will show, also influenced the ultimate cessation of urban burial.⁵²⁸ Indeed, Griffin makes the very significant point that missing from the story of urban improvements, including paving, lighting and cleaning, 'has been an account of the cultural transformation these physical changes involved for those who had traditionally worked and played there. Civic improvement was accompanied by new ideas concerning who might use the streets and when.'⁵²⁹ Similarly, Dymond has argued that the changing use of churchyards is best considered in light of the increasing divide between 'elite' and 'popular' culture, and to the fact that leisure activities were increasingly confined to their own specific spaces, rather than being conducted in flexible communal areas.⁵³⁰

As has been noted, there are some signs that these changes affected churchyards, for example the cessation of St James' fair, which, as we have seen, can be included among the multifunctional public spaces discussed by Griffin. However, the sources consulted also support Griffin's assertion that the process of change was not simple, straightforward or fast; as we have seen, the dominant tone of the sources examined is overall one of continuity of usage and understanding.⁵³¹ It must also be emphasised that changes in the accessibility of churchyards appear to have been prompted as much by the logistical problems posed by the greater volume of traffic they received than by altered notions of acceptable churchyard usage; this may well be because, with the exception of St James' fair, their use was rather more casual and less communal than the activities discussed by Griffin, which include blood sports and other forms of public, often celebratory, gatherings.

Finally, as observed in the previous sub-section, a further reason for the continued presence of the living and their activities in churchyards was because they seldom interfered with the dead, who were rarely mentioned in relation to churchyard 'nuisances.' This therefore emphasises that 'decent' treatment of the

⁵²⁸ Ibid., pp. 102-3

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 83

⁵³⁰ Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', p. 490

⁵³¹ Griffin, *England's Revelry*, p. 83

dead below ground consisted of leaving their remains undisturbed until decay was complete. Providing that activities above ground did not interfere with this process, or damage memorials, they were not considered incompatible with the primary function of burial places.

The persistence of churchyards' secular usage is therefore attributable to the nature of the vestries which administered and managed them, to wider attitudes towards public spaces, of which churchyards were one despite their sacred status and ownership by the church, and to the fact that the dead themselves were, by and large, left in peace.

In conclusion, this section has demonstrated the many ways in which churchyards were used in the course of everyday life. They performed a variety of functions and were, in many ways, almost seamlessly integrated into the urban environment. Although evidence exists for their increased separation from the sea of urban life during the latter part of the period in question, it appears to have been neither representative of general opinion nor solely the result of reaction against the fundamental principle of churchyards' accessibility. The 'nuisances' described were, for most, not in fact nuisances at all but a way of life.

MOVEMENT

The increased volume of human, animal and vehicular activity which problematised burial grounds' openness also taxed their capacity below ground, as well as the functionality of the surrounding urban environment. During the long eighteenth century, particularly its latter half, both the living and the dead were faced with an urgent need for more room in urban areas, and were forced to adapt to each other's needs, negotiating and renegotiating space. This process had long been a feature of urban life. For example, the churchyard of St Michael, Spurriergate, York, had been substantially reduced by a row of commercial buildings erected in the fourteenth century, and

bisected by Church Lane at some point prior to the 1700s.⁵³² Similarly, the churchyard of St Martin-le-Grand, Coney Street, also in York, diminished as shops and houses were constructed around it over the centuries.⁵³³ Examples of the converse process, the extension of existing burial spaces and establishment of additional ones, can also be found prior to 1700, primarily in the capital.⁵³⁴ However, as with so many aspects of burial practice, these processes, once infrequent, became far more common over the course of our period.

This section will continue to demonstrate that flexibility was a central characteristic of burial grounds and their treatment and that, as seen in both the previous section and the previous chapter, parishes assumed primary responsibility for their management. However, it will also emphasise that civic and central authorities could be involved. This involvement is an important qualification to two arguments, outlined in the introduction to this thesis: first, that authorities' involvement in burial in the form of the establishment and enforced usage of extramural cemeteries was a novel phenomenon; and second, that authorities' involvement can be equated with responsibility for the dead being removed from local communities and those personally connected to the dead.

EXTENSION

Extension, or the establishment of secondary burial grounds, was the logical response to the challenge of accommodating increasing numbers of bodies. It became more common from around the middle of the eighteenth century, the point at which population growth began to accelerate markedly, meaning that by the end of our period most parishes in Bristol and York, as in London, had obtained additional burial space either adjoining or separate from their existing grounds.⁵³⁵ However, the process was not straightforward and, while the need

⁵³² Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, pp. 108-9

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 77

⁵³⁴ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 95-100

⁵³⁵ For illustration of the ubiquity of secondary burial grounds in London see Joseph Turner, *Burial Fees of the Principal Churches, Chapels, and New Burial-Grounds, in London and its Environs* (London, 1838).

for more burial space was easily recognised, it was less easily achieved, a problem which contributed to overcrowding.

Two examples from Bristol can be used to illustrate just how difficult and long-winded the process could be, and how it impacted upon burial conditions. The parish of St Augustine held a meeting regarding the enlargement of their churchyard in 1806.⁵³⁶ Enquiries made the following year apparently came to nought, and the subject was not raised again until 1812, when the churchyard was full and concerns were expressed that its continued use could damage public health.⁵³⁷ Enquiries were again made for additional land, but a year later financial obstacles were mentioned.⁵³⁸ By 1814 a piece of land had been identified, but apparently not purchased, and in 1817 the parish was still searching.⁵³⁹ They finally settled on a piece of land the following year at the cost of £1250.⁵⁴⁰

However, this was not the end of the story. The parish was also in need of a new church and for some time plans for this took precedence.⁵⁴¹ The question of the churchyard was only raised again in a vestry meeting of 1819, when a letter from a physician named Dr Heslop was discussed. It urged that 'the present overcrowded state of the Churchyard [made it] absolutely impossible that any further Burials should take place'. The vicar and sexton were consulted and reported that

for want of room it has been necessary in the last Week to refuse four Applications for Interment of Parishioners, And it further appeared from all the Trials lately made of the state of the Ground that it was not possible to dig to the depth of more than four or five feet at the utmost in any part of the churchyard without disturbing Bodies recently interred, and that many of the Bodies lately interred have from necessity been deposited in a less depth than four feet from the surface.

The yard was closed, but the closure encountered opposition, and the parish were advised by a lawyer that they could face prosecution if they did not

⁵³⁶ BRO/P/St.Aug/V/1/(b), Vestry minutes of St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol, p. 20

⁵³⁷ Ibid., pp. 26, 56-60

⁵³⁸ Ibid., pp. 66-7, 73-4

⁵³⁹ Ibid., pp. 86, 131

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 153

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 156, 160-64

provide burial space for their parishioners.⁵⁴² Soon after, a new rate was arranged to raise the £2576 3s 9d necessary to cover the cost of the land settled upon in 1818, its preparation and consecration.⁵⁴³ Later in the year, despite the fact that some parishioners were refusing to pay the new rate, plans were approved for the walling and preparation of the ground.⁵⁴⁴ It was completed and consecrated in August 1820, and yet was not put into use until March 1821.⁵⁴⁵ Where burials were made in the meantime is unknown. The process of discussing, obtaining, financing, preparing and opening the additional burial ground therefore took nine years, and the original ground was in use for at least seven years after it became full.

A litany of similar problems was faced by St Stephen's parish. They talked of enlarging their burial ground in 1772, achieved its enlargement in 1774, but again discussed the need for space in 1777, 1783 and 1792, when a vestry meeting took 'into Consideration a Resolution of the Mayor and Corporation of presenting as a Nuisance the Burying Ground in Princess St. Belonging to this Parish.' Its description as a 'nuisance' indicates that it had been overcrowded for some time, that remains were therefore close to the surface and, quite possibly, causing an unpleasant smell which had attracted the attention of city authorities, conditions also implied by Dr Heslop's description of St Augustine-the-Less. St Stephen's vestry 'resolved...to confer with the Corporation about relinquish^g the Burying Ground to them on their making an adequate Compensation,' a resolution reinforcing the difficulty of finding and financing additional ground.

However, despite its lack of space and resulting overcrowded conditions, it seems that the churchyard continued in use for several more years; in 1794 the vestry met to discuss 'disposing of a certain Churchyard at the End of Princes' Street belonging to this Parish,' and authorised workmen 'to prepare in the most convenient Manner the piece of burying Gro^d behind the Church to

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 186, 189

⁵⁴³ Ibid., p. 192

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 200, 208

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 234, 262

receive such Bodies as have been heretofore usually interred in the Lower Church Yard, that Church Yard being henceforward intended to be shut up.' The problem of space was therefore solved for a time, although in 1811 the parish again required more space, a requirement that remained unmet in 1819, when a rate was instituted to raise funds for a new ground.⁵⁴⁶ This was still being collected in 1823, at which time the vestry noted that the 'back churchyard' opened in 1794 was nearly full.⁵⁴⁷ Whether this indicates that on this occasion the parish had planned in advance for more space, or whether 'full' indicated its usage beyond normal capacity, as with the old ground, is unclear.⁵⁴⁸

The case of St Stephen illustrates one of the ways in which local authorities, in the form of city Corporations, could influence burial space. In this instance their role was advisory and, as their advice went unheeded for some time, their authority clearly was not absolute. It was also mentioned that they might assist the parish in finding and/or funding alternate space. However, the Corporation's role in influencing burial places was usually more formal than this, and most commonly occurred through Improvement Acts, which tended to impact burial space indirectly. Another example from St Stephen can be used to illustrate this point. The enlargement of their churchyard in 1774, mentioned above, was part of a wider scheme to remodel and thereby improve the accessibility of the neighbourhood and its streets. In order to enlarge the burial ground, a number of 'ruinous' old buildings were purchased and

⁵⁴⁶ BRO/ P/St.S/V/1(b), Vestry minutes of St Stephen, Bristol

⁵⁴⁷ BRO/ P/St.S/V/1(c), Vestry minutes of St Stephen, Bristol

⁵⁴⁸ A further example is that of St Andrew's, Bristol. They met to discuss the extension of their churchyard in February and June 1770, deciding at the latter meeting to purchase a piece of land on Honey Pen Hill. Nothing came of the resolution, and in 1782 fears for 'the purity of the air' in the existing graveyard were raised and it was determined again that the ground on Honey Pen Hill would be purchased. The date of the purchase is unknown, but by 1808 it was struggling to cope with the number of bodies it received; the vestry stated that 'in a very few years, the said Burial Ground will be so full of Corpses as to occasion much Difficulty in finding room therein for future Burials without disturbing the Corpses buried therein'. However at the same time the parish noted their concern that 'additional Burial Ground (if at all to be obtained) could only be procured with great difficulty and at very heavy Expense.' See the following parish accounts: BRO/P/St.A/V1/2, pp. 99, 173, 189-91; BRO/P/St A/ChW/4/5. In 1810 another meeting regarding additional burial ground was held, again leading to nothing, and in 1821 the sexton testified that only fourteen graves remained in the existing burial ground. See the parish's vestry minutes: BRO/P/St.A/V1/3, pp. 2, 312. They were not able to obtain additional ground until 1816. See the following volume of churchwardens' accounts: BRO/P/St A/ChW/8/4, p. 2.

demolished.⁵⁴⁹ Similarly, the reconstruction of the bridge adjacent to St Nicholas' church, Bristol during the 1760s, also an improvement measure coordinated by the city Corporation, involved appropriation of part of their churchyard, for which additional burial space was granted in lieu.⁵⁵⁰

In addition to parochial and civic authority, burial places could also be affected by central government. Its role was implicit in parochial Acts for urban improvement, which were sponsored by members of parliament, but it also played a more direct role through instituting nationwide legislation. Unfortunately, proof for this takes the form of occasional vestry references to unnamed legislation which it has been impossible to trace. Even so, the comments made by various Bristol and York parishes suggest that several laws were passed in the early decades of the nineteenth century which granted financial support to parishes for the provision of burial and church space in recognition of the widespread need for both in the face of population expansion. For instance, the vestry of St Michael-le-Belfry, York, noted in 1834 that they had been informed by an unknown person of the parish's eligibility to apply for a reimbursement of the cost of renting their burial ground on Grove Lane under the terms of the said law.⁵⁵¹ In 1813 St Augustine-the-Less, discussed above, referred to a new law offering assistance for those constructing churches and churchyards and resolved to apply to parliament for this purpose, although no further mention of either the legislation or their application occurs in parish records.⁵⁵² The parish also made reference to a Bill of sanctioning the private donation of land for the purpose of establishing additional burial space. It dated from 1803 and was entitled 'A Bill to Promote the Building, repairing or otherwise Providing of Churches and Chapels and of

⁵⁴⁹ BRO/P/St S/PM/1(a), p. 7. For further examples of such Improvement Acts see also BRO/P/StM/PM/5 (a), 'An Act for...cleaning, paving, and enlightening the Streets of the City of Bristol...', 1747, p. 464; BRO, P/StM/PM/5 (b), 'An Act for widening several Streets, Lanes, Ways and Passages within the City of BRISTOL, and for opening several new Streets and Passages within the same; and for explaining, amending, and enlarging the Powers of several Acts passed for Paving, Cleaning, Lighting, Watching, and Regulating the Streets and other Places with the said City and Liberties thereof', May 1766, printed 1767.

⁵⁵⁰ See the following documents detailing the alteration of the church and churchyard: BRO/EP/A/22/St N/3; BRO, EP/A/22/St N/4

⁵⁵¹ BOR/PR/Y/MB/38, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

⁵⁵² BRO/P/St.Aug/V/1/(b), Vestry minutes of St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol, pp. 66-7, 73-4

Houses for the Residence of Ministers and the Providing of Church Yards and Glebes,' and stated that individuals were allowed to give land or buildings over to these purposes, providing that their worth did not exceed £500, or that the total contribution did not exceed five separate areas or goods or chattels.⁵⁵³ The parish of Christ Church, Surrey, mentioned in the previous section, also noted in 1817 that they had applied to parliament for funds to help them purchase additional ground, their existing churchyard being grossly overcrowded.⁵⁵⁴ In this case, no specific law was mentioned, raising the possibility that some parishes may have felt their situation so severe that they petitioned the government for assistance directly. These laws are important illustrations not only of the fact that local and central authorities were involved in the management of burial spaces, directly and indirectly, prior to the nineteenth century, but that they were also aware of both existing and potential overcrowding long before significant and dedicated legislation was passed in the 1850s. However, it would also seem that these laws were either poorly communicated, or that vestries were ill-informed, given the uncertainty and rarity with which they are mentioned.

Therefore, over the course of the eighteenth century, the dead demanded increasing amounts of space, something which was both difficult and costly to obtain. The process of acquiring new space was slower than the accumulation of the dead, and therefore contributed to overcrowding and its attendant sanitary implications. Parishes could be aided in their efforts by civic and central authorities, although civic assistance was more common given the decentralised nature of eighteenth century legislation and administration. The following section will examine these issues in relation to the reduction of burial space.

⁵⁵³ 43 Geo. III CVIII. See BRO/P/St Aug/ChW/7(b)I, Churchwardens' accounts of St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol, p. 2.

⁵⁵⁴ GL/Fo. Pam. 235, 'Observations in favour of enlarging the churchyard of Christchurch, Surry' (c. 1817)

REDUCTION

As stated above, although local legislation, in the form of Improvement Acts, could result in the expansion of parishes' burial space, more often it resulted in their reduction, sometimes with compensation made for alternative land.

In York markets were a major cause of churchyard alteration. In 1768 part of Holy Trinity, King's Court church was demolished and this area, along with part of the churchyard, acquired by the Corporation so that the city's hay market could be held there.⁵⁵⁵ In 1782 the churchyard and chancel of All Saints, Pavement were also acquired by the Corporation in order to expand the Pavement market.⁵⁵⁶ The deal was made in 1781, when the Corporation agreed to pay the parish £100 for the land, although they later attempted to extricate themselves from payment.⁵⁵⁷ It is unclear whether the parish received the money, or whether they received alternative burial ground in lieu.⁵⁵⁸ Similarly, the south side of St Crux, Pavement's churchyard had also been taken to enlarge the Pavement marketplace in 1769.⁵⁵⁹ This proximity between churchyards and market places, and the latter's increasing appropriation of the former, reinforces the points made in the previous section regarding the long-standing association of the two, and emphasises the proximity of the dead to the bustle of everyday urban life.

This fact is similarly reinforced by the use of churchyards for street-widening, another common cause of their reduction. St Crux, whose reduction in 1769 was mentioned above, had already been reduced in 1764 in order to widen the surrounding inconveniently narrow streets, a problem also addressed by an Act of the previous year which had seen the demolition of a number of old

⁵⁵⁵ P. M. Tillott, *A History of Yorkshire: The City of York*, The Victoria History of the Counties of England, series ed. R. B. Pugh (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 487. The market was moved away from this area in 1827.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 487

⁵⁵⁷ See YCA/B45, House Book containing minutes of the proceedings of the Corporation, 7th May 1781, p. 49 and 21st September 1782, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁵⁸ A Dr White noted in his diary in February 1782 that 'workmen began to pull down the east part (Chancel) of All Hallow's Church...in order to enlarge the market place. Towards this excellent improvement the City chamber gave £100'. See YCA/163, Dr White's diary, p. 2. However, it is suggested in another document that the extra land for burial was received in lieu of the £100 for the land given up in 1782, as desired by the Corporation. See BOR/PR/Y/ASP/26/4 regarding the enlargement of All Saints, Pavement, York.

⁵⁵⁹ Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, p. 37

buildings in the narrowest and busiest areas of York.⁵⁶⁰ The narrowness of surrounding streets was also the reason for the substantial reduction of the churchyard of St Helen, Stonegate, again in York. The old churchyard extended 'in a direct line into the Middle of Stonegate in length Sixty foot and in breadth from Davygate towards Blake Street fifty foot across Stonegate,' and acted as 'the passage through and into the said Streets which are a greater thoroughfare for Coaches and all sorts of Carriages than any other part of the said City'. One of the sources of traffic in the area was the Assembly Rooms on Blake Street, opened in 1735. St Helen's churchyard made carriage access to them difficult, meaning that many patrons were forced to exit their carriages and cross the churchyard in their finery in order to reach the entrance. In sum, the churchyard proved 'a very great nuisance and inconvenience to all persons and Carriages,' illustrating the important point that while churchyards suffered themselves from a variety of 'nuisances', they could themselves be viewed as such when inconveniently located, as well as when overcrowded and noxious, as in the case of St Stephen.⁵⁶¹

The example of St Helen also illustrates that the process of reduction, like that of extension, was often lengthy, and that the need for alteration often significantly predated action to resolve the problem. Awareness of St Helen's inconvenient location dated from 1729, its reduction being proposed by the parish itself. In fact, expecting that the location of the churchyard would eventually lead to its reduction, parishioners had had the foresight to leave 'Sixty Square Yards Undug'.⁵⁶² The Corporation did not purchase the land until 1733, at which time they also purchased a piece of replacement ground for the parish on Davyhall (now Davygate), and another twelve years passed before the churchyard was actually levelled and 'laid to the street'.⁵⁶³ In addition to the

⁵⁶⁰ See BOR/Reg. 37, ff. 98r-101v, 98r, detailing the deconsecration of part of St Crux.

⁵⁶¹ See YCA/G46, a collection of documents detailing the reduction of St Helen, Stonegate churchyard.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ YCA/B42, House book containing minutes of the proceedings of the Corporation, 3rd August 1732, p. 157r. The Corporation ordered that the ground be purchased in 1732, but discussions and arrangements continued in to the following year. See also YCA/B42, 14th September 1733, p. 166r. Regarding the levelling and deconsecration of the churchyard see: Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, pp. 54-5; YCA/G46; YCA/B43, House book containing minutes of the proceeding of the Corporation, 14th June

churchyard, several houses were demolished to create sufficient space for the new roadway.⁵⁶⁴ A similar example from York is that of Holy Trinity King's Court, whose churchyard, along with some surrounding buildings, was partly laid to the street in 1768 because it obstructed streets in a busy centre of town. The cost was covered by some money remaining from an Act concerning the improvement of streets, although whether it pertained to the parish or the city is unclear.⁵⁶⁵

Churchyards' reduction therefore appears to have been influenced solely by local legislation, the need for it demonstrating in turn that the dead could be an inconvenience, even a 'nuisance' in urban areas, emphasising their situation at the heart of every life.

In conclusion, as the population of English towns grew, which it did significantly over the second half of the eighteenth century, and alarmingly during the first half of the nineteenth century, churchyards and other burial places were engaged in a constant competition with the surrounding environment. They expanded where and when they could, but were often forced to reduce or otherwise alter their shape and size in response to population growth and urban improvements. The process was expensive, often lengthy and rarely straightforward, and could lead to churchyards themselves becoming 'nuisances', either through their location or internal overcrowding. Furthermore, just as 'nuisances' were perennial, often cyclically recurring issues, so the process of extension and reduction was ongoing, and many parishes had to extend, and/or reduce, their burial space on multiple

1745, pp. 172 & 179. This marked the first stage in the development of the present-day St Helen's Square. The new piece of land was laid out during the construction of New Street between Coney Street and Davygate and contained one hundred and forty three square yards. Although it was considered to be 'more than sufficient to answer the uses of the said Church Yard', it later proved woefully inadequate. See YCA/G46.

Similar examples also exist outside Bristol and York. In 1791 part of the churchyard of St Nicholas, Nottingham was appropriated, along with several houses, to widen the road to London. See BOR/Reg. 38, ff. 241v-242v. A Rotheram churchyard which projected into the street was also reduced although, like the inhabitants of St Helen Stonegate, parishioners were aware of the problem and had not buried in the area. See BOR/Reg. 38, ff. 264v-266v.

⁵⁶⁴ YCA/B42, House book containing minutes of the proceedings of the Corporation, 13th September 1734, p. 181v

⁵⁶⁵ BOR/Reg. 37, ff. 84v-87v, 87r, Faculty for the deconsecration of part of Holy Trinity, King's Court, York

occasions.⁵⁶⁶ Ultimately, as the following chapter will show in detail, the space available for the dead proved to be finite, and urban areas were reserved for the living; it had become clear that the nationwide impact of population growth, of which shortage of burial space was only one aspect, required nationwide rather than local legislation.

REMAINS

An inevitable consequence both of overcrowding, which typically preceded extension, and of churchyards' alteration or reduction, was the movement of remains. Leaving the issue of overcrowding for the following chapter, this section will explore remains' organised movement in instances of planned alterations to burial grounds, and compare it with grave robbing. These two forms of moving and removing remains form the opposing ends of the spectrum regarding the treatment of buried bodies, the one activity being organised and sanctioned, the other illicit and ill-intentioned. When considered in relation to the themes of permanency and 'decency' these two practices serve to throw into relief the variety of attitudes that existed towards human remains during the long eighteenth century, which taken as a whole amount to profound ambivalence. The resulting conclusions will provide the backdrop for the following chapter's discussion of overcrowding.

ORGANISED EXHUMATION

As shown in the first part of this thesis, when talking about the dead above ground, 'decency' connoted respectful treatment of the body from the point of death until the moment of burial through ritualised behaviour that preserved

⁵⁶⁶ For instance, St Nicholas, Bristol, doubled the size of its churchyard in 1743 on account of a swelling population. It was then re-built and its burial space altered during the 1760s as part of the reconstruction of the neighbouring bridge, and was altered again in 1782. See the following documents detailing the alteration of the parish's church and churchyard: BRO, EP/A/22/St N/3; BRO, EP/A/22/St N/4. In 1799 the parish petitioned for additional burial ground, and did so again in 1808, obtaining a piece of land next to the existing churchyard. See BRO, EP/A/22/St N/1; BRO/P/St.N/V/1(a). The York parish of St Maurice, which had had to compete with builders to secure a piece of land adjacent to their existing churchyard in 1827, lost a portion of this land a decade later to the Commissioners of the York Improvement Act for the widening of Monkgate. See BOR/PR/Y/MAUR/16, Vestry minutes of St Maurice, York.

the dignity and integrity of the deceased, and which in turn gave comfort to the bereaved. When used in relation to burial places 'decency' signified much the same, being centred largely on appropriate treatment of the dead body, or remains of it, again emphasising its dignity. 'Decent' burial places were ones in which remains were allowed to rest in peace well beneath the ground. However, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the movement of remains over time in the course of grave digging activities was accepted where these were decayed and appropriately re-deposited.

The same appears to be true for the movement of remains in the course of burial grounds' alteration. For instance, when Bristol's Christ Church parish found their secondary burial ground in Duck Lane had become full, they chose to level their original burial ground, closed in 1746, in order to begin using it again, pointing out that 'there are no Bodies therein but what are entirely decayed'. Even so, the number of burials within the old ground was so great that it had risen five feet above street level. This earth was to be removed 'so as to level the said Churchyard even with the Pavement', and the 'Dead Body Bones' carefully removed from the earth and buried in a pit six feet square and six feet deep in the newly levelled old ground.⁵⁶⁷ Similarly, when St Crux, Pavement in York were to give up part of their churchyard in 1764 to widen the street it was specified that care would be taken 'to disturb as few Corpses as possible and to remove with all possible Decency such as must unavoidably be removed and to deposit the same in a very large and deep Vault or Cellar (which is more than sufficient to hold the same) belonging to one of the said Houses to be pulled down next and adjoining to the said church.'⁵⁶⁸ While the 'cellar' sounds a somewhat inauspicious location for remains, the fact that it is mentioned in the same sentence as the phrase 'with all possible Decency' suggests that, according to contemporary definitions, the fact that the remains were to be placed securely below ground was sufficient.

⁵⁶⁷ See the following documents regarding the old churchyard: BRO/P/Xch/ChW/7, Document detailing the lowering of the old churchyard of Christ Church, Bristol; BRO/P/Xch/ChW/21 (a); BRO/P/Xch/ChW/21(b); BRO/P/Xch/ChW/21(c).

⁵⁶⁸ BOR/Reg. 37, ff. 98r-101v, 98v, Faculty for deconsecrating part of St Crux, York

In some instances public concern for remains was made explicit and could influence their treatment. When in 1845 St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol proposed to level their churchyard, which had become raised above street level by several feet, public demand forced them to clarify the details of the operation and assuage fears of mistreatment. It was agreed that all bodies should be removed carefully, and if their coffins were at all decayed their remains were to be transferred to a shell. The exhumed remains were to be kept in the crypt of the church until the ground had been levelled and new vaults and graves dug. These were to be as close to their original location as possible. All coffins were to be numbered or marked in some other way to enable this. In addition, all grave stones were to be replaced above the correct remains.⁵⁶⁹ This source is very important in suggesting that by the end of the period in question the 'decent' treatment of remains, and their original burial, had come to be concerned far more with the individual and their integrity, even once their body had been reduced to bones, a change possibly connected to the consequences of overcrowding and to the establishment of cemeteries, which offered clearly defined and demarcated graves and gave the promise that these would not be disturbed. These issues will be discussed further in the following chapter.

When the remains to be moved were not reduced to bone, measures might be taken to prevent bodies being exposed to public view: forced to excavate part of their churchyard in order to prepare for the construction of a new church in 1828, the parish of St Martin in the Fields, London, erected a ten foot high wooden fence around the area to 'avoid unnecessary exposure of the dead,' having found that excavation created 'scenes of too revolting a kind to admit of being minutely described.'⁵⁷⁰ This source indicates that 'decency' was a reciprocal consideration affecting the living, as well as the dead: not only did the dead deserve 'decency' and protection when circumstances necessitated their exhumation before decomposition was complete, but the living also

⁵⁶⁹ BRO/P/St MR/ChW/4/3, Document detailing the alteration of St Mary Redcliffe churchyard, Bristol

⁵⁷⁰ TNA/CRES 26/142, 'Specification of works to be done in excavating St. Martin's Church Yard and building Vaults around the Church', 1828

required protection from this 'indecent' spectacle. However, this only applied where remains were incompletely decayed: exposure to bones was unproblematic.

As details of the treatment and fate of remains during planned large-scale exhumations are scarce, it is hard to generalise about either how the process was undertaken and viewed, or attitudes towards remains in these situations. The examples discussed here suggest less ambiguity in the treatment of remains in these situations than in the day-to-day use of burial grounds, although it may well be that in other cases remains were treated less ceremoniously. The example of St Mary Redcliffe also indicates a possible change in attitudes towards remains, and burial, occurred towards the end of the long eighteenth century. However remains were treated, the fact of churchyard alteration reinforces their insecure and impermanent position and the fact that, at least for the majority of the long eighteenth century, this was part of burial culture although, as the decision of St Helen Stonegate's parishioners indicates, if exhumation could be avoided, it would be.

Impermanency is also illustrated by the fact that many burial grounds, in particular new, additional grounds or piece of ground, were leased. Leasing implicitly acknowledged and sanctioned the communal exhumation of remains as a future possibility, as well as demonstrating that the spaces of the dead as a whole could ultimately be impermanent. Prior to leasing its Grove Lane ground, St Michael-le-Belfry, York had leased an area of ground adjacent to the Minster, apparently since the Middle Ages.⁵⁷¹ Holy Trinity Goodramgate, St Cuthbert and St Olave also rented areas of ground in York.⁵⁷² Redcross Street burial ground, used by both of Bristol's Baptist congregations, also appears to

⁵⁷¹ See the parish's churchwarden's accounts, BOR/PR/Y/MB/35, which describes the land as an 'ancient and accustomed burial ground' of the parish. See also a 1416 comment quoted by David Dymond, which mentions 'a commonmarket' held on Sundays and feastdays in the churchyard of St Michael le Belfry, in the very shadow of York Minster' during which 'horses trampled and excreted over graves, and [church] services were disturbed by the clamour of "those that stand about"'. See Dymond, 'God's Disputed Acre', p. 474.

⁵⁷² See the following churchwardens' accounts of York parishes: BOR/PR/Y/MB/35; BOR/PR/Y/MB/37; BOR/PR/Y/MB/38; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13; BOR/PR/Y/CU/24 (from 1827 onwards); BOR/PR/Y/OL/19

have been leased, although it was ultimately purchased outright in 1833.⁵⁷³ The city's Jewish burial ground was also leased until the freehold was acquired in 1859, despite the fact that this was contrary to Jewish law.⁵⁷⁴ It was, in fact, also contrary to Anglican practice. However, as the solicitor to the parish of St Augustine-the-Less, Bristol informed his clients, who feared that the leasehold status of part of the ground they intended to purchase for additional burial space might make it ineligible for consecration, the practice of consecrating rented ground was in practice so commonplace that it would not be an obstacle.⁵⁷⁵ This very relaxed doctrinal and legal position seems further recognition of the fact that finding suitable burial ground was difficult and expensive, and that compromise was therefore a necessity.

The view and treatment of remains exhumed *en masse* therefore demonstrates further that 'decency' as understood in relation to the dead below ground was compatible with flexibility, even exhumation and exposure, providing that their remains were treated appropriately. However, the end of the long eighteenth century seems to have seen the beginning of a more particular attitude focused on the preservation of individual integrity and association with a specific location, an idea to be explored further in the following chapter. The impermanence of remains, and the exchange of space between the living and the dead in densely populated urban areas, are additionally illustrated by the leasehold status of many burial grounds.

GRAVE ROBBERY

In stark contrast to the organised and, certainly in theory, respectful movement of remains was the practice of grave robbery, which involved not only the removal of remains but also of coffin parts. Although exceptional, this phenomenon offers an insight into wider contemporary attitudes towards the dead body.

⁵⁷³ See the following document relating to the Redcross Street burial ground: BRO/41045/TF/E/25/1. See also BRO/41045/TF/E/25/2-4 for the numerous deeds relating to the release of the piece of garden land, and for a number of deeds relating to the properties surrounding the burial ground.

⁵⁷⁴ Samuel, *Jews in Bristol*, p. 74

⁵⁷⁵ See BRO/P/St Aug/ChW/7(a)iii, pp. 1-2, describing the purchase of additional burial ground.

Vanessa Harding has found cases of body snatching as early as the mid-seventeenth-century in London, and one significant example from 1720, involving the robbery of thirty bodies, has also been found.⁵⁷⁶ However, it was certainly fairly rare at this time. More common in the earlier part of our period were reports of the theft of coffins and metal coffin furniture, in which grave diggers and others involved in the burial of the dead, such as sextons, were frequently implicated. In each of these cases, the coffins and their components were judged the property of those who had buried the deceased.⁵⁷⁷ Remains were often disturbed in the process, in some cases left lying in the open, in others re-interred, more likely because this offered the best way to conceal a large scale operation than because of a sense of decency.⁵⁷⁸ However, no comment was passed on these actions and no punishment was made on these grounds.

Theft of coffin parts did not necessarily involve the mistreatment of bodies, nor was it necessarily considered theft if those pieces had been unearthed in the course of routine grave digging, which was commonplace. For instance, in 1766 Charles Dennet, grave digger for the parish of St Clement Danes, and his assistant Samuel Newcombe were indicted for stealing 10lbs of brass nails, the property of persons unknown. A witness had seen them digging graves, which brought up pieces of coffins, some with nails remaining, which they took for themselves. Both were acquitted, such things being considered as perquisites to

⁵⁷⁶ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, p. 116; BL/1851.c.10(37), 'A Full and True Account of thirty dead bodies of Men Women and Children, that was taken out of one of the burying grounds belonging to St. Mary Overs in the park, by George Gambol, and several others' (London, 1720).

⁵⁷⁷ In 1732 a Thomas Middleton, along with an accomplice, was indicted for stealing 50lbs of lead, valued at 5s, taken from the coffin of the son of a Rene de Boyville buried in 1721 in the vault of Bow Church. The lead was sold and re-sold a number of times, until one buyer commented that the lead smelled of corpses, and found the coffin name plate among the metal. The father of the deceased, Mr de Boyville, was informed and prosecution begun. It was revealed that the accused was grave digger for the parish of Aldgate and was sometimes employed as a bearer by the sexton of Bow Church. He had obtained the key to the vaults from the sexton's servant, who was happy to oblige in return for a small fee. The verdict of the trial is unknown. However, Middleton was indicted a second time for stealing 150lbs of lead, obtained by breaking through the wooden outer layer of a coffin buried seven years previously. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), January 1732, trial of Thomas Middleton (t17320114-1).

⁵⁷⁸ In one case it was noted that a corpse had been dumped on the floor and covered with the sawdust from the coffin. See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), January 1732, trial of Thomas Middleton (t17320114-1). In another a group of men who had stolen the lead from one hundred and fifty coffins 'had taken the Bodies out, and made a Hole in the Church-Yard, and buried them.' See *Westminster Journal or New Weekly Miscellany*, Saturday, September 26, 1747.

which grave diggers and other such employees were entitled.⁵⁷⁹ A similar defence was given in an 1842 case when grave digger Henry Carter was indicted on five separate counts of stealing brass coffin plates and handles. He pleaded that 'It is a perquisite I and my mate have, we belong to the churchyard, and we dug it up.'⁵⁸⁰ A further example illustrates that the practice was not confined to London: in 1789 Mr Elston, sexton of St Michael-le-Belfry, York, was found by his parish to be guilty of 'Conveying Old Coffin Board &c from the Church Yard of this Parish to Geo. Stephenson, of Clifton' and suspended. However the sexton was not charged, and was reinstated after promising 'never to offend in the like manner'.⁵⁸¹ Therefore, the material used to encase the corpse had a relatively clear legal status, although this only applied if it was exhumed with the intention of theft. If, as was commonly the case, coffins were disturbed in the process of grave making they were deemed property of those who found them. Therefore, despite their legal status as property, the ownership of the materials used to inter the dead was flexible and could pass from one person to another in a way that separated them from their original purpose.

The legal status of remains themselves, in particular their movement and appropriation, was even less well defined, as instances of body snatching make clear. The earliest case found in London newspapers dates from 1765, when a man was convicted of stealing the body of a child from a grave in St Andrews, Holborn, and committed to Wood-Street compter.⁵⁸² Several more cases were reported in the following months and years.⁵⁸³ A case from December 1777, in

⁵⁷⁹ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), December 1766, trial of Charles Dennet (t17661217-41)

⁵⁸⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* (www.oldbaileyonline.org, 23 January 2009), April 1842, trial of Henry Carter (t18420404-1362)

⁵⁸¹ BOR/PR/Y/MB/37, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

⁵⁸² *London Evening Post*, Saturday, February 2, 1765

⁵⁸³ The following month a man was chased from the churchyard of St Saviour, but not caught, after being found stealing a corpse, also that of a child. See *Public Ledger*, Thursday, October 24, 1765. Two years later a witness to an attempted grave robbery recounted his experiences in a letter to the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*. He described walking into a Soho churchyard early one morning, having been attracted by the sound of voices. He found that a corpse had been exhumed and left lying on the ground. Attempting to find out more about the situation he asked a man there, whom he assumed to be the grave digger 'but could not get a satisfactory answer, for he seemed to want to conceal it.' See *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, Monday, April 20, 1767.

which a grave digger was tried and charged, seems to have been the first trial of its kind and to have set the precedent for future prosecutions: firstly, through the use of the infamous distinction between the theft of a body and the theft of a shroud or burial furniture (the latter being the only act judged to be criminal as per the precedent of the trials mentioned above); and secondly, through establishing a precedent for sentencing in spite of this loophole. The accused grave digger, employed by St George's, Bloomsbury, was indicted along with two others for stealing the body of Mrs Jane Saintsbury, who had died some three months before.⁵⁸⁴ The trial was reported at length in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, being considered 'of a very extraordinary and interesting nature.' The paper, claiming that it was 'the first indictment of the kind,' (emphasising that although in existence for a century, body snatching remained rare), judged that 'a substantial account of [the case] will not be unpleasing; and although the fact is of a most disagreeable nature, yet the law decision will be firmly instructive to the community.'⁵⁸⁵

The argument that the case was a felony only if it involved the theft of property, for example 'the shroud, or any other thing, such as pillow, &c. or any part of it,' was upheld; as the shroud was torn off and left behind, the case was considered only a misdemeanour. However, the justice presiding over the case argued that the crime was one which had throughout history been *contra bonos mores*, 'an offence against decency and good manners,' and sentenced the gravedigger and his assistant to six months imprisonment each, at the beginning and end of which time they were to be whipped.⁵⁸⁶ Therefore, despite the fact that, not being property, bodies could not technically be stolen, in practice the principle of *contra bonos mores*, which reinforces the existence of a wider standard of 'decency' and its application to human remains, could lead to prosecution and imprisonment. Proof that it acted as a precedent can be found in the 1799 case of T. Binely, former gravedigger, and his accomplice W. Marsh, who were each sentenced to six months imprisonment for stealing a dead body

⁵⁸⁴ *London Evening Post*, Saturday, December 6, 1777

⁵⁸⁵ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, Tuesday, December 9, 1777

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

from St Giles' parish burial ground, a sentence erroneously reported by the *Observer* to be the first of its kind.⁵⁸⁷

However, although incorrect, the *Observer's* statement is not surprising given the long gap between the first prosecution in 1777 and the case of Binley, and the fact that, as will be shown below, the five years prior to Binley's sentencing had seen several grave robbing scandals, unsuccessful trials and a failed attempt to pass legislation making the practice a distinct felony. These facts demonstrate a weak official will to address the treatment and uses to which stolen bodies were subject, and therefore an apparent lack of concern regarding the matter at a level where preventative and punitive measures could be made and enforced. This is in contrast to the public feeling which the aforementioned scandals induced.

The first of these scandals occurred in 1795 in Lambeth burial ground. The theft of a number of bodies from the ground had been discovered the previous year, but it was not until the following February that the scandal broke.⁵⁸⁸ The catalyst was the apprehension of three men disturbed in the act of stealing five bodies, which led to relatives of those buried in the ground demanding to ascertain that their loved ones remained in situ. Having been refused,

people of all descriptions...in great numbers forced their way in [to the ground], and in spite of every effort of the Parish Officers...began like mad people, to tear up the ground; at the same time charging the Officers, and everyone that offered them any opposition, with being privy to the robberies, and in general terms threatening them.

The Officers found that they could not summon the force required to quell the furious outburst and, fearing inducing a riot, allowed the crowd to continue digging,

⁵⁸⁷ *Observer*, Sunday, February 24, 1799

⁵⁸⁸ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Saturday, July 26, 1794. Earlier in the year the *Morning Post* reported that resurrection men were seen near the Turnpike in Mile End, when an 'ill-looking fellow' carrying a sack got out of a coach and entered a house from which he emerged with a large hamper. Parish officers were informed and in the evening they broke in. They found 'two men and a woman drinking tea on a bench, at one end of which lay the bodies of two children...and on entering an adjoining room, the bodies of six adults were discovered un mutilated, besides which, the floor was strewn with limbs in a state too shocking for public description.' See *Morning Post*, Friday, March 21, 1794. The story was also reported in the *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Friday, March 21, 1794.

by which a great number of empty coffins were discovered, the bodies having been stolen from them; great distress and agitation of mind was manifest in every one, and some, in a kind of frenzy, ran away with the coffins of their deceased relations; and the generality of the populace were so ripe for mischief, that they attacked a house with stones and brickbats, upon the bare suspicion that the occupier had been concerned in, or privy to the robbery of the ground, and it was with difficulty that they were prevented from demolishing it.

Upon investigation, it transpired that the grave digger and three other men were the culprits. They stole for eight different surgeons, making their deals with hospital employees, and were part of an operation covering thirty burial grounds, many of whose grave diggers were involved in the body snatching in return for five shillings per corpse. It was revealed that the bodies were used by surgeons not only for dissection, but were burned, reduced to skeletons or buried. Human flesh had also been reduced to 'a substance like Spermaceti, and candles made of it, and...soap has also been made from the same materials.'⁵⁸⁹

The case prompted an almost immediate application to parliament for the criminalisation of stealing bodies from burial grounds, described as 'a practice of late so very prevalent...in and round the metropolis.'⁵⁹⁰ Instrumental in creating and submitting this application were the churchwardens of London parishes, in particular the churchwarden of Lambeth parish, Mr H. I. Blunt, who together formed a committee to see the Bill through Parliament.⁵⁹¹ In March 1795, just over a month after the initial discovery of the thefts, a Sir John Frederick was arguing in favour of the Bill to 'more effectually to prevent the stealing of dead bodies out of church-yards, and other burying-grounds.' However, although he had some support in parliament, opinion was not unanimous. Mr Mainwaring, for example, argued that the present punishment of fine, imprisonment and whipping, again indicating the status of the 1777 case as a precedent for punishment and possibly the existence of other less publicised convictions, was 'sufficiently severe.' The Bill was also opposed by Lord Russell who 'said, he thought the proposition of the Hon. Baronet had a

⁵⁸⁹ *Sunday Reformer and Universal Register*, Sunday, March 22, 1795

⁵⁹⁰ *London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post*, Monday, February 9, 1795

⁵⁹¹ *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Thursday, February 26, 1795

tendency to revive the pangs which individuals felt on the occasion for the removal of their friends and relatives, and to excite a considerable degree of indignation and prejudice in the minds of the people against professional men,' and opposed the Bill as being of no practical good.

Even so, when put to the vote, 'the Ayes had it' and the preparation of the Bill was ordered.⁵⁹² In the following weeks a further meeting of London churchwardens was held where the committee resolved to take measures to invite subscribers from London parishes to assist the cause.⁵⁹³ However, despite this initial flurry of activity and apparently reasonable degree of government support, the Bill ultimately failed to pass. The reasons for this are unknown, but we can assume that the protection of 'professional men' and perhaps other, related, vested interests, as advocated by Lord Russell under the very thin guise of concern for the bereaved, was an important factor. So too, perhaps, was the argument of Mr Mainwaring that a precedent for punishment existed, although it was a lenient one relative to contemporary convictions for 'thefts' whose legal status and definitions were clearer. Therefore, despite evidence for public distress at the practice, government concern was more muted and ultimately insufficient to force legislative action. This indicates not only the ambiguous legal position of remains, but shows that the lack of legal action effectively abetted body snatchers' and surgeons' activities, which continued unhindered.

A second scandal emerged in 1798, when a hackney coachman named John Peak (elsewhere called John Peach) was charged on suspicion of being involved with several others in stealing nine freshly buried bodies from the burial ground of Tottenham-court Chapel.⁵⁹⁴ Although denying the charges at first, the prisoner was found to be one-and-the-same as a certain 'Lousy Jack' known to be connected with resurrectionists and previously implicated in a similar robbery from a Hampstead churchyard.⁵⁹⁵ Suspicion also fell on the sexton

⁵⁹² *Whitehall Evening Post* (1770), Tuesday, March 17, 1795

⁵⁹³ *Sunday Reformer and Universal Register*, Sunday, March 22, 1795. The story was also reported in the *Morning Chronicle*, Friday, March 20, 1795.

⁵⁹⁴ *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, March 14, 1798; *Evening Mail*, Friday, March 9, 1798.

⁵⁹⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* (1770), Thursday, March 8, 1798. See also *Lloyd's Evening Post*, Friday, March 9, 1798.

upon the discovery of a boring instrument in 'every way calculated to break open coffins and which the Sexton acknowledged had been made by his orders.'⁵⁹⁶ It emerged that at least sixty bodies had been stolen from the ground over an unspecified period. However, although a list of bodies stolen was presented to the magistrate, there was not enough evidence to prove any of the implicated parties guilty and no charges were brought.⁵⁹⁷

As with Lambeth, these reports caused a great deal of distress among the relatives of the deceased. The *Sun* reported that '[i]t is a most afflicting scene, to witness the concourses of people who daily flock about the burial-ground in Tottenham-court-road, to discover whether the remains of their relatives are still left interred in their graves. Numbers of coffins have been opened for this purpose.' A number of bodies were taken away from the ground to be reburied elsewhere, emphasising the desire to protect the dead. Contrastingly, it was also reported that 'on Tuesday afternoon no fewer than twenty-nine coffins were broken up in the church-yard for fire-wood, the bodies having been stolen. There was quite a scuffle for the wood,' indicating that even in cases of deliberate exhumation, once empty, coffins were free to become the property of anyone who might claim them.⁵⁹⁸ Significantly, in this instance, no evidence of subsequent action or agitation to act against body snatching has been found.

The lack of official response left the responsibility for ensuring the safety of remains with the public. The removal of remains to other burial places presumably deemed safer was, according to the above example, apparently one option available to those who wished to safeguard their loved ones. It also indicates that the exhumation of remains on an individual basis was acceptable, even desirable, if it was in the interests of the deceased. Other measures might also be taken to prevent the disruption of remains after death, for example employing people to watch over one's grave.⁵⁹⁹ Fear of body snatching even led

⁵⁹⁶ *Evening Mail*, Friday, March 9, 1798

⁵⁹⁷ *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, March 14, 1798

⁵⁹⁸ *Sun*, Thursday, March 15, 1798

⁵⁹⁹ A wealthy Jewish man directed that his grave be watched for twelve months after his death, giving 200 guineas to be divided between the three men entrusted with the job. See *Observer*, Sunday, February 9, 1800.

to the creation of a market for goods and services which promised, in the words of one advertisement for iron 'patent coffins' 'security for the dead.' These coffins were advertised as impenetrable, 'a perfect security against all attempts of the Grave-Robbers', and appear from at least November 1796 until 1799 in a number of London newspapers, a particular concentration being found in 1798, certainly in response to the Tottenham Court Road scandal.⁶⁰⁰ Similarly, a 1797 advertisement, mentioning the Lambeth case from several years before, reminded 'the Public of the necessity there absolutely exists for such security, if we are desirous that the Remains of our departed Friends should continue in the same place where we had decently interred them.'⁶⁰¹

Some people resorted to private burial grounds, which advertised themselves as secure and often charged low fees. However, for this reason they were often particularly subject to overcrowding in the interests of proprietors' profit. Burial reformer George Walker was therefore especially critical of them, mentioning the case of New Bunhill Fields where about ten thousand bodies had been buried in an eighteen year period.⁶⁰² Moreover, private grounds were not necessarily safer. The danger of private grounds was expressed in a satirical poem of c.1825 entitled 'A Parody on "Mary's Ghost" ', which combines the idea of private grounds with patent coffins, mocking their claims of security. In it the ghost of a recently buried girl visits her lover to inform her that her

Some individuals' fear stemmed from their extraordinary anatomy. For instance one man, a bank clerk named Mr Jenkins, being 'so remarkable for his height', 'suffered considerably in his mind before his death, from the apprehension that his body would be taken up after burial for the use of the Surgeons.' His friends therefore applied to the government and were granted permission to have him interred within the garden of the Bank of England, his place of employment, which had previously been the burial ground of St Christopher's church. His coffin measured more than eight feet, and more than 200 guineas had been offered for his body by surgeons. See *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Thursday, April 5, 1798.

Others, however, were content to pledge their bodies to surgeons. In 1788 *World* wrote of a 'singular annuity' which had been agreed between a surgeon and a very tall man of six foot four inches in height. The surgeon agreed to pay the man £10 per year for the rest of his life if he were to agree that upon his death, he would consent to his body being dissected by the surgeon, 'and during his life, to walk one given hour under the Piazza, Covent Garden, where the Surgeon resided, every day if able to do it.' This continued for many years until the surgeon died, whereupon the annuity was passed on to a professional friend. They reported that 'the man still walks the Piazza every morning, and is in general dressed in black, and wears a large wig.' See *World* (1787), Friday, September 19, 1788.

⁶⁰⁰ *Whitehall Evening Post* (1770), Saturday, February 3, 1798; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Thursday, March 22, 1798; *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Friday, November 11, 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, December 29, 1796; *Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, December 12, 1799.

⁶⁰¹ *True Briton* (1793), Monday, January 2, 1797

⁶⁰² Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp. 182-236

remains have been stolen, saying, 'I wish you'd speak to Mr. D./Who owes that *patent* ground;/And tell him that his *patent* graves,/Are neither safe nor sound.'⁶⁰³ Therefore while the seemingly more effective measure of *patent* coffins were affordable to the wealthy, the only option available to the poorer sections of society was one which could make them even more vulnerable, not only to body snatching but to overcrowding.

Reactions to body snatching cases and the existence and advertisement of measures claiming to prevent the removal and subsequent dissection of remains clearly indicate a widespread alarm at the idea of remains being disinterred without authorisation or ceremony to be used and abused by surgeons. This is hardly surprising. We can surmise that, in addition to the idea of dissection, distress was caused by the simple fact that the remains stolen were still recognisable as individuals; as Vanessa Harding has argued in relation to early modern Paris, remains retaining recognisable features are less likely to be viewed 'pragmatically and impersonally' than bones, an idea that fits with the aforementioned definition of 'decency' as it applied to buried remains, that is that they should remain buried and undisturbed until decomposition was complete.⁶⁰⁴

A particularly striking feature of the body snatching accounts discussed is the complicity of grave diggers and sextons, those whose responsibility it was to ensure 'decent' interment and to care for burial grounds. However, their apparently frequent abuse of their position, although it inspired anger in individual cases, does not seem to have coalesced into any widespread action against this group even though, as the following chapter will show, they were also responsible for the mistreatment, sometimes mutilation and exhumation of bodies in overcrowded burial grounds, using methods which differed little from those of grave robbers, for instance breaking coffins with 'borers' and pulling bodies to the surface with ropes.

⁶⁰³ BL/1608/1283, 'A Parody on "Mary's Ghost"; or, The Doctors and the Body-Snatchers' (Norwich, c.1825), p. 4

⁶⁰⁴ Harding, 'Whose Body?', pp. 171-2

We have therefore seen evidence of a dual attitude towards bodies removed, often using brutal methods, with the specific intention of dissection. Among much of the population these practices were viewed with horror, but among official circles with indifference meaning that legal action against body snatching was never taken. Grave robbing continued for a further three decades after the scandals described, scandals whose chance discovery appear to have marked the entrance of grave robbing into public consciousness for the scale of operations they revealed.⁶⁰⁵ The practice only stopped with the passing of Warburton's Anatomy Act in 1832 which, rather than being a punitive measure, acted to officially condone anatomists' activities and continued to leave a significant group of bodies vulnerable to dissection before they had even been accorded the 'decency' of a funeral. Grave robbing therefore ceased only because it was no longer necessary, rather than because it had been deemed illegal and therefore wrong. Significantly, it attached anatomisation firmly to the poor, a fate according with their gradual alienation from burial grounds and the fact that they were most likely to suffer the worst effects of overcrowding, developments reflecting their declining position in contemporary society as a whole.

This section has provided further evidence of the importance of the 'decent' treatment of the dead, and the distress that failure to meet these standards could cause. Yet it has also shown that in situations where 'decency' was disregarded to an extreme degree, no action was taken at an official or a popular level. The tolerance of 'indecent' treatment of the dead will be further evidenced in the following chapter, in which it will be shown that the growing concentration of bodies contained within burial grounds increasingly resulted in the kind of extreme and brutal treatment of remains seen in body snatching cases becoming a part of their everyday management.

⁶⁰⁵ *The Times*, Wednesday, October 15, 1823, p. 3; *The Times*, Friday, Oct 13, 1826, p. 3; *The Times*, Saturday, April 07, 1827, p. 3; *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, Sunday, March 19, 1826, p. 93; *John Bull*, Monday, December 24, 1827, p. 403; *John Bull*, Saturday, October 14, 1843, p. 646.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that churchyards were spaces with many functions, of which burial of the dead was only one. They were used in essentially the same manner as other public urban spaces and this was considered compatible with the presence of the dead, providing that they and any memorials to them were left undisturbed. Nor, for the most part, were the various quotidian and profane activities which took place within them considered incompatible with the consecrated status of these areas. Fluidity and flexibility were accepted features of urban life, even when they altered burial grounds' shape and size and required the re-location of the dead buried within. All of these features of urban burial places contributed to, rather than detracted from, their symbolic importance as places for the dead through which the deceased could express their position within their local community.

Although there is evidence of a growing desire to enclose and better separate churchyards from their surroundings, this does not seem to have been representative of all vestries, and certainly not of all parishioners. Furthermore, the sources consulted indicate that changing ideas regarding the 'proper' use of burial spaces were only one, perhaps the lesser, factor behind these measures; instead, it seems that attitudes towards churchyards were affected more by population growth, which made traditional forms of usage, otherwise still acceptable in principle, problematic. Population growth also made churchyards increasingly inconvenient in urban spaces, and demonstrated that they were no longer sufficient to contain their own rapidly accumulating populations. The following chapter will assess how the latter problem developed over the eighteenth century; its management when additional ground was not available; and the ultimate decision to exclude the dead from urban areas. It will also further explore the ambivalence towards remains, demonstrating that their 'indecent' treatment became more common as a consequence of overcrowding.

OVERCROWDING AND REFORM

INTRODUCTION

A series of laws passed in the 1850s progressively outlawed burial in towns and enforced the use of extramural cemeteries. This very significant reform of burial custom was prompted by the saturation of urban burial grounds, caused by the great increase in the number of bodies they received as a result of urban population growth. The overcrowding of burial grounds illustrated not only that the amount of space available for the dead was insufficient, but presented several further problems affecting both the dead and the living. For the dead, it meant burial increasingly close to the surface of grounds, and the increased likelihood of their disturbance, even their exhumation, before their bodies had fully decayed. For the living, the densely crowded dead and their proximity to, even presence above, the surface posed a serious threat to health. This chapter will examine the development of this situation, demonstrating that many aspects of it have a pre-history stretching back much further than the early nineteenth century, the period most historians associate with the problem. It will ask why these problems did not inspire action until so late a date given that they were widespread and familiar, and that action against them, including the idea of cemeteries, were not unprecedented.

It will start by examining the condition of urban burial grounds, the means used to maximise their capacity and the implications of these methods for the treatment of remains, comparing conditions and practices with those discussed in the previous chapter. It will then go on to demonstrate that calls for reform, and the arguments and solutions posed within them, had just as long a pre-history as overcrowding and identify the factors which contributed to the conditions reaching such extremes before action was taken against them. It will

also be asked whether cemeteries changed, or were the result of changes in, burial preference, the treatment of remains and the treatment of burial places, and just how radical an alteration in burial practice they were.

OVERCROWDING

Previous chapters have indicated some of the signs and effects of overcrowding and practical responses to them. This section will discuss its manifestations, management and implications for the treatment of remains in more detail, demonstrating that the problem existed throughout the long eighteenth century and that it was of equal severity in Bristol and York as in the capital. It will emphasise the visibility of the dead and their spaces in the urban environment, and demonstrate that overcrowding increased this visibility, even to the point of unearthing the dead.

As discussed in the previous chapter, while extension was an option for parishes seeking additional burial space, it was an expensive and frequently long-winded process which was often instigated and completed long after overcrowding had become a problem. Another solution, although it was not by itself enough to create additional space, was the exclusion of certain groups from parochial grounds, for example the poor. More common as means of dealing with over-populated burial places were a variety of forms of internal management which sought to make the most of the finite space available, often at the expense of the bodies already interred.

A common sign of overcrowding was the raised surface level of churchyards, some of which reached as much as five or six feet above ground level. For instance, by the 1770s the small churchyard of St Stephen's, Bristol had been 'raised five feet above the natural level' due to the sheer number of bodies it contained, a factor contributing to its extension, discussed in the previous chapter.⁶⁰⁶ In 1849, *The Lady's Newspaper* included an image of Old St Pancras Churchyard, which was similarly raised many feet above its original level.

⁶⁰⁶ Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol*, pp. 399 & 497

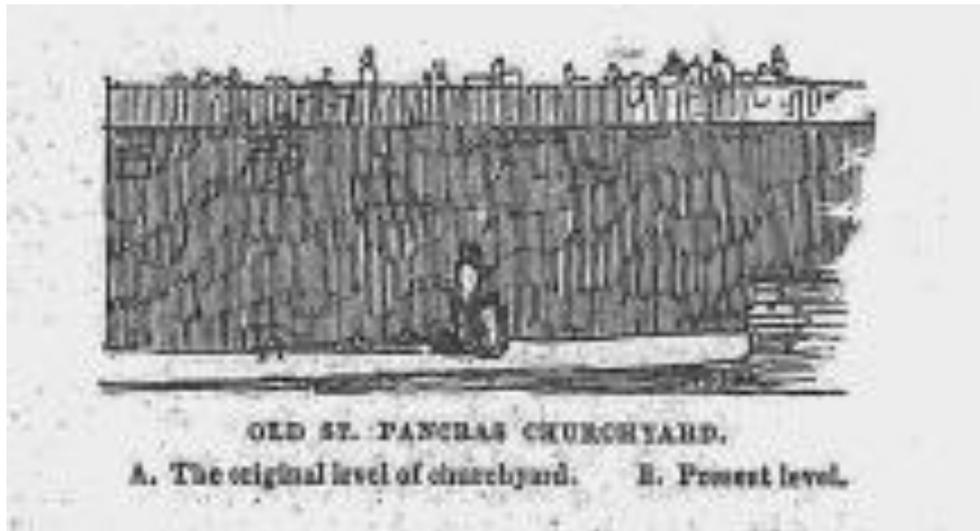


Figure 23. from 'Proximate Causes of Cholera', *The Lady's Newspaper*, Saturday, September 22, 1849, p. 159

George Alfred Walker noted a number of such examples, which caused particular problems when the burial grounds in question were enclosed by buildings rather than open streets. One burial ground in Drury Lane, he reported, had risen up to the window level of the surrounding houses.⁶⁰⁷ The result in such cases was that the effluvia of putrefaction leached from the soil through the brickwork and into the surrounding homes.⁶⁰⁸ This phenomenon was known even in the earlier part of our period; Sir Christopher Wren commented of London in 1708 that churchyards were 'being continually raised by the graves [which] occasions, in time, a descent by steps into the Church, which renders it damp, and the walls green; as appears evidently in all old Churches.'⁶⁰⁹

Raised ground levels resulted from the layering of burials, which became more pronounced as the number of bodies interred increased: with lower layers having less time to decay before the addition of further layers, the raising effect was correspondingly greater. This in turn resulted in increasingly shallow graves, a problem also present as early as the seventeenth century.⁶¹⁰ This

⁶⁰⁷ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp. 162-3

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152

⁶⁰⁹ *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, November 11, 1790. The letter was also reprinted in *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, Friday, November 12, 1790.

⁶¹⁰ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 64-5

practice, and the effects of digging in crowded burial grounds, are well illustrated by an 1843 article entitled 'Further Churchyard Outrages', printed in *The Penny Satirist*. It described several cases of shallow burial, one in which a body was covered in just eight to ten inches of earth, the other in which a grave was dug only two and a half feet deep. Inspecting the latter grave, the family of the deceased complained of its shallowness. The gravediggers' response was to remove a coffin that prevented deeper burial with a pickaxe, in the process breaking through the top and exposing the body within. They 'then put the axe under the coffin, which they thus overturned, throwing the corpse out, and mixed it up with the clay [and] then threw up the coffin, and wheeled it away.' The process was repeated twice more in order to make the grave sufficiently deep.⁶¹¹ This was but one way in which 'everyday' management of burial grounds came to resemble the extraordinary practices of grave robbers, discussed in the previous chapter.

As the previous chapters have mentioned, the disruption of remains had long been an accepted part of digging new graves and the accepted fate of remains. During the Middle Ages charnel houses were used in some places, but they do not appear in our period.⁶¹² Parish records indicate that throughout the eighteenth century bones and coffin pieces often lay upon the surfaces of churchyards, requiring periodic collection. For instance, St Michael-le-Belfry, York, paid 1s to their Sexton 'for burning pieces of Coffin Boards' in 1748, and for 'Removing the bones &c' in 1756.⁶¹³ A number of other examples from the city also exist: in 1821 Thomas Silversides was paid £1 by St Michael Spurriergate for 'gathering and burying bones'; in 1834 St Crux paid their Sexton 'for Cutting Grass in Church Yard Gathering Bones in Street,' indicating that remains could even leave consecrated ground, a likely indication of lack of enclosure; and bones and coffin fragments were also often exhumed in St Olave,

⁶¹¹ 'Further Churchyard Outrages', *The Penny Satirist*, Saturday, November 18, 1843, p. 1

⁶¹² Milne, *St Bride's Church London*, p. 14. Six medieval charnel houses are known to have existed in late medieval London, although some of these were used only for remains disturbed in the course of organised exhumation occasioned by building works or other such programmes. See *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶¹³ BOR/PR/Y/MB/35, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael-le-Belfry, York

and Holy Trinity Goodramgate.⁶¹⁴ The long-standing nature of this problem can be illustrated by several comments. Christopher Wren noted in 1708 that the dead were frequently disturbed 'at the pleasure of the sexton, or piled four or five upon one another, or bones thrown out to gain room', while in 1664 Samuel Pepys recorded in his diary that, 'for a payment of sixpence, a grave-digger promised to "jostle [the other coffins] together" to make room for Samuel's brother...near his mother's pew, an action which disturbed "other corpses that are not quite rotten."' ⁶¹⁵ This disturbance was common even in the middle ages: Walter Stocket left a bequest of 10s to the parish of St Bride, London in 1380 "if the parish do not disturb me in my burial".⁶¹⁶

However, as the example from *The Penny Satirist* demonstrates, overcrowding not only made this disruption more likely, but meant that the remains disturbed were often incompletely decayed, and that in some cases complete exhumation occurred.⁶¹⁷ An 1842 Report commissioned by the House of Commons described the frequency of the disruption of remains, many of which had been mere months in the ground. Witnesses reported seeing bones with flesh still hanging from them being disinterred. In some cases the flesh was cut from the bones and thrown back into the earth, the bones being reburied in separate holes, transported to dead houses or removed completely to face uncertain fates.⁶¹⁸

Of the very many examples which illustrate the prevalence of such practices by the latter part of our period, perhaps the most extreme, or at least the best documented, is that of Spa Fields burial ground in Clerkenwell, London, where

⁶¹⁴ BOR/PR/Y/MS/27, Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael, Spurriergate, York; BOR/PR/Y/CR/13, Churchwardens' accounts of St Crux, York; YCL/Y.614.61, Alfred E. Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom of Interment in Towns, and the Present State of York Grave Yards* (York, 1847), p. 14; BOR/PR/Y/HTG/13, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, York.

⁶¹⁵ *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, November 11, 1790. The letter was also reprinted in *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, Friday, November 12, 1790; Milne, *St Bride's Church London*, p. 13.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107

⁶¹⁷ A very similar example was given in *The Times* Thursday, Apr 22, 1830, p. 3. It described the 'atrocious and inhuman circumstances' with which the sexton of St Mary Islington had removed the lid of a coffin and mutilated the body within, leaving its trunk and limbs laying on the ground and removing the coffin to an adjoining burial ground.

⁶¹⁸ *The Times*, Friday, October 07, 1842, p. 4. For similarly horrifying and graphic examples see the following: *The Times*, Wednesday, February 01, 1843, p. 5; *The Times*, Friday, December 22, 1843, p. 4; *The Times*, Saturday, September 08, 1849, p. 5; *The Times*, Friday, November 09, 1849, p. 8; *The Times*, Wednesday, January 16, 1850, p. 8.

in 1845 an investigation instigated by a petition from local residents brought to the public attention the 'nuisance' and 'malpractices that have so long prevailed', causing a scandal and leading to a police inquiry.⁶¹⁹ The petition was prompted by comment made by the gravedigger who, on his final day of work there, asserted 'that he well knew after he left that the coffin [of a recently buried child] would be burnt, the body and limbs severed, and deposited elsewhere.' Two police constables were called in to prevent the disinterment, and the gravedigger took them to an outhouse where several coffin lids with pieces of flesh adhering to them were being 'consumed over a fierce fire.' At the inquiry, the gravedigger, named Reuben Room, freely testified to the brutal means used to manage space in the ground. He described how graves were dug haphazardly, frequently in ground known to be full, meaning that he had

often disturbed and mutilated seven or eight bodies; that is, I have severed heads, arms, legs, or whatever came in my way, with a crowbar, pickaxe, chopper, and saw. Of the bodies, some were quite fresh and some decomposed. I have had as much as 1½ cwt. of human flesh on what we term the "beef-board" at the foot of the grave at one time. I have often put a rope round the neck of the corpse to drag it out of the coffin, fastening one end of the rope to a tombstone so as to keep the corpse upright to get at the coffin from underneath, to make room for the flesh of other bodies. The coffins were taken away and burnt with pieces of decomposing flesh adhering thereto...I have been up to my knees in human flesh by jumping on bodies so as to cram them into the least possible space at the bottom of the graves in which fresh bodies were afterwards placed. We covered over the flesh at the bottom by a small layer of mould. I have ruptured myself in dragging a heavy corpse out of the coffin. It was a very heavy one. It slipped from my hold lifting it up by the shoulders. The corpse was quite fresh. These occurrences took place every day.⁶²⁰

A number of local residents testified to the smell caused by the almost constant fire used to dispose of remains in the Spa Fields bone house, which was particularly fierce and foetid at night, and had several times set the bone house itself alight. Many also testified to frequent and recurrent illness in the area, in particular fevers, one woman having lost five of her eight children.⁶²¹ The result of the inquiry and evidence given was that in 1846 it was ordered

⁶¹⁹ 'The Spa Fields Burial Ground', *Age and Argus*, Saturday, March 08, 1845, p. 3

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3; *The Times* Saturday, March 01, 1845, p. 8.

that burial should cease in most, but not all, parts of the burial ground; that those coffins which were interred were to be buried at least five feet deep and at least one foot apart; and that no remains be disturbed within ten years of their burial.⁶²² However, three years later a girl in the vicinity died from malaria believed to have been caused by the burial ground, which had evidently been recently re-opened, regardless of the previous order, to the general detriment of health in the locality.⁶²³

The description accompanying the Spa Fields case was particularly graphic, but practices described, including the exhumation and brutal treatment of remains, their dismemberment and ignominious disposal, were commonplace features of grave digging across the country by the latter decades of our period. Reuben Room's testimony illustrates, perhaps a little too vividly, that their methods had essentially become those of grave robbers. Therefore, while grave robbing was an extraordinary fate for a corpse, in fact increasing numbers of bodies suffered much the same treatment, even forms of dissection and dismemberment, in the course of day-to-day burial ground management. Similar methods and consequences can be seen in the variety of other space-creating measures typically used in urban graveyards.

One option was the raising of ground levels with additional earth; Alfred Hargrove, in an 1847 lecture describing the severely overcrowded and insanitary state of York's graveyards, explained that the tiny ground of St Helen's on Davygate had been buried over so many times that it had run out of soil, 'and as a last resort, *rubbish* has been led in, by which means it has been raised about three feet above the street.'⁶²⁴ However, it was more common that raised grounds were reduced in height, otherwise known as 'levelling' or 'burying over', a practice of long-standing mentioned in the previous chapter. It could be a significant undertaking; in 1710 St John Ousebridge, York paid 'for Six Days Worke for Digging & Levelling the Church Yard,' and in 1766 Holy

⁶²² *The Times*, Tuesday, September 08, 1846, p. 6

⁶²³ *The Morning Chronicle*, Thursday, September 6, 1849; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, September 9, 1849.

⁶²⁴ *Caledonian Mercury*, Thursday, January 4, 1849; YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, p. 15.

Trinity Micklegate, also in York, paid three men for five days levelling work.⁶²⁵ St Martin-le-Grand, Coney Street, also in York had been twice buried over in the first twenty five years of the nineteenth-century, although coffins could still only be buried eighteen inches deep, illustrating that this traditional means of making room unsurprisingly became more frequent over time as bodies accumulated more rapidly.⁶²⁶

As stated, the treatment of remains removed in the course of levelling was often little more ceremonious than the methods of exhumation described above. For instance, in 1849 *The Times* reported that after the levelling of Bedford Street burial ground,

Eight double loads of the consecrated ground, full of human remains (as might be expected) were wheeled from Covent-garden churchyard, where a brick grave had been dug, to the bottom of Church-place, and there remained till removed by carts, to the horror of the inhabitants and persons passing in the street, the various bones of the human body being played with by boys, and jaw-bones, with the teeth perfect, taken up by various individuals.⁶²⁷

Similarly, Alfred Hargrove reported that the formation of a new vault within one York churchyard had 'caused a great number of bones to be disturbed, and many of these mouldering remains were removed, along with the surplus earth, to be thrown into some depot for rubbish-or, it may be, to mend some road in the neighbouring suburbs.'⁶²⁸ George Walker quoted an article in the *Quarterly Review*, which he described as 'one of the most influential of the literary and scientific periodicals of the present day', which claimed that ' "Many tons of human bones every year are sent from London to the North, where they are crushed in mills constructed for the purpose, and used as manure." '⁶²⁹ Similar

⁶²⁵ BOR/PR/Y/J/18, Churchwardens' accounts of St John, Ousebridge, York; BOR/PR/Y/HTM/18, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Micklegate, York.

⁶²⁶ Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, p. 77

⁶²⁷ *The Times*, Saturday, December 29, 1849, p. 5

⁶²⁸ YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, p. 12

⁶²⁹ This claim was made in the *Quarterly Review*, no. XLII, p. 380. Quoted in Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 218.

reports of bone breaking came from Andover workhouse where, among the animal bones sent to be broken, human bones were also reported.⁶³⁰

We can also turn to Hargrove for another example of children playing with disinterred remains, as mentioned above, and even animals' interference with them. He described how,

In opening a grave in one of the church-yards, a considerable quantity of bones were exhumed, some of them with *fragments of flesh* still adhering. A hungry dog entered the sacred ground, seized a leg bone in his mouth, and bore it away in triumph to his lair, where he doubtless would *feast* on the putrefying remnant of mortality. The bone which I hold in my hand, a portion of a skull, was rescued from a group of children in Walmgate, who had by some means become possessed of the greater portion of a skeleton, with which they were amusing themselves.⁶³¹

The removal of earth was also the only solution available to combat the degrading effect of large numbers of decaying bodies on burial grounds' soil, which was sometimes reduced to a swampy morass; Hargrove warned listeners at his lecture to 'Tread cautiously when you leave the [churchyard] path, or your foot may sink into something clammier and fouler than earth.'⁶³² Such problems could be exacerbated by high water tables, which affected several low-lying riverside areas of York, and some London graveyards, in which tombstones sank down into the boggy earth.⁶³³

⁶³⁰ See *The Times*, Friday, October 03, 1845, p. 4. An article of a few weeks later included accounts testifying to the presence of human bones; one inmate of the workhouse said he had 'seen human bones among the cattle bones, such as leg bones and others.' Another stated, 'I saw some human bones among the rest at one time. They powdered as soon as they were touched. We could almost squeeze them to dust with our fingers. It was said they came from the churchyard.' A hawker who sold bones to the workhouse claimed that he 'had human bones brought to me by children, but I did not buy them.' It was also reported that hunger led some to eat the flesh and marrow from the bones, some of which may conceivably have been human, even if it was putrid. See *The Times*, Monday, October 13, 1845, p. 8.

⁶³¹ YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, p. 16

⁶³² *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8

⁶³³ For example, St Sampson's, York, was located in the densely populated heart of the city and adjoining the Fish Market, was 'In some parts...so *wet and swampy*, that graves have been known to be partly filled with water, prior to the interment taking place, and when the coffin has been lowered, it has plunged out of sight, into a mass of *loathsome mire*, whilst the mourners have *shuddered* around.' See *Ibid.*, pp. 12-3, 15.

Walker complained of similar problems in London. See Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp. 170, 173, 214. The proximity of burial grounds to water sources also caused problems. 'An Act to make further Provision for the Expenses of Local Boards of Health and Improvement Commissioners acting as Burial Boards', passed on 6th August 1860, proposed amongst other things that burial grounds should not be placed near water supplies, as well as having plenty of drainage and being outside of flooding areas. See GL/S 393, Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts*, p. 143.

Contemporaries' often noted that simply identifying available grave locations could disturb and even mutilate remains through the use of long poles or rods designed to locate clear ground, which appear to have been widespread. A letter to *The Times* in 1849 condemned 'the revolting and disgusting' means of preparing graves in the burial ground of Christ Church, near Blackfriars bridge, in London. It described how relatives accompanied grave diggers to choose the location in which 'to deposit the remains of their departed friends.' Once a place was selected, the grave diggers thrust

huge iron instruments, some 10 or 12 feet in length...into the earth to see if there be room- but it invariably comes in contact with a coffin; heavy thrusts are then made, and if by bearing his whole weight upon the instrument the gravedigger can force it through, it is considered sufficiently decayed, and the grave is dug; generally three or four of these borings for the dead have to be made before sufficient grave space is found. This scene is repeated at intervals during the day, and there is always a large crowd of persons gazing through the railings at this most revolting and disgraceful exhibition.⁶³⁴

Hargrove described the widespread use of these instruments in York, stating that 'Popular sentiments...are offended, and very justly so, by such open practices as that of using an iron borer, to bore down and ascertain whether the ground is occupied by a coffin, and whether it and its contents are sufficiently decayed for removal.'⁶³⁵ Equally problematic, he argued, was the fact that if the borer found the ground occupied, the hole it created was left open, contributing to the release of the gases produced by putrefaction.⁶³⁶ Evidence also exists for their use in Bristol, and at a relatively early date; the parish of St Michael paid an iron worker 'for a Searcher for the Graves' in 1788, and two years later paid for 'repairing a Grave Searcher.'⁶³⁷ These instruments are therefore a further similarity between everyday grave digging, and grave robbing.

The degree and nature of remains' movement and disruption revealed by these activities are clearly very difficult to reconcile with the standards of

⁶³⁴ *The Times*, Saturday, September 01, 1849, p. 3

⁶³⁵ YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, pp. 13-4

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁶³⁷ BRO/P/St.M/ChW/1(d), Churchwardens' accounts of St Michael, Bristol

'decency' described in the previous chapters. They indicate that severe overcrowding, involving the regular disruption of recently buried and incompletely decomposed bodies, was a regular occurrence in Bristol and York as much as it was in the capital. Although many of the sources quoted here are of late date, just outside our period, the conditions and practices they describe can confidently be applied to the decades immediately prior; the greater number of these sources after 1840, and the more explicit detail they provide, can be attributed to the growth of public awareness and agitation surrounding the issue of overcrowding, rather than the novelty of these practices during that period. Walker himself stated that 'by far the greater number of grave yards are crowded to excess: many, indeed, have been in this condition for an indefinite period.'⁶³⁸ A number of eighteenth century examples from Bristol noting overcrowding and expressing concern at the insanitary conditions in certain grounds, quoted in the previous chapter, also serve to support this. So too do the following statement from the parish of Christ Church in the city, which noted as early as 1762 that 'for the prevention of indecencies which happen by, opening graves before a Reasonable time is expired' all graves in their newly prepared burial ground should be dug six feet deep, and the use of pauper pits by London parishes 'very much straitened for room to bury their dead' as early as 1721.⁶³⁹ Therefore, while it is indubitable that overcrowding increased in severity in the decades immediately prior to reform, the sources discussed here, and in the previous chapter in regards to burial places enlargement, also make clear that it was a problem familiar long before, particularly in larger cities, and therefore that the treatment of remains had been steadily worsening over an extended period.

The sources discussed above do indicate a variety of reactions to the various features and consequences of overcrowding which reflect their contravention of accepted standards of 'decency.' They mention 'horror', and we see the practices discussed described as 'revolting', 'disgusting' and 'outrages,' while

⁶³⁸ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards* (London, 1839), p. iv

⁶³⁹ BRO/P/XCh/V/1(b), Vestry minutes of Christ Church, Bristol; George, *London Life*, p. 353, quoted in Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual*, p. 64.

Hargrove mentioned the offence done to 'popular sentiments,' indicating that these views were widespread. However, he also described the use of the borer as 'open,' just as the letter to *The Times* in 1849 noted that its use in Christ Church burial ground was witnessed on a regular basis by 'a large crowd of persons gazing.' These comments emphasise the important point that many features of overcrowding's management, and indeed of its existence, were plainly visible and widely known; in addition to the use of borers, or searchers, overcrowding was also obvious in the raised level of so many burial grounds, and in the smell which emanated from those in the advanced stages of overcrowding. Furthermore, while the more extreme practices described may have been conducted with a degree of privacy, for example at night, even these were not infrequently observed.

The sources therefore strongly indicate that, in between the small group of people who openly expressed their feelings regarding the 'indecent' of overcrowding, and those few who played a direct role in the gross mistreatment of remains, there existed an attitude of considerable ambivalence towards remains which appears to have been characteristic of the majority, an attitude which echoes that towards grave robbery. We cannot, therefore, attribute to ignorance the extreme levels reached by overcrowding.

In sum, overcrowding made the places of the dead, and the dead themselves, increasingly noticeable in sight and smell in the urban environment during the long eighteenth century. The long-term flexibility of remains, which has been shown to have been a customary feature of burial practice, accelerated to the extent that disturbed remains were increasingly likely to be incompletely decomposed. They were, in addition, actively mutilated when above and below ground, in some cases exhumed completely and their remains disposed of in a variety of ignominious ways. However, while the problems of overcrowding and the means of management it produced were condemned by some, and demonstrated the inadequacy of traditional burial spaces and means of using them, they were, and were allowed to remain, features of urban burial practice for decades, in some cases almost a century, until concerted efforts were made

to prevent them. Even then, as the following section will demonstrate, the object of reformers was as much, sometimes more, the threat to public health that burial conditions produced, rather than their impact upon the dead. Therefore, as in cases of grave robbery, despite the existence of standards of 'decency' and various factors which indicate emotional attachment to remains, discussed in chapter five, in practice contemporaries demonstrated a remarkable degree of tolerance of their treatment in ways that fell short of, and not infrequently utterly contravened, these standards and belied any form of attachment.

PROTEST

This section will address the issue of why action regarding overcrowded burial conditions and the vulnerability of the dead was so late in coming, given that the problem was so severe and long-standing, and the arguments made against it and proposals to remedy it equally well-established. It will demonstrate that despite the abuse of remains demonstrated above, the focus of reformers was upon the sanitary threat posed by overcrowding as much as, often more so, than its effects upon the dead, further reinforcing the profound ambiguity in attitudes towards remains during the long eighteenth century.

While they may only have become a cause of widespread protest on grounds of health during the 1840s, health-related concerns regarding the poor condition of urban burial grounds form a current of opinion, albeit only occasionally voiced, traceable to at least the sixteenth century, when Henry VIII addressed the subject in a letter to the Archbishop of Westminster 1535.⁶⁴⁰ In 1726 a lengthy complaint regarding the practice of burial in churches, its profanity and its pernicious effects on health entitled *Churches No Charnel-Houses* was published by Thomas Lewis. Although he was a religious controversialist with an aggressive and adversarial character, there seems no reason to doubt the phenomena he describes. Moreover, whatever the motivation for his complaint, it is important to note that the theories he employed to support his argument

⁶⁴⁰ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp. 186-7, 208-9

and his suggestion that the only solution to the practice was the removal of dead from urban areas, are precisely the same as those of reformers a century and more later.

Enraged by the burial of epidemic victims in churches and churchyards, Lewis suggested burial at a distance from towns, supporting his arguments with the opinions of physicians.⁶⁴¹ Like later opponents of intramural burial, he based his ideas on miasmatic theory, arguing; 'Truly, the Stenches of Dead Bodies, when they begin to corrupt, are exceeding hurtful to the Health of the Living, and destructive of Life too.'⁶⁴² He felt the problem was compounded by burial in coffins which did not properly contain either corpses or the products of their putrefaction.⁶⁴³ He summed up that, as,

In a Word, no Good in the World can be expected from it, but only great Inconveniences may be feared, it is most humbly offered to the CONSIDERATION of our SUPERIORS, Whether it might not be proper, for the Good of Mankind, that Burial-Places be appointed abroad from Cities and Towns, and the *Burying in Churches and Church-Yards* be utterly forbid.⁶⁴⁴

As Mark Jenner has demonstrated, such ideas can be traced back into the seventeenth century and the 1720s saw the closure of several London churchyards, and enquiries into several others on sanitary grounds.⁶⁴⁵ Burial in churches was outlawed.⁶⁴⁶

However, despite this and despite the continued enquiries of medical men into the dangers of overcrowded burial places, burial practice in churches and churchyards continued unchanged and seems seldom to have attracted public comment. The issue features surprisingly seldom in contemporary newspapers, although letters of complaint regarding the presence of the dead in towns increase in number during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The first of

⁶⁴¹ Thomas Lewis, *Churches No Charnel-Houses* (London, 1726), pp. 61-2

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 49-52, 56

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61

⁶⁴⁵ Mark Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation? Public Health and Church Burial in Eighteenth-Century England', *English Historical Review* CXX:487 (2005), pp. 615-6, 621. John McManners has noted that in France concern was raised regarding the harmful effects of churchyard 'vapours' from the late sixteenth century. See McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, pp. 306-7.

⁶⁴⁶ Jenner, 'Death, Decomposition and Dechristianisation?', p. 628

these to mention health (the second found overall) dates from August 1765. However, the author's concerns regarding the endangering of 'the Lives of the neighbouring Inhabitants' were confined to the last line of the letter; his primary object was the description of a poor ground and the open pits in which the poor were buried, which he condemned as 'A Nuisance of...most shameful Nature, considering what an intolerable stench must necessarily arise, this hot weather, from such a Number of Corpses, yet Green and festering in their Shrouds.' He argued further that it manifested 'a total Neglect of every decent and religious Rite' and, to emphasise his point, signed himself 'Decorum.'⁶⁴⁷ This concern with 'decency' was the sole object of the first letter found complaining of London burial grounds. 'Look into the places set apart for the interment of the Dead,' it instructed its audience, 'and you see neither order or decency preserved; much less any mark of that reverend esteem we ought to have for the remains of our fellow-creatures.'⁶⁴⁸

In contrast, the author of a lengthy letter published by the *Public Advertiser* in 1774 placed health very much at the forefront of their grievances regarding urban burial, emphasising the point by signing themselves 'Salus Publica'. This letter, evidently the work of a medical man, even went so far as to recommend legislative action to prevent 'putrid fever' caused by 'the Vital Fluid Air' of the Metropolis being 'loaded with putrid Particles.' He continued;

it is a Matter of great Astonishment that the Church-yards and open Vaults in and about this Town are not put under proper Regulation. Bodies are suffered to be buried scarce two Feet under the Surface of the Earth; many only in wooden Coffins are deposited in open Vaults, where there is nothing to prevent the putrid Effluvia from mixing with the open Air... Now if we consider the Number of open Vaults and Church-yards in and about this great City, who can doubt a Moment of the terrible Consequence of such an Evil?

⁶⁴⁷ *Public Advertiser*, Monday, August 5, 1765

⁶⁴⁸ *London Chronicle*, Saturday, September 2, 1758

His proposed solutions included the introduction of a minimum burial depth and a maximum number of grave occupants.⁶⁴⁹ Even so, 'Salus Publica' stopped short of suggesting that burial in towns be ceased.

Only one complainant voiced the opinion that all forms of burial in urban areas were fundamentally wrong and called for their absolute cessation, proposing that a cemetery should be established a mile outside every entrance to the metropolis. This letter, published in 1788 in the *St James's Chronicle* and signed 'Philanthropos', expressed in no uncertain terms the severity of the burial problem;

The Subject...is of a Nature too serious and important to be confined in its Discussion within the narrow Limits of a Newspaper. A Volume would not be sufficient to display in their proper Colours its direful Effects. The Practice to which I allude is the pernicious and savage Custom of burying the Dead in the Heart of the Metropolis. It excites the Astonishment of every contemplative Man that the Corporation of London...should neglect to turn their Thoughts to a Subject which...materially affects the Health and Happiness of the Inhabitants of London.⁶⁵⁰

These sources are therefore significant on three counts: firstly, they reinforce the argument that even extreme manifestations of overcrowding were present very nearly a century before decisive legislative action was taken against it; secondly, they show that there existed a current of opinion condemning it on the grounds of public health and the 'indecent' and unchristian treatment suffered by the dead; and thirdly, it shows that the ideas supporting these arguments and the solutions proposed were essentially the same as those which ultimately led to the outlawing of urban burial.

The first significant and extended argument against intramural interment of the period which saw the origins of reform was George Alfred Walker's *Gatherings From Graveyards*, published in 1839. At its heart was the belief that 'burial places in the neighbourhood of the living are...a national evil- the harbingers, if not the originators of pestilence; the cause, direct or indirect, of

⁶⁴⁹ *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, April 21, 1774

⁶⁵⁰ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Tuesday, October 28, 1788

inhumanity, immorality, and irreligion.⁶⁵¹ Walker, a doctor, went so far as to personify these poisonous burial grounds, arguing their 'insatiable appetite' led to their 'constantly devouring fresh victims'.⁶⁵² Basing his arguments on the miasmatic theory of contagion (although it was already a contentious concept by this point) he cited cases in which grave diggers had been killed by the air from disturbed graves, and an instance in which the gases arising from an imperfectly sealed grave underneath a church floor caused a number of deaths among the church's congregation.⁶⁵³ The effects of these gases were also, he continued, detrimental to the capital's population as a whole. The only remedy for the situation was, he concluded, 'to remove as far as possible from the living, THE PESTIFEROUS EXHALATIONS OF THE DEAD' through the 'ENTIRE REMOVAL OF THE DEAD FROM THE IMMEDIATE PROXIMITY OF THE LIVING.'⁶⁵⁴ As we have seen, Walker had good reason to be emphatic. His fulminations against London churchyards literally overflowing with decomposing corpses and the dangers of 'the dreadful effluvia of human putrefaction' were explicit, but not exaggerated.⁶⁵⁵

Gatherings From Graveyards succeeded in attracting attention to Walker's cause and the following decade saw agitation for reform from a number of corners. For instance, in 1842 'A petition, numerously signed, was... presented to the House of Lords, strongly praying for the abolition of the "practice of burying the dead in burial grounds situated in populous districts", and urgently beseeching their lordships to cause inquiry with a view to provide a remedy, and thus to destroy the disease and pestilence occasioned by the practice.'⁶⁵⁶ As one supporter of the Bill stated, 'The scenes that present themselves daily in the churchyards of this great capital are purely disgusting, and are derogatory to every sense of decency, leaving the word sanctity quite out of the question...we are furnished with daily evidence from those who reside in the vicinity of such

⁶⁵¹ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. iii

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-4

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. Vii, 11

⁶⁵⁵ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 9

⁶⁵⁶ 'Burial Grounds in London', *John Bull*, Monday, March 14, 1842, p. 125

spots that the stench that proceeds from these compounds of death is at times intolerable.⁶⁵⁷ These sentiments therefore reflect the same range of concerns as expressed by Walker himself: public health, decency and profanity. Also in 1842, William Mackinnon, a reforming conservative politician involved in a number of public health-related Bills, motioned and conducted a House of Commons Report on the issue, its findings and opinions regarding burial grounds' condition the same as Walker's.⁶⁵⁸ He appears to have continued agitating on the issue during the 1840s, although his name is seldom mentioned in the sources consulted.⁶⁵⁹

In the following year, Edwin Chadwick, the controversial sanitary reformer, also produced a Report on the problem of intramural burial as a supplement to his *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring People of Great Britain*. Adhering to the miasmatic theories on which Walker based his work, Chadwick condemned the practice of intramural burial on the grounds of public health, although much of the *Report* was taken up with exposing the long retention of the body before burial among the poor, as discussed in chapter one, and the unnecessarily high cost of funerals, described in chapter two.⁶⁶⁰ However, despite the damning evidence presented by these inquiries, no plan for remedying the situation was made.⁶⁶¹ The latter half of the 1840s saw further attempts to prompt legislative change. Walker formed the Metropolitan Society for the Abolition of Burial in Towns, who met regularly to discuss petitioning parliament for the closure of urban burial grounds and other remedies for the problem.⁶⁶² These years also saw the enforced closure of a selection of London burial places on sanitary grounds. However, the first legislation banning intramural interment entirely did not appear until 1850, and then affected only

⁶⁵⁷ 'The Corpse Holes of London', *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement*, Saturday, March 19, 1842

⁶⁵⁸ *The Times*, Friday, October 07, 1842, p. 4; H. C. G. Matthew, 'Mackinnon, William Alexander, of Mackinnon (1784–1870)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/view/article/17619>, accessed 19 December 2011].

⁶⁵⁹ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 29, 1846

⁶⁶⁰ Edwin Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*

⁶⁶¹ *The Times*, Friday, December 22, 1843, p. 4

⁶⁶² *The Times*, Friday, September 17, 1847, p. 3; *The Times*, Thursday, April 05, 1849, p. 5; *The Times*, Wednesday, September 19, 1849, p. 5; *The Times*, Tuesday, May 14, 1850, p. 8.

the capital. A series of additional reforms, to be discussed further below, passed during the decade made the ban nationwide.

It is important to note that concern regarding overcrowding and campaigns for its abolition were not confined to London, as we have seen in the form of Alfred Hargrove's York enquiries, published as *The Baneful Custom of Interment in Towns, and the Present State of York Grave Yards*. This monograph, originally a lecture delivered in York's Merchant's Hall in June 1847, was published in the same year at the request of the York branch of the Health of Town's Association. At the time of writing, five of York's twenty four graveyards had already been closed due to overcrowding, and Hargrove made clear his feelings regarding the remaining nineteen.⁶⁶³ Hargrove went so far as to state that, 'In no city is an inquiry of this kind so much wanted as in York; for, where do grave-yards abound to a greater extent? Or, where are they more crowded? Desecration is daily taking place- desecration of the most indecent, disgusting, and pestilential nature. Corpses are consigned to our crowded church-yards, already sodden with human flesh and gore', as well as under churches and pews, even under stoves, whose heat 'draws forth the noxious fumes of corruption'.⁶⁶⁴ Regrettably, no similar local report exists for Bristol, which, like York, also lacks a local report on general sanitary conditions.⁶⁶⁵ However, as sources examined above indicate, many, if not most, of Bristol's burial grounds were in a similar condition from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Significantly, no reports have been found detailing concerted agitation by those who lived near to or otherwise encountered overcrowding and its consequences, with the exception of the petition made by residents of the Spa Fields locality.

⁶⁶³ YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, p. 11. They were all closed by law in 1853, with the exception of the new part of St Lawrence burial ground, which had only recently been established and whose burial ground was without the city walls, Lendal chapel burial ground, and the English Presbyterian chapel and burial ground in St Saviour parish. The Quaker ground in St Mary Bishophill Senior parish stayed open until August 1855. See BOR/PR/Y/ASP/31/1.

⁶⁶⁴ YCL/Y.614.61, Hargrove, *The Baneful Custom*, pp. 5-6

⁶⁶⁵ Christopher Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain, 1800-1854* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 188

As the theories behind the dangerous sanitary effects of urban burial, and the concepts of 'decency' and profanity, behind the arguments of the 1840s were the same as those which went before, and, as shown in the previous section, the overcrowded conditions reformers attacked were not new to that period, we must ask what contemporary factors sparked change at this particular time. The following section will examine this issue, after it considers views towards extramural burial, its implementation and the legislation which effected burial reform.

REFORM

This section first examines when and why cemeteries appeared in England and the legislation enforcing their use passed during the 1850s, and second, why the reform of burial practice occurred when it did and no earlier, before going on to consider whether it was inspired by, or whether it inspired, a change in attitudes towards remains.

CEMETERIES AND LEGISLATION

Just as calls for reform long pre-dated legislative change, so the concepts of cemeteries and extramural burial were well known long before either were first established in Britain. These practices were familiar from the Classical world, and more recent examples also existed. Sixteenth-century Lutheran cities in Germany relocated their burial grounds outside city walls, Martin Luther himself suggesting that this was advisable on medical and spiritual grounds: 'a cemetery rightfully ought to be a fine quiet place, removed from all other localities, to which one can go and reverently meditate upon death.'⁶⁶⁶ Within England, both Thomas Lewis and Christopher Wren had suggested extramural burial in the early part of the period in question, as demonstrated above.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁶ Gordon & Marshall, 'Introduction', p. 11; Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 297; Bridget Heal, 'Sacred Image and Sacred Space in Lutheran Germany' in Coster & Spicer, *Sacred Space*, quoted on p. 43.

⁶⁶⁷ Lewis, *Churches No Charnel-Houses*; *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, November 11, 1790; *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, Friday, November 12, 1790.

On the continent legislative action against overcrowding in urban burial grounds and the removal of the dead from them began in France in the 1760s, where the first modern garden cemetery, the model for all modern cemeteries, was established. These measures were soon followed in other states, making Britain exceptional in Western Europe for the lateness with which it took action against conditions which were not only nationwide, but widely known on the continent.⁶⁶⁸

The first English cemetery was established only in 1819 in Norwich. The second, the Liverpool Necropolis, not until 1825, and the third, Liverpool St James, in 1829. More followed in the larger cities, including London, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Sheffield, during the 1830s, although the majority were not established until the 1840s.⁶⁶⁹ Bristol and York both opened their cemeteries in 1837. As stated, certain burial grounds were subjected to inspection and possible closure prior to 1850. These powers were granted through 'The Public Health Act' of 1848.⁶⁷⁰ However, urban burial did not become illegal, and cemetery use enforced, until the 1850 'Metropolitan Interments Act,' although this applied to London only. Two years later this Act was repealed and replaced by 'An Act to amend the Laws concerning the Burial

⁶⁶⁸ Indications of the measures taken by other European states can be found in newspapers. It was reported in 1784 that new burial practices had been instituted in Vienna in order to hasten complete decay of bodies and thereby prevent the problems arising from overcrowded burial grounds. The order stated that all bodies, irrespective of rank, should be buried with the usual ceremonies, but that before burial they would be removed from the coffin and all clothing taken from them, put into a linen sack and into a six foot deep grave, before being covered with lime. Each parish was to provide the coffin needed to carry the dead to church and place of burial. The erection of monuments was allowed, but not directly over graves, and on the proviso that they did not take up space that might be needed for future burials. See *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, Wednesday, October 27, 1784. Two years later it was reported that His Most Serene Highness the Landgrave of Hess-Dormstadt had issued proclamations ordering the closure of all cemeteries, even those outside towns and villages. In their place was to be set up one large burying ground away from all places of habitation. All corpses were to be buried seven feet deep and no graves were to be reopened before thirty years has passed. All private family vaults were also to be 'successively suppressed.' See *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, Friday, September 15, 1786. Similarly, in 1787, the King of Spain published an ordinance ending burial in churches and the creation of extramural cemeteries. See *Whitehall Evening Post* (1770), Tuesday, May 15, 1787. George Walker also mentioned that New York burial grounds were recommended for closure in 1806 and that Maria Theresa established extramural cemeteries throughout the Habsburg empire. See Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, pp. 90, 115. However, France's status as an innovator in extramural burial may require questioning in light of Walker's observation that Dublin closed its urban burial grounds in 1740, and that Denmark also closed their urban burial grounds earlier, although investigation of these examples are outside the scope of this thesis. See Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 90.

⁶⁶⁹ Hugh Murray, *This Garden of Death: The History of York Cemetery* (York: Ebor Press, 1991), p. 5; Rugg, 'A New Burial Form', p. 45.

⁶⁷⁰ GL/S 393, Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts*, p. 80

of the Dead in the Metropolis', passed 'for the protection of the public health'.⁶⁷¹ Both of these Acts excepted the burial grounds of Quakers and Jews, as well as privately owned grounds.⁶⁷² The reason is not clear as, although the former two were less likely to be overcrowded, the latter were among the most overcrowded, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The Act specified that no new burial grounds were to be established within two miles of city boundaries, or within 200 yards of any dwelling house unless written consent was obtained.⁶⁷³ Legislation was extended to all cities and towns across England and Wales only in 1853 with 'An Act to amend the Laws concerning the Burial of the Dead in England beyond the limits of the Metropolis, and to amend the Act concerning the Burial of the Dead in the Metropolis'.⁶⁷⁴

A number of further Acts refining and responding to problems with previous Acts were also passed during the decade: 'An Act to make further Provisions for the Burial of the Dead in England beyond the limits of the Metropolis' (1854); 'An Act further to amend the Laws concerning the Burial of the Dead on England' (1855); 'An Act to amend an Act passed in the fifteenth and sixteenth years of the reign of Her Present Majesty Queen Victoria, entitled An Act to amend the Laws concerning the Burial of the Dead in the Metropolis, so far as relates to the City of London and the Liberties thereof' (1857); 'An Act to amend the Burial Acts' (1857); 'An Act more effectually to prevent Danger to the Public Health from Places of Burial' (1859); and 'An Act to make further Provision for the Expenses of Local Boards of Health and Improvement Commissioners acting as Burial Boards' (1860).⁶⁷⁵

Although calls for reform and legislation were based in very large part on sanitary concerns, which also formed the dominant motivation in European cases of burial reform, as well as in earlier examples (even those from the Classical world), Julie Rugg has argued that the creation of the first English cemeteries were motivated by a desire for profit. They were founded by

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p. 36

⁶⁷² Ibid., pp. 14-5

⁶⁷³ Ibid., pp. 40, 49

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 80

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 91-2, 98-9

Cemetery Companies, joint-stock ventures which were part of the economic climate of the period and its widespread enthusiasm for investment.⁶⁷⁶ However, the number of these cemeteries which proved profitable, and thus survived, were relatively few: as stated above, the majority of cemeteries were established in the 1840s at the time when public health concerns came to the fore. This therefore suggests that cemeteries were not, in fact, in high demand during the first two decades of their existence. The example of Bristol's cemetery can be used to demonstrate that this low demand continued, at least in some places, until the commencement of legislative enforcement; in 1842, five years after it opened, the proprietors of Bristol's Arnos Vale cemetery noted that it was still only 'very partially used, and that in this great city and its populous neighbourhood the bodies of the dead are still retained in the vicinity of the living.'⁶⁷⁷ Even by 1847 only 22% of the city's dead were buried in the cemetery.⁶⁷⁸ Only in 1850 did they see a sudden significant rise in the number of bodies they buried, from 174 in 1849 to 915, almost certainly the result of legislative developments in London and concomitant discussion regarding their nationwide enforcement.⁶⁷⁹ In fact, this lack of demand might also explain why earlier cemeteries often failed; however, it also indicates that overcrowding was widely observed at this earlier point, investors believing that it and the circumstances surrounding it would tempt people into cemeteries. This in turn suggests that some aspect of attitudes towards the dead encouraged tolerance of overcrowding, even in the face of alternatives.

Both Bristol and York's cemeteries can also be used to illustrate another point raised by Rugg; sanitary concerns, specifically raised by cholera outbreaks, also contributed to cemeteries' establishment in the 1830s. Cholera, in addition to other diseases, was believed to be caused by miasma originating, in part, from the smell of putrefaction originating from burial grounds. However, those who committed themselves to establishing cemeteries during this period in the

⁶⁷⁶ Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation', pp. 220-1; Rugg, 'A New Burial Form', pp. 48-9.

⁶⁷⁷ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 13, 1842

⁶⁷⁸ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 21, 1847

⁶⁷⁹ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 24, 1850

interests of public health were a minority; fears that burial grounds were a contributing factor to disease faded along with the epidemics.⁶⁸⁰

This sub-section has therefore provided further evidence that some features of the wider social climate in the 1840s contributed to the move towards burial reform, a factor which was lacking in previous decades despite the fact that all the same views, theories and solutions were in existence. The following section will examine the factors that contributed to these conditions.

CONTEXT

A variety of reasons may be suggested for concerted agitation occurring, and succeeding, specifically in the 1840s. This section will examine these interlinked factors, which include money, class, identity and remains, many of which were connected to some degree with the much wider process of social and administrative reform of this period, and the changing cultural attitudes by which it was accompanied, this factor being the overarching force for change.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, lack of money and the cost of land inhibited the acquisition of additional burial space, as a result contributing to overcrowding. Money also contributed to the problem in the form of vested interests, particularly those of the church. Burial was a significant source of revenue for the church, and burial reform was opposed by clergy and parishes on the grounds of loss of income. In order to compensate for this a system of mortuary fees, paid to the parish incumbent upon a parishioners' burial in a cemetery, was instituted as part of the 1850 'Metropolitan Interments Act.' Unsurprisingly, this compromise was widely opposed by those who wished reform to effect the complete separation of church and state.⁶⁸¹ Parishes, however, were not compensated for their loss, or financially supported in providing alternative burial space for their parishioners, which they were permitted to do providing this space met with the conditions of the Acts. The difficulties they faced in this respect are clearly illustrated by the repetition and

⁶⁸⁰ Murray, *This Garden of Death*, pp. 4-5

⁶⁸¹ *The Era*, Sunday, March 3, 1850; *The Era*, Sunday, May 19, 1850; *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, Sunday, June 2, 1850; *Daily News*, Thursday, May 16, 1850; *The Northern Star and National Trades' Journal*, Saturday, June 22, 1850; *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, November 26, 1853.

revision of the terms of the original Acts, many of which dealt with those who, for want of money, failed to comply with legislation and continued interring the dead in towns, sometimes in grounds that were officially closed, as will be discussed below, raising the important point that burial reform was not a complete or an absolute process.

Money was an issue for users, as well as providers, of burial grounds, and connected to a crucial factor influencing the process of reform: social class. In many ways, it was the poor who were worst affected and most likely to suffer from overcrowding. As stated in chapter five, paupers were the first to feel the effects of lack of space, being crammed together in pauper pits and/or poor grounds which inspired recurrent complaint for well over a century.⁶⁸² Paupers had no say in these places or conditions, although the rest of the poor were little better off; overcrowded grounds were typically located in poor areas and the only affordable option for this class. Cemeteries were certainly out of their financial reach, in particular because of the additional cost of transport. The proximity of the poor to the worst grounds also meant that they were most likely to suffer the detrimental effects of miasma.⁶⁸³

For these reasons, agitators often focused heavily on grounds used by, and considered dangerous to, the health of the poor. Yet by the 1840s this class was increasingly seen as a separate and, at best, distasteful part of society; Walker, although he intended reform to better their condition, described the poor as 'crawling around [the] streets, spreading contamination around, presenting centres of infection morally and physically in their own persons.'⁶⁸⁴ His mention of morality accords with a point raised by Rugg, namely that one motivation for the establishment of cemeteries was civic improvement and the desire to make public spaces morally instructive and 'civilising', a process

⁶⁸² In addition to the earlier sources quoted in chapter five, see: *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Tuesday, August 6, 1833; *The Times* Friday, October 07, 1842, p. 4; *The Times* Thursday, January 06, 1848, p. 5; *Caledonian Mercury*, Thursday, January 4, 1849; *The Times* Friday, August 24, 1849, p. 5; *The Times* Wednesday, January 16, 1850, p. 8.

⁶⁸³ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 6; *The Times*, Friday, October 07, 1842, p. 4; Rugg, 'From Reason to Regulation', pp. 220-1.

⁶⁸⁴ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 5

highlighted in the previous chapter.⁶⁸⁵ In all cases this need for civilisation was related explicitly to the poor, and we have already seen evidence of it in the belief that the dead should be removed from the homes of the poor prior to burial.⁶⁸⁶ The 1840s therefore saw a situation in which the almost subhuman nature considered to be characteristic of the poor inspired change, although it was on behalf of wider society rather than the poor themselves.

The aforementioned issue of retention of the body among the poor raises an aspect of 'popular' opinion which may have retarded acceptance of cemetery burial until it was enforced. As explained in the first chapter, many contemporaries saw a particularly strong desire for proximity to the dead to be characteristic of the poor, a desire seen to apply after burial as much as before. For instance, the vestry of St Werburgh's in Bristol opined that the desire to be buried with relations was 'the long cherished wish of Most Classes and I have generally observed it very strong amongst the lower classes', and thus concluded cemeteries were 'likely to [be] unpopular and to produce serious discontent.'⁶⁸⁷ However, it was a current of opinion not confined to the poor. For example, although many inhabitants of St Michael-le-Belfry parish in York were largely happy to start using the city cemetery when it opened in 1837, there were also significant numbers who wished to stay within the parish, enough to lead to the establishment of a new burial ground in 1843.⁶⁸⁸ Similarly, although the churchyard of St Mary Bishophill Senior, York was significantly overcrowded, when asked in 1853 if they wanted it closed, parishioners were not enthusiastic.⁶⁸⁹ John McManners has also noted opposition to cemetery usage in France owing to a desire to remain close to the dead.⁶⁹⁰ Furthermore, as we have seen, it took many years for Bristol's cemetery to attract any significant number of interments, a fact that can only be partially explained by its burial fees. In contrast, Chadwick stated that burial with family was no

⁶⁸⁵ Rugg, 'A New Burial Form', pp. 50-2

⁶⁸⁶ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, September 25, 1847

⁶⁸⁷ BRO/P/St.W/V/1(a), p. 291

⁶⁸⁸ Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, p. 102

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86

⁶⁹⁰ McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, pp. 312-4

longer a priority, although he also noted that those with family vaults, i.e. where remains would not have dispersed over time as they would in regular graves, were transporting these remains to cemeteries and being buried alongside them, indicating that the wealthier portions of society continued to value this aspect of burial custom, even if it may have been as much a statement of social position as emotional attachment.⁶⁹¹

This current of opinion might also have been attributable to parochial attachment, as much as familial connections. This is suggested by Christopher Wren's 1708 proposal that cemeteries should be divided into four quarters, each dedicated to serving a particular parish.⁶⁹² Although early in date, it supports the importance of parochial identity in determining place of burial demonstrated in chapter five. Attachment to parochial grounds may also have been connected to long-standing associations that prejudiced some against cemeteries. London's earliest non-parochial burial grounds, established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, came to be associated primarily with the poor and socially marginal, or else were appropriated by dissenting denominations; Bunhill Fields, opened in 1665, came to be used primarily by Quakers and the New Churchyard, established in 1569 close to Bethlehem hospital for the insane, was used primarily for the poor.⁶⁹³ It is therefore possible that nonparochial and extramural burial grounds, like dead houses, came to be associated with with ignominy and friendlessness which may in turn have contributed to the continuation of keeping bodies at home before burial among all classes. The issue of their association with dissenters may even have acquired additional negative significance for Anglicans during the reform period, given that they saw reforms as anti-Anglican. They may therefore have lost some tolerance of dissenters, resenting the idea that Nonconformist modes of burial were threatening to replace their own.

⁶⁹¹ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, pp. 103-4

⁶⁹² *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, November 11, 1790. The letter was also reprinted in *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, Friday, November 12, 1790.

⁶⁹³ Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, pp. 95-100

However, opinion regarding attachment to either family or parish was not unanimous. Edwin Chadwick presented evidence for diminishing parochial attachment, albeit in the face of poverty, arguing that it could lead to Anglicans choosing to bury in dissenters' grounds, which were typically a third cheaper.⁶⁹⁴ This also provides evidence of two further things: first, that any current of Anglican objection to dissenting grounds as a result of reform was not absolute; and second, that dissenting burial grounds could be as diverse and inclusive as Anglican ones. Chadwick's observation is supported by a comment made by the parish of St Werburgh, Bristol who, despite acknowledging the attachment of the poor to burial with family, also noted that the poor 'were in some Parishes much in the habit of interring their Friends at Dissenting or Public Burial Grounds until the Incumbents of the Churches reduced the Fees to a level with those places.'⁶⁹⁵ It is also supported by an order issued by Bristol's Congregationalist ground in 1853, stating that none but their congregation were to be buried in their burial ground.⁶⁹⁶

Conversely, Chadwick also raised a factor which may have contributed to preference for cemeteries. He argued that by the early 1840s the predominant concern in burial choice was a quiet location, away from 'the profanation arising from interment amidst the scenes of the crowd and bustle of everyday life', a sentiment in keeping with those above pertaining to changing ideas about the nature of urban space, its use and the propriety of burial therein.⁶⁹⁷ No similar observations in regard to burial choice have been found in the sources consulted, but the praise given to continental garden cemeteries was mentioned above.

However, acceptance of and desire for change certainly seems to have been a minority opinion, despite the extent of overcrowding. One of the most powerful factors contributing to the continuation of the problem and the late date of change was habituation. George Walker himself concluded that 'the most

⁶⁹⁴ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, p. 47

⁶⁹⁵ BRO/P/St.W/V/1(a), p. 291

⁶⁹⁶ BRO/35481/PT/CP/1(h)

⁶⁹⁷ Chadwick, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population*, pp. 84, 103-4

perfect indifference appears to prevail upon the subject' because 'interment of the dead within Churches or vaults, or in Burying Grounds, surrounded with houses, or in the immediate vicinity of densely populated Cities or Towns, is so familiar from its frequent or daily occurrence.⁶⁹⁸ This was certainly one of the reasons repeatedly given by the proprietors of Bristol's cemetery for its limited use.⁶⁹⁹ As they observed in 1847, 'People generally admit its evils; public journals occasionally wax eloquent on the enormities of its consequences; and yet it is allowed to slumber on, until some one of those harrowing scenes which occur with most frequency in the metropolis, brings it into a short-lived prominence,' characterising attitudes towards the problem as 'laissez faire.'⁷⁰⁰ This habituation seems to have extended to the disturbance of the recently buried. As noted above, this was not a new problem, with Christ Church in Bristol recording it in 1762. As overcrowding grew worse, so the amount of time bodies might spend below ground grew gradually shorter, and the populace became accustomed to it. A comment from 1798 can be used to illustrate this point; in that year, a woman whose husband's body had been exhumed by body snatchers three months after his burial initially concluded that the disturbance of his grave was 'done for the purpose of public accommodation' by the sexton and 'could not suppress her sorrow at the apparent necessity of the act', a sentiment indicating that, while distressing, the removal of remains to make room for the more recently dead remained essentially unquestioned.⁷⁰¹

The strength of attachment to traditional practice and standards of 'decent' treatment and disposal, even where they could no longer be decent, was also acknowledged by *The Lady's Newspaper* in 1849, who observed

We are now living in a period of such change and progression that it will be most inapplicable to continue ancient observances; and, however unpleasant it is to our feelings to abandon those particular forms which

⁶⁹⁸ Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 5

⁶⁹⁹ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 21, 1847; *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, September 25, 1847; *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 25, 1849.

⁷⁰⁰ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 21, 1847

⁷⁰¹ *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, March 14, 1798

education has instructed us are marks of respect to departed worth, still the increase of our population and of knowledge will enforce upon us the necessity of suiting burial ceremonials to the altered condition of the people.⁷⁰²

This comment illustrates the final, but most important reason, for the occurrence of widespread agitation for burial reform in the 1840s. It occurred as part of far wider-reaching sanitary reforms, of which action against burial was only a small and relatively late part. These were, in turn, part of more far-reaching reforms, most of which were motivated by the attitudes towards the poor outlined above, in particular sanitary and Poor Law reform. All of this was made possible by the newly centralised and secularised system of administration and legislation, which also affected the dead by instituting a centralised system of registration of births, marriages and deaths. These changes, and the view of the poor which accompanied most of them, were, as has also been stated, connected to ideas of civilisation and the refinement of public morality. The period saw a growing feeling that Britain was a changed place with a changed position in the world. Many contemporaries, including Walker, characterised traditional burial customs as savage and ill-befitting the most advanced and civilised nation in the world.⁷⁰³ This view of Britain was not new; 'Philanthropos', quoted above, opined in 1788 that

It is an Axiom pretty generally acknowledged in the present Day, that the British Nation is more distinguished by its Readiness to accede to every laudable Plan for promoting the Conveniences and Happiness of its Citizens, than any other civilised Nation upon Earth.⁷⁰⁴

Similar sentiments were expressed in the 1758 letter discussed above. However, it was in the Victorian era that this attitude blossomed and, as we have seen, the poor were seen to require urgent incorporation into this process of improvement. Notions of 'savagery' and 'civilisation' also reinforce the connection of reform to another broader strand of contemporary thought that has reappeared throughout this chapter and this thesis, one indicating a general

⁷⁰² 'Proximate Causes of Cholera', *The Lady's Newspaper*, Saturday, September 29, 1849, p. 172

⁷⁰³ See for example Walker, *Gatherings from Graveyards*, p. 7.

⁷⁰⁴ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, Tuesday, October 28, 1788

change in standards of behaviour and 'decency.' These ideas as they pertained to death and the dead were realised fully during the Victorian period which, although they do not appear to have introduced a greater distance between the living and the dead, indicate that the boundaries drawn between the two were more clearly, even rigidly, drawn.

The 1840s therefore saw the point at which the broader cultural climate created the conditions, structures and will to change a practice which had long been in need of attention. The feeling that traditional, parochial means of managing urban spaces and the urban population were inadequate or, as one contemporary phrased it, 'jarring, inconsistent, and shortsighted', was not new; for instance, provision for the poor had been centralised in both London and Bristol during the 1690s.⁷⁰⁵ However, it was only the combination of conditions which existed at the beginning of the Victorian period which allowed this on a nationwide scale. This change in attitudes, although it reached far beyond concern with burial, and had little to do with the dead themselves, nonetheless brought together many long-standing ideas regarding their position in urban society. We can therefore see that change in burial practice was not the result of a change in attitudes towards the dead before and after burial, although it certainly wished to introduce a new standard of 'decency' in relation to the ways and places in which they were encountered. This in turn raises question as to how sharp the distinction between urban and cemetery burial and the position and treatment of the dead in these places differed.

CHANGE?

Throughout the second part of this thesis, much weight has been given to population growth as a force for change by virtue of its acceleration of long-established processes and cycles, which increased their scale and rendered traditional means of management ineffectual. However, we have also seen evidence of fundamentally new attitudes, although by the end of our period they were still in their infancy. Moreover, although they succeeded in effecting legislative reform in burial practice, this did not equate to complete and

⁷⁰⁵ *The Northern Star and National Trades' Journal*, Saturday, June 22, 1850

immediate reform in practice. Indeed, even cemeteries cannot be viewed as entirely dissimilar to urban burial grounds.

As stated above, burial in urban areas did not cease immediately, owing primarily to factors of cost. Although many burial grounds were closed prior to the passing of legislation, it seems that a significant number continued in use long after.⁷⁰⁶ For instance, 1854's 'An Act to make further Provisions for the Burial of the Dead in England beyond the limits of the Metropolis' deemed that where parishes were unable to provide new burial grounds, the council was obliged to do so, demonstrating the problem of finance.⁷⁰⁷ In the following year 'An Act further to amend the Laws concerning the Burial of the Dead in England' was forced to permit the postponement of the cessation of burial in urban areas if necessary, although it threatened those who continued to bury in grounds closed by law with a £10 fine.⁷⁰⁸ In 1859 a further Act of amendment was issued, reminding all that the law must be followed and put in place in a reasonable amount of time.

There is also some indication that cemetery conditions were not necessarily better than those in urban grounds. Many of the later Acts were concerned with outlining the proper practices to be followed in burying the dead, advising on the ideal positions in which cemeteries should be located, their soil type, and the way in which they should be laid out in order to be most sanitary. This suggests that even cemeteries did not always meet the appropriate standards of hygiene.⁷⁰⁹ Two Acts of 1857 suggest that this was especially the case with

⁷⁰⁶ For example, in 1848 All Saints North Street, York, decided to close their ground as it no longer possible to bury 'with any regard to decency any more bodies'. See BOR/PR/Y/ASN/12. In 1846, following the receipt of a letter from parish residents, one of whom was a doctor, Holy Trinity Goodramgate, York, similarly argued that 'the dead can no longer be interred therein with a due regard to Christian decency, to the common feelings of humanity, and to the health of the Parishioners', the vestry decided to discontinue burials, with the exception of existing vaults and in cases where a spouse was already buried there. See BOR/Y/HTG/14, Churchwardens' accounts of Holy Trinity, Goodramgate, York. In 1845 St Johns, York, agreed that 'in consequence of the crowded state of the Church Yard...no more Interments will be allowed to take Place.' See BOR/PR/Y/J/19, Churchwardens' accounts of St John, Ousebridge, York.

⁷⁰⁷ GL/S 393, Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts*, pp. 91-2

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-9

⁷⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-4, 148-51, 156. The parish of Sts Philip and Jacob, Bristol exemplifies the problems suffered by many parishes after the implementation of the 1854 Act, and demonstrates that the outlawing of urban burial was far from the end of the problem. The minute book of its Burial Board records the persistent problem of finding suitable ground for a new burial ground for the parish, and moreover, of

common graves, i.e. graves of the poor, stipulating as they did that when necessary, orders might be made regarding common graves in certain privately owned cemeteries, as well as those in parish or council run cemeteries for the protection of public health and maintenance of public decency.⁷¹⁰

A further similarity between urban grounds and cemeteries was the fact that neither was reserved solely for the dead. Indeed garden cemeteries were designed to be pleasant and attractive places for the living to visit and promenade, and therefore actually encouraged their use by the living. As the Cemeteries Clauses Act of 1847 made clear, cemeteries also attracted the same 'nuisances' as burial grounds, such as games, sports and, more unusually, 'discharging weapons.'⁷¹¹

In addition, it is also important to note that the disused burial grounds in towns and cities continued to be used by the living after their closure. They could often suffer further reduction in the interests of better accommodation for the living. For instance, only a decade after its closure, part of the churchyard of St Michael, Spurriergate, was turned into a public urinal, while the rest was used for street widening.⁷¹² In contrast, and highly ironically, within fifty years of their closure on the grounds of their threat to public health many urban churchyards were being turned into urban oases. A variety of government Acts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the 1881 Metropolitan Open Spaces Act, sought to create more green open spaces in urban areas to improve the health of their inhabitants, and often appropriated disused burial grounds for this purpose. A large number of churchyards in London, Bristol and York, and certainly across the rest of the country, were levelled and landscaped, in order that they could be turned into small parks or open greens, many of which remain today.⁷¹³

raising the money to buy land. The parish complained that it had been put in a difficult position with the closure of their burial ground, as the parish was very poor and also very populous. However, the Corporation of the Poor refused to contribute towards any costs. See BRO/P/St P&J/M/4/2(a).

⁷¹⁰ GL/S 393, Cunningham, *The Burial Board Acts*, p. 131

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63

⁷¹² Murray, *The York Graveyard Guide*, pp. 108-9

⁷¹³ For example those of St Thomas, Bristol and London's Bridewell Hospital: BRO, P/St T/ChW/168(a); GL/Ms 33032.

Given the prevalence of the disruption of human remains in overcrowded grounds, it is significant that the body did not acquire the right of burial without disturbance 'in perpetuity', that is for one hundred years, until the Act of 1857, although legal ownership of graves was a feature of at least some cemeteries prior to this. For instance, in 1847 Bristol's cemetery advertised itself on these grounds, boasting among its advantages a 'perfect' system of registration and notation of grave locations.⁷¹⁴ This indicates that the dead themselves and the status of their remains, specifically the preservation of their individuality and integrity, and their association with a specific, fixed location, may have been a contributing factor to change at a 'popular' level, but also that at an official one, these were secondary concerns. Their importance at this 'popular' level is supported by the example of St Mary Redcliffe in the previous chapter, where residents specified that the exhumation of remains respect both individuals' remains and their original place of burial. The eventual guarantee of burial 'in perpetuity', and the legal status it granted the dead, would therefore mark a profound alteration in their status, removing their flexibility and instead rooting them firmly in the ground, where they were to be inviolable and immovable.

Therefore although burial reforms, the legislative regulation and control of burial practices, and the form of burial they advocated, have been taken by historians as one of the key signs of the removal of the dead from the hands and experience of the living, in fact the process was not quite so simple. In the short-term there was not a clear-cut change in the nature and usage of burial grounds or the conditions of remains in them, even though cemeteries would gradually come to alter attitudes towards the dead and their remains in certain fundamental ways.

⁷¹⁴ *The Bristol Mercury*, Saturday, August 21, 1847

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated that overcrowding has a longer pre-history than traditionally thought, as do the sanitary concerns that came to force change in burial practice. It has also shown that change in burial practice was not inevitable, even though it had long been clear that urban burial was increasingly untenable, but instead came as a result of wider concerns orientated around the needs of the living. It did not therefore arise because of a shift in attitudes towards the dead, despite their increasingly brutal treatment. Instead, these changes were a part of a new standard of 'decency' which applied to most aspects of urban life and the urban population. Furthermore, the implication that a sharp line should be drawn between urban and cemetery burial, and between the periods before and after the commencement of reform in 1850, is misleading, as there existed a significant degree of overlap in practice. However, it is important to note that reform and cemetery burial would come to alter attitudes towards the dead after our period. This was particularly so in relation to remains, which became fixed and protected from intrusion, a fundamental change to the treatment they had experienced for a millennium.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has offered a number of revisions to characterisations of death in the long eighteenth century, expanding upon existing research and covering a number of topics as yet unexplored by histories of death covering the period. The long eighteenth century has been shown to be a discrete and significant period in the treatment of and attitudes towards the dead. There is no doubt that it witnessed certain key developments: the emergence and spread of undertaking and the emergence of a mourning trade, which together gave death a new commercial presence; the development of a new material culture of death, comprised of funerals based on heraldic form and elite-derived mourning custom, a development only partially connected to the existence of specialist suppliers; the standards of 'decency' challenged and re-shaped by death's involvement with commerce and fashion and, by extension, with the middling sort; enforced cemetery use for urban inhabitants at the end of the period; and the early stages of a shift in attitudes towards the permanence and integrity of buried human remains. A further notable development of the period is the gradual alienation of, and inferior provision for, the poor; although paupers were awarded generous sums for their funerals in the belief that they, like anyone else, were owed 'decent' care up to and including the point of their interment, aspects of their culture of death were brought into question, and their manner, place and condition of burial worsened significantly, in tandem with their standards of living.

However, it is also true that many of the changes witnessed by the long eighteenth century were in form rather than in substance. As stated, the new material culture of death was derived from well-established elite forms. In addition, although they displayed an increasing degree of elaboration, the essential components of funerals and funeral processions remained the same.

The principle of undertaking was similarly familiar, being derived from undertakers' predecessors, the College of Arms and the nature and use of cemeteries also display a number of important continuities with urban burial places.

Moreover, many practices and attitudes remained unaltered. Crucially, this includes the proximity of the dead to the living and to everyday life and where, how, when and by whom the dead were encountered; the changes listed above were almost entirely with rituals surrounding the body rather than with the ways and places it was cared for. There were no limits on exposure to or physical contact with the dead before burial. In fact, the continued proximity of the living to the dead was central to the 'decent' demonstration of respect for and emotional attachment to the deceased. Undertaking, although associated with changes in funeral form, does not appear to have had any real impact on how or by whom the dead were prepared for burial during this period, or their treatment in the period between death and the funeral.

In relation to burial places, proximity and exposure only diminished at the very end of our period with the establishment and enforced usage of cemeteries, and the outlawing of intramural interment. However, cemetery burial cannot be said to constitute an absolute removal of the dead, and it was preceded by a period in which the presence of and exposure to the dead increased as a result of widespread overcrowding. Furthermore, cemeteries were not a development motivated by changes in attitudes towards the dead, but towards the living, and would only gradually come to alter the view of buried remains. Aside from this development, burial practice and the use of burial spaces during the long eighteenth century were characterised by a particularly striking degree of continuity, retaining all the features of earlier centuries, albeit exaggerated and accelerated owing to population growth and the shifting urban environment. One of the most notable developments in regard to burial, other than cemeteries, was the adoption of increasingly brutal means of managing overcrowded spaces which had more in common with the methods of grave robbers than 'decent' standards of treatment.

Consideration of the role of the urban environment and the social, economic, as well as spatial changes that it witnessed, are one way in which the findings of this thesis have been contextualised. This process has emphasised the position of the dead in everyday life and the effects it had on their treatment, as well as showing how far developments regarding the dead were shaped by the wider circumstances of the world of the living, rather than by considerations pertaining to the dead themselves. Population growth, the rise of the middling sort, the growth and nature of trade and commercial culture, all of which play an important role in urban history, have been shown to be among the key factors influencing both practices that changed, and those that persisted. They were instrumental in creating a climate in which the new material culture of death was able to emerge, while population growth contributed to a situation which made traditional means of urban burial and the management and use of urban burial grounds untenable. In both instances, it was these wider factors, rather than changing attitudes towards the dead themselves, which encouraged and allowed change; changing attitudes towards 'decency' as it applied to both funerals and mourning, and to burial and human remains, were therefore results, rather than causes, of change. Importantly, it has also been shown that although death continued to be understood within a firmly religious framework, the practical handling of the dead; funeral and mourning form; the places in which the dead were to be found; and the treatment of these places were determined in very large part by factors which owed little to any explicitly religious factors or principles. In the process, it has also been shown that the church lost its monopoly first over provision for funerals, and second over burial places.

A particularly important feature of attitudes towards bodily remains identified is the difference which existed between their treatment above and below ground. Above, concerns with 'decency', respect and integrity were strong, as evidenced by the preparation of the body for burial and the fears which arose in response to the commercialisation of death. Below, attitudes were more ambivalent. Although standards of 'decency' pertaining to remains

were technically very similar to those governing treatment of the body before burial, even though they admitted a sometimes significant degree of flexibility, in practice they could be adhered to rather loosely, and sometimes disregarded to an astounding degree, something seen in the routine management of burial places as much as in the extraordinary circumstances of grave robbery.

All of the issues considered (and many which were beyond the scope of this thesis) would benefit from further research. Undertaking requires further examination on a nationwide scale in order to refine the chronology of its spread proposed herein and to explore the issue of provincial undertakers and the vague nature of 'undertaker' as a title. Mourning culture is also in need of much clearer mapping, particularly in relation to the date of its appearance and the processes which shaped its many degrees and points of etiquette. Also deserving of attention in the interests of comparison is the place of the dead in industrial towns and also rural areas. It is known that the latter also experienced the problem of shortage of burial space at the end of our period, indicating that the effects of population growth were not confined to urban areas. Further investigation into the possible existence of a separate death culture among the poor during the eighteenth and into the later nineteenth century would also be a valuable undertaking, as the results of this thesis suggest that such a culture does seem to have existed, and that it displays a remarkable degree of continuity with that detailed by Julie-Marie Strange in relation to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The church's loss of control over both funerals and burial is a very significant issue in need of further attention, as are attitudes towards dying and the deathbed; Roy Porter's argument that this process and place became appropriated by doctors and medicine has yet to receive further detailed attention, and it must be questioned how far it really affected the spiritual concerns attached to dying and the moment of death, processes which, like the burial service, were determined by spiritual concerns more explicitly and completely than the vast majority of issues examined in this thesis.

In sum, while this thesis does not deny the significance of the changes typically associated with the long eighteenth century, it has qualified their nature and extent. It has challenged the idea that the dead were removed from everyday life during the period question, providing important evidence for their continued presence and integration into everyday life in both public and private places.

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Mf. 840 Burial registers

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Mf. 860, 862 Burial registers

PR/Y/MB/35-39 Churchwardens' accounts

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PR/Y/MS/27 Churchwardens' accounts

PR/Y/MS/44, 47-48, 52 Faculties for the alteration of the churchyard, 20thC

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Fac. Bk. 7, pp. 163-5 Creation of a path through Holy Trinity Micklegate churchyard noting all tombstones to be replaced, 1898

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