4 The funeral

As an organised and identifiable set of customs centred on the disposal of the corpse, the funeral has featured prominently in analyses concerning Western attitudes towards death. The Victorian funeral has attracted particular interest on account of its perceived opulence. Indeed, the meanings invested in the Victorian funeral have been explored almost entirely in terms of extravagance. With mutes, plumes, Belgian horses, carriages, yards of black crepe and coffins 'ablaze with flowers', the Victorian funeral procession was 'an extraordinary sight' to behold. According to James Curl, such displays were typical: the 'panoply which once had been the privilege of the aristocracy alone' had filtered down into the burial customs of the middle and working classes. The expenditure necessitated by such displays has been equated with respect and affection for the deceased: 'a cheap funeral with no flowers and a plain box for a coffin would have made it clear to the world that the corpse went unloved and unhonoured to the grave'.[1] For the working classes, however, pursuit of such customs could lead to financial ruin. As one woman recalled of Edwardian Bolton: 'you did the best you possibly could, even to the extent of leaving yourself slightly broke, it was supposed to be respect for the dead, but I think a little bit was to save the neighbours from talking after as well'.[2]

Herein lies what contemporaries and historians alike have perceived as the crux of the working-class culture of death: the blurred distinction between respect for the dead and respectability. At its most sympathetic, this interpretation has located the working-class culture of extravagance in antipathy to the pauper grave and the desire to distance oneself from the stigma of the workhouse. However, 'the respectable burial' has also been used as a tool to portray the working classes as shallow and riddled with snobbery. Notably, Dickens portrayed a culture that was 'sordid' and 'ludicrous' with funeral arrangements closely observed by the

[1] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 2 and 20–1.
[2] BOHT, Tape 115, Reference: AL/CG/116.

'jealous eyes of neighbours' keen to judge the position of the bereaved within a localised social hierarchy.[3] The perception of the expensive funeral as the goal of the socially ambitious persisted to the end of the nineteenth century. Arthur Morrison's short story 'All That Messuage' satirised the kudos associated with costly funeral attire. The story begins with a married couple celebrating the purchase of tenanted property. In recognition of their new status as landlords, they fantasise about the fancy funerals they will be able to afford and pledge to inter each other in expensive, polished oak coffins replete with brass fittings. Saddled with a house where the tenants refuse to pay the rent, however, the pair gradually descend into poverty. The ultimate symbol of their degradation, Morrison suggests, is not admission to the workhouse but the revelation that each will be buried in a 'common caufin' of plain deal.[4] In juxtaposing the desire for an ostentatious funeral with the sobering prospect of a pauper burial, Morrison exposes the superficiality of conceptions of respectability that rested on conspicuous consumption. Yet Morrison also illustrates the tendency for contemporary critics to depict the working-class funeral in a one-dimensional framework.

This chapter challenges the assumptions inherent in contemporary and historical literature concerning respectability and the working-class culture of death and disposal. Not only have accounts of extravagance been mythologised, the definition of working-class death custom in terms of social status alone is unhelpful. First, it negates the possibility that burial rituals were cathartic. Furthermore, it nullifies the independence of the working classes to invest custom with multiple and individual meanings. This is not to dismiss respectability from the analysis of burial customs, but to recognise that the meanings invested in the funeral were not confined to issues of social status. Indeed, an exploration of working-class burial rites suggests that attitudes towards death and disposal were typified by complex and diverse expressions of loss and bereavement. In approaching the funeral as a series of rituals which rendered private loss a public rite, it is also possible to perceive components of burial custom as communal sites for the creation and expression of condolence and consolation. The consequence of many funeral customs lay in their role as forums for expressing grief and sympathy with the bereaved, whilst reaffirming a sense of social inclusion. Street collections, closing one's curtains and participating in the funeral tea could all enable the bereaved, and those who sympathised with them, to express sorrow and loss.

[3] Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 21–2.
[4] Morrison, 'All That Messuage' in *Tales of Mean Streets*, 224–51.

In shifting the discussion of death and disposal beyond a preoccupation with respectability and funeral extravagance, it is possible to explore a wider culture of death in the context of grief. Moving beyond a concern with the financial cost of the funeral, analysis can turn to the meanings inscribed on the burial service itself. For most, the burial service was inseparable from shared understandings of decent and customary interment. As Jennifer Leaney highlights, the failure of early cremationists to appreciate this relationship might explain why late Victorian and Edwardian cremation propaganda failed to impress upon a wide public. Arguments based on utility, hygiene and economics bore little relevance to a working-class culture of death.[5] Peter Jupp also notes that cremation propaganda was anathema to a conservative working-class perception of the funeral as a means to express identity, affection for the dead and a sense of social status. It also compromised notions of physical resurrection.[6] More importantly, perhaps, cremation called into question the whole social and cultural significance of customs geared towards the grave. It is impossible to separate the secular rituals of the funeral from spiritual significance. For many, the burial service was a custom imbued with meaning extra to religion and spirituality: it signified community membership, expressed identity and was interpreted as a right of citizenship.

The burial service

The preoccupation with respectability and extravagance has encouraged a tendency for contemporary and historical commentaries on the funeral to focus exclusively on secular rituals of mourning as opposed to the burial service and the spiritual beliefs invested in the disposal of the dead. With reference to elite families, Pat Jalland has illustrated that the language of the Christian burial service ameliorated grief by reaffirming belief in heavenly reunion. Conversely, the exclusivity of Christian doctrine could exacerbate loss, especially for agnostic/atheist mourners or Christians who grieved for an unbeliever.[7] The significance of the burial service for a working-class culture of grief has, however, been almost entirely ignored. As Elizabeth Roberts notes, this is reflected in the

[5] J. Leaney, 'Ashes to Ashes: Cremation and the Celebration of Death in Nineteenth Century Britain' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 118–35.
[6] P. Jupp, 'The Development of Cremation in England, 1820–1990: A Sociological Account', unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1993.
[7] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 216–22, and Martha McMackin Garland, 'Victorian Unbelief and Bereavement' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 151–70 (156–61).

tendency for individuals to recall secular rites rather than the burial service, the vicar, or the church where the funeral was held.[8] Similarly, rumination on death, judgement and the afterlife (eschatology) was increasingly common during the Victorian period but debate on this issue has tended to be analysed in terms of an intellectual elite rather than popular belief.[9] Where religion has been considered in relation to working-class burial, it has been in the context of the near-monopoly of the Established Church on burial privileges that prohibited officiating ministers from non-Anglican denominations performing interment rites in the Anglican churchyard. Even this debate, however, is perceived as holding specific interest for a religious and intellectual elite.[10] More generally, orthodox approaches to religion among the working classes have fixed on the religious census and later, more localised, surveys of church attendance which highlighted a gradual decline in working-class patterns of worship, prompting the conclusion that the urban working classes were alienated from a clergy who inhabited a different ideological and cultural world.[11] Alternative interpretations of attitudes towards organised religion emphasise the potential for individuals to mould the church to their needs. James Obelkevich's classic study of rural Lindsey, for instance, emphasised the popular appropriation of formal religious services, such as baptism and burial, to argue for separate plebeian worlds of belief.[12] Revisionist analyses of religion have contested interpretations of falling church attendance figures as evidence of an increasingly secular working class, emphasising instead the distinction between concepts of 'indifference' and 'difference' to religion. Thus, Callum Brown has emphasised the role of church-based voluntary organisations and the tendency for municipal authorities to promote evangelical agendas of

[8] E. Roberts, 'The Lancashire Way of Death' in Houlbrooke, *Death, Ritual and Bereavement*, 188–207 (201).

[9] M. Wheeler, *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), C. McDannell and B. Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Yale: Yale University Press, [1988] 2001) and P. Stanford, *Heaven: A Traveller's Guide to the Undiscovered Country* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).

[10] After the Burial Act 1880, services could take the preferred form of relatives and be led by the minister of their choice. See O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, 2nd edn, vol. II (London: Black, 1970), 202–7.

[11] S. Meacham, 'The Church in the Victorian City', *Victorian Studies*, 11, 3 (1968), 359–78, B. Harrison, 'Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England', *Past and Present*, 38 (1967), 98–125, H. Pelling, 'Religion in the Nineteenth Century British Working Class', *Past and Present*, 27 (1964), 128–33, H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 280–3, Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longmans, 1976).

[12] J. Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey 1825–1875* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).

social reform to argue that few individuals would have been untouched by religion at some point in their lives.[13] Gerald Parsons, meanwhile, has posited the notion of a working-class version of Christianity which prioritised practical deeds and was characterised by a 'consumer-like' selection of what was relevant to individual needs.[14] As Sarah Williams has highlighted, however, the problem with both orthodox and revisionist accounts of popular religion lies in the agenda they set for research, invariably tied to notions of decline, urbanisation and secularisation.[15] Even more nuanced readings of popular culture based upon participant testimony, such as Hugh McLeod's recent *Piety and Poverty*, persist, suggests Williams, in approaching working-class belief through notions of secularisation.[16] Moreover, accounts which juxtapose a popular/folk belief with elite/formal religion limit the possibilities for exploring the fluidity of spirituality.

Lawrence Taylor's analysis of religion as a discourse whose narrator has a wide range of voices and imagery at their disposal has illustrated how religious belief can adopt multiple voices which demand to be heard, not in isolation, but in concert, however disharmonious they may be. Taylor refers to these subcultural diversities as 'fields of religious experience' which coalesce in a 'loosely bounded "interpretative community" with a generally shared understanding of religious meaning'.[17] Williams's study of religious belief in popular culture in Southwark, 1880–1939, expands Taylor's emphasis on the fluidity of religious narrative. Moving away from notions of subcultural diversity, Williams draws attention to the perpetual re-creation and reinterpretation of belief by the individual. Rejecting attempts to define both categories of belief and religious activity (which were probably alien to the experience and perception of the historical actors concerned), Williams argues instead for a loose understanding of belief which prioritises participant criteria.[18] It is, she contends, only by engaging with the language, symbolism and imagery

[13] C. G. Brown, 'Did Urbanisation Secularise Britain?', *Urban History Yearbook* (1988), 1–13.

[14] G. Parsons, 'A Question of Meaning: Religion and Working-Class Life' in Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 79.

[15] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 1–23.

[16] H. McLeod, *Piety and Poverty: Working-Class Religion in Berlin, London and New York, 1870–1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1996) and H. McLeod, 'New Perspectives on Victorian Class Religion: The Oral Evidence', *Oral History*, 14, 1 (1985), 31–50.

[17] L. Taylor, 'The Languages of Belief: Nineteenth-Century Religious Discourse in Southwest Donegal' in M. Silverman and P. H. Gulliver (eds.), *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 142–75.

[18] See also S. Williams, 'The Problem of Belief: The Place of Oral History in the Study of Popular Religion', *Oral History*, 24, 2 (1996), 27–34.

created and used by historical actors themselves that it becomes possible to explore the multiple roles, uses and concepts relating belief to broader notions of popular culture.

For Williams, then, belief is a dynamic process which draws on folklore, superstition, formal belief and occasional or conditional conformity to institutions. The secular/popular and the spiritual/official languages of belief were not mutually exclusive but inextricable parts of a web of broader cultural meaning. Williams's conclusion that belief was complex and amorphous suggests the potential for the burial service to be appropriated by individuals and perpetually recast and redefined. The supposed secularism of the late-Victorian and Edwardian period need not, therefore, preclude a reading of the meanings invested in the burial service. Indeed, interaction with religion at the interment of the dead was crucial to understandings of the decent and proper funeral. Thomas Kselman's exploration of funeral conflicts in nineteenth-century France goes some way to illustrate this point. Civil burial in early nineteenth-century France was rare, limited to the funerals of freethinkers or to cases where the Catholic clergy refused to officiate. The improvisations made by families forced to organise a burial outside the format provided by the church provides an insight, argues Kselman, into the sentiments and values of people confronting death. In particular, the withholding of burial rites conferred a source of shame and dishonour on the dead and implied that prayers for their soul were futile. Of equal significance, however, it removed customs which were used to establish an individual's place within a community. Where interment rituals were improvised, they tended to emulate the purpose of the Catholic burial: to reaffirm identity, to console the bereaved and to articulate hope. Thus, Kselman warns against crude readings of secularisation and calls, instead, for an appreciation of forms of belief as positive forces for innovation in tandem with wider cultural change.[19]

Working-class radicals had long been critical of the church, yet the burial service was so ingrained in custom, it is doubtful how many families would have considered interment without clerical involvement as a viable option. Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, omission of the burial service was perceived to be one of the greatest indignities of the pauper funeral. In particular, recourse to the church or chapel for the disposal of the dead was rooted in a cultural concept of 'God's acre' as the traditional repository for the dead. Even the supposedly secular cemetery usually had a chapel or three at its core, mimicking the layout of the

[19] T. Kselman, 'Funeral Conflicts in Nineteenth-Century France', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1988), 312–32.

churchyard. For those who lived in rural areas, the absence of a municipal cemetery left little option but to turn to the churchyard unless, of course, they could afford the fee to transport the coffin to a town. For families who regularly attended a place of worship, familiarity both with the clergyman and the formal language of religion could enable the bereaved to impart some personal significance on the burial service by requesting favourite hymns or readings, or by relating memories of the deceased. If we believe that the urbanised working classes were alienated from the clergy, however, it seems unlikely that bereft relatives would have negotiated personalised burial services with officiating ministers. Even so, as a sarcastic article in *Nineteenth Century* in 1897 noted, families could usually derive some comfort from the spiritual implications of the burial service. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory assuaged grief by encouraging mourners to pray for the dead and speed their soul on its way to Heaven. The Anglican service was more democratic: it afforded men and women of 'no special piety' immediate entry into Heaven, a notion supported by the 'nauseous hymns, so commonly sung, proclaiming that the trials and troubles of the deceased are at an end'.[20]

Confessional cultures might be lampooned for offering glib promises, but they could also be criticised for aggravating grief. It is not surprising that in an autobiography that championed socialism and democratic education, Alice Foley gently rebuked the 'kind and sympathetic' nuns at her Catholic school who shook their heads in dismay to learn that her brother had not received mass before his death. The 'ominous implication' of this omission for her brother's soul exacerbated Alice's 'overwrought sensitivity' and she lay sick for weeks.[21] Most commentators, however, noted the flexibility of popular belief. The district nurse Margaret Loane contended that the poor had no real need of formalised religious ceremonies because it was improvised notions of religion that commonly bolstered fortitude in the face of suffering.[22] Kathleen Woodward also highlighted a culture of selective belief, recollecting that whilst mission meetings in Edwardian London made good use of Hell and retribution as tools of moral reform, these were easily overlooked by audiences in favour of the all-encompassing belief that 'God is Love'.[23] Even vague notions of Heaven represented a language of hope against a life of poverty. Robert Tressell explored the allure of Heaven in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. Vehemently anti-clerical, Tressell speculated that Christianity was a clever, if absurd, device that distracted the poor from the horror of their lives by promising them eternal joy after

[20] *Nineteenth Century*, January 1897, 38–55. [21] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 38.
[22] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 44. [23] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 128–30.

death. For Tressell, this served only to depoliticise the poor: even his radical protagonist Owen 'could not help longing for something to believe, for some hope for the future; something to compensate for the unhappiness of the present'.[24] Aiming to illustrate the emptiness of such promises, Tressell rails against the hypocrisy of the clergy and ridicules Owen's peers who cling to the promises of Christianity despite knowing 'practically nothing about it!'.[25]

Tressell's contemptuous treatment of the 'Christian' populace suggests an assumption that the majority of the working classes held some concept of Heaven, even if they chose to dispense with notions of Hell. Yet the obscurity that surrounds the religious beliefs of the working classes inevitably problematises any analysis of the spiritual significance of the burial service. As Williams highlights, middle-class Christians and clerics frequently despaired that working-class understandings of salvation were vague, inadequate or wholly inaccurate. She disputes, however, the idea that the working classes retained no concept of atonement: popular belief perpetuated a clear set of moral expectations which were neither arbitrary nor divorced from church-based religion. Thus, the fulfilment of subjective moral and ethical criteria was perceived as sufficient to secure entry into the afterlife. In particular, notions of 'sin' and 'goodness' were dependent on points of 'neighbourliness' and 'brotherliness' rather than doctrinal strictures or church attendance.[26] In this sense, the bereaved could derive comfort from the burial service as confirmation of the social worth of the dead and form a tacit understanding that it signified the right of the deceased to an afterlife. That historiography has latched onto the secular rituals of burial is, perhaps, indicative of an assumption that only the secular could be imbued with individual meaning. If we invoke Sarah Williams's model of belief, however, the public discourse of religion and the fixed liturgy of the burial service could, like the secular rituals of mourning, be appropriated and invested with private meaning.

Herein lies the significance of the religious burial service. As an ingrained component of funeral ritual, the burial service was inseparable from the secular customs of death. The liturgical consignment of the corpse back to the earth engendered a sense of finality: throwing soil onto the lid of the lowered coffin signified that 'it was all over'.[27] The solemnity of the ritual encouraged reflection on mortality and the afterlife, but, also, on the personality and mis/fortunes of the deceased. Hence,

[24] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 229–30. [25] Ibid., 145–6.
[26] S. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture*, 116–17.
[27] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.

Deborah Smith tied the story of her brother's coffin being lowered into the ground with reflection on his troubled life: 'No more would he have to seek for work, no more to work when he was not well.'[28] Likewise, the fulfilment of interment rites could prompt the bereaved to ruminate on the character of the relationship lost. Considering loss, however, could also provoke bitter mourning for things that never were, notably relationships that had never quite matched hopes or expectations. Recollecting the funeral of his estranged father, Sam Shaw delivered a subtle blow to the dead man's memory: 'I paid him all I ever owed, the tribute of a passing sigh.'[29]

The consignment of the dead back to the earth was integral to a sense of closure: it separated the dead from the bereaved, propelled them towards an afterlife whilst sanctioning the return of the bereaved to the world of the living, and it incorporated both the deceased and the mourner in their respective domain.[30] To omit or deny a fundamental component of burial custom ruptured the cathartic function of the funeral. A widely publicised burial scandal in Stoke, near Coventry, in August 1878, highlights the distress caused when a family were prohibited from interring the dead in their chosen manner. The parents of an unbaptised baby had approached the Anglican minister of their parish, the Reverend Arrowsmith, to conduct the funeral of their child. Arrowsmith refused and informed the family that church law forbade any Anglican clergyman to read the burial service over the grave of an unbaptised babe. Having no money to travel to the municipal cemetery in Coventry, the distressed parents sought the advice of a local 'gentleman'. On his advice, they approached a Nonconformist minister who agreed to assist them in conducting an improvised service: the funeral began in the Stoke Independent Chapel, moved to the turnpike near the graveyard wall, and ended with the interment of the coffin in the Anglican burial ground. That the family chose to improvise rather than omit a burial service suggests the significance they attached to their right to inter the dead with spiritual rites. Moreover, the decision to overlook the implications of Anglican regulations that withheld access to the burial service illustrates a malleable notion of spiritual authority. That Arrowsmith received death threats and hate mail following the publication of this story in *The Times* also points to the significance of the case for a wider debate on burial privileges in Anglican graveyards.[31]

[28] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 81–2.
[29] S. Shaw, *Guttersnipe* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1946), 161.
[30] J. Littlewood, 'The Denial of Death and Rites of Passage in Contemporary Societies' in Clark, *Sociology of Death*, 69–84.
[31] *The Times*, 9 August 1878, 7; 15 August 1878, 12.

The religious component of the funeral can thus be interpreted as a secular 'right' as well as a spiritual 'rite', the denial of which was read as a denial of dignity and respect. For instance, the refusal of entry into Heaven for unbaptised infants (limbo) was inextricable from the prohibition of traditional burial custom. Anne Tibble described her mother's horror when told she could not expect to see the soul of her unbaptised baby in Heaven. Further to this blow, the child's corpse was to be consigned to the back of the church, underneath the rubbish heap, along with the other 'ungiven'. Despite attempts to quell the grief of his wife with assurances that 'Holy folk can often be grudgers', Anne's father clearly harboured a deep resentment and never returned to church.[32] Kate Taylor, born in 1891, recalled that her sister's death from infectious disease meant that the coffin was forbidden entry into church. Kate's mother, consumed by bitterness, overcame her usual reticence to chide the vicar: 'You have kept her out of church; you can't keep her out of Heaven.'[33]

The conduct of some clergy could also be construed as a denial of dignity. In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Robert Tressell suggests that clerics were 'contemptuously indifferent' to the bereaved poor. At the pauper funeral of Philpot, the cleric 'gabbles' the funeral service in a 'rapid and wholly unintelligible manner' which would have 'compelled laughter' in a less tragic context.[34] Such stories were a useful device for railing against the perceived hypocrisy of the clergy, yet this vision of the Christian funeral as a mockery highlights the potential for the bereaved to feel that their dignity, and that of the corpse, had been slighted. Clearly, some clergy were indifferent or high-handed with their parishioners, sometimes turning up late to conduct burial services. Bolton Burial Board admonished Anglican and Nonconformist ministers in 1906 for persistent unpunctuality at funeral services.[35] Yet the potential for antagonism between some clerics and mourners should not eclipse the possibility that many bereaved families found comfort in the burial service, however they chose to interpret it. As the chaplain for Walton workhouse in Liverpool noted, some families 'thanked me very much' for the consideration shown to them, for the attention paid to their dead, and for his ministry.[36] The very personality of an officiating minister could represent calm assurance and belief in an afterlife. As Thomas Jones noted of ministers in Nonconformist South Wales, a melodious and consoling tone of voice could lighten the solemnity of a burial service. Less formally, prayer meetings at the home of the deceased on the eve before the funeral could provide a wealth of emotional

[32] Tibble, *Greenhorn*, 63, 98. [33] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 292.
[34] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 524. [35] BRO ABCF 15/16.
[36] LVRO 353 WES 14/3. See, for instance, 12, 14 and 23 June 1882.

and spiritual succour.[37] Such was the relationship between the liturgical and the secular that it is impossible to analyse the burial service in isolation: for the devout and ambivalent alike, interment with religious rites was a sign that due dignity had been attributed to the dead. Definitions of 'the funeral' extend, however, beyond the burial to include mourning paraphernalia and the rituals which flank the burial service. This not only suggests that secular custom could offer similar mechanisms of support and consolation to those perpetuated by religious belief, but that secular customs held meanings beyond a concern for status and display.

Expense

Historians of death have claimed that Victorian funeral extravagance reached its apex by the 1880s. Yet to contemporaries who continued to campaign for funeral reform at the end of the century, burial customs remained too costly and elaborate.[38] Since Dickens's scathing attacks on the 'black jobmaster', undertakers had shouldered much of the blame for the 'very ugly, dismal and expensive mockeries' associated with the funeral customs of both rich and poor.[39] In particular, the undertaker fell foul of sanitary and health reformers who argued that the time it took families to accumulate resources for a respectable funeral was additional time spent in the presence of a decaying corpse. In 1886 the sanitary reformer Frederick Lowndes accused undertakers of exploiting their 'monopoly' on burial custom deliberately to retard economical and wholesome burial practice.[40] The perception that the undertaker was a parasite, epitomised by Dickens's character Mr Mould, persisted to the turn of the twentieth century. Surveying the East End in Edwardian London, Helen Bosanquet described the typical undertaker as a 'seedy, dolorous, out-at-elbows man' in 'greasy black' who had difficulty remaining sober.[41] The undertaker was an easy figure to caricature, not least because he derived a 'living' from other people's deaths. Yet the business of disposing of the dead was far from uniform and much depended on the personality of the undertaker and, indeed, the status of his clientele. Moreover, by the late Victorian period, undertaking was in a state of flux and moving slowly towards professionalisation.[42]

[37] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories* (Newtown: Welsh Outlook Press, 1938), 67–8.
[38] See *Lancet*, 20 January 1894, 165–6.
[39] Dickens, 'Raven in the Happy Family', 193, and *Lancet*, 16 October 1875, 571–2.
[40] *Lancet*, 12 June 1886, 1141–2. [41] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 126.
[42] G. Howarth, 'Professionalising the Funeral Industry in England, 1700–1960' in Jupp and Howarth, *Changing Face of Death*, 120–34 and G. Howarth, *Last Rites: The Work of the Modern Funeral Director* (Baywood: Baywood Publishing Company, 1996).

By the end of the nineteenth century, many undertaking businesses offered a broad range of services priced on a sliding scale. *Cassell's Household Guide* gave readers of its 1870 edition an example of funerals available from a large firm of undertakers in the Metropolis: funerals could be purchased from a modest £3 5s 0d to a staggering £53 0s 0d. At the bottom of the price range, mourners would enjoy use of a simple carriage with coachman and horse, an elm coffin with lining, use of a pall and the services of coffin bearers; effects such as mourning wear or a plate for the coffin were not included in the price but could be bought additionally. One step up the sliding scale, a funeral at £5 5s bought a hearse and one horse, a mourning coach and one horse, an elm coffin covered in black with wadded lining, simple coffin fittings, a pall and funeral attendants. Again, mourning wear was not included in the price. A funeral for a child under the age of two ranged from £1 0s 0d to £2 12s 0d. For those who just wished to purchase a coffin, prices ranged from £2 14s 0d for a plain elm coffin to £15 0s 0d for a solid oak affair with brass fittings.[43] Prices in the provinces tended to be cheaper, especially if funeral paraphernalia were sourced direct from suppliers. As the accounts of Gloucestershire carpenters and undertakers W. B. Wood & Sons illustrate, expenses could range from a few shillings for a child's coffin to seven pounds for a trimmed adult coffin.[44] The Derby Mourning and Funeral Warehouse sold polished elm coffins that ranged from £1 10s 0d to £2 10s 0d, whilst oak coffins started at £3 10s 0d. Funeral packages consisting of coffin, coaches and paraphernalia ranged from £2 14s 0d to £15 0s 0d.[45]

By the end of the century, undertakers increasingly marketed themselves as purveyors of 'funeral reform' and advocates of 'economy'. Even undertakers who catered for local dignitaries and landowners provided economic as well as extravagant funerals.[46] Daniel Davis, a builder, decorator and undertaker in 1890s Cheltenham, offered funerals of 'all classes'. In 1885, Lewis & Co., undertakers in Bristol, advertised 'reform funeral cars' and a sliding scale of charges that began at two pounds for an adult funeral. Charles Billing of Bristol went further, openly declaring his willingness to be directed by the wishes and the pocket of the bereaved: 'funerals conducted in accordance with Funeral Reform or if wished in the old style. No unnecessary ostentation.

[43] *Cassell's Household Guide* (1869–71), vol. III, 292.
[44] GRO D4375, W. B. Wood & Sons of Frampton-on-Severn, Ledger of Accounts, 1889–1937.
[45] The Derby Mourning & Funeral Warehouse Advertising Booklet (T. Lloyd Proprietor: Derby, c. 1885).
[46] GRO D2265/1/1, J. M. Lewis of Stroud, Ledger of Accounts, 1885–1937.

No useless expenditure.'[47] Implicit in Billing's advertisement was the acknowledgement that the modest funeral was modern. This did not, however, mean that dignity had to be compromised; all the emphasis is placed on the bereaved as the funeral 'director'. As trade directories for the latter part of the century indicate, undertaking was frequently subsumed into larger concerns. J. D. Burnett & Co., for instance, advertising in *Kelly's* in 1894, oversaw a Somerset establishment selling linen, groceries, ironmongery, medicines, fancy goods and funerals.[48] The employees and owners of businesses that managed to traverse the grocery and funeral trade were likely to be known to the bereaved as local personalities and in a capacity other than that of undertaking, rendering the typecasting of the undertaker as a villainous opportunist harder to sustain. Some undertakers even helped the bereaved to cut interment costs by lying about the length of residency in an area to avoid incurring extra charges for the burial of non-parishioners.[49]

Challenging the overwhelming prejudice against the black jobmaster, an article in the *Lancet* in 1893 asserted that the undertaker was what the public made him: extravagant funerals would only persist so long as there was a market demand for them. In this context, however, 'the public' were perceived as an undifferentiated mass that slavishly followed the fashions of the upper classes, spending on funerals that 'which would be much more wisely expended in providing additional comforts and even necessaries for the living'.[50] The responsibility for funeral reform thus lay with the wealthy: if they adopted frugal burial customs, the rest of society would follow. Notably, the Duke of Clarence's funeral, in January 1892, received widespread criticism as a 'high carnival' and 'pomp of obsequies' which set a poor example to the working classes and highlighted a national 'weakness for display'.[51]

Funeral expenditure has often been portrayed as integral to cultures of conspicuous consumption but it is useful to remember that even a basic burial necessitated extraordinary expense. Cemetery fees, an essential component of the funeral, depended upon a number of variable factors: whether families had to purchase a new grave space or simply account for the reopening of an existing plot; how deep the grave had to be dug (a first interment in a grave space was more

[47] *Kelly's Trade Directory*, Gloucestershire, 1885 and 1894. [48] Ibid., 1894.
[49] For instance, Cheltenham undertakers had a facility for converting weeks into years for residency in the area. GRO CBR D2/2/1.
[50] *Lancet*, 24 June 1893, 1529. See also *Lancet*, 29 May 1886, 1033 and 12 March 1887, 539.
[51] *Liverpool Weekly Mercury*, 30 January 1892, 4.

expensive simply because digging deeper into the ground cost more in terms of labour);[52] whether the family required a minister to officiate at the burial; and the location of the grave. The fee charged for a burial certificate averaged one shilling.[53] The cost of grave space in municipal cemeteries in 1887 ranged from one to five pounds depending on the 'class' of grave. Like railway carriages, classes of private graves ranged from first to third and were determined according to size and position; first class plots were large and usually located in prominent sites, whilst third class graves were arranged in a tighter formation and set away from pathways.[54] At Bacup Cemetery in 1888, the fee for interment in a third class grave was priced at one pound whilst burial in a 'reserved' grave at the upper end of the market would cost £4 10s 0d.[55] Morecambe Cemetery catered for a broad rural and urban community. Within the year 1884, cemetery fees ranged from ten shillings for the interment of small children and infants to over five pounds for adult burial including the purchase of a grave, interment and minister's fees.[56] Elizabeth Woodhouse, the wife of a farmer, was interred in January 1884 at the cost of £3 12s 0d, of which £1 10s 0d paid for the reopening of the grave, £1 1s 0d for labour and the remainder for interment and minister's fees. This was expensive compared to the costs for Thomas Statter, a labourer, who was buried on 15 February at a cost of £2 19s 4d, which included the purchase of a grave, labour, interment and minister's fees. Burials could be arranged for less expense if the family already owned grave space. Thus, Betty Ellis, wife of a farmer, was interred in a grave bought for a previous bereavement and her family, members of the Free Church, took the unusual step of dispensing with the services of a minister, thus paying only for labour and the interment fee at a total of £1 5s 6d.[57] The class of a grave also influenced the cost of other basic fees. For instance, at Farnworth Cemetery in 1910 the charges for attendance of an officiating minister ranged from five shillings for interment in a third class plot to almost ten shillings for a burial in a first class grave.[58] Overall, cemetery fees remained stable throughout the decades

[52] LRO MBH/42/1. Haslingden Table of Fees 1901: first interment in a grave priced at £2 5s 0d and decreasing to fifth interment at £1 6s 0d.
[53] LRO UDPa 29/16, Padiham Day Book 1880.
[54] LRO MBH/42/1, Rules and Regulations for Ramsbottom and Great Harwood Cemeteries.
[55] Ibid., Bacup Cemetery Fees.
[56] LRO MBMo 2/2 Cemetery Order Book, e.g. 19 September 1884 and 19 November 1884.
[57] Ibid., 17 January 1884, 15 February 1884, 20 May 1884. [58] BALS AF/6/134/2.

flanking the turn of the century but were revised upwards during and after the First World War.[59]

The ability to pay for a funeral was, undoubtedly, a source of great anxiety. Indeed, if customs of laying out were female-centred, the ability to finance a funeral provided a practical channel for the grief of a male breadwinner. For those with a financial shortfall, the most immediate way of raising ready money was to turn to the pawnshop. In her study of ironworkers' families in Middlesbrough, Florence Bell related the story of one family who pawned their clock, 'the only thing available left in their bare little house', in order to pay for the funeral of their child.[60] Most families incurred debts to finance a funeral. William Blackburn (born 1895) estimated that 'seventy-five per cent of the families that had a bereavement went into debt... by the time you'd straightened up for one funeral, probably there was another one shortly after'.[61] Despite being separated from her spouse at the time of his expiration, Joseph Barlow Brooks's mother was still paying the debts incurred by her husband's funeral for years afterwards.[62]

Although some undertakers offered payment by instalments, the most common means of financing a funeral was subscription to a burial club.[63] Even for those with relatively low earnings, burial insurance (also referred to as 'life insurance') was a cheap investment. Violet Butler observed of Oxford that life insurance represented the 'commonest' form of thrift among the 'really poor': they had 'tragic reason for knowing its need' and the larger commercial companies had perfected the organisation and collection of contributions from such investors.[64] Even in rural villages, most weekly budgets accounted for payment into a benefit society.[65] According to Rowntree, 33.6 per cent of the working-class population in York earned between twenty-one and thirty shillings per week whilst 52.6 per cent earned over thirty shillings per week (at an average weekly wage of 41s 9d); approximately 13.8 per cent earned below twenty-one shillings.[66] Among his samples of weekly budgets for those earning under twenty-one shillings per week, Rowntree noted that an average of 3.9 per cent of weekly income was spent on insurance and sick clubs, costs for

[59] See proposals for increased fees, LRO MBH/42/3 September 1919 and BRO ABZ 3/3 c. 1917.
[60] Bell, *At the Works*, 83.
[61] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588. See also BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013, Bell, *At the Works*, 76–7, and Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 69–71.
[62] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 130. [63] GRO D4375, Accounts for W. B. Wood & Sons.
[64] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 241. [65] M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 250.
[66] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 70–95.

burial insurance ranging from five to six pence per week. Even among higher income groups, weekly costs for life insurance averaged just over eight pence.[67] The budget diaries compiled for Maud Pember Reeves's study of Lambeth families indicate similar rates of investment in burial insurance in 1910. For families earning between twenty and twenty-five shillings per week, Reeves noted that payments to burial clubs ranged between three and ten pence. Most families with regular incomes invested money in burial insurance, but during periods of unemployment payments tended to lapse.[68] The variety in costs was accounted for, firstly, by the different services and rates offered by individual clubs and, secondly, the number of family members insured. The generosity of premiums paid on death differed between clubs and depended on variable factors such as the length of membership. In Oxford in 1911, the expiration of a long-standing male member of the Oddfellows would incur a payment of twelve pounds; six pounds was paid for members' wives who died. Subscribers to the Sons of Temperance were entitled to twenty pounds to cover both spouses' funerals. In comparison, the Foresters Society paid only fifteen pounds between married couples. For a weekly payment of eight pence, members of the Plasterers' Union (for ten years and over) received ten pounds at the death of the male breadwinner and six pounds at the death of their spouse.[69] In turn-of-the-century York, weekly payments with the Prudential Company averaged two pence per person for a median insurance sum of ten pounds. Payments into trade union insurance schemes reflected similar contributions and payments: the most generous payouts averaging fifteen pounds; the vast majority lying somewhere between eight and twelve pounds.[70]

Nevertheless, burial insurance was a gamble. As Maud Pember Reeves noted, one missed payment during a period of illness or unemployment could render years of regular subscription obsolete.[71] Violet Butler thought the weekly payments for some schemes so small that members easily forgot to make them.[72] By the turn of the twentieth century, friendly societies and insurance companies were subject to strict legal controls to ensure against fraud and mismanagement. Nonetheless, some smaller clubs, such as informal, pub-based 'slate clubs', remained unregistered with the government, were badly organised and susceptible to collapse.[73] Warning of the iniquities of *The Nether World*, Gissing

[67] Ibid., 310–17, 423. [68] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 137–41, 196–7.
[69] Ibid., 238–9. [70] Rowntree, *Poverty*, 424 and appendix II.
[71] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 70. [72] Butler, *Social Conditions in Oxford*, 242.
[73] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 15. In York in 1901, 1,944 friendly societies were unregistered with the government. Rowntree, *Poverty*, 419–21.

highlighted the vulnerability of the poor who placed faith in the unregulated burial club. In a world of immediate gratification, the burial club was the only long-term investment most families made and for the seemingly hapless John Hewett, payments into a burial insurance scheme represent a solitary 'stronghold against fate'. He had contrived to maintain payments to the club even through periods of extreme indigence. As his wife lies on the brink of death, however, Hewett learns that the fifteen-year-old burial club has collapsed through a combination of carelessness, mismanagement and fraud. He is devastated. The sense of tragedy is heightened by the sharp contrast between Hewett's general despondency in the prelude to the scene and his passionate outpouring of anger when he learns of the club's demise. Gissing is at pains to emphasise that Hewett did not aspire to a lavish burial for himself or any of his family. Rather, he simply wished to protect his kin against the degradation of a pauper burial.[74]

Paul Johnson notes the paradox inherent in the deep antipathy towards burial insurance displayed by late Victorian champions of thrift.[75] The insecurity of unregulated burial clubs explains some of this hostility. Overwhelmingly, however, it was the perception that burial club payments encouraged extravagance and, in some cases at least, a fatalistic acceptance of death that encouraged bourgeois antagonism. A sketch of 'Liverpool in the Rough' in the satirical magazine *Porcupine* in 1880 outlined the perceived uses of burial insurance to both the reprobate and the respectable working classes. Poorer families, it suggested, were inclined to insure their elderly kin in a number of burial clubs.[76] At death, the multiple policies were cashed to fund drinking sprees, whilst the dead were buried as cheaply as possible. For 'the really honest poor', however, burial insurance permitted reverential interment of the dead. This acted as 'a balm' to grief, for 'the "little bit of black" they are able to get "out of respect" – and love – goes a long way to make their sorrow bearable'. Although aiming to illustrate the pitfalls of burial insurance, the subtext to the sketch parodied superficial notions of decent burial. Not only did such customs occasion a waste of money, the whole concept of respectable burial was drawn from the working-class imagination. The bereaved invited 'all their friends – at least, as many of them as can raise "black"' to the ceremony and subsequent funeral tea to 'talk over the good deeds of the past and the bad ones of the present'. This was a natural inclination

[74] Gissing, *Nether World*, 185. [75] P. Johnson, *Saving and Spending*, 25.
[76] This was because companies generally made no effort to establish whether the insurer was the person liable for funeral expenses, enabling a dozen grandchildren to insure one grandparent. Ibid., 21.

and most participants in such occasions meant no harm, even though tempers often got the better of them. The observation that the bereaved had waited patiently for club money, and been 'so poor and hard put to the while', was a familiar justification for indulgence at times of death. Yet it also implied that the so-called respectable funeral was little more than an excuse, subconsciously perhaps, for a 'spree' under the guise of grief and decency.[77] This conception of the funeral is inextricable from one of theatre; mourning is a performance that permits the actors to indulge in drink, cheap philosophy and bawdy merry-making. Helen Bosanquet made a similar comparison in her survey of London's East End: the poor regarded their funeral as the 'most important occasion in their earthly career' as it measured their place in a social hierarchy; and 'every nerve is strained to make it a goodly show'. Women were particularly susceptible to the illusion that funerals cast: 'I have never yet known a woman who did not make a death in the family the occasion for new clothing all round, however desperate their poverty.'[78] Similarly, the district nurse Margaret Loane indicated that there was a 'touch of idealism' in the mourning customs of the poor. Far from criticising the drama of the funeral, however, Loane felt it lent a degree of romanticism, variety and escapism that poorer folk could 'little afford to lose'.[79] Against the drab routine of life, even meagre displays captured the imagination of local people: 'it was really an occasion the funeral, it was like all the street would come out and watch it'.[80]

The extent to which such portrayals were representative of the working-class funeral is, however, uncertain. Even in the early Victorian heyday of lavish funerals, numbers of the working classes remained sceptical as to the benefits of burial insurance.[81] Moreover, the assumption that burial insurance fostered improvidence is questionable. Funerals were indeed perceived as a 'luxury'.[82] Yet definitions of extravagance and decency were also highly subjective. On balance, the respectable burial was defined in opposition to the pauper burial. This was not, however, restricted to the purchase of a private grave but related to a desire on the part of the bereaved to assert the identity of, and claim dignity for, the dead. As Thomas Laqueur notes, even the meanest of funerals tended to have the 'extra' of the coffinplate with the name of the deceased inscribed upon it.[83] The very notion of the 'extra' begs the question: what

[77] *Porcupine*, 7 August 1880, 294. [78] Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor*, 66–7, 126.
[79] Loane, *Queen's Poor*, 121. [80] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.
[81] T. Frost, *Reminiscences of a Country Journalist* (London: Ward & Downey, 1886), 94–9.
[82] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[83] T. Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', *Representations*, 1, 1 (1983), 109–31 (114).

constituted a necessity? Despite chastising the working classes for occasional fecklessness, Maud Pember Reeves typified the arbitrary attitude towards funeral economy. Describing the funeral of a six-month-old child in a common grave, Reeves saw no conflict between the parents purchasing flowers for the coffin and a black tie for the father and their status as 'unusually careful people' who buried their child with 'no display and no extravagance'.[84] It is difficult to determine the subjective criteria used to discriminate between excess, decency and necessity, although it seems likely that some customs were so ingrained in the concept of the funeral that to dispense with them would have been unthinkable.

Undoubtedly, there was a sense in which burial was a public rite and the bereaved were expected to fulfil shared norms of what constituted a 'decent funeral'. Reflecting on his Lancashire childhood, Joseph Barlow Brooks observed: 'However poor one might be, public opinion and personal pride forbade that there should be anything shabby about the clothes, coffin, coaches, or meal at the funeral of one's relatives.'[85] Such expectations must be placed within a local economic context however. Many working-class families considered their funerals incomparable to those of the 'pretty affluent' who indulged in hearses, coaches and horses with plumes.[86] As Reeves noted, burial insurance did not always even cover the basic costs of the funeral.[87] Moreover, recollections of grand funerals tend to pertain to the exceptional. Kathleen Woodward, for instance, recalled that lavish funerals 'composed the one interest strongly binding' the inhabitants of Kent Street. A funeral for one of the notorious Roper family was bound to draw crowds of spectators who gasped and muttered numerous 'blimeys' at the number of wreaths. Yet exceptional extravagance was not necessarily equated with respectability. As Woodward's friend observed, if floral tributes helped the dead on their way to Heaven, a Roper would need Covent Garden on their coffin.[88]

On balance, therefore, the element of display inherent in the idea that 'all might be equal before the Lord . . . but there was nothing to be gained in going shabby' must be placed in perspective.[89] Even amongst the middle and upper classes, the extravagant funeral has been somewhat mythologised, stories of excess hinging on the sensational funerals of a minority.[90] Fantastic funerals formed part of a local and cultural

[84] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 71. [85] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 170.
[86] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133. [87] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 69.
[88] Woodward, *Jipping Street*, 36–8.
[89] R. Roberts, *A Ragged Schooling: Growing Up in the Classic Slum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 133.
[90] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 196.

landscape but were largely perceived as Other; the poor 'didn't have fancy funerals like that, they couldn't afford it, they just didn't have them'.[91] In the 'Tripe Colony' in Miles Platting, a working-class district in Manchester, early twentieth-century funeral processions were typified less by extravagance than by 'walking' processions where the bereaved carried the coffin to the cemetery followed by mourners on foot.[92] Villagers in rural Surrey also found the services of the undertaker superfluous when local men volunteered to carry coffins to the churchyard.[93] In some districts, churches retained a funeral bier that could be pushed from the home of the deceased to the grave or farmers might loan horses to pull a collective hearse.[94] When families did hire a funeral coach, numbers of relatives might be packed tightly into one car to keep costs low.[95] Economies extended to the coffin itself. Some coffins were trussed with ribbons, wadding, webbing, brass furniture and expensive linings; many were fashioned in plain deal wood with nothing attached save for a nameplate.[96] Recalling life in pre-war Rhymney, Thomas Jones observed that the well-off had coffins of polished mahogany studded with brass; 'poorer folk' had coffins of 'common wood covered with black cloth and black studs'.[97] Further examination of the customary components of the funeral suggests that the working-class culture of burial was imbued not just with concerns for status but also with gestures of loss, sympathy and community.

Mourning

In *Death in the Victorian Family*, Pat Jalland illustrates how mourning customs helped assuage the grief of elite families: funerals reinforced the finality of loss; the burial service reaffirmed religious belief; and funeral gatherings prompted the articulation of memories while facilitating familial displays of sympathy.[98] Claims that customs filtered down the social scale need to be treated with caution. With regard to death and bereavement, there is much to suggest that the performance of funeral rites as a mode of catharsis is universal across cultures and chronologies: customs associated with interment and mourning separate the deceased from the living in order to bring a liminal period after expiration to a close, allowing

[91] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[92] Man. OH Transcript, Miles Platting, Tape 153. [93] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20.
[94] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13, and Mary Watson in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176. An excellent example of a bier survives in the parish church in Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales.
[95] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 34.
[96] GRO D4375, W. B. Wood & Sons, Ledger of Accounts.
[97] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories*, 67. [98] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 210–29.

the deceased and the bereaved to move forward and inhabit their respective worlds. Amongst the working classes in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, mourning customs facilitated the negotiation of identity and created symbolic spaces for the expression of grief and condolence.

The most common form of distinguishing a bereaved family was by their black clothes or, in the case of widows, their 'weeds'. The fashion for mourning dress mushroomed in the 1840s, spawning a whole new industry dedicated to the manufacture of black crepe and jet jewellery.[99] John Morley has argued that wearing black was so crucial to a strict and intricate code of mourning etiquette that any attempts to curtail the custom were fervently resisted, inviting charges of 'indelicacy or worse'.[100] James Curl, meanwhile, has located the origins of this fashion in a 'deeply-rooted fear' of the dead returning (when veiled and cloaked in black, mourners were thought to be invisible to the dead).[101] It is doubtful how far, by the turn of the twentieth century at least, people subscribed to or were aware of this belief. Rather, as Jalland has suggested, mourning clothes helped others to identify the recently bereaved; black reflected the sombre mood of grief; and the wearing of mourning was widely interpreted as a sign of respect for the dead.[102] Catalogues for mourning wear show extensive ranges in everything from mourning evening gowns to wedding dresses, crepe silk hatbands to jet earrings. The expense of crepe and jet placed them beyond the means of many working-class families and they were not even automatically included in wealthy families' funeral customs, many preferring to don modest or second-hand mourning garb.[103]

Nevertheless, among the working classes, the purchase of mourning wear may well have been perceived as a sign of comparative affluence. If neighbours did watch funeral proceedings to gauge the inter-relation between cost and respectability, clothes were one of the most tangible means of estimating expenditure. As one Bolton woman (born 1905) suggested, even neighbours who watched funeral processions to pay their respects to the dead almost invariably made mental notes of what the bereaved were wearing.[104] The two impulses did not necessarily conflict: nosiness compounded a desire to participate in communal acts of condolence. Considered of little therapeutic value, however, the element of conspicuous consumption inherent in mourning dress rendered it a prime

[99] Litten refers to this as 'shroud couture'. Litten, *English Way of Death*, 81–4.
[100] Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, 63–79.
[101] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 9.
[102] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 301–2. [103] Ibid., 300–7.
[104] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.

target for critics of funeral extravagance.[105] James Curl's claim that, 'impossible though it might seem', poorer families always appeared in new black clothing immediately after death hints at the fecklessness historians and contemporaries have associated with mourning dress.[106] Florence Bell was horrified to learn of a widow who had spent a charitable donation on the 'mourning weeds of the stage, including a long black skirt, a deep crape flounce and everything complete'.[107] In her report on widows in Liverpool in 1913, Eleanor Rathbone related the story of one woman who was refused out-relief by the parish guardians because she spent fifteen pounds of her husband's insurance money on his funeral and clothes.[108] Such exasperation from contemporaries and historians alike needs, however, to be treated with caution. Bell's observation that such clothing belonged to the stage suggests that it was an unusual spectacle in the streets. Similarly, Curl's generalisations are hard to sustain when the culture of wearing black is explored in any depth.

Certainly, black clothing at funerals was de rigueur until the early part of the twentieth century.[109] Moreover, recollections relating to the efforts of the poor to acquire dark clothing are widespread. Amy Pownall, an assistant in a pawnbrokers from the age of fourteen, recalled that 'however poor' the bereaved were, 'you were always sure of a good funeral order' as they would invariably want to 'rig' the entire family up in black clothing.[110] Even when the dead were interred in pauper graves, families would strive to acquire suitable mourning garb. Jack Lannigan's mother bought both he and his brother new suits and caps for their father's burial in a pauper grave. Yet the costs incurred were strategically managed. The suits, purchased 'on tick', were pawned immediately following the funeral and the boys never saw them again.[111] Alice Foley recalled that her brothers' dark suits would regularly be loaned to neighbours for weddings or funerals.[112] Describing pauper funerals in Edwardian Liverpool, Andie Clerk noted that despite the poverty of the bereaved, 'a brave effort would be made to wear something black, jackets or skirts being got from the pawnbrokers'.[113] Notably, the emphasis in such narratives rests upon the strategies implemented to acquire suitable clothing and suggests that, far from signifying conspicuous consumption, mourning clothes could be interpreted as a sign of resourcefulness and commitment to observing the dignity of the funeral.

[105] Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 300. [106] Curl, *Victorian Celebration of Death*, 9.
[107] Bell, *At the Works*, 78. [108] Rathbone, *Report on the Condition of Widows*, 51.
[109] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 202.
[110] Man. OH Transcript, Amy Pownall, Tape 800. [111] Burnett, *Destiny Obscure*, 97.
[112] Foley, *Bolton Childhood*, 15.
[113] A. Clerk, *'Suffer Little Children': The Autobiography of an Early Century Street Arab* (Liverpool: J. E. James, 1978), 11.

Definitions of 'black' fluctuated wildly according to the circumstances of the bereaved. For many poorer families, the aspiration to wear black to funerals was combined with a sense of compromise and pragmatic ingenuity. Margaret Penn described a local funeral where 'The boys wore their Sunday best with black ties – some bought specially for the occasion, some borrowed, some, on the very poorest children, [ties] merely lengths of broad black tape.'[114] Albert Jasper recalled one family funeral where the bereaved 'bought what black they could afford' and, with varying degrees of success, dyed their everyday clothes in dark colours.[115] The shoddiness of such clothes must have been apparent to all. What took precedence was the colour. In this sense, mourning wear was easily perceived as a display of comparative affluence for those who could afford to buy new clothing. For those who could not, the principal purpose of wearing dark clothing was to signify loss and respect for the dead. As a Bolton woman (born 1899) noted: 'Oh they respected the dead in them days and everybody wore black, you would never dream of going to a funeral with anything but black on.'[116] In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Philpot's coffin is carried by four workmates all nominally dressed in black. They bear, however, a 'remarkable dissimilarity' in appearance, their 'black' garments ranging from 'rusty brown to dark blue'.[117] Tressell is keen to emphasise that poverty did not lessen the significance of customs thought to denote respect for the dead; choosing to compromise rather than dispense with those customs served to heighten the meaning vested in them. Indeed, the custom of wearing black was so ingrained in the culture of death that to overlook it was to invite speculation on the gravity of loss: neighbours would 'talk about you if you had a colour on'.[118] As Elizabeth Roberts has argued, expense was not the overriding issue at funerals: most rituals cost very little or were improvised whilst retaining supreme symbolic significance.[119] Moreover, critics who chided the poor for buying clothes with burial insurance money overlooked the possibility that the garments in question were much needed.

If mourning clothes were the most obvious visual sign of bereavement, other customs, such as closing curtains at the house of the deceased during the day, were also effective in announcing that expiration had taken place.[120] As with the colour of funeral clothes, the darkness of drawn blinds cast a sense of gloom, reflecting the mood of grief. In some instances, the

[114] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 162. [115] Jasper, *Hoxton Childhood*, 121.
[116] BOHT, Tape 74, Reference: JP/SP/1/028.
[117] Tressell, *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, 523.
[118] BOHT, Tape 155b, Reference: AB/SS/1b/005.
[119] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 191.
[120] See, for instance, BOHT, Tape 71b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/006.

custom even notified relatives of death before they arrived at the scene.[121] Once the knowledge of death was disseminated along the street, neighbours would also close their curtains in sympathy with the bereaved. Lewis Jones's novel *Cwmardy* emphasised the tight-knit communities within mining towns. The comradeship of the miners is echoed in a domestic context when the 'drawn blinds in every house in the street' inform a man of his daughter's death before he reaches his home.[122] This simple act permitted neighbours and friends to articulate a sense of sympathy with the bereaved whilst symbolically expressing respect for the dead:

> if there was a death in the house the blinds were always drawn, very often, the neighbours on each side and anyone who had been friendly would also draw theirs for the entire time between the death and the funeral. On the day of the funeral all the blinds in the street would be drawn, men when the funeral was passing always took their hats off, women would stop and bend their heads.[123]

Gestures of communal sympathy reminded the bereaved that they were surrounded by friends. Likewise, the custom operated as a means of displaying local respect and affection for philanthropists or official figures who had worked in the district.[124]

Participation in a funeral procession also represented a non-verbal means of offering condolences to the bereaved and paying one's respects to the dead. Sunday funerals were particularly popular among the working classes.[125] The cynical commentator concluded that this enabled mourning parties to overindulge for a day: 'They go in for a spree, a feed, a guzzle, winding up with long pipes, long yarns, and very often, a row.'[126] Cynicism that Sunday funerals were an excuse for debauchery was, perhaps, best encapsulated in James Greenwood's scathing essay 'At a Public-House of Mourning' (1874). Venturing to watch a funeral procession on a Sunday afternoon, Greenwood describes the rapid transition amongst the funeral party from 'red-eyed' mourners with 'unquenchable' woe to a rowdy and foul-mouthed crowd clamouring to quench their thirst for gin and ale immediately after interment has taken place. Sunday, he concluded, was undoubtedly viewed as a 'day for boozing and drunkenness' for mourners and undertakers alike.[127] A more sympathetic reading, however, allows for the possibility that mourners contrived to organise funerals at times when

[121] 'Death of a Sailor's Wife', *Porcupine*, 5 June 1880, 150–1. [122] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 57.
[123] Bromilow and Power, *Looking Back*, 35. [124] *Sunday at Home*, 12 June 1880, 369–74.
[125] Cline, *Lifting the Taboo*, 43, and D. Clark, 'Death in Staithes' in D. Dickenson and M. Johnson (eds.), *Death, Dying and Bereavement* (London: Sage and Open University Press, 1993), 5.
[126] *Porcupine*, 13 June 1863, 84–5.
[127] J. Greenwood, 'At a Public-House of Mourning' in *The Wilds of London* (London: Garland, [1874] 1985), 125–32.

participation would not damage their earnings.[128] Where burial boards prohibited Sunday funerals, workers persisted in striving to arrange burials at times when the maximum number of people could attend without detriment to their income. David Kirkwood recalled the tragic death of a craneman in an accident at a Glasgow forge. His funeral was held at lunchtime to permit workmates to pay their last respects, joining the cortege from the gates of the forge.[129] In July 1890, Alfred Stansfield approached Middleton Burial Board on behalf of a number of Nonconformists to request that the times of funerals in the unconsecrated portion of the cemetery be changed: it was difficult for people 'which [sic] work in spinning mills and people engaged in warehouses in Manchester' to attend funerals as 'it means a whole afternoon off at works and leaving warehouses at the busiest time for to catch the train'.[130] The compromise between attending a funeral and losing earnings demonstrates that whilst financial considerations were important, they did not override the desire to pay one's respects to the dead. As one Bolton textile worker (born 1898) asserted, following a coffin was a simple but effective demonstration of neighbours' sympathy with the bereaved.[131] At Jane's funeral in *Cwmardy*, Jones again emphasises the communality that characterised the mining town: the departure of the coffin from the house is marked by passage through a crowd of miners, her father's workmates; as the cortege edges its way toward the cemetery, miners returning from work stop and doff their caps. Having been seduced and abandoned by the son of an 'overman' at the mines, Jane's death in childbirth seems to imply culpability among the mining bosses who refuse to acknowledge their own or their sons' responsibilities. Juxtaposed with the arrogance of the mining bosses, the display of solidarity among the miners showing respect for Jane, to all intents and purposes a fallen woman, only serves to heighten their humanity.[132] Indeed, Jones's story suggests that in so far as the funeral was a 'display', it was one which drew upon gestures of communal support rather than extravagance.

The culture of neighbours spilling out into the street to watch a funeral procession illustrates the relationship between burial customs and notions of social inclusion.[133] Indeed, Thomas Laqueur has suggested

[128] In contrast, weekday weddings remained relatively popular. See D. Reid, 'Weddings, Weekdays, Work and Leisure in Urban England 1791–1911: The Decline of Saint Monday Revisited', *Past and Present*, 153 (1996), 135–63.
[129] Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 47.
[130] LRO MBM/3/2 5 July 1890. The board made Nonconformist funerals thirty minutes later.
[131] BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/1a/016. [132] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 63–5.
[133] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588; BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003; and Man. OH Transcript, Florence Smith, Tape 962.

that respectable burial was not rooted in expense alone; the ability to bury the dead decently also drew on notions of community membership. Funerals took up public space with relatives and neighbours, workmates, trade union and friendly society members joining together to pay their respects and give expression to the multifaceted identity of the deceased. Thus, the funeral as a consumer good signified the value of an individual's life and their relationship with society. In contrast, the indecent funeral – notably the pauper burial – denoted personal failure and social exclusion.[134] This reading of the funeral persists today: it represents 'the finished picture of a person', one which reveals the individual's social relations with the wider community.[135] In this sense, neighbours who came to watch funeral processions were not simply indulging their curiosity, they were expressing sympathy and (re)forging an idea of community. Participation in a cortege could also assume vague spiritual significance, the number of participants indicating a measure of the deceased's 'goodness' and, consequently, the speed of their journey to Heaven.[136] On a more literal level, the spatial arrangement of participants could indicate the identity of the deceased. At children's funerals, for instance, schoolmates would often flank the coffin, the girls decked in white sashes or, if parents could afford it, white dresses and the boys wearing white armbands and white ties.[137]

Whilst attendance at a funeral often signified membership of a family group, a locality or a workplace, the procession to the cemetery should not be seen as a free for all. In parts of rural Yorkshire and Northumberland at least, it was expected that a distant relative or neighbour would circulate the neighbourhood on behalf of the bereaved to 'bid' (that is, invite) people to participate in the procession.[138] Some people considered it bad manners for others, even friends, to intrude on the family's grief at the graveside.[139] The attendance of women at funerals varied. Undoubtedly, some families thought it improper for women to follow the funeral into the church.[140] As Jalland has suggested, this was inextricable from perceptions of female emotional vulnerability.[141]

[134] Laqueur, 'Bodies, Death and Pauper Funerals', 115–26.
[135] M. Drakeford, 'Last Rights? Funerals, Poverty and Social Exclusion', *Journal of Social Policy*, 27, 4 (1998), 507–24 (522).
[136] BOHT, Tape 60b, Reference: AL/JW/1a/003.
[137] Cissie Elliot and 'George' (born 1896) in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 42.
[138] Maggie Chapman and Cissie Elliot in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 176 and 113.
[139] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[140] Maggie Chapman in Kightly, *Country Voices*, 113.
[141] Jalland notes that *Cassell's Household Guide* in 1870 bemoaned the custom of some women from the poorer classes to attend funerals as few could control their emotions. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 221.

On a more practical level, some women would have stayed at home to fulfil a domestic role and prepare the funeral tea.[142] Even so, the desire to participate in burial rites could override subjective perceptions of propriety. One textile worker (born 1895) recalled that when her grandmother died, the ruling by the male head of the family that men only were to attend the funeral service was overturned by his indignant female siblings.[143]

Of course, the presence of friends and family did not necessarily alleviate the emotional trial of the funeral. Describing his mother's funeral, Wil Edwards was accompanied by fellow mourners but his grief placed him in 'utter loneliness'.[144] Moreover, perceptions of the funeral as the climax of mourning rites fostered expectations that interment would prove an emotionally poignant moment. When the bereaved felt only the isolation and anger of loss, it could encourage feelings of guilt and disloyalty. In his memoir of his mother's funeral, V. W. Garratt suggested that his grief was eclipsed by numbness: 'I tried hard to cry but failed. My emotions had become stifled . . . Even at the graveside I felt unmoved, and it was not until I was absolutely alone and could reflect on the loss with a tranquil mind that tears flowed and my heart became heavy with sorrow.'[145] In this recollection, the absence of anticipated emotion is interpreted almost as a personal failure whereby 'stifled' feelings create a metaphorical sense of suffocating oppression. It also indicates the extent to which perceptions of funeral were bound to notions of emotional distress.

Some families perceived the funeral as an intimate forum for saying their last goodbyes and deeply resented neighbours and extended kin 'you'd never seen' who turned up to watch, and no doubt judge, the event.[146] People 'with a funeral' acquired a temporary importance in the neighbourhood which could grate by virtue of its superficiality. Joseph Barlow Brooks thought there was something 'intrusive' about the gathering of women in the graveyard to watch the funeral of his father.[147] Likewise, George Acorn condemned those who lined the road to watch funerals as 'vulgar sightseers'.[148] Such feelings suggest a degree of ambiguity in the public character of many funeral rites and, perhaps, our reading of them. Undoubtedly, the practical and emotional support of others was valued

[142] Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 194. See also Cline, *Lifting the Taboo*, 42–4, and C. Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 39–40.
[143] BOHT, Tape 149, Reference: AL/KP/1c/007. [144] Edwards, *From the Valley*, 55.
[145] Garratt, *Man in the Street*, 82. [146] BOHT, Tape 166, Reference: AL/LSS/A/007.
[147] Brooks, *Lancashire Bred*, 13. See also Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[148] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 44.

by many, but locating the funeral in public space also left the bereaved susceptible to prying eyes and the gossip of the less well intentioned.

Far more welcome were the gestures of communal support offered through channels of mutual aid. Street and workplace collections helped defray the expense of burial (especially for families with no burial insurance) or went towards the purchase of a wreath. As with mourning wear, floral tributes were targeted by funeral reformers as superfluous custom. Editors at the *Lancet*, for instance, argued that wreaths simply encouraged equations between the corpse and the personality of the dead.[149] More importantly, they were a waste of money. In his autobiography *There Was a Time*, Walter Greenwood drew attention to the paradox of the poor donating money for flowers. Greenwood tells the story of a local woman, Annie Boarder, condemning collections for funeral flowers in the same breath that she requested neighbours to make donations. As Boarder was apt to note, floral tributes demonstrated the sympathy of the community but would not feed a widow and her children.[150] Margaret Penn recollected a school-based subscription to purchase a wreath for a boy who had died, whereby each child donated 'the utmost its parents could afford'. Some donors may have contributed to avoid charges of parsimony whilst most contributions represented extraordinary expenditure from relatively small incomes. As Penn noted, however, the funeral flowers were 'beautiful', the inscription sent with them a sincere expression of sympathy, and the act of taking the tribute to the house of the bereaved an 'honour'.[151]

In a sense, the cost of making a donation heightened the meanings invested in it. Sam Shaw recalled that among borstal boys, meagre contributions for a funerary wreath represented a powerful statement of respect and solidarity: 'Each of the ten of us subscribed two of our pennies for a little wreath as a last tribute to one who had been a prison mate and who must once have been somebody's darling.'[152] The small bouquet illuminates the contrast between the harsh penal system for children and the suggestion that inmates could retain humanity. Charles Booth also noted the significance of funeral tributes amidst the 'drunkenness and dirt and bad language' of an Irish Catholic slum in London in the 1890s. When one pious young woman died, neighbours 'showed their respect by covering the coffin and almost filling the one room in which these women lived with costly wreaths and quantities of beautiful flowers'.[153] In

[149] *Lancet*, 14 April 1894, 979.
[150] W. Greenwood, *There Was a Time* (London: Cape, 1967), 16–17.
[151] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 161. [152] Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 84.
[153] Booth, *Life and Labour*, Vol. II, 53–4.

drawing attention to the expense of wreaths, Booth implies disapproval, whilst the juxtaposition between squalor and expenditure on fresh floral displays highlights a sense of disordered priorities. Booth's suggestion that it was the piety of the dead woman that singled her out for such lavish commemoration indicates that the flowers are a metaphor for the individual whose moral integrity remains intact amidst the degradation of poverty. At a more literal level, however, the generous display demonstrates the pervasiveness of customs of condolence across those considered rough and respectable. That there was often a conflict between the wish to donate funeral flowers and the desire to adopt more pragmatic forms of assistance further suggests that floral tributes carried a significance that stretched beyond a shallow concern for display. As one bleacher from Bolton (born 1899) noted, 'they used to always go around collecting and trying to provide well to buy flowers for them and that. Oh they respected the dead in them days.'[154] Yet floral tributes need not be showy or expensive. In rural areas, charges of extravagance might be avoided by picking daffodils and primroses from one's garden.[155] The simplicity of such bouquets again suggests that the custom of laying flowers on a coffin or a grave was invested with meaning beyond mere display.

Commentators such as Booth were quick to make moral evaluations of donations to the bereaved that did not appear to serve a pragmatic function. Yet perceptions of the utility of donations differed widely. Deborah Smith saw little value in funeral flowers and took monetary donations for her husband's death to treat herself to a more 'useful' and recuperative seaside holiday, although it is doubtful whether many philanthropists would have viewed a holiday in quite the same way when there were children to feed.[156] Champions of working-class thrift campaigning to strip the funeral of superfluous custom argued that donations to funeral funds only encouraged unnecessary expenditure. Yet for the bereaved, pecuniary assistance with burial costs represented the pragmatic face of symbolic condolence. Even among poor neighbourhoods, friends and relatives enacted small kindnesses to lighten the financial, and consequently emotional, burden of the bereaved.[157] A sketch in *Porcupine* in 1880 was mildly scornful of such generosity: the poor 'have a system of mutual assistance, a habit of helping each other, which prevents many of them from ever becoming rich in anything but nobleness of character'.[158]

[154] BOHT, Tape 74, Reference: JP/SP/1/028. [155] Hillyer, *Country Boy*, 13.
[156] D. Smith, *My Revelation*, 34.
[157] See Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 40, and Shaw, *Guttersnipe*, 162.
[158] *Porcupine*, 29 May 1880, 138.

For Florence Bell, the street or workplace collection was indicative of a culture of 'self-sacrificing kindness' borne of hardship.[159] Neither was such generosity confined to the urban and industrial classes. George Bourne observed that it was 'usual' for villagers in rural Surrey to 'help bury a mate' in order to save them from a pauper's grave.[160] As Ellen Ross has noted, however, 'gifts create obligations' and the defining principle of mutual aid was reciprocity.[161] This could, as *Porcupine* hinted, result in a self-defeating circle of obligation. Yet expectations of reciprocity also enabled the bereaved to avoid thinking of donations as charity. Furthermore, the language of respect for the dead helped save the pride of the bereaved whilst, in some cases at least, averting the need to apply to the parish guardians for assistance. Indeed, some commentators suggested that it was the shared antipathy to pauper burial among the working classes that motivated such acts of generosity.[162] As the sketch in *Porcupine* in 1880 highlighted, 'There is no money, no club; but among most poor people there is feeling . . . They go round from house to house and from shop to shop all over the neighbourhood until they raise the money to bury the sailor's wife.'[163] The donations for this burial were prompted by the desire that it should never 'be thrown at those children' that their mother had a pauper burial. *Porcupine* appears to sneer at this culture implying, on the one hand, that a pauper burial is the least of the orphans' concerns whilst, on the other, making the more serious point that such networks of assistance would not be necessary if parochial funerals were more humane. There is also, perhaps, a sense in which the taint of parish burial touched not only the bereaved, but, also, those who lived in their locality. In practice, however, it seems plausible to suggest that assistance with burial costs derived from sympathy with the financial and emotional obligations of bereavement. Moreover, that few families appear to have taken offence at receiving donations towards expenses implies that definitions of the respectable funeral were fluid: respectability was dependent on fulfilling the rituals of burial rather than the economic affluence of the bereaved.

Most funerals ended with a funeral or 'wakes' tea, typified by ham for those who could afford it and 'the old currant bread'.[164] As with laying out, a female neighbour or 'buxom, buoyant and managing aunt' oversaw the event, leaving the bereaved free to talk with those who had

[159] Bell, *At the Works*, 76. [160] Bourne, *Change in the Village*, 20.
[161] Ross, 'Survival Networks', 4–27, and Chinn, *They Worked All Their Lives*, 34–7.
[162] Reeves, *Round About a Pound*, 68. [163] *Porcupine*, 5 June 1880, 150–1.
[164] Man. OH Transcript, William Blackburn, Tape 588. See also BOHT, Tape 23c, Reference: AL/MS/1a/016.

attended the funeral.[165] So ingrained was the culture of the post-burial tea that funerals were sometimes referred to as 'currant bread and slow walking' whilst, as Robert Roberts notes, being ' "buried with 'am" became a comic's cliché'.[166] However, the middle-class perception of funeral feasts often merged with negative stereotypes of wakes, leading to accusations of drunkenness, excess and unseemly behaviour. According to *Porcupine*, the 'wakes tea' was the anticipated highpoint of a death.[167] Gissing also utilised this notion in *The Nether World* to cement his portrayal of the Peckovers as morally fickle: the wakes tea for old Mrs Peckover is 'noisily hilarious' and populated by drunks, whilst no-one expresses any sorrow for the passing of the dead woman.[168] For some, the sombre tones of the funeral and the emotional pain of grief were incompatible with the sociability fostered by the post-burial gathering. George Acorn's memoir of the funeral tea held for his baby brother was suffused with repulsion: 'it was so degrading . . . to convert a funeral procession into a drinking bout'.[169] Many funeral teas did adopt the aspect of a great social occasion: 'they would have a party after, a great big spread of food and all the relatives and neighbours would join in'.[170] The scale of some gatherings can be gauged from families borrowing seats from pubs and cups from neighbours, whilst some undertakers went so far as to hire out cups and saucers along with tea urns.[171]

Not all critics, however, issued blanket condemnation of the practice. Florence Bell despaired at the expense involved but conceded that: 'A funeral is, indeed, one of the principal social opportunities in the class we are describing.'[172] They were especially exciting for children. As a child, Clifford Hills (born 1904) associated death with ginger cakes, jam sandwiches and home-made wine, asserting that he 'enjoyed people dying'.[173] Following the death of a younger sister, Annie Wilson (born 1898) asked her mother if they could have another funeral so that she might have more cake.[174] As Bell was quick to note, the funeral tea offered a rare opportunity for adults to indulge: crowding the house with guests and having an 'open house' party for a day was 'a stimulus and a pleasure', undoubtedly 'tinged with the excitement and anticipation of the entertainer'. Bell

[165] T. Jones, *Rhymney Memories*, 68.
[166] BOHT, Tape 166, Reference: AL/LSS/A/007, and R. Roberts, *Classic Slum*, 104.
[167] *Porcupine*, 7 August 1880, 294. [168] Gissing, *Nether World*, 44.
[169] Acorn, *One of the Multitude*, 45. [170] BOHT, Tape 32a, Reference: AL/KP/1c/013.
[171] Man. OH Transcript, Mr Brown, Tape 133 and Alfred Warhurst, Tape 81. See also Stalybridge Oral History Transcript, Mr Gill, uncatalogued.
[172] Bell, *At the Works*, 77. [173] T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 50.
[174] Ibid., 81.

lamented that 'these wild outbursts of expenditure generally take place in a crisis of emotion', rendering it difficult 'to preach against them'.[175] Implicit in this observation was an acknowledgement that the funeral tea formed part of a larger set of rituals related to grief: funerals were not simply shows of respectability or excuses for indulgence; they provided an outlet for feelings in a supportive, communal context. This was not necessarily at odds with the suggestion that funerals were a party, but an indication of the multi-layered meanings attributed to such occasions.

On a practical level, funeral teas could be used as a forum for making decisions about the future, whether this was in terms of financial strategies, care for widowed or elderly spouses,[176] or responsibility for orphans.[177] Conversely, the funeral afforded an opportunity for old antagonisms to erupt. Florence Atherton's (born 1898) father had lost all contact with his Protestant family after he married a Catholic. When he was buried in Catholic ground, his family did not attend the burial but later visited his widow and children to inform them that they would not give them any assistance on account of religious differences.[178] On a friendlier note, the funeral tea could also represent a 'thanksgiving' and, poor as the family might be, a gesture of thanks to neighbours and friends for their support.[179] The social aspect of the gathering also gave the bereaved an opportunity to share memories of the deceased, whilst the familiar customs of burial stimulated memories of past funerals.[180] More importantly, the funeral tea marked the closure of public mourning customs and a significant point in the psychology of bereavement: the corpse had been laid to rest, the rituals associated with death were complete, and the bereaved were finally left to resume their daily routines. Lewis Jones illustrated the symbolic role of the funeral tea in *Cwmardy*. Following the burial of Jane, neighbours and friends retire to the home of the bereaved, creating a diversion from solitary dwelling on melancholic thoughts in the immediate aftermath of the burial. As the guests depart from the house, they whisper their condolences, leaving the bereaved family 'alone with their thoughts and their memories'.[181] From this point onwards, grief became a private experience.

[175] Bell, *At the Works*, 77–8. [176] Penn, *Manchester Fourteen Miles*, 36.
[177] See, for instance, Man. OH Transcript, Edna Sherran, Tape 1125.
[178] Florence Atherton, born 1898, in T. Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 115.
[179] Man. OH Tape, Mr Brown, Tape 133.
[180] Ivy Troope in M. Chamberlain, *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* (London: Virago, [1975] 1983), 182, Roberts, 'Lancashire Way of Death', 193, 205, and L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 103.
[181] L. Jones, *Cwmardy*, 66.

Conclusion

As will be argued in chapter 6, a degree of ambivalence characterised long-term attitudes towards the resting place of the dead which seems at odds with the importance attached to rituals of interment. This may appear to endorse perceptions of the working-class funeral as an elaborate exercise in revelry. Conversely, it is plausible to suggest that funeral customs provided a shared language of grief, loss and condolence whilst creating a forum in which that language could be expressed; factors that the solitary grave could not sustain. Indeed, some families chose to forego the purchase of a private grave in favour of funding the rites accompanying burial. Again, this demonstrates that concepts of respectable burial were not straitjacketed by expenditure and ownership of grave deeds. Rather, it was 'respect' for the dead that defined the use and perpetuation of secular and spiritual burial custom. Moreover, expressions of grief and condolence were considerably more sophisticated than correlations with material culture alone allow. Burial rites were a public means of negotiating private feelings of loss and sympathy. Thus, it was not the cost of a coffin and attendant mourning paraphernalia but the fulfilment of obligations to the dead which related detailed stories of love, grief, dignity and condolence. As Mark Drakeford argues, the funeral ceremony holds a significance which extends beyond economic or psychological value: monetary expenditure simply represents the most tangible means of expressing the sentiments of the bereaved for the deceased, reaffirming for the bereaved the meaning and purpose of a life.[182] In this context, it is possible to reconcile a funeral culture where rituals of display interrelate with expressions of grief and loss. The two factors were (and are) not mutually exclusive.

[182] Drakeford, 'Last Rights?', 521–3.