Death, Burial and Mutuality
A Study of Popular Funerary Customs in Cumbria, 1700-1920

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the impact of modernisation
upon popular death customs in Cumbria between 1700 and
1920. Specifically, it explores the role and nature of
mutuality, arguing that despite the growth of
individualism, the mutual ideal which had underpinned many
popular death customs in the pre-industrial environment
continued to play a crucial role in shaping working-class
mortuary practices in the towns. This study challenges
historical arguments that mutuality was simply
individualism in disguise; it suggests that at its heart
lay an internal tension: a conflict between self-interest
and collectivism which was exacerbated by modernising
trends. Ultimately individualism was to triumph, but not
in the way historians have claimed. Its success can be
gauged, not by the apparent readiness of the nineteenth-
century urban working classes to embrace a more
materialistic attitude to death and burial, but in the
growth of the burial insurance industry which capitalised
on the collectivism of the majority to further the self-
interest of an enterprising minority.

The thesis begins by tracing the roots of mutuality in
death through an examination of popular death customs in
pre-industrial Cumbria. It reveals that although such
practices were designed to alleviate individual distress,
they also worked to cultivate an ideal of collectivism by
encouraging community participation, and by publicly

affirming a common notion of 'decency' which was rooted in powerful spiritual beliefs.

Informal aid of this type was supplemented by that supplied by the guilds and friendly societies. In this more formal, premeditated setting, the contractual nature of mutuality was more pronounced, and a tension between collectivism and self-interest more clearly articulated. This conflict was exacerbated by the sanitary reforms of the nineteenth century, and in particular the passage of the Burial Acts of the 1850's. The creation of the private grave, and the division of the cemeteries into areas of greater and lesser desirability, increased social discrimination while emphasising conspicuous consumption as a means of articulating individual social position.

A consequence of such reforms was the commercialisation of the funeral. Many of those who could afford it now modelled their obsequies on much older aristocratic rites which were designed to indicate social standing. These materialistic rituals set a new standard in funerary protocol, and increased social pressure on the working classes to conform to elite norms.

Despite greater stress on materialistic individualism, however, many working-class people continued to observe familiar death customs which were rooted in community participation. Familiar customs of long-standing were of value in many ways, not least because they symbolised values which helped sustain a distinct cultural identity. Thus, while individualism emerged as a powerful cultural force, collectivism did not vanish. Indeed, this thesis concludes by arguing that the continued potency of popular

collectivism was most strikingly exemplified in the growth to prominence, in the early years of the twentieth century, of working-class burial insurance.

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DEDICATION

For Tim and Natasha, whose faith in my ability to complete this work kept me going, despite everything.
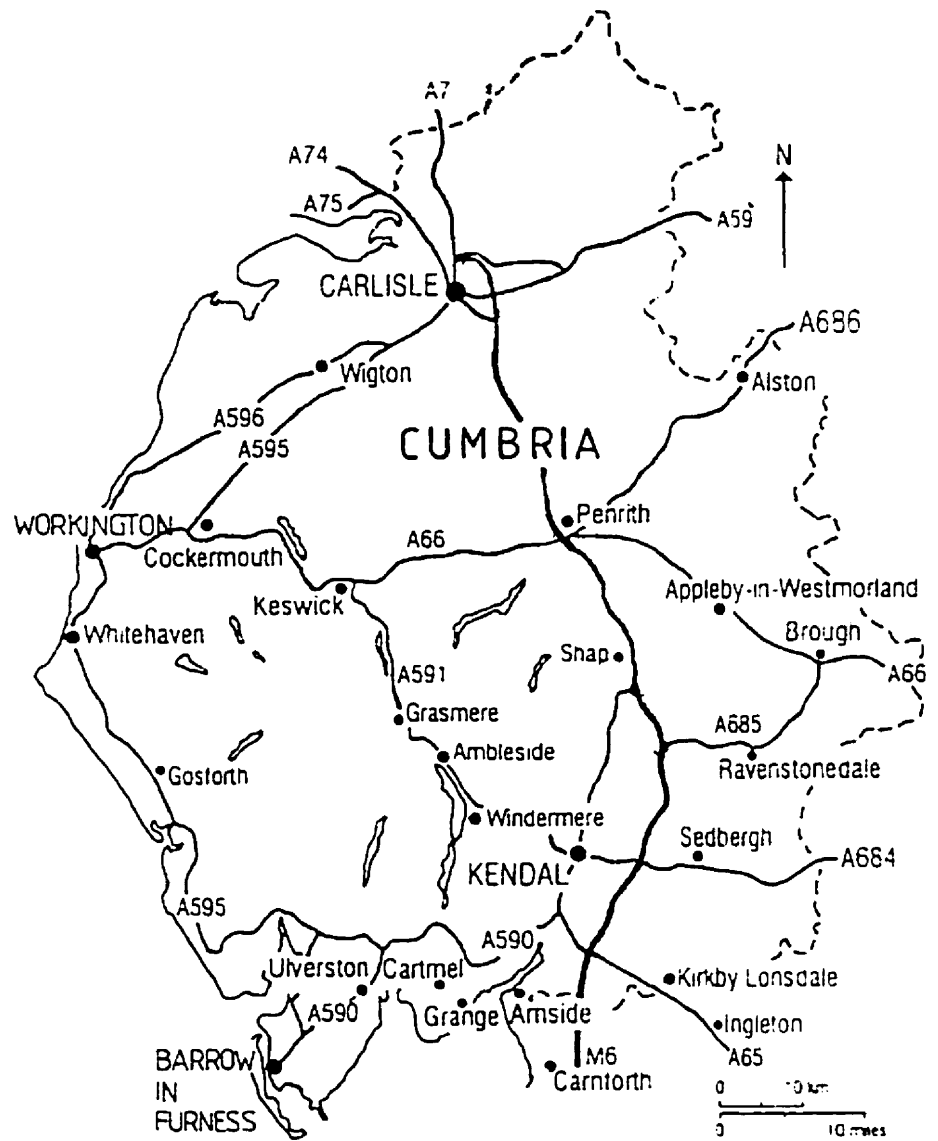
INTRODUCTION

...in all societies...the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences...[1]

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[1] Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, _Celebrations of Death_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979),2.

Historians have claimed that the process of modernisation had a marked effect upon popular customs relating to death and burial. The consensus is that over the course of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries numerous and complex changes including the combined effects of commercialisation, professionalisation, urban growth, sanitary reform, and a growing ethos of individualism, caused the demise of well-established, community-based types of ritual.[2] A corollary of this was an increasing trend to measure dignity in death in more overtly material terms, as mortuary practices became vehicles to articulate personal wealth and social status. Although the middle classes were the first proponents of the funeral as status symbol, contemporaries claimed that by the mid-nineteenth century the working classes were following their lead. Several historians have noted that in the latter decades of the century many of the less affluent were staging materialistic displays, and at least one scholar has argued that the readiness of poorer people to utilise death ritual to affirm social position, implies that the mutuality which had traditionally characterised popular death culture was simply a ploy to further material self-interest. Hence the mushrooming demand for burial insurance throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, as increasing numbers of working-class families clamoured for ever-more extravagant funerals, in a bid to outdo their neighbours.[3]

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[2] See, for example, Phillippe Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

[3] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending: the Working-class Economy of Britain, 1870-1939 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). See chapters 2 and 8.

This thesis sets out to examine the effects of
modernisation on popular death culture in the county of
Cumbria between 1700 - 1920, with special emphasis on the
nature and role of mutuality. It challenges the hypothesis
that mutuality was in the service of individualism purely
and simply. Rather, it suggests that at the heart of
popular death culture lay an implicit tension between self-
interest and collectivism, a conflict which was exacerbated
by the numerous changes which modernisation brought in its
wake. Ultimately, the growing power of individualism did
make itself felt. But this process was more complex than
most historians have acknowledged. Although the passage of
the Burial Acts in the mid-nineteenth century put
increasing pressure upon the working classes to adopt more
materialistic funerals celebrating individual social
status, a powerful collective ethos continued to support
many older funerary customs. Indeed, rather than a
testament to the self-interest of the masses, the success
of burial insurance must be attributed to the individualism
of an enterprising minority who recognised the enduring
potency of the collective aspect of mutuality in death
culture, and exploited it to its own pecuniary advantage.

This introduction falls roughly into four parts. It
begins with an overview of the historiography of death,
noting major themes and approaches. It then moves on to
comment on methodological issues, emphasising the value to
the historian of micro-studies. Following a brief
description of the economic and social development of
Cumbria, it concludes with a summary of each of the
following chapters, noting the source material utilised in
each case.

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One of the major themes running through much of the historiography of death to date has been the evolution of an ethos of individualism which, it has been claimed, grew and ultimately overwhelmed the traditional collectivity which characterised popular death culture. Historian Phillippe Ariès is a chief exponent of the modernisation thesis, and his seminal work The Hour of Our Death has been extremely influential.[4] Ariès' work is essentially an overview of the changing attitudes to death in western culture for a thousand year period, and it argues that although death's ability to evoke strong emotion has been a constant of human experience, the precise way in which a cultural group has conceived of mortality at any given time has shaped the nature of that society's reaction to it.[5]

Important from the point of view of this study, Ariès argues that prior to the middle of the nineteenth century the involvement of the community in death meant that all were acquainted with it. Death was familiar, public and expected and hence communities had evolved appropriate ritualistic ways of responding to it. However, throughout

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[4] Other historians of the French school who have made valuable contributions to the study of death are Michel Vovelle, Mourir Autrefois: Attitudes Collectives devant la mort aux XVIII siecles (Julliard: Editions Gallimard, 1974); John McManners Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death Among the Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-century France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), and Thomas A. Kselman, Death and the Afterlife in Modern France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). Unfortunately, much scholarship has not been translated into English and thus remains inaccessible to many historians.

[5] He suggests that the factors governing this perception include beliefs about an afterlife, incorporating views on the inter-relatedness of the individual as a corporeal entity, the human soul, and the spirit world; and elements more pragmatic than spiritual, in effect the innumerable ways in which factors such as ideology, political interests, social stratification, domestic arrangements, traditions, economic structure and so on, impact upon both the individual and society as a whole. Ariès, The Hour of Our Death.

the latter part of the nineteenth century death became a family-controlled event, and by the mid-twentieth century it had been medicalised, commercialised, professionalised and ultimately driven into secrecy. With the institutionalisation of death traditional death customs rooted in a sense of shared obligation and common destiny declined. As death increasingly became the problem of the individual, ritualistic expression gave way to an embarrassed and unhealthy silence which is only now being challenged.[6]

Following the lead of Ariès, other historians have also examined the impact of modernism on death. David Stannard's Death in America, also emphasises the connection between changes in ritualistic behaviour and evolving social values.[7] Like Ariès, he emphasises the shift from customs representative of a communal response to practices symbolising a less satisfactory individualism. In traditional societies, such as the provincial and folk cultures of America and Mexico, Stannard argues, death called forth familiar and trusted coping strategies which

[6] Geoffrey Gorer provided the first influential, albeit subjective, socio-anthropological study of attitudes to death in Britain. In Death, Grief and Mourning (New York: Doubleday and Company,1965), he postulated that death had become the "taboo" of the late twentieth century. More recently Tony Walter, who in 1998 pioneered the first degree-course in Death Studies at Reading University, has produced some notable work, again from a sociological perspective. For a thought-provoking analysis of current attitudes towards death and dying, see Tony Walter, "Modern Death: Taboo or Not Taboo?" Sociology 25(2), (May 1992): 293-310. See, also "The Morning After Hillsborough," Social Review 39 (1991): 599-625, and Funerals and How to Improve Them (London: Hodder, 1990.) Sally Cline, Lifting the Taboo: Women, Death and Dying (London: Little Brown, 1995), examines the subject from a feminist position. A unique, interdisciplinary anthology which examines the subject from many perspectives is Donna Dickenson and Malcolm Johnson, eds. Death, Dying and Bereavement (London: Sage Publications, 1993).

[7] David E. Stannard, Death in America (Pittsburgh: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

involved the entire community. Although it represented a
major intrusion into the social fabric, and was much feared
"death's meaning remained clear for both the individual
anticipating death and for those who would survive...."[8]
In cultures where society was becoming less "cohesive",
however, death had less impact at a collective level and
new practises were of necessity manufactured to help the
individual family to cope with a situation which was all
the more threatening because of the weakening of community
support structures.[9]

In _Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern
England_ Clare Gittings outlines some of the major landmarks
as society moved towards a more individualistic outlook.[10]
She notes the emergence of the nuclear family from the
seventeenth century on, and the concomitant breakdown in
traditional social networks. The belief in individualism
ultimately superseded a sense of community, in this world
and the next, and rendered death much more fearsome as a
consequence.

Lawrence Stone and Edward Shorter have also studied
the changes in family structure and relationships
throughout the early-modern period. Lawrence Stone posits
the evolution of what he calls "affective individualism", a
trend towards greater affection within marriage,
accompanied by a withdrawal from community networks and a
privatisation of family life. As emotional bonds
strengthened, death became more threatening, and funeral
ritual, originally a community response rooted in fear and

[8] Stannard, _Death in America_, xiv.

[9] Stannard, _Death in America_, xiii-xiv.

[10] Clare Gittings, _Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England_ (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

awe, became a more personalised expression of intense grief.[11]

The growth of individualism was contingent upon sweeping changes in many aspects of life. Throughout the nineteenth century, legislative changes, sanitary reforms, and the many faces of commercialisation began to exercise a profound effect upon death culture. Among the middle classes there was an increasing tendency for burial and funeral customs to be used as vehicles for articulating wealth and social standing. Indeed, sanitary reform, which resulted in the opening of the cemeteries, was extremely important in ushering in not only new styles of burial, but also changes in attitude. Ruth Richardson, James Walvin, John Morley, Stuart Rawnsley, Jack Reynolds, and James Stevens Curl have described how the new English cemeteries, with their emphasis on hygiene, aesthetics, rational land-use, and classification of graves, increasingly stressed individual and familial status over communal identity.[12] So far, however, discussions of interment practises have been perfunctory, and English historians have yet to match the detailed analyses of cemeteries which French scholars have produced.

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[11] Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 (London: Harper and Row, 1977); Edward Shorter, The Making of the Modern Family (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

[12] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988); Stuart Rawnsley and Jack Reynolds, "Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford," History Workshop 4 (1977): 215-221; James Walvin, "Dust to Dust: Celebrations of Death in Victorian England," Historical Reflections 9, 3, (Fall 1982): 353-375; John Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians (London: Studio Vista, 1971); James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1972).

The dearth of cemetery studies in England has made it necessary, for the purposes of this study, to look further afield. The work of Thomas Kselman has been particularly valuable in this regard. Kselman shows how cemeteries in France were very powerful spaces, signifying a continuity with the past, inculcating loyalty to one's community, reflecting people's feelings of self-worth, making public "their most intensely held commitments," and helping to create and preserve a lasting identity. [13] But burial places could also reflect important social changes. Kselman describes how the emergence of the "concession" or private grave in the new suburban cemeteries, provided an opportunity to purchase one's own plot of earth in perpetuity. This had far-reaching implications, highlighting, among other things, the pull between a customary collectivism and an emergent individualism.[14] As richer folk began to use ostentatious graves as a symbol of social standing, so the funeral itself became an important status symbol. James Stevens Curl claims that the closing of many of the traditional churchyards and the opening of the new suburban cemeteries in England provided a new, more agreeable venue where death could be "celebrated" in more flamboyant style. Indeed, the fashionable funeral of the Victorian era has been interpreted as representative of the quintessence of nineteenth-century middle-class ness: a validation of the participants' individual and familial respectability.

Several historians make no secret of the fact that they find the morbid materialism of the Victorians

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[13] Thomas A. Kselman, Death and the Afterlife in Modern France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 182.

[14] Thomas Kselman, Death and the Afterlife, 188.

offensive. John Morley has provided a highly critical account of the Victorian love-affair with funerary flamboyance, [15] and David Cannadine has gone even further, lashing out in a stinging condemnation of what he sees as useless ostentation. In his view the Victorian funeral was a tasteless piece of theatrics engineered to enhance the social position of those it simultaneously robbed, orchestrated by an undertaking profession whose only goal was monetary gain.[16] His views are supported to a degree in the arguments of Nicholas Penny and Ruth Richardson.[17]

Yet the extravagance of Victorian middle-class obsequies has much to reveal about other aspects of nineteenth-century life. It sheds light, for example, upon fashion and etiquette, an important theme of this study. Nigel Llwellyn has described in some detail the memento mori of the Victorian era, and Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas provide an illuminating and very detailed account of the conventions of mourning wear.[18] It also has much to reveal about the commercialisation of death, and the role of the undertaker and crepe manufacturer in exploiting the insecurities of a class desperate to assert its cultural dominance.

But the funeral as status symbol was not new. Indeed, the sophisticated middle-class funeral had its roots in the aristocratic processionals of earlier centuries, a subject

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[15] Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians.

[16] David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in Joachim Whaley, ed. Mirrors of Mortality (London: Europa Publications, 1981), 187-243.

[17] Nicholas Penny, Mourning (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1981), and Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute,

[18] Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), 278.

well-documented by historians such as Lawrence Stone, Olivia Bland, Anthony Wagner, and Paul Fritz. These historians show that no expense was spared in the creation of a magnificent spectacle. In the funerals of the powerful, spiritual and emotional considerations were subordinated to the necessity of putting on an impressive display intended to symbolize enduring social and political strength. [19]

As the foregoing studies indicate, much of the existing historiography on death deals with the experiences of the better-off. Indeed, studies have stressed that the rise of individualism was most strongly associated with an emerging middle class. This study is less interested in the role of the fashionable burial in upper-class culture, however, than its effect on those lower down the social scale. What, then, have historians to say about modernisation of the death customs of the working classes?

Several historians have argued that the flamboyant funeral of the middle classes had an important influence upon popular death culture, and have assumed that the working classes were affected by social pressure to "keep up with the Jones" in the same way as their middle-class counterparts. In fact, the popularity of commercial burial insurance has been cited repeatedly as powerful evidence of this desire.

The consensus is that the popularity of this type of insurance can be attributed to lower-class dread of the

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[19] Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Olivia Bland, The Royal Way of Death, (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1968); Anthony Wagner, Heralds of England, (London: H.M. Stationery Office); and Paul S. Fritz, "From 'Public' to 'Private': The Royal Funerals in England, 1500-1830," Joachim Whaley, ed. Mirrors of Mortality, 61-80.

indignity of a pauper grave. Historians have suggested that this type of degradation carried with it a profound sense of shame. Apart from the horrendous bodily indignities it inflicted, death on the parish under the terms of the New Poor Law of 1834 was held to be disgraceful in itself, for it indicated the victim's inability to retain any vestige of independence or self-respect. The hierarchical structure of working-class society dictated that one should always strive to maintain status within one's neighbourhood, and pauperism was tantamount to failure. Hence the symbolic importance of a "decent burial" within working-class culture more broadly. It was a way of affirming respectability, or at worst, reclaiming it at the final hour.

Several scholars have highlighted the tendency of poorer people to stage rather showy funerals in order to underscore their high ranking on the status ladder. Indeed, the use of conspicuous consumption to gain neighbourhood approval has been a noted feature of working-class culture.[20] Lace curtains and a cluttered mantelpiece signalled worldly success and won neighbourhood respect. Robert Roberts, among other working-class writers, has personal memories of the obsession with "not showing yerself up" in front of neighbours. [21] As Gareth Stedman Jones has observed, "The concern for display and keeping up appearances was predominant throughout the working class."[22]

[20] Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984),127-128,195,199.

[21] Robert Roberts, The Classic Slum, (London: Penguin, 1990), especially chapter 2. See also Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957).

[22] Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class", Journal of Social History 7, 3, (Spring 1974): 460-508, 474.

The ostentatious funeral, then, was just one more ploy to impress one's peers.

Paul Johnson is at pains to develop this argument in his study Saving and Spending. One of the few historians to delve more deeply into the motives which lay behind the purchase of burial insurance, he supports the thesis that display was a means of maintaining self-esteem. Indeed, Johnson claims that the popularity of burial insurance among the poor must be interpreted as proof that personal position and status were just as important to the working classes as they were to those higher up the social ladder. Like the rich, the poor were also motivated primarily by self-interest. Indeed, that much-lauded principle of working-class life - mutuality - was actually a facade disguising a deep-seated individualism.[23]

In Johnson's view, "decency" in death was an affirmation of financial stability, and thus was measured primarily in material terms. Failure to provide a respectable funeral was "a stigma not only on the dead, but on those living who could not afford to pay for a more becoming interment."[24] Indeed:

> The desire for respectability, for flamboyant display that would impress friends and neighbours, provided the positive incentive to save in any way that would make this possible. [25]

Yet the extent to which the working classes sought to emulate the kind of display which was so important a part of middle-class social etiquette has been assumed rather

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[23] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, chapters 2 and 8.

[24] Johnson, Saving and Spending, 45.

[25] Johnson, Saving and Spending, 43-45.

than demonstrated. Although not underestimating the effects upon popular deathways of legislative, structural and social changes, this study argues that there is a danger that the modernisation thesis can be taken too far, and older continuities overlooked.

In concentrating on broad modernising trends, many historians of death have underestimated the enduring importance of community-based rituals. Customs rooted in collectivism had provided a vital and much valued survival strategy for many poorer people facing crises of many kinds. Historians of popular culture have provided some excellent examples of this type of aid generally. In her study of the medieval countryside, for example, Elaine Clark has described how villagers relied heavily on one another in their efforts to combat hunger, and material deprivation. She notes that a well-developed community sense was enshrined in custom, law and traditional practises.[26]

James Winter has provided an illuminating analysis of the reciprocal character of this type of community-based help in the nineteenth century. In his study of the mutual aid available to widows he has explained that mutuality rested on an tacit acknowledgement that the social equality of the recipient was equivalent to that of the giver, and that such assistance carried with it an implicit obligation, placing the recipient in a position of liability until roles were reversed and the good deed repaid in kind.[27]

[26] Elaine Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," Journal of British Studies 33 (1994): 381-406.

[27] James Winter, "Widowed Mothers and Mutual Aid in Early Victorian England," Journal of Social History 17 (Fall 1983): 115-125.

But, as this study emphasises, to concentrate simply on the economic aspect of mutuality is to miss its other functions. Mutuality in death could supply more than material wants; indeed, customary practises connected with death had a crucial ritualistic role to play. David Cressy's pioneering study of birth, marriage and death in the Tudor and Stuart periods concurs with other historians of death who employ an anthropological perspective, in suggesting that "Ritual observance of stages in the life cycle," among other important functions "...helped bond participants within social and familial groups." [28]

Many historians have found anthropological theory of tremendous value in unlocking customs related to death. Most influential has been the classic work undertaken by Victor Turner which examines the symbolism inherent in various kinds of ritualistic form. Turner has demonstrated that ritual process in general is a highly complex phenomenon. He suggests that it is a vehicle for articulating unspoken, obscure and often unconscious meanings by use of symbol and is commonly used at times when powerful emotions are experienced, usually at a collective level. Turner's theory owes much to the work of Van Gennep who posits that the function of ritual surrounding death is to help the individual and the community to pass through what is usually a period of intense trauma. Ritual facilitates collective evaluation of the experience, helps overcome revulsion and fear, bolsters social ties and reinforces group solidarity. By stressing continuity of the group as opposed to the transitory nature of human life, funerary ritual transcends

[28] David Cressy, **Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion and the Lifecycle** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 475.

individual death by absorbing it into the collective
continuity of the whole.[29]

The rituals accompanying death, then, often reciprocal
in nature, can be understood as part of a collective
response to death which encompassed more than simple
gestures of material help. Such customs symbolised the
collective containment of death, and had social value not
only for the dying and the bereaved but for the community
more broadly.

David Clark's case-study of Staithes, a sea-side
village in the north-east of England, provides a good
illustration of the ritualistic help available in rural
communities even until the turn of the twentieth century.[30]
He describes how neighbours felt it a mark of duty to
gather together to perform certain death-related
observances. Women would prepare the death-bed, lay out
the body and help with the funeral "tea", while neighbours
of both sexes would visit the funeral house, "watch" the
body, "bid" people to the funeral, and act as bearers.
Typically the entire community accompanied the corpse to
church. Ann Gordon, Catrin Stevens, and Rosemary Power
have documented similar death customs for Scotland, Wales
and Ireland respectively. [31] In performing these, and many

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[29] Victor Witter Turner, Ritual Process (Chicago: Aldine
Publications, 1969), 10; Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, in Richard
Huntington and Peter Metcalf, Celebrations of Death, 8.

[30] David Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew: Folk Religion in a North
Yorkshire Fishing Village (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
1982), 128-138.

[31] Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," Folklife XIV
(1976): 27-45; Ann Gordon, Death is for the Living, (Edinburgh: Paul
Harris, 1984), and Rosemary Power, "Death in Ireland: deaths, wakes and
funerals in contemporary Irish society," Death, Dying and Bereavement,
Donna Dickenson and Malcolm Johnson, eds. 21-26.

similar customs, participants were not only offering practical aid to the dead and bereaved, they were acknowledging the latters' membership in the local community.

Many such customs found their way into the urban environment where they formed a cultural alternative to the funeral rituals of the elite. Indeed, Ruth Richardson has claimed that there were clearly defined "class-bound death-cultures" in nineteenth-century Britain, a view which has been borne out in the work of other historians.[32] As Pat Jalland observed in her recent study of the Evangelical "good death", "The material and cultural gulf between rich and poor affected most aspects of life, including death."[33]

Using folklorist accounts and oral sources, Richardson has shown how death customs practised by the nineteenth-century London poor were rooted in strong spiritual beliefs which dictated popular notions of "decency".[34] Elizabeth Roberts' oral history of three Lancashire towns has drawn attention to comparable practices and attitudes in poor households in the industrial north.[35]

The successful adaptation of such customs to the urban environment supports broader arguments that collectivist pre-industrial culture was a vigorous one, and that the working classes were able to resist pressures to conform to a more individualistic style of life. Françoise Barret-

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[32] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute,16.

[33] Pat Jalland, Death in the Victorian Family (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.

[34] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, chapter 1.

[35] Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place, 187-191.

Ducrocq and Ross McKibbin have described how the English working classes of the mid- and late nineteenth century recreated aspects of their rural culture in the urban environment,[36] and other historians have argued that it was instrumental in easing the transition to a very different style and pace of life. F.M.L. Thompson has described the mutual support networks in closely-knit Lancashire textile communities during the shift from a domestic to an industrial economy, [37] and E. P. Thompson and Patrick Joyce have argued that the urban culture of the working classes, drawing on rural roots, created a value system at odds with the dominant code of more affluent society. Indeed, it had an integrity of its own.[38]

But there was another aspect to popular death culture - a counterpart to the informal aid offered by the neighbourhood. This was the financial and emotional support provided by the mutual associations. Christopher Daniell, Julian Litten, Dermot Morrah, and Sharon Strocchia are among a handful of historians who have broached this area, and the consensus is that financial help for the bereaved originated in the medieval guilds and was a religious imperative. [39]

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[36] Ross McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1991).

[37] F.M.L. Thompson, ed. "Town and City," in The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1-78.

[38] E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics: the Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian Britain (Brighton: John Spiers and Margaret A. Boden, 1980).

[39] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 1066-1550 (London: Routledge, 1997), 20; Julian Litten, The English Way of Death: the Common Funeral Since 1450 (London: Robert Hale, 1992);

In a study of the history of undertaking Julian Litten describes how, prior to the Reformation, many people turned to religious guilds to ensure that they and members of their family would be accorded a Christian burial.[40] Indeed, such fraternities were often founded for the sole purpose of organising a dignified end for their members, which was a matter of some importance.[41] Christopher Daniell's work on burials in monastic institutions supports this view. He explains that in paying for funerals of their peers, guild members were acting in accordance with biblical edicts which decreed that the funding of funerals of members - particularly those in straitened circumstances - was a Christian duty.[42]

If the guilds helped to secure a Christian burial for members with minimum financial outlay for the bereaved, funerals could also confer other, less tangible benefits.

Dermot Morrah, A History of Industrial Life Assurance (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), 14; Sharon Strocchia Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 16, 84-88. In Coventry, the St. Catherines Gild which was founded in the reign of Edward III, stipulated that those who died too poor to afford a funeral were to be buried at the charge of the Gild. F.M. Eden, The State of the Poor 1 (n.p: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1966), 595. The Charter of the Gild of Carpenters of 1389 stated that any member dying in poverty "schal be honestliche buried at ye costages of ye brothered," Chambers and Daunt, London English, (1931) 41-43, cited in Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Burial Reform (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), frontispiece.

[40] Litten, The English Way of Death, 7-12.

[41] The funerals arranged by the great livery companies of London in the medieval period could be quite ostentatious, especially those of honorary members. The more affluent appear to have met the costs of such obsequies themselves. See William Herbert, The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London, Vols. 1, 2, (New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1968; orig. published 1834 and 1837). Puckle explains that the company of the deceased member would appear in their livery and that a splendid pall was often provided, and also a hearse, bier, and candles. Bertram Puckle, Funeral Customs, (London: Werner Laurie Ltd., 1926), 34.

[42] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 20.

In her analysis of funeral ritual in renaissance Florence, Strocchia notes that funerals were important opportunities for the forging of group loyalties and solidarity. The funeral cortege was a powerful vehicle for articulating ideals in a very public way.[43] Strocchia's work is important in drawing attention to the fact that mutuality in death had more than an economic function. It could create and reflect collective identity.

As the important work by Wilson and Levy has shown, the decline of the guilds saw the friendly societies inherit the tradition of fraternal funeral organisation and funding.[44] Until recently P.H.J.H. Gosden represented the most authoritative source on friendly society development and management in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, providing some valuable insights on their role in aiding the bereaved.[45] More recently James Riley has made an influential contribution, although his focus has been on sickness rather than death benefit.[46]

Other historians have preferred to discuss the political underpinnings of the movement rather than its commitment to welfare, and this debate has drawn conflicting opinion. Neville Kirk and Harold Perkin among others, have argued for the conservative nature of these organisations, stressing their commitment to bourgeois

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[43] Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence, 83. See also Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths, 136.

[44] Sir Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Industrial Assurance. (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), ix.

[45] P.H.J.H. Gosden, Self-Help. (London: B.T.Batsford, 1973.)

[46] James Riley, Sick, Not Dead: the Health of the British Workman, 1880-1930, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997).

ideals of self-help and independence. [47] Kirk has claimed that by the middle decades of the nineteenth century they had revealed themselves as "models of self-help, respectability and sound, moderate habits..." [48]

David Neave disagrees. One of the few historians to examine rural societies, he provides a wealth of evidence which demonstrates that friendly society activities often met with middle-class suspicion and disapproval. In his view, the often unruly parades at Whitsuntide, and the regular meetings at public houses where alcohol was routinely imbibed, provide evidence of a vigorous popular culture which existed in defiance of the dominant canons of behaviour. [49] Neave claims the "labels of 'individualism' and 'self-help'" which some scholars have all too readily applied to the societies, is unwarranted, and should be replaced by "collectivism" and "mutual-aid." [50]

Geoffrey Crossick's study of friendly societies of Kentish London argues in a similar vein. Charting the development of societies in the urban environment, he rejects the claim that the values of the working classes who participated in this type of association were moulded by their social superiors. He argues that working-class respectability sprang from uniquely working-class ideals and expectations related to dignity. Although swept up in the great changes of the nineteenth century, the working

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[47] Neville Kirk, The Growth of Reformism in Mid-Victorian England (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1985), 149. Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society (London: Routledge, 1969), 382.

[48] Neville Kirk, The Growth of Reformism in Mid-Victorian England, 149.

[49] David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside: Friendly Societies in the Rural East Riding, 1830-1914 (Hull: Hull University Press, 1991), 99.

[50] Neave, Mutual Aid, 98.

classes preserved what was of importance to them. Friendly
societies represented and preserved values rooted in a
robust popular culture and ensured that, "The ethos of
mutuality so fundamental to working-class life did not
disappear."[51]

In neglecting to look in any depth at the role of
funerals in friendly society culture, historians have
missed a valuable opportunity to refine their arguments.
As Strocchia has observed, funerals have much to reveal
about the underlying values of such societies. This thesis
argues that the involvement of friendly societies in
organising and funding funerals, and particularly the
function of the ritual employed, can add greatly to our
understanding of the conflict between mutuality and self-
interest which is at the heart of the debate.

Although this study is concerned primarily with the
relationship between death and issues of social class and
associated ideologies, another discernable thread is that
of gender. Sally Cline has observed that very little has
been written on women's connection with death, and this
study can do little more than offer some tentative
observations on women's role in death culture. [52] It is
very clear that women's relationship with death and burial
varied according to social class. In popular death culture
women were active agents, responsible for many of the
crucial death-bed rituals. As Cressy has observed, women
were important in all the lifecycle rituals, and their
connection with death may well have been an extension of

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[51] Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society:
Kentish London, 1840-1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 197-198.

[52] Sally Cline, Lifting the Taboo: Women, Death and Dying (London:
Little Brown, 1995), 22.

their role as midwives. Certainly many midwives were also
"layers out", and the high rate of maternal and infant
mortality may well explain why expertise in one should lead
to expertise in the other.

Sharon Strocchia's study of death rituals in
Renaissance Florence, is probably the most valuable source
on upper class women and funerary ritual, indeed, her
analysis of funerary ritual generally is particularly
penetrating. Strocchia examines the ways in which the
public cortege affords "...complex messages about order
and honour, family and community, women and men."[53] She
explains that women were often excluded from the
processional because, regarded as more emotional, and more
likely to display grief, it was feared they would
compromise the integrity of a public procession which was
essentially a political statement rather than a vehicle of
mourning. The custom of excluding women from funerals was
continued by the Victorian middle classes.

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As the above survey has intimated, historians have
provided some valuable studies of various aspects of death
and burial. Particularly influential has been the
modernisation thesis which charts the rise of
individualism, and most research thus far has focused on
the middle-class experience. Studies of working-class
death culture have been less adept at addressing the impact

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[53] Strocchia, <u>Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence,</u> 30.

of modernisation, however. One school of thought, citing the huge success of burial insurance, argues that the working classes embraced materialistic individualism with as much fervour as did their middle-class counterparts. But other studies hint that working-class collectivism was strong even up to the present century.

This thesis adds a new dimension to the debate by suggesting that the study of mutuality in popular death culture can help to elucidate the way in which such ideological tensions were played out. Although the fraternal societies have received some scholarly attention, as we have seen their involvement in funerals in England has barely been addressed. This oversight is all the more glaring when one considers that one important branch of the commercial burial insurance industry was an outgrowth of the mutual associations. The analysis employed in this dissertation places working-class mutuality, as expressed both in the informal customs of neighbourhood, as well as in the more structured context of the fraternal societies, at the centre of popular death culture. It argues that the moral force of the collective aspect of mutuality provided a vigorous basis for working-class death culture, and that this continued to offer a cultural alternative to self-centred materialism, despite the growing ideological dominance of individualism throughout the nineteenth century.

The evidence for this investigation is drawn primarily from the rural north west of England, specifically the county of Cumbria, which, until the reorganisation of county boundaries in 1974, comprised the counties of Cumberland, Westmorland, the Furness district of north Lancashire and the Sedbergh area of West Yorkshire.

There are important advantages to the historian of focusing attention on a distinct region, as opposed to the country as a whole. Most significantly, regional studies are particularly useful for testing hypotheses which have been posited by historians charting more general trends. This has been an extremely fruitful approach to the history of friendly societies, for as James Riley has noted, the idea originally posited by historians that skilled workers formed the bulk of the membership has been "persuasively contradicted by what local historians have found from the rosters of individual clubs." [54]

In their respective investigations of friendly societies of the East Riding of Yorkshire and Glamorgan, David Neave and Dorothy Jones have demonstrated the efficacy of small-scale studies in countering the arguments of scholars who have researched the movement at a national level, often relying heavily on the reports of Royal Commissions. Whereas such investigations have regarded friendly societies as a product largely of the urban environment, and consisting mainly of better-paid artisans, Neave has revealed that they were ubiquitous in the Yorkshire countryside, and both Neave and Jones concur that their memberships included a large number of labourers. [55] Hilary Marland has come to similar conclusions in her study

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[54] James Riley, Sick not Dead, 31.

[55] David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside; Dorothy Jones, "Did Friendly Societies Matter? A Study of Friendly Society Membership in Glamorgan, 1794-1910," Welsh History Review 12 3 (1984-85): 326-346.

of two West Riding towns,[56] as has Elizabeth Edwards in her study of societies in Cambridge.[57]

David Clark's micro-study of a tiny Northumberland village challenges more sweeping claims that the march of modernism had successfully eradicated most popular customs surrounding death by turn of the twentieth century. His case-study shows that popular culture could be extremely tenacious, and the details he supplies on death practices suggest that rural areas may have moved to professionalise and commercialise death at a much slower pace than the modernisation thesis of Ariès and his supporters allows.[58] Elizabeth Roberts' study of three towns: Preston, Lancaster and Barrow (also studied here), argues in a similar vein. She reveals that local women in these urban communities were particularly instrumental in providing neighbourhood services for the bereaved up until the early decades of the present century.[59]

The studies of Clark and Roberts employ a "bottom up" approach, a perspective often favoured by historians looking at small geographical areas. Their emphasis on oral evidence and other sources generated by the working classes themselves contrasts sharply with historians such as Julian Litten who, in a much broader study claiming to present the "English Way of Death", overlooks a wealth of customs and practises and gives the misleading impression that death has always fallen within the jurisdiction of

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[56] Hilary Marland, Medicine and Society in Wakefield and Huddersfield 1780-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[57] Elizabeth Edwards, "The Friendly Societies and the Ethic of Respectability in Nineteenth-Century Cambridge," (Ph. D. Diss., Cambridge College of Arts and Technology, 1987), in Riley, 31.

[58] David Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew, 128-138.

[59] Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place. 187-191.

professionals. Most of Litten's problems arise from his concentration on undertakers' records, underscoring the pitfalls of over-reliance on documentary and official sources.[60]

European historians of popular culture have long recognised the value of small-scale studies in elucidating the attitudes and values of ordinary people, and some of the most influential research has been done on ritual. Apart from the work of Strocchia on funerals in Florence, already discussed, Carlo Ginzberg, Edward Muir, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Natalie Zemon Davis have all made valuable contributions, closely interrogating specific events or situations from a socio-anthropological perspective.[61] These historians suggest that ritual symbolism should be seen as a way of emphasising the collective values of the inarticulate, and as part of an alternative tradition drawing on ancient precedents. Their insights have been particularly pertinent to this study, and reinforce the idea that not only can micro-studies offer a new way of understanding popular attitudes, but in so doing they can bring new knowledge to bear on existing theoretical positions.

Cumbria provides the historian with an excellent opportunity to observe customs which appear to have very deep roots. Folklorists and antiquaries were particularly

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[60] Julian Litten, The English Way of Death.

[61] Edward Muir and Ruggerio Guido, Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe, trans. Eren Branch, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Carnival in Romans, trans. Mary Feeney (New York: George Braziller Inc.,1979); Carlo Ginzberg, Myths, Emblems, Clues, trans. John and Anne Tedesche (London: Hutchinson Radius,1986); Ecstacies: Deciphering the Witches Sabbath, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Natalie Zemon Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1965).

active in Cumbria in the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, anxious, as they were in many other rural areas,
to preserve a lasting record of behaviours they felt to be
in imminent danger of extinction. Such sources present
certain problems for the historian, of course, for those
recording such customs were not part of the culture they
were observing. Middle-class bias may well have intruded
into the accounts offered up these learned gentlemen and
women, for as Ruth Richardson has observed, such
chroniclers "were largely unaware of their own cultural
preconceptions." [62] Richardson suggests that their reports
may be coloured to a degree by nostalgic regret for the
passing of what was perceived by many as a "golden age".
Equally as common, as this chapter makes clear, is a
tendency for folklorists and antiquaries to moralise about
what they saw.

E. P. Thompson is well aware of such problems. He
warns that such material should certainly be interpreted
critically, bearing in mind its tendency to provide a
romantic view of the past. He notes that folklorists often
took customs out of context, failing to see them either as
functional or as indicative of broader attitudes, simply as
quaint and entertaining.[63] Notwithstanding potential
problems, there can be little doubt that given the paucity
of alternative source material, folklorist accounts provide
an invaluable window on popular customs, particularly those
associated with death. As Richardson has argued, "The use

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[62] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 5.

[63] E.P. Thompson, Customs in Common (New York: The New Press, 1993), 1-15.

of folklore material in the work of leading historians has shown its value in an understanding of popular culture."[64]

It is significant that many of the practices noted by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chroniclers survive in living memory to the present day, and oral archives have been utilised to a modest extent in this study.[65] As the pioneer of oral history in England, Paul Thompson, has pointed out, oral testimony is a particularly valuable source of knowledge for historians of rural areas. This thesis reveals that oral evidence has much to say about the mortuary practices of both the countryside and the town, especially the rituals of the less well-off, who were less likely to leave written records.

As with folklore, oral history has also come under fire for its alleged "unreliability" and "subjectivity". Yet such potential problems are by no means exclusive to this particular methodology. In fact, it can be legitimately argued that one of oral history's most important contributions to historiography is the attention it has drawn to the issue of bias in the interpretation of all historical sources. As oral historians have observed, documentary material was produced for any number of purposes, but historical study was certainly not one of them.

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Most Victorian studies of death and burial have taken as their focus the urban setting. Discussion of "pauper burials" and burial insurance tend to reflect the

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[64] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 5.

[65] This study draws on oral material from archives compiled by other historians, as well as the writer's personal archive which was compiled between 1990 and 1991. Forty respondents were interviewed, all natives of Cumbria, and their memories cover the period 1890-1940.

experience of city-dwellers and townsfolk, as do descriptions of the archetypal Victorian funeral of the middle classes. Rural death customs and those carried on in smaller towns, by contrast, have been largely neglected.

Cumbria provides the historian with the opportunity to observe death culture both in the urban and the rural setting. Relatively isolated and insular, with a mountainous interior and poor roads, for hundreds of years Cumbria supported little more than a sparse population of poor hill-farmers. In 1851, for example, 26.5 per cent of the combined agricultural labour force of Cumberland and Westmorland was still agrarian.[66]

In contrast, the number of Cumbrians involved in industry prior to the middle of the nineteenth century was the lowest in England. Until the 1840's the local industries tended to be small-scale and scattered. The towns of Carlisle and Kendal boasted weaving trades, as well as tanning and leather works. Basket making, small-scale quarrying and mining, saw milling, the manufacture of silk, flax and wool, gunpowder, and later the manufacture of bobbins for the Lancashire mills, were all industries which thrived in a quiet way, some in very remote locations.

The coming of the railway heralded the first fundamental shift in the economic and demographic fabric of the region. The period 1851-81 not only saw the development of heavy industry and an acceleration of trends towards urbanisation on the west coast, it witnessed major changes in population patterns as large numbers of

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[66] J. D. Marshall and John K. Walton, The Lake Counties from 1830 to the Mid-twentieth Century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 22.

unemployed agricultural workers moved out, and itinerant
industrial workers moved in. Coal and iron-ore mining in
the west and southern coastal areas, and steel manufacture
and shipbuilding in the new town of Barrow-in-Furness all
prospered from improved communication, and after 1880 a
growing gulf appeared between the industrialised coastal
area and a rural interior just beginning to feel the first
effects of what was to become its major industry in the
twentieth century: tourism.

The late arrival of industry, and its failure to
exercise a major impact on the economy as a whole, meant
that social structures were slow to change, although change
most certainly did occur. In Westmorland, the slow
evolution of an indigenous town-based merchant class was
supplemented in the nineteenth century by the integration
of an immigrant mercantile elite: mill-owners from south
Lancashire in search of the rural idyll promised by the
Romantic poets. In west Cumberland and Furness the growth
of industrial towns and a consequent influx of semi-skilled
industrial workers, created the beginnings of a working-
class consciousness and a social structure more typical of
the large industrial city.

The late industrialisation of Cumbria has certain
benefits for the historian. Having remained somewhat aloof
from mainstream influences for much of its history, many
popular death customs dating back to at least the
eighteenth century and often beyond, remained extant here
until well into the twentieth century, and some until the
present day. This study makes extensive use of oral
archives and folklorist accounts, as well as family papers
and miscellaneous documents to trace many aspects of rural

death-culture little documented and long since lost to memory in regions earlier to industrialise.

Then too, the relatively recent growth of industry allows the historian to more easily observe the ways in which provincial death customs actually adapted themselves to a changed environment. Churchwardens' accounts, cemetery records, obituaries in local newspapers and other miscellaneous family papers as well as living memory have all provided valuable information on the how rural customs accommodated themselves to the rise of the nineteenth-century industrial town.

In addition, and contrary to the assumptions of many historians of friendly societies who have tended to see them as an urban phenomenon, Cumbria holds a particularly rich supply of manuscript and printed material on both local and affiliated associations. Industrialist James Christian Curwen of West Cumberland was one of the early pioneers of the movement. His paternalistic efforts to establish societies for his employees, paralleled the formation of numerous other societies set up by working men (and occasionally by women) in the adjacent agricultural areas. This indigenous associational culture was boosted by the influx of tradesmen into the mining and shipbuilding areas of West Cumberland and Furness in the 1860's. These men brought with them experience and knowledge gleaned from their membership in the rank-and-file affiliated orders of friendly societies, most notably the Oddfellows and Foresters, which originated in south Lancashire in the first decade of the century.

South Lancashire was also the headquarters of the Friendly Collecting Societies and later the companies which offered "industrial assurance", which together had become

part of a gargantuan industry by the late nineteenth century. Most of the workers who subscribed to burial insurance lived in the north-west of England, and the Reports of the Royal Commissions into friendly societies and industrial assurance, undertaken in the late nineteenth century, are a valuable source of information, statistical and anecdotal. The official reports include testimony from witnesses from many Cumbrian towns and villages, and provide valuable details on the activities of these organisations throughout the region.

Cumbria, then, largely un-investigated and rich in source materials of many types, provides the historian with a very good opportunity to observe numerous aspects of death-culture. As the following chapters indicate, it also offers important new insights.

Chapter one uses documentary material, folklorists' accounts, and oral sources to argue that a customary ethos of mutuality rooted in a strong sense of collectivism informed most practices related to death in rural Cumbria from at least the beginning of the eighteenth century, and probably earlier. People with limited resources were unlikely to have recourse to professional services, and the ways in which they coped with death formed part of an informal system of reciprocity which characterised popular stratagems for dealing with life's crises. Although functional in nature, most death-related rituals had an important spiritual component and articulated common notions of "decency".

Chapter two turns its attention to the organisations which offered a more structured form of aid to the bereaved: the guilds and local friendly societies. A rich

supply of records pertaining to some of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century guilds of Carlisle, and the dozens of independent friendly societies scattered throughout Cumbria more broadly, allows for a close examination of the ways in which these voluntary associations helped organise and fund the funerals of deceased members and their spouses.

This chapter argues that not only did fraternal associations provide valuable practical assistance for members, but that funeral ritual could also be adapted to serve the needs of a more self-conscious collectivity, refining common ideas about "decency" and underscoring a sense of collective identity and purpose amongst working people. Yet it also reveals how the matter of funerals can highlight a tension between mutuality and self-interest. At the most obvious level, the influence of middle-class notions of respectability and self-help could often be detected in clubs managed by the social elite. But a stress on self-interest was implicit within the organisation of clubs generally. As a formal system of burial insurance evolved out of spontaneous donations and levies, there was a subtle change in emphasis from providing for others, to providing for oneself and one's family. This was illustrated most dramatically by a determination, clearly articulated in society rules, to exclude those felt to be too great a drain on funds.

This tension between collectivism and individualism in death is further developed in chapter three, which focuses on the impact of the Burial Acts of the mid-nineteenth century. Historians have claimed that the move from traditional churchyard to modern cemetery interment saw a demise of the burial ground as an embodiment (both literally and metaphorically) of local, communal identity.

According to this line of argument, the cemeteries, with their more hygienic methods and their need to make a profit, encouraged greater stress on social discrimination. In order to come to some understanding of the situation in Cumbria, this chapter examines churchwardens' accounts, and miscellaneous church and cemetery records, as well as the reports of the Royal Commissions. It argues that although a certain degree of social discrimination existed in the churchyards, personal distinction was in general subsumed within community membership, and a strong identification with locality was particularly striking. Under the terms of the Burial Acts and the construction of modern cemeteries, more efficient procedures, the stress on aesthetic considerations, and the need to repay debts incurred in land purchase, as well as to generate revenue for the day-to-day running of the enterprise, combined to produce a more business-like attitude. This combination of factors nurtured a climate at once more discriminatory and more conducive to display in death, as people were now encouraged to purchase graves in perpetuity and to erect expensive monuments on their own private "property" - a clear assault on traditional attitudes which regarded burial grounds as shared, communal spaces.

Chapter four develops this theme by turning its attention to the funeral. Historians have argued that a greater emphasis on individualism in interment was paralleled by more extravagant funerary rites whose main purpose was to highlight the social status and wealth of the deceased. Such rituals were modelled on the noble funerals of an earlier era, and incorporated symbolism which was intended to celebrate social power. Evidence from Cumbria supports this view. Family papers and

newspaper obituaries reveal that the nineteenth-century middle classes staged spectacular events which drew much public attention, and further contributed to social pressure on those lower down the social ladder to conform to more materialistic norms.

This pressure must be seen in context, however. Chapter five utilises oral evidence, newspaper advertisements, and miscellaneous sources to reveal that despite such trends, popular deathways rooted in the collective aspect of mutuality transferred themselves successfully to the urban environment, where they continued to be observed. Most importantly, mutuality conferred more than economic benefits, it carried moral force. It articulated a commitment to collectivism as an achievable ideal, and as friendly society records reveal, this reached its fullest expression in the funerals of the Affiliated Orders.

Chapter six continues the analysis by observing the ways in which the interplay between continuity and change continued to inform working-class death-culture in the early years of the twentieth century. There can be no doubt that the modernising trends which had made themselves felt throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had profound consequences for working-class death-culture. Indeed, by the beginning of the twentieth century individualism had become a powerful cultural force, in death as in other aspects of life. But although weakened, collectivism did not die. This chapter reveals the ways in which the struggle between competing ideals finally came to a head over the issue of commercial burial insurance. It challenges theories which argue that working-class individualism formed the driving force behind the burial

insurance industry by fuelling a massive demand for expensive funerals. It argues that the situation was somewhat more complex, and that from one perspective working-class death insurance can be interpreted as evidence of the continuing influence of popular collectivism. Indeed, this final analysis underscores the paradox that modernisation of death customs was to an extent facilitated by older continuities. Utilising the reports of the Royal Commissions into friendly societies and burial insurance, this chapter reveals how commercial interests used the much-valued desire for a decent burial to their own pecuniary advantage.

The conclusion emphasises the importance of death studies to an understanding of continuity and change within working-class culture. It suggests that the modernisation thesis as articulated by many historians of death is somewhat simplistic, and that the process of change was by no means a smooth progression from the old to the new. Indeed, older values and practises had the ability to co-exist alongside more modern structures and attitudes, often continuing to exercise a moral authority which challenged more progressive ideals.

CHAPTER ONE

DEATH WITH DECENCY

POPULAR MORTUARY CUSTOMS IN RURAL CUMBRIA

Customs do things - they are not abstract
formulations of, or searches for, meanings,
although they may confer meaning. Customs are
clearly connected to, and rooted in, the material
and social realities of life...[67]

Taken as a whole, the material collected by
folklorists suggests that what appears as
solicitude and tolerance resulted not from any
lack of fear and dread; but rather, from an
understanding and knowledge of the correct forms
of funerary ritual, and a tenacious belief that
if due respect be given to the dead, both the
future repose of the soul and the comfort of the
mourners would be assured.[68]

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[67] Gerald M. Sider, *Culture and Class in Anthropology and History*, in E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, 13.

[68] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 17.

E.P. Thompson has argued that the study of popular customs has much to offer the historian; indeed, rather than "discrete survivals" of little more than antiquarian interest, traditional customs should be viewed "in the singular" as vehicles articulating "a whole vocabulary of discourse, of legitimation, and of expectation."[69] This is of particular import in view of the "disassociation between patrician and plebeian cultures in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" when, he claims, rural customs gave form and coherence to a way of life and code of values at variance with the outlook and manners of an emerging elite. [70]

This chapter argues that a careful analysis of popular customs associated with death and burial can enhance our understanding of the mutual ideal as it applied to death in the rural environment. It reveals that in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cumbria the event of death invoked a protracted and well-rehearsed series of rituals often involving the entire community. These practices were intended to provide the dying and the newly bereaved with various types of assistance, and in many respects paralleled other types of mutual support made available at times of personal crisis. Underpinned by a tacit understanding that it would be reciprocated at some time in the future, such aid was a means of ensuring the well-being of the individual or family by exploiting the greater resources of neighbourhood.

Not only did reciprocity of this type necessitate a united effort on the part of the community to supply the

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[69] E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common, 2.

[70] E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common, 5.

material requirements of the dying and the bereaved, death
customs were infused with spiritual and emotional
components derived from folk beliefs about the
supernatural, and these elements served to define
collective notions of what constituted dignity in death. A
"decent" burial was not measured by material goods alone,
but depended to a large degree upon the community's
observance of customs which were seen to confer respect for
the dead. Such rituals drew together the wider community
in a situation which strengthened social ties not only
through providing opportunities for sociability and
fellowship, but in facilitating a public endorsement of
deep-rooted beliefs held in common - values possessing a
moral force capable of transcending narrow self-interest.

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Death was a frequent if unwelcome guest of families in
the past, and although from the seventeenth century on many
of the social elite purchased the services of professional
undertakers, most dying and bereaved people depended on aid
provided by the broader community. Folklorists documenting
death in Cumbria at the beginning of the nineteenth century
record that just prior to the anticipated decease
neighbours were often called upon to assist the bereaved-
to-be with final preparations. Custom dictated that the
dying person be laid on a bed "hung round and covered with
the best linen."[71] Oral sources confirm that even in the
twentieth century it was a source of shame to die on worn,
patched sheets, suggesting that the dressing of the death-
bed could be a source of concern for many poorer people,
probably exacerbated by the knowledge that the bed-linen

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[71] J. Britton and E. W. Brayley, The Beauties of England and Wales
III (London: n.p., 1802), 246.

would be on general view during the rituals which
followed.[72] Personal pride dictated that communal standards
be observed, and even poorer families usually kept clean
white sheets to hand for the purpose, often carefully put
away many years in advance.[73]

Custom also prescribed that a dying person should
expire on an appropriate type of mattress. It was believed
that a person dying on the feathers of wild fowl would have
a difficult death, and it was quite common for hops to be
substituted.[74] Pigeon feathers were felt to be particularly
unfortunate and a dying person lying on such a bed might be
moved to the floor.[75] Clearly, moving a dying person or
dead body from bed to floor and possibly back again was no
easy task. The fact that neighbours were willing to
inconvenience themselves by providing this service, is
testament not only to their sense of mutual obligation,
premised, no doubt, on the expectation that such services
would one day be reciprocated, but to the strength of
collective beliefs regarding the appropriate way to die.

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[72] During an interview with an elderly woman which I conducted in
1991, the respondent told me that when she was young it was still
considered very important to die on good quality sheets. Marjorie
Noble, personal interview, 1991.

[73] In Scotland a young bride would ensure that she put away her
"dead linen" in preparation for family deaths. Ann Gordon, Death is For
the Living, 12.

[74] In east Cumberland it was considered that as a sound sleep was
not to be had on a mattress stuffed with the feathers of wild fowl,
death would likewise be difficult. In the village of Brampton a "well-
leathered" chair was loaned out to persons desiring an easy death.
Henry Penfold, "Superstitions Connected with Illness, Burial and Death
in East Cumberland," in Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland
Antiquarian and Archaeological Society (hereafter C.W.A.A.S.) 7 (1907):
54-63, 57.

[75] The dislike of dying on feathers persisted until the twentieth
century. When interviewing elderly respondents in 1991, I was told that
even as late as the 1940's it was considered inappropriate to die on a
feather mattress. Marjorie and Mary Noble, personal interviews, 1991.

If the death-bed preparations demanded physical strength, what followed necessitated a degree of skill acquired through experience. Once death had occurred, one of the most pressing concerns of the family was that the body should be "laid out", or prepared for burial. Laying-out consisted of washing and straightening the body, stopping bodily orifices with cotton wool, removing the deceased's clothing and dressing the corpse for burial. In order to ensure that the corpse was suitably presentable before rigormortis set in, eyes would be closed, often by placing pennies on the lids, the mouth would be closed by tying the jaw, and often the ankles would be bound to keep the legs straight.

Richardson has claimed that such rites were more than a practical necessity: they were imbued with metaphysical significance. It was crucial to treat the corpse with respect, as a way of placating spirits and ensuring the soul's peaceful passage. She notes that water was believed to act as a protection against evil spirits and to be a purifier of the soul. Often the ankles would remain bound after rigormortis had worn off as a way of preventing the spirit from returning. And there was also a belief that pennies would be needed to reach the underworld. [76]

Folklorists say little about laying-out, suggesting that it was commonplace across social classes. But whereas in more affluent households this work might be performed by domestic staff or the undertaker, amongst humbler families in rural Cumbria, as elsewhere in England, women well known

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[76] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 19-20. James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 30.

in the community performed this service until very recently.[77]

Oral historians have noted that particular women skilled in the practicalities of death were highly valued in their local communities. As David Clark described for Staithes in the early years of this century:

> 'Lying-out', ...was the charge of a handful of women who were recognised in the village as qualified to carry out the work and who, from their painstaking attention to detail, appear to have taken a considerable pride in their task.[78]

Elizabeth Roberts has made similar observations of layers-out in Lancashire. [79]

In the period discussed by Clark, bodies were routinely dressed in a shroud - a garment resembling a long nightdress. It would often be made in advance by a female family member and put away ahead of time along with the clean sheets. Richardson has noted that it was "sometimes included in the wedding trousseau".[80] But until the beginning of the eighteenth century it was still common for a corpse to be bound in a "winding sheet." Bodies at this time were interred directly in the earth, the parish coffin

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[77] Laying-out has been performed by "unqualified" village women in Cumbria until the 1970's. June Thistlethwaite, Cumbrian Women Remember (Maryport: Ellenbank Press, 1995), 106, 137.

[78] Clark, Between Pulpit and Pew, 128.

[79] Elizabeth Roberts, "The Lancashire Way of Death", in Ralph Houlbrooke, ed. Death, Ritual and Bereavement (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), 194. See also Robert Little, "'Go Seek Mrs. Johnson': the Demise of the Handywoman of the Early Twentieth Century" (M.A. thesis, University of Essex, 1981.)

[80] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 21. Richard Hoggart recalls that his grandmother, living in Leeds in the early twentieth century, "had a splendid laying out gown and sheets ready against her death, and towards the end of her life she would remind us periodically where they were kept....this particular feature was probably a direct relic of her rural background," Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, 115.

being used simply for transportation to the churchyard. Women, again, were responsible for the "winding", an intricate process which required great skill and involved the placing of aromatic herbs within the folds to help mask the odour of decay. The funeral expenses of George Browne, a yeoman from the village of Troutbeck, who died in 1702 reveal that five and a half yards of fine broad flannel were purchased for the purpose and that one shilling apiece was paid to "Peggy Hughs and Maggy Fisher winders."[81]

George Browne was a fairly affluent farmer, thus it is not surprising that his family should offer to pay for such services. Although there is evidence that some women expected some form of remuneration for their attentions to the body, others have expressed the view that such women "did it for kindness." [82] Elizabeth Roberts, who found much evidence of unremunerated laying-out in her study of women in the north of England, has noted that when offered freely this service probably represented a "metaphor for relationships within and obligations to the neighbourhood."[83]

A handywoman from a remote valley in central Cumbria, recalling the early twentieth century, felt that although goodwill was an important motivator of such an act, the giving of a small gift or the promise of a favour was considered to be an appropriate response in such circumstances:

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[81] S.H. Scott, A Westmorland Village (Westminster: Archibald and Constable, 1904), 138. The Browne family was one of the more prominent farming families in the county, and their family papers are a rich source of information of funerals. Despite being from the "middling ranks" of society, they employed customs consistent with those practised by the agricultural population more generally.

[82] Minnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1991.

[83] Roberts, A Woman's Place, 196.

> ...we never charged anything for anything we did.
> You just did it because it was friendship wasn't
> it? They might give her a pound of butter if it
> was a farmer, might give her a dozen eggs, might
> do something...[84]

People gave what they could, and where they had nothing to give at the time, it was understood that they would render some type of assistance to the giver in the future.

It is perhaps not surprising that it should fall to women to perform this final service for the dead.[85] Until the Midwives Act of 1902, the same women often delivered babies, and given the high rates of infant and maternal mortality prior to the twentieth century it is clear that such women would have an intimate knowledge of both birth and death. Indeed, Richardson has observed close parallels between the respective rituals. She notes that the ritual washing of the corpse was reminiscent of baptism, a rite often performed by midwives prior to the seventeenth century in cases where the infant was not expected to survive. Unbaptised infants were denied a Christian burial, as it was believed that they did not yet possess a soul, hence the importance of performing this rite as soon as possible. Pennies, used to close the eyes of the

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[84] This woman's mother had also been a layer-out. CG, Ambleside Oral History Archive.

[85] It is not clear why some women became layers-out and others did not. Elizabeth Roberts has suggested that the skills were passed down from a mother, aunt or other female relative. Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place, 194. Oral evidence used in the present study suggests this was not always the case.

corpse, were similarly used to depress the navel of newborn babies, and winding-sheets were commonly known as "swaddling clothes."[86] It would appear that women well-versed in rituals surrounding birth adapted them in many cases to serve the ultimate rite of passage.

Such women were also valued for their domestic skills. It was not uncommon for midwives and layers-out to help with the housework in the home to which they had been summoned.[87] In Cumbria handywomen in the early twentieth century would often stay until the funeral, caring for the children, preparing meals, and answering the door to visitors who came to pay their respects to the family.[88] Clearly, in a situation where the woman of the house was either incapacitated by childbirth, or grief, or indeed, had been claimed by death herself, the domestic as well as the more specialised skills of the handywoman were indispensable. [89]

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[86] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 19-20.

[87] Barbara Ehreneich and Deidre English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers (New York: Feminist Press, 1973), 40.

[88] Minnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1990.

[89] Evidence suggests that "handywomen" supplied a very real need in many areas up until the twentieth century. The 1861 census identified 24,821 domestic nurses as opposed to 4,448 nurses working in hospitals. The former tended to be of working-class origin, and they worked independently of doctors who regarded them as cheap competition. Despite a number of studies of the nursing profession, domiciliary care has thus far received little attention. Anne Summers, "The Mysterious Demise of Sarah Gamp: The Domiciliary Nurse and her Detractors, c.1830-1860," Victorian Studies (Spring 1989): 365-386.

Once the corpse had been laid out, the local carpenter would be contacted and the coffin prepared.[90] This was one of the few services supplied by country undertakers. Unlike their urban counterparts, such men played only a minor part in the organisation of funerals. Undertaking was a sideline, and the major part of their time was taken with general joinery work. Often their responsibilities might extend to contacting the parson and paying the burial fees, and sometimes they organised the funeral meal, but this was the extent of their involvement. As the detailed ledgers of one local joiner make clear, the onus was on the community to oversee the remainder of the arrangements.[91]

The aid thus far described was of a highly personal nature, involving the family and a small number of neighbours, and the practical and spiritual care of the corpse would appear to be its main function, in addition to easing the physical and probably the emotional burden for the immediate family. The rites which followed reflected similar concerns, but were often more social, drawing in larger numbers from the surrounding area.

It was usual for the coffin to be kept open until just prior to the funeral, which in Cumbria took place between two and three days after death had occurred. During this time the body was "watched". This custom consisted, quite simply, of having people sit with the corpse until burial. Many historians have noted this custom and it seems to have been fairly widespread throughout Britain, and may be of great antiquity. Numerous explanations for "watching" have

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[90] Whereas in the cities ready-made coffins of various styles and qualities had been available since the seventeenth century, in rural areas the local joiner constructed his own coffins as the need arose. Walter Rose The Village Carpenter (London: A. and C. Black, 1937).

[91] Account books of Mr. Wren, Newby Bridge, 1820-1900.

been put forward, and it probably served multiple functions. It has been suggested that the practise grew out of a prayer-meeting in the presence of the corpse;[92] folklorists have claimed that it discouraged ghosts, and from a therapeutic point of view, it may have allowed family members attending the deceased through a long illness to gradually come to terms with the fact of death; it also served to ensure, in times of fallible medical techniques, that the deceased was actually dead. It was believed that in this liminal state between death and burial, the corpse might well have needs similar to those of the living, and it is perhaps not unreasonable to expect that one of these wants might well be companionship.[93]

Folklorists report that in west Cumbria throughout the eighteenth century the younger neighbours kept a vigil throughout the night, while older people watched during the day,[94] and there are multiple reports of bread, cheese and ale together with pipes and tobacco being provided for all those attending.[95] Throughout their vigil the watchers received visitors which Richardson describes as "part visit of condolence and part of a last respectful visit to the dead."[96] Failure to visit was likely to be considered a mark of disrespect, even for a person only slightly acquainted with the deceased or bereaved. Most visiting took place at night, when the day's work was done, although

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[92] Bertram Puckle, Funeral Customs, 62.

[93] Cressy claims that watching the corpse was interpreted as a relic of Catholic "superstition" by the Protestant church. David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, 400-402.

[94] Britton and Brayley, The Beauties of England and Wales, 246.

[95] Scott, A Westmorland Village, 138,

[96] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 24.

women might visit during the day, as their domestic routine
permitted.

The practices of watching and viewing drew in many
more participants than the more intimate death-bed
preparations, and allowed for a degree of sociability.
Such rituals might represent opportunities for re-
establishing connections with neighbours rarely seen. This
had benefits not only for the bereaved, but for all members
of the community. Indeed, for neighbours who were only
distantly acquainted with the deceased this might well be a
strong incentive to attend.

Although historians have claimed that by the
nineteenth century the funeral wake had largely disappeared
in England, folklorists in Cumbria report that large
boisterous gatherings resembling wakes did in fact occur.[97]
Wakes usually took place the night preceding the funeral,
and were characterised by much drinking, reminiscing and
the playing of games and practical jokes. Essentially, the
wake was a celebration in honour of the deceased, and the
corpse was often actively involved in the proceedings.
Catrin Stevens has described the custom of "trouncing" the
corpse at Welsh wakes. This involved men marching up and
down the room supporting the coffin at shoulder-height.[98]
Richardson has suggested that the noisy sociability which
characterised such events probably served a dual role.
Originally a ploy to keep at bay evil spirits, it may well
have had a therapeutic effect upon mourners. [99]

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[97] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 22. William
Rollinson, Life and Tradition in the Lake District (Clapham: Dalesman
Books, 1987), 16.

[98] Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," 27-45, 30.

[99] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 23.

This type of revelry met with disapproval from more "respectable" folk in Cumbria. An observer by the name of Hone noted that it was largely confined to the "humbler sort." Whereas respectful visiting and kindly hospitality may have been appropriate "when population was thin and widely scattered" he felt it had now "degenerated from [its] original use." In fact the concerned gentleman lamented:

> The concourse of visitors rendered the house like a tavern; their noise and tumult being little restricted, and their employment being the drinking of wine or spirits with the smoking of tobacco.[100]

He noted with obvious relief, that the practise had been discontinued in most areas at the time of writing, and that many people "rather assented to the custom rather than approved of it."[101] The critical tone of this observer is not insignificant. Indeed, it is one of the few instances where disapproval takes the place of curiosity and sentimental celebration of rustic ways. However, the stigmatisation of communal folk-customs as "vulgar" or "superstitious" was a process that would gather momentum as more "respectable" observances were seen to confer higher social status on the participants, and it is interesting to note that the wake was one of the first popular death rituals to disappear in England.[102]

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[100] Hone, "Funerals in Cumberland," Hone's Everyday Book 1 (1832) columns 1077-1079.

[101] Hone, " Funerals in Cumberland," Cols. 1077-1079. In Scotland the boisterous games typical of "lykewakes" often attracted complaints. Yet within popular custom this type of sociability was considered fitting for a "decent" send off. Ann Gordon, Death is for the Living, 26, 36.

[102] In Wales the church was instrumental in changing the form of the wake to a more subdued prayer-meeting. Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral

In order to ensure full community participation in the rituals of death, it was necessary to communicate the news of death promptly. In many cases, word of mouth ensured that the community was informed, but for those who did not hear through gossip, the passing-bell rung in the village church would ensure that the news reached the broader community. Originally tolled just prior to the moment of death, it was thought that the bell would ward off evil spirits, and allow the soul of the departed to make its way to heaven, unmolested. For this reason it was often known as the Soul-bell. Popular belief had it that evil spirits were afraid of bells, and the larger the bell, the further the spirit would flee, thus the largest bell in the church was sounded. The bell also served as a prompt to all those hearing it to offer up prayers for the departing spirit - a curious weaving of folklore and theological observance.

The ringing of the passing-bell was commonplace throughout Cumbria, as it was across Britain generally, although there were local variations. It was usual to give a certain number of rings according to the sex of the deceased as well as one ring for each year of age. As people would normally be aware of illness in the community through gossip, people would no doubt be able to identify the deceased fairly easily. The effectiveness of this custom is apparent in its continued use to the present day in some localities. [103]

Another custom which was utilised as a means of relaying the news to the community at large was the drawing

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Wake in Wales," 27-45. Cressy describes how, by the early eighteenth century, the more "respectable" folk in Yorkshire preferred to lock the corpse in a separate room. David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, 427.

[103] This custom is still observed today in the village of Shap.

of blinds in the house of the deceased. It is a practice
recorded widely throughout England, and again, has been
seen as a way of keeping at bay evil spirits.[104] It also
provided the opportunity for neighbours to reciprocate.
Neighbours would commonly express sympathy by drawing their
own curtains and blinds, keeping them closed until after
the funeral.

The customs so far described not only had tangible
practical, and in some cases economic benefits for the
bereaved, they conformed to accepted norms regarding
appropriate respect for the corpse. In addition, in
drawing the community together they provided an opportunity
for sociability. Community involvement was both expected
and forthcoming, and those who were not directly involved
in the more intimate preparations of the body, or who did
not number among those designated to watch, would certainly
be expected to visit, view and "wake" the corpse. And as
every effort was made to communicate the news of death,
there would be little excuse for those who lived close by
not to fulfil their neighbourly obligations.

The rituals more directly connected with the funeral
provided further opportunities for collective
participation. Britton and Brayley record that "the friends
of the deceased as well as the neighbours for several miles
round, are generally invited to the funeral."[105] Indeed, in
the regional dialect, the terms used to designate
neighbourhood itself were synonymous with those understood
to mean "invitation".[106] According to John Gough, "the

[104] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 27.

[105] Britton and Brayley, The Beauties of England and Wales, 246.

[106] WD/Rad/071; Scott, A Westmorland Village, 134.

country was divided into <u>latings</u>, so called from the North
Country verb <u>to late</u> signifying to seek or to invite." [107]
Similarly, J.Briggs observes that

> the regular ancient system of conducting funerals was
> to invite what was called the <u>bidding</u>, being a certain
> extent of houses, considerably less than the township,
> but which had been called the 'bidding' for ages... [108]

Opinions appear to differ on the exact extent of the
"lating" or "bidding", and it may well have varied
according to the density of population in the particular
area, or the ease or difficulty of communication and
transportation, but there is no doubt that funerals could
sometimes involve large numbers of local residents. It was
common for a list of households within the "bidding" to be
drawn up, and for an especially designated "funeral bidder"
to call on each to summon guests.

He or she would deliver the message according to a
prescribed form. In a "drawling, sing-song voice" the
messenger would announce the fact that a death had taken
place and that the occupants of the house were invited to
attend a funeral. They would be told the time of the
departure from the funeral house, and the church where the
service was to take place.[109]   It was usual for one
representative to attend from each household. Many bidding

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[107] John Gough, <u>The Manners and Customs of Westmorland and the
Adjacent Parts of Cumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire - a Series of
Letters</u> (Kendal: John Hudson, 1847), 26.

[108] J. Briggs, "Westmorland as it Was," <u>The Lonsdale Magazine</u> XXXIII
(Sept 30, 1822): 324-326.

[109] The practice of door-to-door bidding was last recorded in the
1940's, but since that time telephone bidding in the stilted style
described by folklorists has been noted. Mr.Tyson and Mrs. Mary White,
personal interviews, 1990.

lists are still extant. In 1748 the funeral of Mr.
Benjamin Browne of Troutbeck drew two hundred and fifty-
eight mourners, for example, [110] and one hundred and fifty
attended a funeral of the Stockdale family in 1806. [111] One
hundred and eighty two mourners turned out for the funeral
of Mary Fell of Pennington in 1813. [112]

In more populous areas a variation on the bidden
funeral existed. Invitations here took a different form.
A day or two prior to the funeral, a crier would go around
the streets with a "solemn-toned bell" and announce to all
within earshot the name of the deceased, the time the
corpse would be "taken up" and the place of the funeral.
Both men and women acted as funeral criers, and elderly
people still living recall them, sometimes quite vividly.

Hone was fascinated by this practise of publicly
announcing deaths, which was clearly very different from
the custom of his own class. His description of the

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[110]   Scott, A Westmorland Village, 134.

[111]   BD/HJ/76/28. Papers relating to the funerals of the Stockdale family.

[112]   William Fleming, The Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book of William Fleming of Pennington, 1798-1819, 2618-9. An observer of a funeral in Appleby in 1917 counted "seventy two farmer's carts and traps, all carrying three or four mourners." Gerald Findler, Folklore of the Lake Counties (Clapham: Dalesman Publishing Co. Ltd., 1976),12. Nor was Cumbria unique in its community-based funerals. Mrs. Gaskell has described the extremely lively "averils" in Haworth, and she notes that Charlotte Bronte was given a large, bidden funeral. Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Bronte (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 53. There are suggestions that northern funerals may have been larger, more convivial gatherings than those further south. Findler remarks that the funerals in the midlands tended to be attended by family members only. The funerals remembered by Flora Thompson in her native Oxfordshire also appear to be much smaller, more subdued affairs. See Flora Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

imagined effect of the news on the local populace is
replete with morbid melodrama:

> What crowds of little urchins feeling a mixed
> sensation of fear and curiosity were congregated!
> What casements were half-opened whilst mute
> attention lent her willing ear to seize upon the
> name of the departed, and the hour of burial! [113]

Locals, well-used to this means of conveying the news of
death, no doubt took it in their stride. [114]

There were also what were termed "unbidden funerals"
where no one in particular was invited to attend, but
neighbours spread word through the town that death had
taken place and it was understood that anyone who wished
might present themselves.

The funeral itself began with the arrival at the
"corse-house" of all those guests who intended to follow
the coffin to the church, and once again the multiple
functions of mortuary customs are apparent. Many of the
practices which were commonly enacted at this point served
to show respect for the corpse by adherence to symbolic
gestures understood as fitting to the occasion; others were
manifestly functional, serving not only the needs of the
bereaved, but also the guests themselves.

Folklorists make little mention of mourning attire for
those in attendance at the funeral. Although those with
the means might have black outfits specially made for the
occasion, it seems unlikely that less affluent people would

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[113] Hone, Hone's Everyday Book, Col. 1079.

[114] There is no doubt that such announcements could make a lasting impression. My grandmother was one of those "little urchins." Recalling the bellman of her childhood in the 1890's, she was able to recite the death-announcement using the precise wording cited in folklorists' accounts. Minnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1990.

be able to afford such luxuries. One source notes that the wearing of black crepe hatbands and gloves was customary in his particular locality, but it is not clear how widespread this custom was in the countryside generally. [115] Apart from this gesture, which was certainly commonplace among the middle-classes, there is nothing to suggest that normal clothes would not be worn. Indeed, it is difficult to see why people would be so willing to attend in such large numbers if participation required the acquisition of special clothing. [116]

According to the locality, specific rituals were observed on arrival at the house. In some places a small table covered with a white cloth was placed at the door, upon which a basin or a vase containing sprigs of Box or Yew was set. Mourners were expected to carry a sprig and eventually to drop it into the grave as a token of respect for the deceased.[117] The convivial aspect of the pre-burial gathering was also extremely important as guests would expect refreshment prior to the "lifting." A table with wines and spirits was often provided, and one observer notes that prior to the 1870's in Kirkby Stephen men were offered hot, spiced ale and women home-made wine. Later tastes became more refined and port and sherry were offered instead.[118]

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[115] Rev. Canon Simpson, "Our Burial Customs," Kirkby Stephen Parish Magazine (May, 1877),4.

[116] The subject of mourning wear for the more affluent is discussed in chapter four.

[117] Various plants were used at funerals to symbolise emotion. Yew, for example, was meant to indicate sorrow. Marjorie Rowlings, The Folklore of the Lake District (London: Batsford, 1976), 136. Evergreens were usually favoured as a symbol of the soul's immortality. Susan Drury, "Funeral Plants and Flowers in England: Some Examples," Folklore 105 (1994): 101-103.

[118] Rev. Canon Simpson, "Our Burial Customs," 4.

So abundant was the supply of alcoholic refreshment at the funeral of the Reverend Cork in Kirkby Lonsdale, in 1786, that a local writer observed:

> ...we are informed by a gentleman who attended the jovial solemnity that by ninety of his appointed friends, eighty bottles of wine besides a large quantity of ale was interred. At the usual time the corpse was brought to the door by two stout fellows, but who were so much affected on this solemn occasion, they let fall the coffin by which accident the lid was burst open and was near to discharging its whole contents into the dirty street...[119]

Whether or not the event in question actually occurred, or was embellished in order to entertain, it is clear that alcohol was regarded as a fitting accompaniment for funeral sociability.

For those not attending the funeral in person, custom allowed for symbolic participation. One important feature of the funeral gathering was the distribution of small wheaten loaves which were to be taken home by the representatives of each household present and later eaten in the presence of the rest of the family in "respectful remembrance of the deceased." This was generally known as "arvel bread" and was made by the woman of the house (or presumably a relative or neighbour in the case of a woman's death). This custom was not confined to Cumbria, and folklorists and historians have debated its origins at length.[120] Gough gives only one of numerous interpretations of its ancestry when he states with unwarranted confidence:

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[119] Alexander Pearson, The Annals of Kirkby Lonsdale (Kendal: Titus Wilson and Son, 1930), 180.

[120] Puckle thinks its origins may well lie in the pagan practise of propitiating malevolent spirits, as many other aspects of funeral

...the antiquity of this present is fully
established by the monastic name which it bears;
for the people call it by the Latin appellation
of Arvel Bread, probably from the practice of
distributing the loaves in the open air...[121]

Others have suggested it was a gesture in honour of
the heir, or that it may have some vague connection with
the Sacrament. Whatever its origins, this practise seems
to have been a special event, as oatbread was more commonly
eaten for everyday fare, and wheat, a rarer commodity, was
regarded as a treat. Sometimes rich cake was substituted
for wheaten bread, and later sources refer to funeral
"biscuits" or "cakes" being handed out to mourners.
Indeed, these were often produced commercially. Arvel
cheese often complemented the bread. For the funeral of
George Browne of Troutbeck in 1702, seventy-eight pounds of
"arvall cheese," and sixteen dozen whole loaves were
served.[122] At the funeral of Mary Muckelt of Dalton-in-
Furness in 1765, thirteen and a half pounds of cheese were
consumed along with an unspecified quantity of bread. [123]

It is not clear whether arvel cheese was also intended
to be taken home to be shared with the family, but it may
well have been consumed there and then by the mourners,
perhaps in anticipation of a long and demanding day.

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ritual were also similarly motivated. Bertram Puckle, Funeral Customs,
61. Fell writes that its origins are Danish, and that the "arveol" was
an inheritance feast where ale was drunk as a memorial toast. T.K.
Fell, Legendary and Folklore in Furness, (n.p.,n.d.), 36-38.

[121] Gough, The Manners and Customs of Cumberland and Westmorland,
23.

[122] Scott, A Westmorland Village, 138.

[123] WD/Rad/072/a. The funeral accounts of Mary Muckelt of Dalton-in-
Furness.

Indeed, the length of the journey to church sometimes required that sustenance be taken en route. In some cases a certain proportion of arvel bread was set aside for the journey, for the serious matter of "lifting" the corpse and conveying it to its final resting place could be arduous.

The difficulties of transporting the body to its final resting place was one important reason for encouraging maximum participation in country funerals, especially in remoter areas. The majority of rural Cumbrians were nominally, at least, members of the Church of England. Thus most people were buried in the consecrated ground adjacent to the parish church. But parishes were large in Cumbria and parish churches few and far between. Although gradual population increase throughout the medieval period had led to the construction of "chapels of ease" in the central area, up until the nineteenth century many burials still involved a difficult journey to the mother church on the periphery of a large parish.

In the medieval period certain roads had come into existence which were primarily used for the purpose of conveying a corpse to the closest burial ground. They were usually the most direct way for people in remote areas to reach the parish church, and they frequently traversed high, inhospitable country. One such road ran from Wasdale Head across the desolate fellside of Burnmoor to the parish church at Eskdale, a distance of about seven miles. Another corpse road, ten miles in length, attained an elevation of 2600 feet close to the summit of Cross Fell. It linked the hamlet of Garrigill near Alston with its mother church at Kirkland in the Eden valley. A similar

road of about seven miles traversed some equally difficult terrain between Mardale Green and Shap.[124]

Travelling with a corpse in this type of country could be taxing. Although a coffin might be strapped on to the back of a pack horse, or taken by farm cart, hand-held or wheeled biers were often loaned by the churches, bearers supporting or pushing as required.[125] It was usual for all the mourners to follow on foot, although in some areas, especially where the land was less rugged, farm carts would be used to follow. [126] It was claimed to be a mark of respect to help with the bearing of a coffin; indeed a country parson noted that "the last service required, the carrying of their dead neighbour to his last resting place, was ungrudgingly rendered, whatever might be his position in life."[127] It is of course impossible to say whether bearers were as magnanimous the Reverend Simpson suggests, but, whether "ungrudgingly rendered" or not, it was a job that usually fell to the strongest adult males in the community, who would work in relays. [128] Change-overs

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[124] Other roads linked remote central communities to lowland parish churches: Hawkshead to Dalton, Grasmere to Kendal and Coniston to Ulverston. It was no easier for Dissenters. Jonathan Wilson who died in 1755 was conveyed twelve to fourteen miles to the Baptist Chapel at Hawkshead Hill. Janet D. Martin, "The Hawkshead Connection - Some Cumbrian Baptists," in C.W.A.A.S. XCI 213-236. Puckle noted that "corpse roads" also existed in Brittany, and were used only for funerals. Bertram Puckle, Funeral Customs, 123.

[125] David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, 432-433.

[126] There are numerous accounts of the difficulties experienced by mourners traversing the corpse roads, yet many of the most inhospitable tracks were maintained well enough to facilitate the passage of a horse and cart. The corpse road over Burnmoor, for example, climbing to an elevation of over 700 feet, was passable in this way until the beginning of the twentieth century. Dudley Hoys, English Lake Country (London: Batsford, 1969), 46.

[127] The Rev. Simpson, "Our Burial Customs," 8.

[128] Prior to the late nineteenth century in the village of Greystoke it was not uncommon for women to act as bearers. Simpson observes that

occurred at designated resting places, marked by crosses or stones. [129] The Lonsdale Magazine of 1867 reported that resting stones existed in Low Furness for walking funerals, and that "arvel cakes" would be eaten there.[130]

Immediately prior to the entrance to the churchyard, if it had not been done before, the coffin was draped in a pall, or black cloth, which completely covered the coffin. There are multiple references to the use of the pall in documentary sources pertaining to burials generally, suggesting that it carried symbolic importance.[131] Each parish church owned at least one, and along with a bier, it would be loaned or hired out at a modest fee for every funeral.

The approach to the churchyard would usually be accompanied by the singing of psalms, and at the arrival at the lyche-gate the community temporarily handed over responsibility to the parish vicar, who conducted the first part of the service there. Here the folklorists become silent, suggesting that the burial service was an

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at the time of writing (1877), women only carried the coffins of children or young girls, supporting them with napkins under the coffin. The Rev.Simpson, "Our Burial Customs," 15.

[129] Bertram Puckle says that crosses would commonly be erected at the meetings of ways for the purpose of providing a convenient place for worship in areas of few churches. Bertram Puckle, Funeral Customs, 264. Ann Gordon writes that resting-crosses were common in Scotland, as funeral processions would pause to take some sort of refreshment en route. Gordon, Death is for the Living, 63. The practice of resting at crosses, and particularly of offering prayers there, was decried by the Protestant church as a vestige of "popery". David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, 401.

[130] "Arval Bread at Funerals," Lonsdale Magazine, (June, 1867): 59-62.

[131] Ann Gordon has noted that the use of a funeral cloth was an important constituent of a "decent" funeral in Scotland. Ann Gordon, Death is for the Living, 118.

unremarkable event which did not warrant their attention. They are much more vocal with regard to what followed.[132]

Following the committal, came the final opportunity for sociability. Folklorists report that at Dalton-in-Furness mourners were routinely instructed by the sexton to reassemble at a particular public house. Upon arrival, they would sit at tables in groups of four, and would be served with ale and the arvel bread which was to be taken home.[133] A similar procedure was followed at Kirkby Lonsdale.[134] It is not clear whether this custom served as an alternative to the pre-burial refreshments, or if it supplemented it. [135]

Refreshments could sometimes be very substantial. For the funeral of George Browne in 1702 a sheep was slaughtered and eight quarters of veal was eaten for the benefit of all in the "bidding".[136] Guests were similarly entertained at another family funeral in 1728. For the funeral of Benjamin Browne, fourteen dozen Wiggs (a type of fancy bread), six dozen cakes, a quart of beef, a side of veal and two sheep were consumed in addition to ale and wine. [137] Not surprisingly, William Fleming records in his diary that a local vicar was rather unwell at a funeral he

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[132] The subject of burial will be addressed in Chapter 3.

[133] The Lonsdale Magazine, (July 1867): 59-63.

[134] Alexander Pearson, Annals of Kirkby Lonsdale (Kendal: Titus Wilson and Son), 181. The custom of announcing the venue of the funeral meal at the graveside may have been widespread. Puckle notes that it took place in Yorkshire. Puckle, Funeral Customs, 110.

[135] At Greystoke a dinner was provided prior to the funeral, mourners coming from a radius of twenty miles. After the dinner each guest received a piece of wheaten bread and cheese. Simpson, "Our Funeral Customs," The Kirkby Stephen Parish Magazine, (July 1877): 153.

[136] Scott, A Westmorland Village, 139.

[137] Scott, A Westmorland Village, 139, 140.

attended because of "too great a store of good things...
more than the Receptacle could retain with ease...."[138]

William Robinson of Hutton lamented the extravagance
of funeral feasts in his poem of 1769. That he found them
inappropriate is made clear when he asks:

> ...is it decent thus to gormandize,
> To play the glutton, and to make a noise?
> At such a season? Is't not wicked waste?---

Inhabitants of the town of Kendal, Robinson noted
approvingly, showed much more restraint, and he entreated
his fellow villagers to:

> Take good example from the adjacent Town;
> They feast not for the Dead; a modest glass
> Of wine or ale suffices; And the like
> In many Villages and Townships round [139]

Middle-class observers were quick to criticise what
they saw as the extravagance of the poorer classes at
funerals. A hearty meal, however, could be more than mere
self-indulgence; it could satisfy a genuine need. Death
brought the community together in a series of rituals
which, given the nature of the environment, could be a
stern test as well as an acknowledgment of community
solidarity. We have seen that rural Cumbria was an area of
scattered population, poorly served with roads. Neighbours
might have to travel a considerable distance to the "corse-
house," and then dutifully follow the corpse to a distant
church, often on foot. It was not unknown for mourners to
come to grief themselves given the combined rigours of

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[138] William Fleming, The Diary and Commonplace Book of William Fleming, 2, 328-329.

[139] WDX/313 Box 3. William Robinson, The Country Funeral - A Poem, Nov. 1769. See also Appendix.

climate and terrain, and most would certainly welcome refreshment as a fitting reward for their efforts.

Eating and drinking could also have deeply symbolic functions. [140] Elaine Clark has shown how in the countryside "communal meals promoted harmony and goodwill"[141] Catrin Stevens has expressed the view that funeral meals served the same function.[142] As we have seen, in rural Cumbria most aspects of death and dying involved co-operation on the part of those in the neighbourhood. Preparing the death-bed, laying out the body, watching and visiting the corpse, accompanying the coffin to church, attending the service - such were the services provided by neighbours who acknowledged an unspoken obligation to be of assistance when death struck a family in their midst. The gatherings before and after the burial provided an opportunity for people who may not have seen each other in a considerable time to exchange news and gossip. In allowing for sociability funeral refreshments strengthened social bonds and could help define communal identity itself.[143]

The rituals so far described reveal that mutual assistance provided much needed material and economic help to the bereaved family, while simultaneously conforming to collective demands regarding an appropriate show of respect

[140] See, for example, Gervase Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England," Journal of British Studies 33 (1994): 430-446; also Bonnie Huskins, "From Haute Cuisine to Ox Roasts: Public Feasting and the Negotiation of Class in Mid-19th-Century Saint John and Halifax," Labour/Le Travail 37 (Spring 1996): 9-33.

[141] Elaine Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," 385.

[142] Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," 33.

[143] Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," 386.

for the dead. In the larger towns, and especially in
London, undertakers charged high prices for similar
services. When local women prepared the body for a nominal
fee (or, in many cases did not charge at all), and relays
of strong men carried the coffin over long and difficult
mountain tracks, expenses were obviously reduced. Yet
death necessarily involved some expense. The coffin had to
be paid for, burial fees had to be met, and food and drink
- sometimes in large quantities - provided. Indeed, at
first glance it would appear that the costs of providing
food, liquor and tobacco for large numbers of participants
would more than offset any saving gained by communal
effort.

But costs might be reduced by other customary
gestures. It was common practice at funerals in the north
of England for guests to make a monetary donation at the
meal itself. Elizabeth Gaskell relates how guests at
funerals in Haworth, Yorkshire, placed donations on a plate
provided for the purpose. One particular funeral there
cost the guests four shillings and sixpence per head! [144]
In Lancashire it was customary for guests to contribute one
shilling each to relations sitting by the open coffin.[145]
Similar customs prevailed in Wales.[146] Several folklorists
report that in Cumbria, in cases where the bereaved were in
financial difficulty, donations would similarly be
offered.[147]

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[144] Elizabeth Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Bronte, 26.

[145] Margaret Baker, Folklore and Rural Customs of Rural England,
London: David and Charles, 1974), 56.

[146] Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," 34.

[147] Gough, The Manners and Customs of Cumberland and Westmorland, 2.
Although there is a paucity of evidence, it is likely that gifts of
food and drink were given at funerals in Cumbria, as was the case in

But it would be a mistake to assume that all funerals involved lavish refreshments. Folklorists were probably drawn to describe what they regarded as more interesting affairs. Little evidence remains of smaller, more modest funerals, though these may well have been fairly common, especially in areas where the proximity of the parish church did not require the relays of bearers typical of more remote places. And, too, there were probably situations where mutual aid was less than forthcoming. Suicides were often discriminated against, for example, and it is conceivable that individuals who contravened communal mores might forfeit their rights to such support. [148] Then too, there were occasions when the combined resources of family and neighbourhood fell short of the amount required to cover even the basic costs of the coffin and burial fees. In such cases, this might necessitate recourse to parish funds.

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other areas. In Wales gifts of food were commonly taken to the house in the days prior to the funeral. Catrin Stevens, "The Funeral Wake in Wales," 33. Cressy has also noted that guests in the Tudor and Stuart periods would commonly contribute to the table at funerals, as they did at weddings. David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death, 446. In Cumbria there existed a rich tradition of public gift-giving at important stages in the lifecycle. At childbirth, and for Christenings, for example, Cumbrian neighbours contributed numerous goods in the form of bread, butter, wine and money to the mother and midwife. A greater turnout meant more gifts, and this is another reason why neighbours for miles around were bidden to such occasions. Sporting events, an important feature of weddings, were designed to attract a "great concourse" who would then make a monetary contribution to the newly married couple. In his published observations on the nation's poor, Sir Frederick Morton Eden noted that "On all these occasions, the greatest part of the provisions is contributed by the neighbourhood.... Every neighbour, how high or low soever, makes it a point to contribute something." F.M.Eden, The State of the Poor, 339.

[148] Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 18. Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 35. For a discussion of the ways in which the community enforced compliance with collective norms see E.P.Thompson, Customs in Common, chapter 8.

As Winter has observed, whereas mutuality was understood as help proffered by social equals, aid provided by the parish was viewed as charity, and implied a loss of status. Yet it is significant that death on the parish did not necessarily mean a lack of dignity. This is well illustrated in Dorothy Wordsworth's poignant description of a funeral in the village of Grasmere in 1800:

> I then went to a funeral at John Dawson's. About
> 10 men and 4 women. Bread, cheese and ale. They
> talked sensibly and cheerfully about common
> things. The dead person, 56 years of age, buried
> by the parish. The coffin was neatly lettered and
> painted black, and covered with a decent cloth.
> They set the corpse down at the door; and, while
> we stood within the threshold, the men with their
> hats off sang with decent and solemn countenances
> a verse of a funeral psalm. The corpse was then
> borne down the hill, and they sang till they had
> passed the Town-end...There were no near kindred,
> no children, ...I thought she was going to a
> quiet spot, and I could not help weeping very
> much. When we came to the bridge, they began to
> sing again, and stopped during four lines before
> they entered the churchyard....[149]

Dorothy Wordsworth's emphasis on decency is telling, for it underscores the fact that the customs which were part of the mutual tradition in death were of more than economic or material importance. Mutual aid was valued not only for the more tangible benefits it might or might not confer; it also symbolised a collective concern for the welfare of the dead. By participating in the funeral of a poor neighbour, these villagers were acknowledging the

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[149] Dorothy Wordsworth, The Grasmere Journal, (London: Michael Joseph, 1997), 40-41.

deceased's right to certain observances which conferred
dignity in death, and were held to be of social importance.
Clearly, the dead woman had no surviving family to witness
and reciprocate this gesture, yet the imperative to ensure
that certain rites were duly observed weighed more heavily
on the mourners than any promise of future restitution. [150]

The funeral described above took place thirty four
years before the Poor Law Amendment Act. As in other parts
of England, under the terms of the Act of 1834, poor law
unions were formed and growing numbers of paupers were
incarcerated in workhouses. Although many able-bodied
paupers successfully resisted institutionalisation in
Cumbria, the elderly and the sick found themselves removed
from their communities.[151]   Not only were these
unfortunates henceforth the recipients of charity rather
than mutual aid in death, what was worse, they were
deprived of the simple dignity in death which collective
rituals had symbolised.

From henceforth paupers were buried in parish
churchyards at a distance from their local communities.[152]
This in itself was not new. As we have seen, traditionally
bodies had often been transported many miles to parish
burial grounds. The difference was, that whereas bodies
of non-paupers had been accompanied there by mourners as an
integral part of customary observance, paupers were

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[150] Cressy has written that paupers in Tudor and Stuart England
could expect a "decent" funeral. He cites evidence from different parts
of the country which demonstrates that the recipients of parish relief
were accorded respectful treatment. David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and
Death, 429-430.

[151] R.N.Thompson, "The Working of the Poor Law Amendment Act in
Cumbria, 1836-1871," Northern History XV (1979): 117-137.

[152] BPR/2 I2 41. Documents pertaining to the extension of St. Mary's
churchyard, Ulverston.

deprived of the ritual watching, waking and other
formalities, and taken straight from the workhouse to the
burial grounds with a minimum of ceremony. Historians have
speculated at length on the enormous emotional cost to the
poor of the loss of rituals which had given meaning not
only to death - but to life. This is aptly summed up in
the words of James Walvin:

> ...such burials clearly transgressed all the
> traditional values associated with a proper and
> respectable burial....The pauper's burial plucked
> a person from that web of social customs and
> practices which formed a value system and a way
> of life from birth to the grave.[153]

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This chapter has revealed that throughout the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mortuary practices in
rural Cumbria offered valuable assistance to the dying and
the newly bereaved, who were among the community's most
vulnerable and most needy individuals. The welfare of
those stricken by death could best be guaranteed by
recourse to the community whose means were far in excess of
the individual or family. The involvement of neighbours in
the rituals of death and burial ensured maximum help, by
dispersing the burden of support over a wide area. This
type of mutual help was a commonplace of life for people
struggling to make ends meet, and did not imply loss of
status or independence, for it was understood that services
and economic assistance would be repaid in kind at some
future time, when the recipient's circumstances
permitted.[154]

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[153] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust", 355.

[154] Neighbourly goodwill has been an enduring feature of Cumbrian
life. In his sociological study of Gosforth, Williams observes, "The

But death customs not only worked to satisfy
individual needs, they could also encourage collectivism.
Death could be a highly social occasion, encouraging of
behaviour likely to promote solidarity and good fellowship
at a time when emotions ran high. Perhaps most important,
collectivity was also nurtured by shared ideals about
respect for the dead. Death customs articulated beliefs
relating to the welfare of the soul and helped define
notions of dignity in death. Co-operative efforts to
provide a "decent" death and burial worked to affirm
collective identity in a very powerful way.

The foregoing discussion lends support to Thompson's
thesis that popular customs are far more than quaint
curiosities of interest only to the folklorist. Indeed,
this chapter has argued that the customs surrounding death,
in common with many other forms of ritualised behaviour
documented by historians, provide a valuable way of
illuminating not only the material conditions of life, but
also spiritual beliefs, standards of decency, and
principles which informed social relationships.
Specifically, by revealing a strong commitment to
collective ideas about death with dignity, this chapter
serves to challenge the claim that mutuality in popular
death-culture worked simply in the service of a
materialistic individualism. Calculated self-interest was
more than counterbalanced by a well-developed sense of
collective identity and obligation.

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pervasiveness of neighbourliness is best illustrated in crisis
situations. One woman, for example, said that ordinarily very few
neighbours visited her, but that when her husband fell ill,'half the
village' called with offers of help and gifts of food and books...."
W.M. Williams, The Sociology of an English Village, (Oxford: 1956),
142.

CHAPTER TWO

FUNERALS AND FRATERNITY

DEATH AND THE LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS

... brotherly affection, which we are assured is
well pleasing in the sight of Heaven, has on many
occasions in this Kingdom, and even in our own
Neighbourhood, exerted itself in such a manner as
to become a source of comfort and convenience to
numbers, deriving their support from the mutual
assistance which the Members of the Society lay
up for each other, in their stated
contributions.[155]

And whereas the brothers in this city are obliged by
our ancient order to attend the corpse of any brother
his wife or children to the church and from thence goe
back againe to their said house where mortality dothe
so fall out and spend each man 6 pence per man through
love and respect of their deceased brother or
friend....[156]

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[155] "Rules and Articles of the Friendly Society of Whitehaven," in
Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792, introduction.

[156] "Constitution of the Tailors' Guild, the City of Carlisle" (June
25, 1734), in R.S. Ferguson and W. Nanson, *Municipal Records of the
City of Carlisle* (Carlisle: Thurnam and Sons, 1887), 160.

The previous chapter drew on evidence from rural Cumbria to argue that the mutual ideal which underpinned popular death customs was more than a means to satisfy material self-interest. Clearly, it was to the advantage of each individual to participate in reciprocal goodwill, but gestures of aid to the dying and the bereaved were also inspired by a collective determination to ensure "decency" in death. Death customs fulfilled spiritual as well as material needs and brought together the broader community in a common expression of respect for the dead. In so doing they served not only to validate collective mores, they strengthened collective identity itself.

This informal reciprocity was paralleled by mutuality in a more structured form. Community aid might not always be sufficient to defray the expenses of a funeral. In order to avoid recourse to the Poor Law - a concern which became more urgent after the Amendment Act of 1834 - substantial numbers of working people formed mutual associations dedicated to meeting financial need in times of sickness and death. Whereas the aid provided by the local community was spontaneous and informal, the type of assistance offered by the voluntary associations was more likely to be premeditated and structured. Operated first by the local guilds and later by the friendly societies, in its most rudimentary form assistance took the form of a simple levy imposed on members at the death of a fellow; at its most sophisticated it formed a standardised system of subscriptions and benefits.

Just as the aid of the community encompassed more than simple economic help, the mutual associations were also committed to ensuring that death - or more specifically burial - accorded with collective standards of dignity.

The associations did not concern themselves with the rituals immediately following death, but played an important role in organising and conducting the funeral cortege and the meal which followed. Combining popular ideas of "decency" in death with more explicitly Christian principles, they refined funerary rituals, utilising them not only to provide an appropriate send-off for the deceased, but to articulate in a very public way, a collective identity distinct from community.

But if the associations made more explicit the collective aspect of reciprocity, they also drew attention to the competing claims of individualism. As this chapter will show, it was within the more formal setting of organised mutuality that the implicit tension between collectivity and self-interest became more apparent.

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Several historians of death have highlighted the importance of the guilds in providing financial and material aid for the dying and bereaved. Christopher Daniell, Julian Litten, Dermot Morrah, and Sharon Strocchia have all discussed the role of these associations in the organisation of funerals of their members.[157] Indeed, Litten argues that the chief function of the medieval religious guilds was funeral provision and the pooling of resources for the purpose of establishing chantries and chantry priests to conduct masses and pray for the soul of the departed.[158] Even the craft and trades guilds, which

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[157] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 20; Julian Litten, The English Way of Death; Dermot Morrah, A History of Industrial Life Assurance, 14; Sharon Strocchia Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence, 16, 84-88.

[158] Julian Litten, The English Way of Death, 7-12.

primarily concerned themselves with occupational issues, gave funeral provision high priority.

Daniell explains that biblical edicts decreed that provision of a proper funeral was a Christian duty. According to St. Matthew's gospel, paying for the burial of a poor member constituted one of the "Seven Corporeal Works of Mercy" defined by Christ.[159] Medieval guilds took such strictures very seriously, and funerals for members were routinely organised and funded, and a pall and regalia were kept on hand for the purpose.[160] Not only was such help available to poor members and their families, many guilds made contributions towards all fraternity funerals, regardless of the family's financial position.

Sharon Strocchia has added another dimension to the issue of guild involvement in funerals. Funerals were not only of obvious benefit to the dying and bereaved, she argues, they also advantaged the mourners. Just as, in the rural community, funerals could strengthen social bonds and act as a reminder of mutual dependence, within the context of a fraternal order the rituals of death could likewise serve the needs of collectivism. In her analysis of funerals in renaissance Florence, Strocchia notes that participation of the membership in guild funerals "was designed to encourage a greater sense of community and solidarity among those practising the trade."[161] Funerals

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[159] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial in Medieval England, 20.

[160] In Coventry, the St. Catherines Gild which was founded in the reign of Edward III, stipulated that those who died too poor to afford a funeral were to be buried at the charge of the Gild. F.M. Eden, The State of the Poor 1, 595. The Charter of the Gild of Carpenters of 1389 stated that any member dying in poverty "schal be honestliche buried at ye costages of ye brothered," Chambers and Daunt, London English, in Arnold Wilson and Hermann Levy, Burial Reform, frontispiece.

[161] Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence, 83.

could be important in helping forge a common identity in creating a "community" which was distinct from neighbourhood.

This fraternal commitment to organising and funding funerals was shared by the friendly societies, many of whom took up this function long after the guilds had gone into decline. Unlike the trade and craft guilds, whose mandate was largely regulation of business practises and working conditions (an area of concern which would later become the jurisdiction of the trades unions), the societies were more specifically committed to social welfare. Their stated aim was to better prepare their membership to cope with sickness, infirmity, old age and death. Dermot Morrah suggests that the movement began in seventeenth-century Scotland.[162] By the end of the eighteenth century there were tens of thousands of such organisations throughout Britain, and by 1803 a Poor Law return estimated a national membership of 704,350. [163] By 1815 membership of local societies had reached over 900,000. [164]

The following analysis uses evidence from Cumbria to highlight the ways in which the mutuality rooted in rural custom recreated itself within the context of this more structured, associational culture. It reveals that the imperative to stage a "decent" funeral - so important in the countryside - was meticulously observed by the guilds and societies and was further refined within the context of

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See also Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths, 136.

[162] Dermot Morrah, A History of Industrial Life Assurance, 14.

[163] R.G.Garnett, A Century of Co-operative Insurance, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), 71.

[164] E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, 460.

fraternal protocol which stressed a more exacting type of collectivism.

Yet this is only one perspective on a complex issue. Focusing more closely on the societies, this chapter also points to the ways in which bourgeois notions of "self-help" struggled to modify ideals of collectivism within clubs which fell under middle-class control. Even more significant, it will also argue that rank-and-file claims to mutuality could themselves be compromised by a common desire to protect individual interests. Changes made to methods of funding funerals - from the simple "funeral gift" or levy to the advance subscription - had far-reaching implications. Whereas the informal mutuality of the village had guaranteed help to all in the casual expectation of future restitution, the calculated mutuality of the fraternities was far more selective in its dispersement of aid. An acute awareness of the need for mutual support and cooperation was tempered by an abiding concern to exclude those considered too great a risk.

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Most of the historiography dealing with guild involvement with death and burial has focused on the medieval period, and several historians have claimed that the demise of the guilds generally meant that by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this function had been largely handed on to the friendly societies. Yet several craft and trade guilds were in existence in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Carlisle, and their constitutions reveal that the organisation of funerals was as important then as

it had been in earlier centuries when specific directives had been implemented pertaining to funeral attendance and arrangement.

An examination of the orders of the seven craft guilds and one merchant guild of Carlisle is invaluable in revealing the ways in which these associations adapted many of the customs of the countryside to their own notions of mortuary ritual. Such a study is also important insofar as it suggests that the rulings set by the guilds, occasionally dating as far back as the sixteenth century, continued as the basis of funeral protocol and funding until well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when similar orders appear in the written constitutions of the local friendly societies.

Many aspects of the rural tradition were incorporated into guild funeral protocol, and it is clear that the notion of a "decent" funeral was just as important to the guild community as it was within popular custom generally. The following extract from the constitution of the Merchants' Guild is typical of the rules pertaining to guild funerals in this area. Just as the bidden funerals of the villages demanded that a representative from each household in the district attend to pay a final tribute to a neighbour, so the guilds expected a similar respectful turn out:

> It is ordered and agreed upon by the consent of
> ye whole company that whensoever any brother or
> sister of this trade doth depart this life that
> upon warning thereof geuen to the maisters the
> maisters for the tyme being shall give warning
> thereof to ye whole company that at least one of
> every house may resort to the church and every

one so offending to forfeit vid.[sixpence]. And
if the maisters doe not give warning upon warning
given to them then the said maisters to forfeit
for every default xiid. [twelve pence].[165]

The Weavers' Guild demanded that all "living within
the city shall attend."[166] And, like the merchants, the
tailors required that if a brother could not attend he
should send "one of his house."[167] The Smiths' Guild called
upon "every brother having his health" to "accompany the
corps to the church in a decent manner for conscience
sake"[168] As was the more general custom, it was crucial that
word of a death be communicated immediately, and where a
guild member or one of his/her family was concerned this
task usually fell to an officeholder. An oath was taken by
the under master of the Tailors' Guild, for example, to the
effect that he would not neglect this important and solemn
fraternal duty.[169]

Within the broad dictates of popular custom, fraternal
protocol could impose its own refinements, however, and the
hierarchy of the order was ritually acknowledged in the
public cortege.[170] The greatest show of solidarity was
reserved for full members; for those who did not have full
membership, fewer mourners were expected to present

[165] "Order of the Company of Merchants", (1656) in R.S. Ferguson and
W. Nanson, Municipal Records, 99.

[166] "Order of the Weavers' Guild," (1679) in Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 127.

[167] "Order of the Tailors' Guild," (n.d.) in Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 146.

[168] "Order of the Smiths' Guild," (1562) in Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 138.

[169] "Order of the Tailors' Guild," (n.d.) in Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 151.

[170] Strocchia has observed that the funeral cortege can be seen as a
"public affirmation of hierarchy." Strocchia, Death and Ritual, 18.

themselves. For a brother or his wife, the Butchers' Guild expected to see the "whole light of ye occupation going before [the corpse] to church," whereas, for a child of a member or an apprentice, half the company might attend.[171]

Guilds prided themselves on the display of regalia which added a degree of pageantry often missing in ordinary village funerals, while emphasising fellowship and unity. Such items might also be used to indicate the precise status of the deceased. The Tailors' Guild required that the entire company bearing a banner should follow a member or a member's wife, but "ye son or daughter to have half-light with ye banner and ye apprentice a third of ye light with ye banner".[172]

An appropriate number of mourners equipped with ceremonial pennants might lend a more colourful dimension to the cortege, but there can be no doubt that the draped coffin, so important to popular notions of dignity in death, was the essential centrepiece. The frequency with which the funeral pall is mentioned in guild records suggests that it was undoubtedly one of the criteria by which "decency" in death was measured. As in the village funeral a "decent cloth" for the coffin was the ultimate tribute to one who was making that final, momentous journey to the grave.

It is perhaps not surprising that the condition of the pall should be a high priority. In 1713 the Shoemakers' Guild paid one pound five shillings to purchase a funeral

[171] "Light" means guild. From the "Orders of the Butchers' Guild," (1665) in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 245.

[172] "Orders of the Tailors' Guild," (n.d.) Feguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 147.

cloth.[173] In 1779 a new pall was purchased by this company
for over eight pounds, and thirteen shillings and three
pence was paid for a box in which to store it.[174] The
Glovers' Guild paid eighteen shillings for a funeral cloth
in 1723 and replaced it in 1748.[175] The importance of the
pall at funerals generally can be gauged by the fact that
the Shoemakers' cloth was frequently hired out for funerals
unconnected with the guild. It was used for "a servant of
Lord Surrey" in 1781, for the funeral of "Pattin the
barber" in 1784, and for a hatter in Botchergate in 1792,
among others.[176]

For the guilds, as for villagers, respect for a
deceased member extended to helping to defray the costs of
the final rituals. As we have seen, in the village setting
funeral sociability often provided a forum for donations to
be made. Similarly, ritualised eating and drinking were
common characteristics of the guilds generally, so it
should not be surprising that members should both
participate in and help fund such communal commemoration.
[177] Thus, following a funeral the tailors would go back to
the house "where mortality doth so fall out and spend each

[173] Records of the Shoemakers' Guild, (1713) in Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 206.

[174] Records of the Shoemakers' Guild, Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 208.

[175] Records of the Glovers' Guild, Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal
Records, 238.

[176] Notes relating to the Shoemakers' Guild, Ferguson and Nanson,
Municipal Records, 208. In Scotland mortcloths were carefully stored
and looked after, as they commanded a higher rental the better their
condition. Ann Gordon, Death is for the Living, 3.

[177] Rosser claims that the word "companion" was synonymous with
"bread sharer" in medieval times and that "the common repast was a
normal way to give tangible expression to the guild." Gervase Rosser,
"Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in
Late Medieval England," Journal of British Studies 33 (1994): 430-446,
431.

man 6 pence per man through the love and respect of their deceased [sic] brother or friend."[178] Butchers also were required to "return to ye house of ye deceased and spend there sixpence a peace [sic]."[179]

This system of contributions was the subject of some discord, however. Some guild members seem to have felt that those at a distance, "country brothers" who were routinely excused from attending, were not paying their fair share. In 1734 the tailors decided to remedy this inequity by making a yearly charge for funerals, to be paid on Lady Day. The boot was now on the other foot. Whereas each city brother was now required to pay sixpence, every "country brother" was from henceforth to pay twelve pence. This discriminatory practise was presumably felt to compensate for years of unpaid dues on the part of the rural membership.[180]

In 1734 the glovers temporarily discontinued the practise of spontaneous contributions at the funeral house, but for different reasons. They appear to have had enough in the general fund to cover funerals, and they announced that for one year all brothers living within the city "shall be exempted from spending as usual at the funeral meetings at brothers houses."[181] One notes that the city

[178] "Orders of the Tailors' Guild", (1734) Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 160.

[179] "Orders of the Butchers' Guild," (n.d.) Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 253.

[180] "Orders of the Tailors' Guild," in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 160.

[181] "Orders of the Glovers' Guild," in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 224.

brothers were once again to be advantaged at the expense of their country counterparts. Country brothers were presumably still to be asked to contribute if and when they were able to attend a city funeral.

The practise of drawing monies from an established fund rather than relying solely on donations after the fact seems to have had appeal for other guilds. In 1806 the butchers decided that a guinea was to be taken out of the general fund for funeral expenses of those who "attended quarterly meetings."[182] The Shoemakers' Guild reserved the common fund for its poorest members only. For those unable to pay for their own or a family member's funeral, "the said charges in bringing him forth and funeral expenses [were] to be taken from the common box."[183] However, members were to return to the house of the deceased after the interment and pay sixpence in the customary manner "if requested", a fine being paid to the "common box" if they failed to do so.[184] The move away from simple reliance on donations made at the funeral itself, to the utilisation of funds held in the "common box" heralded a shift in the principles underlying mutuality in death. For in drawing on general funds, or in making an advance contribution, members were no longer simply funding the funerals of others. They were in effect funding any funeral which

[182] "Orders of the Butchers' Guild," (1734) in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 261.

[183] "Orders of the Shoemakers' Guild", (n.d.) in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 177.

[184] For a brother who died in straightened circumstances, an award might be granted to his widow. "Orders for the Shoemakers' Guild," (1735) in Ferguson and Nanson, Municipal Records, 196.

might subsequently occur - including (in theory) their own.
Thus a subtle but important change had occurred: funding
for funerals was no longer simply a gesture of help towards
others, it might also be a means to ensure a dignified end
for the subscriber. In essence, the utilisation of advance
collections - implemented for reasons of fairness and
efficiency - shifted the emphasis of reciprocity in death
while formalising its operation. For now one was not only
helping one's neighbour, one was also helping oneself. It
was a principle which would be adopted and further refined
within the context of the friendly society movement.

It is clear that the guilds of Carlisle adhered to
many of the collectively-based rituals of death integral to
popular death-culture generally. There was a distinct
expectation that members would attend the funerals of
fellow members, accompanying the coffin to the grave as
part of a dignified cortege. Commonly-held notions of
propriety were particularly evident, and the pall an
important symbol of a "decent" burial, as it was in the
villages. Similarly, members were required to attend the
social gathering afterwards and to make a contribution
toward funeral expenses.

While such collective gestures could be invaluable to
the bereaved family, materially and probably emotionally,
at the same time rituals of death could be an important
means to strengthen a sense of solidarity. As in the
countryside, awareness of a common bond could be sharpened
by a well-attended funeral, and the guilds used members'
funerals to display fraternal unity. A sombre cortege,
carefully marshalled, and bearing fraternal regalia, could
add drama and heighten a sense of unity and reciprocal
obligation. Thus the collectivity and mutuality of popular

custom was reflected and strengthened within the more tightly structured culture of association.

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Friendly societies perpetuated many of the funerary customs of the guilds, further developing and refining the ethos of shared obligation at death as a mark of fraternal fellowship; yet, by a strange paradox, there was a discernable trend in the opposite direction. Middle-class influence, and the drive to protect funds, could also lead to exclusivity and stress on the self.

Although, as historians have claimed, friendly societies tended to be most prolific in industrial regions, they were also popular in rural areas, and many country people could rely on the help in bereavement which such associations could provide. In Cumbria records show that many friendly societies were in existence in the late eighteenth century, and were broadly scattered across the county, although there were fewer in the sparsely populated central area and heavy concentrations in some of the larger market towns, and on the industrial west coast.

FIGURE 1. THE INDEPENDENT LOCAL FRIENDLY SOCIETIES OF WESTMORLAND

Name of Society	Meeting Place	Date Established
Friendly Society	Kings Head, Appleby	1791
Most Honourable Society	Bowness	1804
Friendly Society	Swan Inn, Brough	1810
Amicable Society	School House, Burton-in-Kendal	1794, 1814
Amicable Society	Kendal	1794,1807
Ancient Friendly Society	Lowthers Arms, Kendal	1799, 1805
Female Society	Elephant Inn, Kendal	1794
Free Society	Kendal	1794
Friendly Society	Kendal	1794, 1803
Friendly Society	Crown Inn, Kendal	1794
Friendly Society	Angel Inn, Kendal	1794
Friendly Society	Golden Lion Inn, Kendal	1816
Minerva Society	Black Swan Inn, Kendal	1798
Most Honourable Society	Golden Fleece, Kendal	1794, 1805
Unanimous Society	Royal Oak Inn, Kendal	1795, 1805
Female Union or Friendly Society	Kings Head, Kendal	1794
Union Society	Globe Inn, Kendal	1794
New Union Society	Ship Inn, Kendal	1796
Amicable Society	Kirkby Lonsdale	1794,1801,1806, 1817
Kirkby Lonsdale Female Society	Kirkby Lonsdale	1809
Union Society	Kirkby Lonsdale	1794, 1810
New Union Society	Kirkby Lonsdale	1817, 1818
Milnthorpe Female Society	Milnethorpe	1802
Friendly Society of Linen Weavers	Milnethorpe	1808
Twine Spinners Friendly Society	Milnethorpe	1805
Milnethorpe Friendly Society	Cross Keys Inn, Milnethorpe	1826, 1843
Westward Loyal Provident Society	Morland School Room, Morland	1849

Taken from The Official Return of the Registrar, John Tidd Pratt, 1857. Where two dates are shown, the club was dissolved and reformed. Returns are unreliable, as many societies did not comply with government requests for information.

FIGURE 2. THE INDEPENDENT LOCAL FRIENDLY SOCIETIES OF CUMBERLAND

Name of Society	Place	Date Established
Friendly Male Society	Great Broughton	1834
Friendly Society	Bank Hall	1834
Sick and Burial Society	Carlisle	1833
Friendly Society	Cockermouth	1833
Gardening Society	As Above	1834
Friendly Society	Garrigill-gate	1833
Friendly Society	Lamplugh	1832
Amicable Society	Longtown	1831
Unanimous Seafaring	Maryport	1833
Tradesmans Society	As Above	1833
Shipwrights Society	As Above	1834
Amnity Society	Whitehaven	1824
Honourable Society	Workington	1833

Taken from The Official Returns of the Registrar, 1842. Returns are unreliable, as many societies did not comply with government requests for information.

In his eighteenth-century study of the nation's poor,
Sir Frederick Eden recorded that one of the earliest
associations to be founded in Cumbria was in 1766 at Corby.
In 1797 he was reporting six friendly societies in
Carlisle, the earliest of which dated back to 1772. Each
had on average 160 members, and one society was exclusively
female.[185] Whitehaven and the surrounding area boasted at
least seventeen societies in this period, two of them
female, most instituted in the 1780's.[186] In 1794 nine
associations were begun in the market town of Kendal, among
them two female societies. By 1857 an official return for
Westmorland could count at least twenty-seven local
societies, most founded in the final decade of the
eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth.
Official returns were notoriously unreliable, however, as
many clubs failed to comply with government requests for
information, and official figures probably grossly
underestimate actual membership.[187] (See figure 1).

The proliferation of these mutual associations derives
in part from the fact that whereas the guilds had been
trade-specific, most friendly societies opened their doors
to a broad spectrum of occupations. True, single-trade and
single-industry clubs were not uncommon in the more
populated areas. The mining and seafaring west-coast, and
the market town of Kendal, for example, boasted several
such societies. Colliers, shipwrights and mariners
associations were all based in west Cumberland. In 1795 in

[185] F.M. Eden, The State of the Poor, 1, 618.

[186] The Cumberland Friendly Societies Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[187] WQR/SFBA. List of the Friendly Societies in the County of
Westmorland, 1857.

Kendal there were two woolcombers clubs, two for weavers, one for builders, and two societies of shearmen dyers.[188] But on the whole friendly societies were not the strongholds of skilled craftsmen which early scholarship has claimed.[189]

Extant membership lists reveal that unskilled as well as skilled workers joined such associations, and that many were agricultural workers. Outside the larger towns and industrial villages, and in Cumbria generally, the ubiquitous association included workers of all types. In the village of Lamplugh, a community fairly typical of rural Cumbria, most members of the village society were small farmers, but there was also a miller, three forgemen and the licensee of a public house.[190] The club at Corby consisted of "mechanics, labourers and small farmers".[191] The New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale, initiated in

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[188] F.M. Eden, The State of the Poor, III, 766.

[189] Research on Welsh societies has revealed that in Glamorgan membership included workers from a wide variety of occupations. Dorothy Jones, "Did Friendly Societies Matter? A Study of Friendly Society Membership in Glamorgan 1794-1910," 326-350. Similarly, David Neave has shown that farm servants in the East Riding of Yorkshire were often members of societies, and, contrary to what was initially believed, they could well afford to pay the entrance fees and monthly subscriptions. He claims, with other scholars, that in the north generally labourers had more security than their counterparts in the south as they were hired for set periods of tenure, and the proximity of industry meant that wages were higher. Particularly in the north, then, farm labourers were just as likely to be members of societies as craftsmen, and this goes a long way to explaining their popularity in the rural north. Neave has also disputed the claim, made by the Royal Commission of 1861, that in the north of England where farm labourers "lived in" that the friendly societies were not so important. David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside, 70. Horn contends they were not numerically significant in the "far north." Unfortunately she does not define this vague geographical term. Pamela Horn, The Changing Countryside in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales, (London: Athlone Press, 1984), 185.

[190] R.F. Dickenson, "The Friendly Society of Lamplugh," C.W.A.A.S. 66 (1966): 418-424, 423.

[191] F.M. Eden, The State of the Poor, 1, 618.

1817, comprised a large majority of weavers and husbandmen, and there were also several tanners, cordwainers and joiners. There was in addition one schoolmaster, one hatter, two tailors, one druggist and a chairmaker. [192]

It is clear,then, that such associations were not only a commonplace of Cumbrian life, they drew in broad spectrum of the population. Nor were these workers necessarily of the "labour aristocracy." The most important factor determining membership was probably regularity of employment. Thus they aspired to provide for a much wider cross-section of society the funeral benefits originally provided by the guilds.

In the same manner as the guilds, friendly societies might also use funeral ritual to articulate and strengthen their own concept of brotherly or sisterly collectivism. Certainly, friendly societies were as keen to ensure adherence to strict protocol in the conducting of funerals as were the guilds, and again one senses the influence of popular notions of dignity in death combined with fraternal etiquette. The Charity Stock of Kirkby Stephen was typical in aiming to organise for its members "a decent Burial at ...Death." [193]

In order to do this societies implemented measures similar to those of the guilds: they demanded attendance of all who might be reasonably expected to get to the funeral and once again the stewards, wardens and officers were

[192] WQR/SFB. The Return of Sickness and Mortality of the New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale, 1835-1839.

[193] WQR/SFB. "Articles to be Observed and Kept by the Members of the Charity Stock of Kirkby Stephen," (1792). The rules and procedures of most societies were fairly similar, many societies framing their constitutions in identical language which they had obviously borrowed from each other, and reminiscent of that of the guilds.

charged with giving notice to all the members to attend the funeral on pain of fine for neglect of duty. In Keswick, for example, members of the New Friendly Society living within four miles of town were required to attend a funeral if they could "conveniently do so." All officers were required to attend.[194]

But simple attendance was not sufficient in itself. The deportment of those forming the cortege was governed by a strict code of conduct. The rules of the Charity Stock stipulated that if burial was to take place at the local church, members were to meet in the room at the house at the hour appointed, and to "walk in order before the corpse to church."[195] The members of the Amicable Society of Cockermouth were required to

> walk in procession two and two before the corpse
> to the place of interment, which shall be carried
> shoulder height by four members, who shall take
> the same by rotation...there shall be eight pall
> bearers, who are to take the same by rotation,
> who with the president, stewards and clerk, shall
> have crape hat bands, and the officers shall walk
> before the procession.[196]

Sobriety was an essential condition of a "decent" funeral here. Any one who turned up at a funeral intoxicated was to be fined.

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[194] "Orders of the New Friendly Society," in Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[195] WQR/SFB.

[196] D/Cu. "The Articles of the Amicable Society of Cockermouth."

The insistence on decorum by this particular society was paralleled by the strictures put forth by another club in the same town. The Friendly Society also stressed appropriate demeanour and the use of mourning attire. The funeral of a member was to be

decent, according to the custom of Cockermouth; the president to walk before the corpse, with the staff in mourning, the clerk, stewards, and the first five members in rotation to the stewards, to support the poll [sic], if requested, depute, or each fine One Shilling; to have each hat bands and gloves, at the society's expense, to be lodged in the box, if convenient. [197]

For country members being brought to town for burial or for town members being buried out of town, societies only participated in that part of the funeral taking place within town boundaries. In the former case, members were to meet the coffin at the entrance to the town and accompany it thereafter to the place of interment. In the latter situation, members were to attend the funeral and then accompany the coffin "to a convenient distance" out of town.

When a death of a member occurred at a great distance, and attendance was impractical, it was common for societies to require that a death certificate, issued by the society, be signed by a minister and two churchwardens in the parish of burial to the effect that the funeral of their brother had been "decent and becoming a Christian". Even in absentia, the societies desired to know that the burial accorded with commonly-held standards.

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[197] D/Cu. "The Articles of the Friendly Society of Cockermouth."

Clearly, common notions of decency were held in the highest esteem: the influence of popular custom can be discerned in the importance attached to funeral attendance, the bearing of the coffin, the use of the pall, and the sombre cortege. Yet it could be argued that to an extent the societies' own values were superimposed on those of the broader community. Sobriety does not seem to have been a requirement in non-fraternal funerals, for example; indeed, it is difficult to see how this could have been enforced given the liberal amounts of alcohol freely available prior to the "lifting." Becoming a member of an association meant bowing to the dictates of the collective will, and a public cortege was an ideal venue for enforcing compliance. Clearly, the culture of association could impose conditions of membership more rigorous than those of the broader community.

To ensure that a coffin could be purchased, and burial fees and refreshment costs met, the societies granted monetary gifts to the bereaved in much the same fashion as the guilds.[198] There was a great deal of individual variation in the way clubs funded funerals. In some cases they would rely on a levy at the time of death, only having recourse to general funds in specific circumstances. The Royal Union Society of Whitehaven frequently imposed a levy, only taking money from the box when general funds exceeded one hundred pounds. It also increased the death benefit from six to eight pounds and five shillings when

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[198] Death benefits were usually in excess of the costs of a single interment, which generally ranged between one and three pounds in the mid-nineteenth century. (See Account Books of Mr. Wren of Newby Bridge, Appendix 2.) As discussed below, the monies appear to have been intended to cover the burial of both member and spouse, although some widows probably used the surplus as a financial cushion in the difficult months immediately after bereavement.

there were more than eighty pounds in the box.[199] Some
clubs imposed a levy whose value was determined by the
amount held in the box at the time, the general fund being
used to make up the difference. The Royal Oak Society of
Whitehaven imposed a one shilling "fine" on members when
the fund was less than thirty pounds, a sixpenny fine when
it was between thirty and fifty, and only waived the fine
when the general fund exceeded fifty pounds.[200]

Generally, though, benefits were paid directly from
existing funds. Typically, "box" money accrued through
standard admission fees and regular donations. The former
ranged from one to as much as ten shillings in Cumbria, but
was normally the same for each member of the same society.
The Charity Stock was unusual in having graded admission
fees, apparently to stimulate initial interest. It asked a
shilling from the first forty men to sign up, two shillings
for the next twenty, three shillings for the next twenty
and above that four shillings. [201]

Monthly subscriptions varied from a few pence to two
shillings, but were more commonly around a shilling.[202]
Although standard donations were more usual, some clubs
seem to have accepted whatever a member could afford to

[199] "Orders of the Royal Union Society," in Cumberland Friendly
Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[200] "Rules of the Royal Oak Society, Whitehaven," in Cumberland
Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[201] WQR/SFB.

[202] Wage rates for ordinary agricultural labourers were higher in
Cumberland and Westmorland than the southern counties. In 1824, for
example, the average weekly wage for men in Cumberland was twelve and
sixpence, and in Westmorland twelve and threepence. This contrasts with
Wiltshire at seven shillings, and Dorset at six and ninepence. R.E.
Prothero, English Farming Past and Present in J. Marshall and K.
Walton, The Lake Counties, 339. David Neave has commented on the higher
wages of agricultural labourers in Yorkshire, which permitted many to
join friendly societies. (see note 36 above).

pay.[203] It appears that some of the members of the Royal
Union Society of Cartmel were particularly affluent, for
regular subscriptions here ranged from one shilling to ten
shillings and sixpence.[204]

Friendly societies were more sophisticated than the
guilds had been in financing funerals. Most worked from
tables - albeit fairly inaccurate as we shall see - in
order to set fixed rates of benefit relative to
contributions. Sickness as well as death benefits were
paid out, and the societies' rules stipulated that after a
member had paid in subscriptions for a prescribed period
(commonly twelve or eighteen months,) s/he should be
eligible for full benefits. Many societies refer to such
members as "free members" and they note the date at which
they became "free." Rules usually stipulated that the
funeral benefit would be paid out to the remaining spouse,
or else to the heirs or "friends" responsible for the
funeral costs. On average the benefit was around five or
six pounds for a member, but the range could be great. The
highest benefits on record in Cumbria were those paid out
by the Amicable Society of Whitehaven, and the least by the
Female Love and Unity Society also of that town, benefits
being respectively fifteen and two pounds.[205]

For the funeral of a member's spouse less was paid,
and it was usual for a male member who outlived his wife to
receive a proportion of that allowed for his own funeral in

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[203] In these clubs, benefits appeared to vary relative to the rate
of individual subscription. One assumes that bookkeeping in such clubs
was a complex business!

[204] WDSo/220A2567. The Account Book of the Royal Union Society,
1841. In many societies based in the towns, country members were
permitted to pay quarterly rather than monthly.

[205] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

order to bury her, the remainder to be paid out at his own death. The Milnthorpe society was a case in point. A male member of this society was entitled to seven pounds burial money for his own funeral, which could be claimed either by his widow or the person responsible for organising the funeral. If his wife predeceased him, three pounds was payable, but this amount would be subsequently subtracted from the member's own benefit, and thus only four pounds would then be available for his own funeral. No claim could be made for subsequent wives.[206]

In the town of Keswick the rate of benefit was dependent upon the duration of an individual membership. The New Society of Keswick granted a death benefit of four pounds to members after one year in the society, rising to five pounds after three years. A standard two pounds was payable for a wife.[207]

Benefits were sometimes not needed for the funeral itself, and in this case would go to a named beneficiary. Members of the Charity Stock were allowed, at death, three pounds three shillings either to be paid for burial, or, if not needed, to go to the widow and children, or any person named in the will. If the death occurred four days into the week, then the whole week's sickness benefit, an additional four shillings, would also be paid to the survivor, to supplement the funeral money. The rules stipulated that suicides and lunatics were excluded, and

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[206] WQR/SFB."Rules of the Milnthorpe Friendly Society," (1832). This last stipulation was fairly general, although there were a few clubs that would insure a second wife for an increased subscription rate.

[207] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

all societies made a similar proviso regarding the former. A person who took his life "by his own hand" was not looked upon with sympathy, at least insofar as defraying the costs of his funeral was concerned.[208]

In some clubs funds were replenished by an enforced collection after a death. In the case of the Charity Stock all members were required to pay an extra sixpence to the fund on the first quarterly night after the death of a member, and a fine of fourpence each was applied to anyone who failed to do so.[209] The Royal Union Society at Cartmel followed a similar procedure. At the death of James Kellet in 1843, members made additional donations to the box of one shilling between July and January of the following year, until an amount totalling three pounds fourteen shillings was raised. It appears that each member paid in his shilling if and when he could afford it, and that some members made a slightly larger contribution.[210] For the funeral of a member's wife, less was given, reflecting the lesser benefit granted. Members of the Royal Union Society made donations of sixpence per member on the death of John Fox's wife in 1846.[211]

For members who had not become "free" before death, a levy was imposed, and thus benefits were dependent more on the total membership of the club than on any other single factor. The Seamens society of Whitehaven imposed a levy of sixpence per member supplemented by one shilling paid from the box for anyone dying before becoming fully

[208] WQR/SFB.

[209] WQR/SFB.

[210] WDSo/220A2567. Account Book of the Royal Union Society, 1841.

[211] WDSo/220A2567.

eligible. The Amicable society of that town imposed a two-shilling levy, and a shilling levy for a member's wife.[212]

Societies were fairly tolerant of a certain amount of debt; no doubt well aware of the precarious financial situation of many families, and allowances were made for those who fell on hard times. Eventually members who fell into arrears would be excluded, but it was not uncommon for a prolonged period to elapse before this happened. The Agreeable Society at Hensingham allowed five months of debt to accrue. The Love and Unity Society of Whitehaven allowed six months of non-payment of dues before it expelled members. [213]

Female societies seem to have been managed in much the same way as the male clubs, although subscriptions and benefits were generally lower. However, this was not always the case. The female society at Wigton paid five pounds for a member's funeral, and two pounds for the death of a first husband. Widows received two pounds on the death of a child, and unmarried members received two pounds on the death of a brother or father. [214]

As the foregoing discussion has shown, the societies had a great deal of autonomy and each organised their funds as they saw fit. Subscriptions varied, as did benefits.

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[212] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1774-1792.

[213] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1774-1792. Early clubs kept subscriptions in a box which commonly had one or more locks and three or more keys held by the officers - hence the term "box club" as a common term for friendly societies. Over time, increasing concerns with security led to the regular deposit of funds into savings banks or the Bank of England.

[214] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1774-1792. Females occupied official positions and conducted affairs in the same way as their male counterparts in the male-only societies, usually with stipulations that if no suitable woman could be found for a specific post, a male might undertake the position.

Yet the principles upon which clubs were organised were broadly similar. All societies aimed to ensure each member and spouse sufficient funds to purchase a "decent" burial, and sought to provide protection for their members in case of sickness.

This type of aid at death was qualitatively different from the type of assistance provided by the community, which had tended to rely on gifts in kind and voluntary donations, and it was a refinement of the system of advance donations made to the "box" pioneered by the earlier guilds. By paying compulsory entrance fees and regular subscriptions which granted eligibility for pre-determined benefits, members were anticipating their own demise. No longer simply reliant on the goodwill of community to ameliorate life's crises, they were taking deliberate steps to minimize the impact of illness and death, not only upon others, but upon themselves.

All societies were concerned to remain efficient and solvent. Yet many did not. One village often had several clubs, all of them unstable. Sir F.M.Eden's national study of the poor which looked in some depth at the societies, pointed to the problems experienced by many clubs in Cumbria, and elsewhere. He cited a club established in 1773 in Carlisle, with 230 members, which had had stationary funds for some time because of increasing sickness, and was expected to decline soon. This association, he claimed, was typical of many.[215]

There often existed, on the part of members and managers, a naive understanding of the principles governing the distinct stages of growth to maturity of their

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[215] Eden, The State of the Poor, 1, 619.

organisations. The lifecycle of the club at Corby shows how, over a period of apparently successful years, societies could be lulled into a false sense of security. Each member of this society paid in sixpence every six weeks. For the first ten years the average number of members was forty, growing to seventy-five two decades later. Although regular accounts were not kept, Eden estimated that annual payments to the box must have been over thirteen pounds, which would amount to a total of over four hundred pounds in thirty years. The average number of deaths was one every three years.[216] The problem arising out of this rapid increase in funds was that it tended to give an overly optimistic impression of the society's financial condition. In its youth the club comprised young members whose health and fitness made small demands on resources. As clubs such as this one began to age, however, their liabilities increased greatly, often outstripping assets, and it became apparent, all too late, that the subscription rates had been set far too low to cope with demands in later years. Associations approaching fifty or sixty years of age thus often got into severe difficulties.[217]

A major problem for such clubs was that actuarial expertise was poorly developed, and raw data lacking. One

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[216] Eden, The State of the Poor, I, 618-619.

[217] Another example is The New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale, established in 1817. The return showing rates of sickness and mortality submitted to the Clerk of the Peace of Westmorland, shows that between 1835 and 1839, 187 weeks sick pay had been claimed, over half of the ninety-five members making a claim. In addition, of five members who ultimately died, three had lengthy illnesses immediately prior to death, totalling just under eighty four weeks. This was clearly a severe drain on the club's finances. WQR/SFB.The Accounts of the New Union Society, 1835-1839.

of the first actuaries to devise a table from which to work out life expectancies relative to subscriptions and benefits was one Joseph Milne who used data for the years 1779-1787 supplied by a Dr. Heysham of Carlisle. The data were unreliable, in fact the Carlisle Life Table was criticised at the time as "a wonderful instance of the ingenuity of an actuary in deducing a generally-accepted law of mortality from the most meagre data".[218]

Consequently, in the early years of the nineteenth century the government took steps to improve matters. Efforts were made to make life tables more accurate and to promote actuarial competency, and societies were encouraged to submit their rules to the quarter sessions for approval. In 1846 the Treasury took over this function. Ironically, the process of registration and the submission of society rules for official sanction has generated documentation which goes some way to indicating how short the life expectancy of many of these associations actually were. None of the Cumberland societies established in the late eighteenth century show up in the official returns of the mid-nineteenth century. (See figure 2.) This may in part be due to the fact that registration was not compulsory, but financial failure may have well been a factor, especially for the smaller clubs.[219]

It was the high failure rate of many of these early societies which prompted some of the more affluent to become directly involved with them, either as honorary members or as initiators and managers, having full control.

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[218] A. Kirkwood, _Lectures on Insurance and Industrial Law_, in R.G.Garnett, _A Century of Co-operative Insurance_, 71.

[219] Nationally, there was a reluctance to register, and thus official returns probably grossly underestimate the total number of members.

Honorary members were not entitled to benefits; they were also exempt from the usual fines and services to which regular members were subject. They could, however, be asked to sit on the executive occasionally when it was deemed that their knowledge on some pressing issue was required. The Cartmel society had a number of honorary members and this may well explain the more sophisticated management of its funds, also the substantial donations frequently made.

Clubs run entirely by the middle classes for the benefit of the less well-off were known as the "county societies" and were set up by members of the local gentry or clergy. County societies, their initiators hoped, with their more educated managers, would be more efficiently run and would be more likely to succeed. Altruism alone was not the only motive for middle-class involvement. There was, in addition, a more wide-ranging political reason for their interest in the collective institutions of working men and women. Trades Unions were illegal until 1824, and gatherings of workers, no matter how ostensibly non-political, were seen as potentially subversive combinations and were watched carefully. The constitution of the Burton-in-Kendal society, in common with many other societies, reassured those who might be inclined to suspect its motives that it would not concern itself with matters of state.[220]

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[220] WDSO/44. "The Rules of the Burton-in-Kendal Friendly Society."

FIGURE 3. TABLE OF CONTRIBUTIONS AND BENEFITS, BROUGHTON-IN-FURNESS FRIENDLY SOCIETY, 1864.

Age of admission	Initiation fee		Contributions	Additional Annual Subscriptions		Benefits	
	£. s. d.			Age	To Pay	In sickness	at Death
18 to 24	0	5 0	Fourpence half-penny per week.	30 to 32	4s. 0d.	First 52	Member £6
24 to 27	0	7 6		32 to 33	4 6	weeks of	
27 to 30	1	10 0		33 to 34	5 3	sickness to	
30 to 32	0	15 0		34 to 35	6 4	receive 8s.	Member's
32 to 36	1	0 0		35 to 36	7 6	per week	wife £3
						Next 26	
						weeks 4s.	
						per week.	
						Remainder	
						of	
						sickness,	
						2s.per	
						week.	

This was a `County Society` and included several honorary members who made donations but did not draw benefits.

There was also a more immediate reason for middle-class involvement in these plebeian associations. In many areas indigent people were not permitted to draw simultaneously upon the poor rate and friendly society benefits, and any scheme which promised to reduce pressure on the poor rate naturally had the backing of local worthies.[221] Whatever was seen as self-help, was deemed a laudable goal.

Probably the best-known proponent of friendly societies in Cumbria was John Christian Curwen. The leading industrialist of west Cumberland, he was a zealous champion of social welfare and keen proponent of self-help. He was extremely influential in promoting, managing and funding numerous social insurance schemes for his workers and membership of such organisations was compulsory. Virtually all of the many friendly societies in the Workington area were under his control. Although they did not do as well as he had initially hoped, he was satisfied that they did much to relieve pressure on the parish. In fact he was optimistic that a national system of welfare based on the friendly societies would do much to promote self-reliance among the poor and he tried to encourage involvement from those in the higher ranks of society. In 1808 he published a paper in which he stated:

> The experience of nearly thirty years, has strengthened and confirmed me in the opinion that a system of friendly societies established as a general resource in every parish would go a great way to supersede the necessity of parochial relief.[222]

[221] David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside, 20.

[222] From the "Report of Workington Agricultural Society (1811)," in Edward Hughes, North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century 2,

Curwen made substantial personal contributions to the
societies within his orbit. He funded a society of sailors
and colliers at Harrington, for example, donating three
pounds for every ten pounds collected by the society. [223]
He also contributed at a similar rate to the Ewanrigg
Colliery Society and the Coal-miners Society.[224] He and his
wife both donated to the Friendly Society of Workington, to
which other wealthy patrons also subscribed.[225] The
Sisterly Society, an exclusively female association, was
initiated in 1793 under the patronage of Mrs. Curwen. A
committee of twelve elected members, two stewardesses and a
secretary ran it, and the membership was 225. Mr Curwen
had contributed fifty pounds to this society by 1796, and
together with subscriptions, donations from other wealthy
patrons and interest in money invested, and in the care of
Mrs. Curwen, the fund was in excess of 280 pounds in
1796.[226]

The flip side of generous funding was the potential
for social control which such patronage could introduce.
Members of the Sisterly Society were "obliged to attend"
monthly meetings, for example. And under the rules set by
the Harrington society if any members worked twelve days

Cumberland and Westmorland, 1700-1830 (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1965), 182.

[223] Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 80.

[224] Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 104.

[225] This seems to have been a society which was mainly concerned to
provide for sickness, rather than death. The former benefits were quite
high, but funeral payments were small - two pounds two shillings only
for "indigent members", as compared with five pounds funeral benefit
offered by the Harrington Society. Cumberland Friendly Society Rules
and Orders, 1775-1792.

[226] Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 102.

for another master, they were excluded from benefit.[227] An extant ledger giving detailed accounts of the membership of three societies - the Colliery, the Friendly and the Sisterly - is illuminating in this regard. Each member's name was entered along with subscriptions to each club, and there was also a column for house rent. This ledger was clearly an attempt to give a profile of the financial obligations of the memberships of selected friendly societies in the town, obviously a powerful tool in the hands of an employer.[228]

Curwen's brand of paternalism extended to improving the morals of his employees and was reflected in many of the society rules. The constitutions of virtually all of the societies under his influence waxed lyrical on the religious roots of good fellowship, and unlike societies founded by working people themselves, which almost invariably met in the local public house where ale constituted an important part of the evening's entertainment,[229] Curwen's societies abstained from alcohol.[230] The alleviation of distress then, was only one of the purposes of friendly society membership, as Curwen saw it.[231]

[227] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[228] D/Cu. Subscription book relating to Colliers, Friendly and Sisterly Societies, 1797-1846.

[229] Typical of the majority of male-only clubs, the female club at Wigton likewise met in an ale-house. Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1774-1792. Eden tells us that "the landlady ... is bound under the penalty of 2s. 6d. to find them good ale". Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 104.

[230] The Royal Union of Whitehaven was typical of the dozen or so associations in this town in demanding five shillings from anyone "attempting to remove this Society to a public house". Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[231] Eden observed, approvingly, that friendly society members were "in general, comparatively cleanly, orderly and sober, and consequently

Few employers were as influential in the friendly society movement as Curwen. Most societies run by the middle classes were fairly small, yet they express a similar concern to encourage self-help, especially with regard to funeral provision. The Burton-in-Kendal Society, established in 1828, following the collapse of an earlier society, was initiated and closely supervised by some of the more respectable members of that community. The Lancaster Gazette approved of its inauguration, and spoke of "a most respectable body of persons" being instrumental it its initiation. They were, in fact, the Rev. Bryan Waller, James Rigg, coach proprietor, and Thomas Atkinson, a manufacturer. All were "substantial householders" and the newspaper praised the "zealous exertions of the last named gentleman," who, as its president, had worked hard on its behalf. The society was also "honoured with the presence of a number of other respectable persons." [232]

The middle-class ethos of this society was reflected in a concern to promote temperance and also to spare the public coffers. As with the Curwen-run societies, meetings were at the school rather than the public house, and although funerary items such as hatbands, gloves and a shroud, were provided in the same manner as many other clubs, it is significant that the rules specifically stated that such articles were provided so that there would be "no

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happy and good members of society." Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 543.

[232] Lancaster Gazette, June 7, 1828, in The Holme and District Local History Society's The South Westmorland News, 1827-1831, 1992. I am indebted to the members of the Holme and District Local History Society for drawing my attention to this article.

expense to the township."[233]   Clearly, a flourishing
society would lessen recourse to the public purse. This
had benefits for the more affluent citizens to whom it fell
to maintain it.[234]

Subtle differences in attitudes to funeral
organisation also suggest middle-class priorities at work.
In contrast to the societies which equate dignity in death
with the respectful demeanour of the mourners, their
adherence to local custom, and the provision of a pall, it
was important to this society that a member be buried in a
"decent manner as to his office." In the case of a funeral
taking place for a member living at a distance, a
certificate had to be produced stating that the funeral had
been "becoming of one of his/her station in life". Here
"decency" did not connote adherence to established custom,
nor did it imply a ritual befitting a Christian, but rather
it signified an adherence to behaviour considered fitting
for a specific social rank.

It is perhaps unsurprising that at least some of the
societies run by local worthies appear to be infused with
bourgeois ideals of respectability, self-help and social
status. Yet societies run by the lower classes themselves
could also exhibit characteristics which would seem to
contradict the commitment to collectivity and mutuality in
which they had their roots.

Death, of course, was a certainty for each individual
society member, but where deaths happened too frequently in
any particular club, or where sickness took too heavy a

[233] WDSO/44. "The Burton-in-Kendal Society Rules."

[234] The president and stewards of the New Union Society of Kirkby
Lonsdale were instructed to ensure that the deceased was buried "in a
decent manner, free of all parish dues whatsoever." WQR/SFB. "The Rules
of the New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale."

toll on funds, it could pose a serious threat to the viability of the association. Most clubs took precautions to try to ensure that this did not happen too frequently. They did this by applying certain restrictions to membership.

Good health was usually a stated requirement of eligibility. Barred from the Love and Unity Society of Whitehaven were persons having "Gout, Rheumatism, White Swelling, Rupture, Venereal Disease...."[235] The rules for the Union Club of Kirkby Lonsdale stated that no one who had not had the small pox would be allowed to join. And as death benefits also extended to spouses, most societies also insisted on the good health of wives.[236]

In fact, women were felt to be a greater potential drain on the club's finances than men because of childbearing risks, and although the death benefit was paid out for women dying in childbed, most societies wanted to absolve themselves from financial liability in cases of illnesses related to pregnancy. This was a major factor in the refusal of clubs to admit women members, and thus women-only societies were sometimes formed. These "female" societies, however, although granting death benefit, often - but not always - refused sickness benefits on precisely the same grounds.[237]

Health was closely linked to age, and virtually all clubs set an upper age limit. As younger men and women were usually stronger and healthier they were favoured as their demands on the club's funds were considered to be,

[235] Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

[236] WQR/SFB. "The Orders of the Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale."

[237] The Sisterly Society of Whitehaven did pay benefits for childbirth itself. D/Cu. Rules of the Sisterly Society of Whitehaven.

and in fact were, less. The Charity Stock club of Kirkby Stephen was typical of most in requiring prospective members to be under forty years of age.[238] Other clubs disallowed members over thirty-five, and occasionally over thirty. Fines and even expulsion were imposed on members who lied about their age.

It was also common for societies to restrict membership to those in the "safer" occupations. The Burton-in-Kendal society refused to admit anyone who followed any form of "pernicious employment." This included bailiffs, bailiffs' followers, soldiers, seamen, watchmen, miners, colliers, and men who were currently serving in the militia. [239] The Rules of the Amicable Society in Cockermouth stated:

> if any member shall serve as a miner, or collier,
> for more than six months after his entrance to
> this society, he shall be excluded; and no miner
> or collier shall be admitted to this society.[240]

Thus, high risk workers, as women, were forced to set up societies of their own.[241]

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[238] WQR/SFB. The only society not to impose an age restriction was the New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale. In fact its official return stated that it was impossible to establish the ages of its members. WQR/SFB. Official Return of the New Union Society, Kirkby Lonsdale. (n.d.)

[239] WDSO/44. "The Articles of the Burton-in-Kendal Friendly Society," (1828). It was common for men serving in the militia to be barred from friendly societies. An Act of Parliament passed in 1853 ensured that they would be granted a resumption of benefits when they finished their period of service.

[240] D/Cu. "The Rules of the Amicable Society, Cockermouth." (n.d.)

[241] Weekly subscriptions to the Ewanrigg Colliers Society were very high at one shilling a week, but despite this rate of contribution, the high sickness and accident rate of the miners meant that funds were constantly drawn on, and on January 1 1796 only fifteen pounds five pence was in the fund. Accounts of the Ewanrigg Colliers Society. Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792.

The aforementioned restrictions to membership reflected the interest of the societies in avoiding having to pay out sickness and funeral benefits to people they considered to be at above average risk either through dangerous work, general unhealthiness, advanced age, or a tendency to gender-specific ailments. Thus, although priding themselves on mutuality, such clubs were discriminating in the way in which they directed it. In their desire to minimise risk they deliberately kept out those who most needed help.

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This chapter has examined the ways in which associations of working people, predominantly male, sought to provide aid to members and their families in the event of death and bereavement. In providing death benefits and arranging funerals the friendly societies of Cumbria were adhering to fraternal principles of mutual assistance which had earlier found expression in medieval associations. The trade and craft guilds had given high priority to funeral organising and funding; indeed, the religious guilds had been founded specifically for funerary purposes.

Funerary customs of the guild and friendly society were reminiscent of the practises to be found in the community generally; for example, the stipulation that one representative of each household should attend, the emphasis on the covering the coffin with a "decent cloth," the bearing of the coffin by comrades, and the importance of post-burial refreshment. In fact, as in rural society generally, the social aspect of associational culture was difficult to separate from the economic. The standard

practise of partaking of funerary refreshment was
originally an opportunity to make a personal contribution
to help defray expenses, a common feature of other public
events in the community. And in holding their regular
meetings in the local public house where dues would be
paid, many societies were perpetuating the strong
connection between sociability and mutuality common in the
rural environment.[242]

But in contrast to village society, where "decency"
had its roots in an eclectic mixture of folk beliefs, some
drawn from orthodox religion, some not, the associations
placed a greater stress on established doctrine. The
principles which informed the guilds and the friendly
societies drew in part on Biblical precedents. Attendance
at fraternity funerals was regarded as a Christian duty, an
obligation which all members were expected to acknowledge.
Religious tenets also dictated that brothers and sisters
were obligated to offer financial assistance.

But if society funerals reflected spiritual roots at
variance with those of popular death culture generally,
common notions of dignity in death were equally important
in forging a collective identity. And funerals were a very
public way of articulating it. Not only did pageantry lend
a degree of stateliness to the funerals of ordinary people,
banners and distinctive regalia signalled a sense of pride
in association, and strengthened solidarity.

The paradox of the friendly societies was that while
they aimed at mutual dependence and valued collectivity,

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[242] Eden observed that communal events where mutual aid would be
provided in the context of sociability were very common in Cumbria in
the late eighteenth century, and he believed it was this spirit of
neighbourly generosity which informed the early friendly societies.
Eden, The State of the Poor, 2, 58.

the ideological underpinnings of friendly societies generally, and that the subject is deserving of more historical attention than it has hitherto received.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM COMMON GROUND TO PRIVATE PROPERTY

THE BURIAL ACTS IN CUMBRIA

Cemetery monuments made claim on the future in the _physical_ world: staking out a larger place than required; sited over the body itself - protected by railings, stonework, or other forms of territorial marking; and surmounted by an impressive and identifiable monument. The nineteenth-century tomb was intended as a permanent statement of worldly achievement and stature.[243]

A common interment is a grave dug ten feet, fifteen or twenty feet deep and the bodies are put in one after another. There will be about eight adult persons in that grave, and they will finish off the top with a layer of four children so there may be twelve or sixteen people in one grave...People talk about pit burials, that is what are called common interments.[244]

Rather than being a matter of purely aesthetic concern, style helps mark important disjunctions in social relations, political practise, and cultural ideals...[245]

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[243] Ruth Richardson, _Death, Dissection and the Destitute,_ 273.

[244] Evidence before the Cohen Committee (1933), in Wilson and Levy, _Burial Reform_, 28.

[245] Sharon Strocchia, _Death and Ritual,_ 53.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for most people in rural Cumbria, death was a community affair. The participation of the neighbourhood in various aspects of death and funerary preparation and ultimately a large attendance at the funeral itself,represented the community's acknowledgement of an unspoken commitment to be of assistance to the bereaved, and was typical of other forms of reciprocal aid commonly rendered in the event of personal crisis. Mutuality was a strategy for survival, and was the principle which underpinned the voluntary associations which complemented in a more structured way what the village community offered on a casual basis.

Mutuality, as expressed through the rituals of death, not only benefited the individual, it could also give tangible expression to a sense of collective identity based on an acknowledgment of customs held in common. The sequence of practices which commonly accompanied death was intended to ensure "decency", in accordance with prevailing social mores. But collectivity was also strengthened by the social nature of the rituals themselves. Conviviality at the funeral house provided a forum for the cultivation and expression of fraternal cooperation and goodwill, whereas the more dignified street ritual could affirm a sense of self-respect and pride in association. For villagers and society members alike, mortuary rituals for the death of a comrade drew survivors together in acknowledgement of a common interest, and provided the opportunity for a public expression of solidarity.

But there were also pressures which worked against collectivism, and these were more apparent in the organised mutuality of the guilds and friendly societies. Gestures of goodwill shown by neighbours, which might consist of

expressing concern or sympathy, of rendering practical help, or of offering a gift where such goods could be spared, were qualitatively different from the mutuality of the associations. In the latter case the collective pledge to fund funerals in advance, meant that each individual or family undertook a financial commitment which might prove quite onerous. It involved making repeated monetary donations on an ongoing basis and without reference to the changing circumstances of the subscriber, and may well have required a degree of personal sacrifice greater than that demanded by the more casual reciprocity of neighbourhood. Organised mutuality could also be more explicitly self-serving. From the spontaneous aid of one's fellow, emphasis now shifted to the premeditated accumulation of a specific fund to provide not only for one's neighbour - but also for oneself. For both these reasons safeguarding the fund became a priority, and this might mean excluding those whose needs presented too great a risk.

This chapter reveals that sanitary reforms implemented in the mid-nineteenth century had a tremendous effect on burial practices, serving to intensify the conflict implicit in the mutual ideal. In Cumbria as elsewhere in England, concerns over poverty and public health precipitated by industrialisation, urbanisation and changing demographics, served to transform the methods and the location of burials. Such changes had important social consequences, as under the terms of the Burial Acts of the 1850's, new sophisticated methods of classifying graves, and regulations stipulating more substantial types of interment, created a new form of social discrimination which drew increasing attention to the wealth and social status of the individual.

In her important discussion of the social implications of nineteenth-century changes in the disposal of human remains, Ruth Richardson notes that the new urban burial grounds were "planned on picturesque, utilitarian and socially stratified lines, rather than upon those of tradition."[246] The new cemeteries were informed by rational, not religious, principles, and the efficient use of space was a dominant concern; hence the emphasis on the subdivision of the ground into separate sections, according to perceived differences in quality of location. Indeed, according to James Walvin, "Victorians began their first effective efforts at town planning not for the living but for the dead."[247]

Stuart Rawnsley and Jack Reynolds contrast the discriminatory use of space in Victorian cemeteries with what they see as the more egalitarian atmosphere of the pre-industrial churchyards. Whereas traditional burial grounds did not differentiate between rich and poor, they argue, the creation of the new cemeteries saw the intrusion of hierarchy. As richer people chose to be buried in the "best" areas, the mid-nineteenth century became an era when "funerals and burial places alike were indicators of a preoccupation with social position."[248]

Not all historians support the notion that an obsession with the social status of corpses was peculiar to the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, some claim that personal rank had always been an important consideration in burial. Christopher Daniell has described, in some detail,

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[246] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute,* 6.

[247] Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 68.

[248] Stuart Rawnsley and Jack Reynolds, "Undercliffe Cemetery, Bradford," 215-221, 213.

how some areas of the medieval church and the churchyard
were considered more holy, thus more desirable, than
others.[249] He argues that even at this early date, the
positioning of graves could sometimes pose a problem as
people competed for favoured spots.[250] David Cressy
supports this view. Although Protestants of the Tudor and
Stuart periods rejected the belief that some pieces of
ground were more holy than others, they favoured burial in
more prominent areas for social reasons. Indeed, an
ostentatious grave in a prime location was the best means
to secure the deference in death that one had enjoyed in
life. [251]

Vanessa Harding argues in a similar vein. She, too,
has shown how burial in the church and churchyard could
sometimes be used to heighten social discrimination.[252] She
cites evidence from early-modern London which suggests that
those who could afford it chose the "best" places to be
buried within the church and the churchyard. The result of
a policy of differential pricing for burial was that a
hierarchy was created, with humbler people ghettoised in
less desirable corners, yet, ironically, often being
required to pay more than their more affluent counterparts

[249]Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial, 5.

[250]Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial, 96.

[251]In Maidstone, Kent, for example, richer parishioners who
contributed to parish dues, were buried in a superior graveyard, quite
separate from poorer folk. David Cressy, Birth, Marriage and Death,
460-461, 458.

[252]Vanessa Harding, "'And one more may be laid there': the Location
of Burials in Early Modern London," London Journal 14 2 (1989): 112-
129.

who, as subscribers to the poor rate, were granted generous concessions.[253]

Contrary to the claims of Rawnsley and Reynolds, it would appear that egalitarianism had never been a characteristic of traditional burying grounds. But if social discrimination in burial was by no means new, many scholars maintain that it was in the Victorian period that it most forcefully intruded into the public consciousness. The nineteenth century has been seen as the period when the issue of social class became of paramount importance. As Ruth Richardson has observed:

> The Victorian era was one with an obsessive interest in the gradations of social placing; and death served as a prime means of expressing, and of defining, social place.[254]

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[253] The interior of the church carried the highest price, and this privilege was reserved for the most wealthy. The chancel was the most favoured location. The aisles and chapels were the next most desirable places and then the body of the church. Forty shillings was charged for burial in the chancel of St. Brides, whereas 6/8 was the cost of burial in the cloister or cellar under the church at All Hallows, Honey Lane. Vanessa Harding, "'And One More May Be Laid There,'" 121-22. European historians have likewise noted the hierarchical lay-out of traditional burial grounds. Tunde Zentai contends that the arrangement of graves in the churchyard had much to reveal about the structure of local societies. In Hungary the marginalised occupied less attractive positions within the churchyard, whereas those held in high esteem had graves not only located in more prominent areas, but also denoted by superior forms of commemoration. Tunde Zentai, "The Sign-Language of Hungarian Graveyards," Folklore 90 2 (1979):131-140. Italian burial grounds were also characterised by social segregation. Sharon Strocchia has observed that in the Medici period magnificent tombs were built in churches and churchyards to mark off a narrow social elite from the masses. Sharon Strocchia, Death and Burial, 161.

[254] Ruth Richardson, "Why Was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?" in Ralph Houlbrooke, ed., Death, Ritual and Bereavement (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), 106.

In Richardson's view, the cemetery was a physical space which had intense symbolic significance. It allowed far greater numbers to celebrate their new-found affluence by making a personal and lasting claim on the ground in which they were laid to rest. They could do this because in the mid-nineteenth century the grave, previously regarded as a temporary resting-place, was now redefined as personal property to be held in perpetuity.

Thomas Kselman argues that the emergence of the "perpetual" grave had profound consequences for attitudes toward burial. He has provided one of the most detailed analyses of the creation of the modern cemeteries, and although he focuses on France, many of his observations apply equally well to the situation in England. Kselman is particularly interested in interment in Paris, and he draws attention to the symbolic uses as well as the practical functions of the new burial places.

Concerns over the crowded and unsanitary state of traditional burial grounds began to be voiced in France in the eighteenth century, and were connected to fears over moral crisis. The new, cleaner cemeteries created to alleviate the problem were intended to uplift public morals as well as to solve the more palpable dilemma of disposing of dead bodies in a wholesome manner. But the new cemeteries introduced a distinction between the temporary and the perpetual grave. Those who opted to purchase rather than to rent their plot, often adorned their "property" with expensive forms of commemoration.[255]

Although scholarship on English cemeteries has been somewhat less erudite than the French contribution, several

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[255] Thomas A. Kselman, Death and the Afterlife in Modern France, 188.

social historians have addressed in some depth the changes
in interment practises which took place in the nineteenth
century, and their work is all the more important for the
paucity of such studies generally. James Stevens Curl and
John Morley have shown how the agitation surrounding the
closing of the old churchyards and the creation of new,
more spacious cemeteries was part of a much broader
movement which encompassed Europe and North America. [256]
Essentially, the cemetery movement was a response to the
overcrowding of the traditional burial grounds in the most
heavily populated and industrialised countries. Many
cities in Europe and America were experiencing the same
kinds of public health problems by the nineteenth century,
and the provision of municipal and private cemeteries
became a significant component of sanitary reform.

Curl describes how in Britain, C. F. Carden, a London
barrister, and J.C. Louden, a botanist, became vociferous
advocates of the creation of new, more hygienic, burial
places. Louden directed public attention in this country
to the new cemeteries being constructed in France, Spain,
Germany and America, and reports on the foreign cemeteries
were studied by British architects keen to emulate them.[257]
Père Lachaise in Paris was held up as the most sanitary,
best-designed cemetery in Europe, and a prototype for

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[256] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, and John
Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians.

[257] For a discussion of the cemetery movement in America, see James
Farrell, Inventing the American Way of Death 1830-1920 (Philadelphia:
Temple University Press, 1980). Cemeteries here were also part of a
programme of urban improvement.

European cemeteries generally.[258] In 1832 the Glasgow necropolis was built on this model, and Belfast had two large out-of-town cemeteries in the early nineteenth century. Other pioneering British cities were Liverpool and Manchester.[259]

Within these modern burial grounds the emergent middle classes, in an effort to affirm their social dominance, purchased their plots and erected the same types of commemoration that had previously been the prerogative of a narrow elite. Curl has noted that generally the most sought-after sites flanked the main avenues leading to the mortuary chapels where the ostentatious monuments of the wealthy would be sure to be noticed at every subsequent funeral.[260] And Sylvia Barnard has observed of the Beckett Street Cemetery in Leeds that first-class graves were located on the top of the hill, whereas the cheapest (fifth-class) were at the bottom.[261]

Indeed, the antithesis of the ostentatious tomb of the wealthy was the pauper pit, a style of interment lacking in dignity and grotesque in the extreme. In some of the larger cemeteries in London, Liverpool and Manchester, the bodies of the poor were buried in mass graves, occasionally accommodating as many as 200 bodies. The cheapest kind of coffin was used, such graves were kept open until full, and personal memorials were disallowed.

The cemetery then, in one important aspect, took on the same character as the urban city: it segregated the

[258] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 42.

[259] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 43.

[260] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 17.

[261] Sylvia M. Barnard, To Prove I'm Not Forgot: Living and Dying in a Victorian City (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 8.

very rich as far as physically possible from the very poor.
A person's social and financial position could now be as
readily identified in death as in life. For the poor, the
new regime could be a source of profound dread, for the
wealthy it was an age in which "the family grave, like the
family house, became a mark of substance."[262]

Such changes had important effects on popular death
culture. Contemporaries noted, with some disapproval, that
in the wake of the Burial Acts and the opening of municipal
and private cemeteries, many working-class people adopted
more ostentatious forms of burial in their attempts to
follow the dictates of fashion set by their more affluent
middle-class counterparts. Indeed, some historians have
suggested that more materialistic burial customs were
increasingly used by poorer folk in order to "keep up
appearances" within their community.[263] This argument has
been used to explain the continued steady increase in
national friendly society membership throughout the
nineteenth century, and in particular the success of other
forms of burial insurance which emerged after mid-century.
According to this hypothesis, recourse to mutuality in
death was prompted by social pressure to affirm personal
financial standing.[264] Other historians disagree, arguing
that under the terms of the Burial Acts pauper burial
became so horrific that many poorer people had no choice

[262] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 25.

[263] See, for example, Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-class Culture
and Working-class Politics in London, 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking
of a Working Class," Journal of Social History 7 3 (Spring 1974): 460-
580, and R.G. Garnett, A Century of Co-operative Insurance, 72.

[264] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, particularly chapters 2 and 8.

but to spend more on burial simply to escape its
indignities.[265]

The following analysis contributes to the above debate
by examining the implications of the move from churchyard
to cemetery interment in Cumbria in the light of the Burial
Acts of the 1850's. Whereas most studies of cemeteries
have focused on the situation in the largest cities, this
analysis concentrates on a region of smaller urban centres.
It thus allows the historian to assess the extent to which
metropolitan developments were mirrored in the provinces,
something which has not yet been attempted.

This chapter argues that although a degree of social
discrimination was the norm in churchyard burial in Cumbria
prior to the Acts, within the new cemeteries with their
stress on hygiene, efficiency and aesthetics, it became
distinctly more overt. A heightened consciousness of
social class in death and burial accompanied by a trend to
measure "decency" in more explicitly material terms,
intensified an existing ambiguity between collectivism and
self-interest in popular death culture.

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Burial practises were regulated far more stringently
by legal requirements and religious ordinances than were
funerary customs generally. Common-law dictated that all
Christians had the right to a Christian burial within the
consecrated ground of a churchyard, and the right to the
prayer book service for the burial of the dead conducted by
a clergyman.[266] Most rural Cumbrians were members of the

[265] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 353-375.

[266] Suicides, the unbaptised and Nonconformists were exempt from the
service. Alfred Fellows, The Law of Burial (London: Hadden, Best and

Church of England, and, prior to the mid-nineteenth century, at death their bodies would be conveyed for burial to the parish churchyard.

The interior of the church was considered the most desirable place to be buried, but internal burials only took place within a minority of Cumbrian churches. Chapter one revealed that many remote churches and their adjoining yards did not gain the right of burial until fairly late, bodies being transported long distances to the few parish churches having consecrated ground. Churches not gaining the right of burial until after 1818, when interior burials were being restricted nationally in order to preserve church fabric and prevent despoliation, had no interior interments at all. Where such burials were permitted, clerics and local gentry were usually represented, but many richer folk buried their kin in the churchyard, sometimes simply placing a memorial tablet on an inside wall of the church.

Within the churchyard, costs of interment were not dependent on location; unlike some London churchyards, there were no gradations of "desirability." But if the better-off made little effort to segregate themselves from the common folk, there were nevertheless graves which drew attention to themselves by the sturdiness of their construction and the amount of commemorative masonry with which they were enclosed. Gentry graves could certainly be substantial, and most Cumbrian village churchyards contained the graves of the leading local family or families almost always distinguished by an enclosing

Co. Ltd.,1952), 26.

curbstone.[267] Such graves were designed to accommodate a number of family members and were frequently marked by sizable monuments.

Clerical attitudes with regard to the ornamentation of graves seem to have varied. The erection of headstones, curbstones and other commemorative masonry was regulated by each incumbent, often with the advice of the bishop. In all cases larger memorials cost more money. Some incumbents appear to have had a very tolerant view of family commemoration in stone, probably because more elaborate graves came at a high price and held the promise of increased revenue for the church. Lindale-in-Cartmel churchyard had an exceptionally large number of elaborate enclosed graves, many dating back to the mid-eighteenth century, for example, suggesting a lenient attitude on the part of the incumbent.

Conversely, it could be argued that in setting very high prices for ornate gravestones some clerics were trying to actively discourage ostentation rather than to profit from it. The vicar of Colton Parish seems to have been chiefly concerned to encourage uniformity and restraint rather than excess. He set the price of an upright gravestone not exceeding four feet six inches high and two feet six inches wide at one guinea (see figure 4), but if it exceeded these dimensions the cost soared to five guineas. The minister of Seathwaite Church was even more adamant in his determination to restrict excess. In 1876 he ruled that headstones were not to be more than four feet

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[267] The Shepherd family grave, dating from the 1780's still dominates the village churchyard at Grayrigg, and Cartmel priory churchyard contains the remains of several prominent families whose graves date back to the mid-eighteenth century. (Personal observation.)

FIGURE 4. COLTON PARISH CHURCH BURIAL FEES

Burials....2s...0d. (Vicar) 6s...6d (Sexton) *

Upright Gravestone up to 4' 6" high by 2' 6" wide

....£1...0s...0d

Upright Gravestone if exceeding above dimensions..

....£5...5s...0d

Flat Stone or Enclosed Ground per square yard......

....£1...1s...0d

Permission to make or re-open a brick grave or vault.

....£1...1s...0d

* The fees named for the Sexton were for ordinary graves having 3ft. of earth above the coffin. The fee for a child's grave was 3 shillings. Adapted from BPR/18 I4/8. (n.d.) Colton Parish Church, Table of Fees.

high and that he reserved the right to approve all inscriptions.[268]

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[268] BPR/8 I9. Table of Fees, Seathwaite Church, Ulpha, 1876.

A factor which may have mediated against clerical support of large monuments was the fact that the placement of a tombstone over a particular grave was often accompanied by a substantial curb, railing or flatstone, which marked off the ground, removing it from common usage. Elaborate ornamentation made a lasting claim upon the ground it occupied, and could be viewed as a violation of the common interest.

Throughout history churchyards had provided only a temporary sanctuary for human remains. Only in the late seventeenth century were coffins brought into general use. Until that time graves were usually unmarked, and it had been common practice for bones to be dug up after a certain period had elapsed, to be placed in an ossuary in order to make room for subsequent burials. A belief in the common ownership of the graveyard by the people of the parish, under the stewardship of the incumbent, was widespread. Indeed, clerical opposition to grave enclosure by individuals or their families could sometimes be quite heated, on ethical as well as purely practical grounds, and was a topic frequently debated in clerical correspondence throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. [269]

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[269] Such sentiments came to the fore in a dispute between Canon Rawnsley and the vicar of Dalton over grave enclosure in 1903. The former believed that not only did the erection of curbstones around private graves spoil the aesthetics of the churchyards, it compromised an objective close to the hearts of many clerics, specifically, "...the non-parting with the soil of the churchyard for the proprietary use to the privileged few." BPR/1 12/2 19. Letter from Canon Rawnsley to rural

Thus most bodies buried in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Cumbrian churchyards were interred in simple earthen graves without a curbstone, and were marked by an upright headstone which usually provided the name, age and residence of the deceased, together with familial relationships. Few epitaphs celebrated individual achievements or status; instead there was a marked tendency to reflect the character of the community in which the deceased had resided. Close to the coast, maritime motifs were common features, and further inland inscriptions typically denoted place of residence, usually the farm the deceased had worked or the village where they had resided. Many of these people had farmed the same land for generations, and there was a strong identification with territory.

Although by law the church could not charge a fee for burial, it was nevertheless customary for a fee to be applied. Whereas historians have claimed that in some areas discriminatory practises were in effect which favoured subscribers to the poor rate, this was not the practice in Cumbria. Fees were directly related to the various services carried out: grave digging, bell ringing, and the reading of the service for example. The only exception to this was in the case of non-parishioners, when double fees

dean, 1910. Such views were not only held by individual clerics, but were reflected at the level of the consistory court. An enquiry by the Rev. Baines, minister at Brathay, in 1897, regarding the enclosure of graves in his churchyard elicited a stern rebuke from his superiors. He was advised that this practise was not generally condoned. The bishop regarded such an act as tantamount to selling a grave, and this was unethical. WPR/64. In 1930 an official ecclesiastical communication expressed the "long-established" view that churchyards were not the property of those buried therein, but were held in common by the dead, the living and those still to come. BPR/30I3/7/6.

were usually applied.[270] There was no standardisation between churches, the matter lying largely within the jurisdiction of the incumbent of each parish.

One of the earliest reference to costs for burial in Cumbria is for St. Mary's of Ulverston. The Church Book of 1768 indicated that the sexton was paid one shilling for digging the grave of every person over eighteen.[271] Less was charged for children. In 1846 the minister of Lowick church charged two shillings for burials of parishioners. In addition was the sexton or clerk's fee, which, in 1865, was listed as four shillings for all funerals of persons above six years of age. Graves for younger children cost three shillings. The sexton's services involved tolling the church bell, digging the grave, and attending the funeral. Fees then, tended to be directly related to work done, and this system of rational pricing was typical throughout the area.

It would seem, then, that social discrimination within the Cumbrian churchyard certainly existed, but that it was fairly understated. The local gentry segregated themselves by claiming the more exclusive interior of some of the older parish churches, and most set themselves apart in enclosed family plots in the churchyard. But social segregation did not approximate the scale noted by Harding or Cressy for some southern churches. Interior burials

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[270] BRR/18 I4,7-11. Table of fees, Lowick Church. Discrimination against outsiders could be blatant. At Bampton the vicar charged a mere eightpence to bury a parishioner, yet he extorted two pounds two shillings from the family of a non-parishioner!

[271] Sixpence was charged for tolling the Passing Bell at the funeral, and a further sixpence per day for extra tolling. BPR/2 WI 1-17. Churchwardens' Accounts, St. Marys, Ulverston.

were limited, and in the churchyard there was no preferred area.

Extramural fees depended not on location, but upon the size and depth of the grave. Costs of headstones and other monumental masonry could be quite considerable, however, and persons selecting such monuments were no doubt publicly proclaiming their wealth and social standing. Yet such graves were usually a small minority of the total. Indeed, in some cases incumbents may not have been well-disposed towards elaborate graves which effectively removed common ground from public usage. Most graves were of earth, with a minimum of masonry, monumental inscriptions reflecting, rather than individual achievements or status, the broad social and economic character of the surrounding area.

The opening of the cemeteries throughout the nineteenth century, was to create a very different climate for disposal of the dead. For within many of these new, more spacious burial grounds social discrimination was far more overt. This new ethos was in large part a by-product of the zeal for profitability, efficiency, and improved hygiene on the part of cemetery managers. It was also attributable to a new stress on the aesthetics of burial, an effort to bring greater dignity to what had become, in many areas of the country, a gruesome business.

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The creation of the cemeteries was part of a comprehensive program of sanitary improvement which gained momentum throughout the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and was a response to unprecedented demographic and economic change. Harold Perkin has noted that acute social crisis necessitated a radical overhaul of the principles of administration, and that the "evolution of a

new legislative and administrative practice" saw the demise of a prevalent belief in laissez-faire and a move to deliberate state intervention.[272] This transformation, he claims, amounted to a "revolution in government" and was brought about by reformers convinced of the efficacy of utilitarianism: a practical, economical and efficient approach to government which would assure the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." [273]

At the forefront of this drive toward efficiency was an ardent reformer by the name of Edwin Chadwick. As secretary of the Poor Law board, he took a keen interest in the problems associated with urban poverty, and he undertook the first major social survey in 1840: A Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain. This, the first empirical study, used statistical evidence as well as case studies to demonstrate the connection between illness, mortality and unsanitary living conditions. Chadwick's pioneering work heralded the Public Health Movement which saw the passing of a number of statutes, chief of which was the Public Health Act of 1848. Under its mandate a General Board of Health was formed, upon which Chadwick sat. It also provided for the establishment of local boards throughout the nation which were charged with tackling the many and challenging problems of public health within their districts.[274]

[272] Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, (London: Routledge, 1969), 325.

[273] Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 322.

[274] A public meeting could be called if two thirds of the ratepayers in a municipality felt that the formation of a local board was warranted. In order for a local board to be established, an inspection and an enquiry had to be carried out, followed by a report to the General Board of Health. Ursula R.Q. Henriques, Before the Welfare State: Social Administration in Early Industrial Britain (London:

The Public Health Act had no real force, however, and
was primarily an enabling act, as the central government
had no powers of compulsion over local authorities. The
latter were often slow to act, either through stubbornness
or inexperience, yet by 1871 there were seven hundred Local
Boards of Health in England and Wales, and the piecemeal
improvements which they authorised throughout the later
half of the nineteenth century gradually began to
ameliorate sanitary conditions in the cities, ultimately
bringing a decline in an unacceptably high mortality
rate.[275]

Among their many functions, Local Boards of Health
were charged with overseeing the provision of adequate
drainage, sewerage and water supply, the control of
nuisances, public parks and privies. They were also
responsible for inspecting and closing offensive burial
grounds. Chadwick's examination of the condition of
churchyards nationally in 1843 precipitated public outrage
at the appalling state of the communities of the dead, and
prompted many local groups to act. Chadwick's initial
findings were published as a supplement to his major Report
on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of
Great Britain which had been conducted a year earlier.
This supplement was widely distributed throughout the
country to clerics and Boards of Guardians in the hope that
voluntary improvements would be forthcoming. Indeed, some
steps were taken by concerned parties and in 1845 a

Longman,1979), 136.

[275] Ursula Henriques, Before the Welfare State, 149-151. For a
discussion of the reasons for the local authorities' reluctance to act,
see Christopher Hamlin, "Muddling in Bumbledon: on the Enormity of
Large Sanitary Improvements in Four British Towns," Victorian Studies
42 1 (Autumn 1988): 55-83.

voluntary society, "The National Society for the Abolition of Burial in Towns" was formed.[276]

But it was the outbreak of cholera which brought matters to a head. Indeed, the country-wide epidemics of 1831-32, 1853-54 and 1866 acted as powerful incentives to action in many areas of public health.[277] In terms of burial procedures they mark an important turning point, for changes in interment practices had implications for procedures and attitudes related to funerary matters generally.

In 1850 Chadwick issued his Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, which was concerned with burial practises in London, where upwards of two hundred burial grounds were receiving bodies at the time of publication. This report was replete with graphic accounts of the deplorable state of many of London's oldest churchyards. In Bunhill-fields graveyard, for example, an area of less than four acres, the registry recorded in excess of one hundred and seven thousand burials between 1713 and 1832.[278] Witnesses reported that:

> the stench proceeding from some of the crowded
> and confined graveyards in the metropolis is
> frequently so great that the residents in the
> neighbourhood are obliged to shut their windows
> for hours and days together.[279]

Not only did people occupying nearby houses have to deal with the terrible smells and sights at a distance,

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[276]Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Burial Reform, vii.

[277]Cholera outbreaks were also an incentive to burial improvement in France. Thomas Kselman, Death and the Afterlife, 175.

[278]Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture PP 1850 (1153) XXI 575, 9.

[279] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 8.

sometimes the horror intruded into their homes.
Commissioners were told of one labouring man's dwelling
which backed onto a graveyard and had once had a window
overlooking the ground. Over time, successive burials
where coffins had been stacked one atop the other for want
of space, had raised the level of the graveyard to the
point that he was unable to see out of the window. He
blocked it off and built a skylight. The floor of his room
was now six feet below that of the graveyard, and the wall
of his house was buckling under the weight of the soil and
coffins it was supporting. Eventually the wall gave way
and human remains fell into his living room.[280]

In some graveyards it was common practise to dig huge
pits in which to store bones recovered when making room for
new graves. In others, pits were dug to receive coffins
themselves, some accommodating as many as twenty adult
coffins, with no earth between them, and kept open until
full. They were filled up to within a few inches of the
surface of the ground.[281] Burial in vaults underneath the
churches was little better. Coffins were frequently piled
one atop the other until those at the bottom began to give
way, the noisome vapours escaping into the church above.[282]

Similar conditions were apparent outside of the
metropolis. In 1851 a subsequent report entitled A General
Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns was
released by the General Board of Health. It examined two
hundred towns throughout the country. Norwich was singled
out as being of particular concern. It was reported that

[280] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 18.

[281] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 18.

[282] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 18-19.

as early as the seventeenth century most of its churches looked as though they had been built in pits, so high were the graveyards with their dead. Bodies were often buried above the heads of people living nearby.[283] In Banbury a sexton recalled that on several occasions he had seen coffins "swimming about in the vaults" of his church. Many churchyard walls, struggling to contain the coffin-laden earth, diffused contaminated secretions from putrefying corpses and this not infrequently found its way into the water supply and into nearby homes. There was evidence of flooded cellars in public houses and cottages in some places where the water was thus contaminated. [284]

In order to find space for new graves sextons often had to resort to a boring rod to find the bodies in the most advanced state of decomposition. Conversely, there were many instances of bodies being dug up to make way for a new interment after only three weeks.[285] Pit burials were particularly prevalent in Manchester and Liverpool, where graves holding as many as two hundred bodies were reported. They were termed "public graves" and the top layer of coffins was only two and a half feet from the surface of the ground. Like the London pits, they remained open until filled, with a plank of wood covering them.[286]

Private cemeteries were no better. These burial grounds, owned and operated by joint-stock companies, had been created in some more populous areas early in the

[283] Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns PP 1851 (1348) XXXIII 177, 5.

[284] Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 14-15.

[285] Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 14-15.

[286] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 18.

nineteenth century. [287]   One of the reasons for the failure
of many of the private grounds was that little thought had
been given to soil type and drainage, and numerous
unsavoury problems had arisen as a consequence.[288]

Medical opinion had it that vapours from decomposing
corpses were a deadly threat to health, and the "noxious
exhalations" emanating from overcrowded graveyards were
held to be responsible for the cholera epidemics which
swept the country between 1830 and 1870.[289]   The 1850 report
made the connection explicit:

> Where the living body is exposed to these putrid
> emanations in a highly concentrated state, the
> effects are immediate and deadly, when more
> diluted they still taint the system, inducing a
> morbid condition which renders it more prone to
> disease in general, but especially to all the
> forms of epidemic disease.[290]

Quite simply, the nation's churchyards could no longer
cope, and for the sake of public health something had to be
done.

The situation in London and many other provincial
towns was more extreme than conditions existing in most
parts of Cumbria, although this area was not exempt from
the critical eye of the commissioners.   The demands placed

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[287] They usually came into being as a result of a private Act, and if
created after 1847 were governed by the Cemetery Clauses Act of that
year. These burial grounds were run for profit and were looked upon
unfavourably in some quarters. One of the commissioners felt that "the
spirit of trade and of pecuniary profit should not by permitted to
enter into any arrangements for the burial of the dead." Report on a
General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 27.

[288] Another problem was that these cemeteries were often so far out
of town as to present problems of access. Report on a General Scheme of
Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 27.

[289] Similar beliefs were prevalent in France. Kselman, Death and the
Afterlife, 169.

[290] Report on a General Scheme for Extramural Sepulture, 9.

upon Cumbrian churchyards in general were not as great as those in more populous areas; nevertheless, the older parish churchyards had been receiving bodies for centuries, and it would appear that the cherished ideal of "decency" in death was in some cases compromised for sheer want of space.[291] The city of Carlisle was in dire need of new burial places by the time of Chadwick's surveys, as was the smaller town of Penrith to the south. The commissioners conducted a detailed study of the churchyard at Penrith. Their findings, summarised below, draw attention to the inadequacy of the churchyard still being used.

Situated in the centre of the town, the yard was closely surrounded by houses on three sides; on the fourth side outbuildings and a high wall formed a boundary. Up until 1838 the total area of the churchyard had been 3,724 square yards, including walls, and between 1598 and 1838 more than 28,000 bodies had been interred there. In 1838 the churchyard had been extended, and in the following ten years a further 1,553 bodies were interred, partly in the old, partly in the new ground. The eastern end of the ground was too wet for burials most of the time. When the commissioners examined it they found there was no part of the ground that had not been used, and hardly any graves contained a body that was decomposed enough to be removed. Nor was burial hygienic. Some coffins had only two and a half feet of soil on top of them, and the bottoms of many

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[291] Yet it is by no means clear that popular notions of decency conformed to what government reports understood to be "hygienic". Families showed a preference for continued burial in the older, most crowded, section of the Penrith yard, (described below), rather than in a newer section. Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 7.

of the graves were higher than the first floor rooms of adjoining homes. The report lamented:

> The whole soil of the old yard is said to be one mass of human remains, and yet graves continue to be opened in it. On the north side of the yard is the grammar school and the graves have been crowded close up to it and many of the windows overlook the yard. [292]

The threat to human health was obvious. The detailed reports by Chadwick and his commissioners, with their grotesque imagery, resulted in the passing of a series of acts designed to more strictly regulate burial. The first was the Metropolitan Interment Act of 1850. Under its mandate, the existing Board of Health in London was designated the Burial Authority for the Metropolis with the power to close overcrowded burial grounds and to open new ones. It also had the power to take over private cemeteries already existing. The chief Burial Act was that of 1852, under which no new burial ground was to be opened within two miles of London without approval. This measure was subsequently extended to other cities and was to be augmented between 1852 and 1862 by over 500 Orders in Council which closed 4,000 old and overcrowded burial grounds throughout the country. New ground was appropriated, mortuaries provided in many cases, and new regulations came into force strictly controlling burial.

Under the new regime churchwardens in each parish were encouraged to convene a vestry meeting to help decide on whether existing burial grounds in their locality were adequate for current and future needs. The government sent out questionnaires for completion to individual parishes,

[292] Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 7.

and subsequently decisions were made on particular burial grounds. The churchyard of Trinity Church in Ulverston, for example, received a questionnaire from the Home Office in 1857.[293] The result of this particular inquiry was the closure of the churchyard, "for the protection of public health". Directives stipulated that no new burial ground was to be opened in this parish without the approval of one of the Secretaries of State.[294] Burials were also banned in the Roman Catholic burial ground in the same town, and also in the burial ground of the Independent Chapel.

In Kendal, local initiatives appear to have been taken in advance of directives from central government, possibly as a response to the earlier report circulated by Chadwick. A private cemetery for Dissenters had already been established here, and this may also have been a spur to local attempts to improve the situation for Anglicans. In 1850 the Kendal Board of Health undertook a study of the town's burial grounds. It noted that since 1842 there had been an increasing tendency not to bury in the parish churchyard, and that

> the decreased resort to the parish church yard naturally created the suspicion that there is an increasing distaste to inter within its boundaries....[295]

The board was at pains to describe the offensive condition of this ground which had "been dug over and over

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[293] BPR/3 I39.Home Office enquiry relating to the Act to Amend the Laws Concerning the Burial of the Dead in England, Beyond the Limits of the Metropolis 1857.

[294] BPR/I39. Letter from Whitehall, to the Churchwardens and Minister of Holy Trinity Church, Ulverston, 27 August,1857.

[295] WDY/81.Report on the Burial Grounds in the Borough of Kendal, 1850.

again for several hundred years." Indeed, its report
continued:

> we may easily conceive the large amount of
> decomposed and decomposing human remains with
> which the church is surrounded; and we no longer
> wonder that in some parts of the church yard the
> ground is literally sprinkled with human bones,
> and the earth when opened to receive a coffin is
> found to be full of them.[296]

The Board noted that depletion of the parish ground
was in part attributable to the existence of enclosed
graves, but that the more popular earth graves were in
sanitary. Cheaper graves were dug only to a depth of three
feet six and the committee noted rather pompously that
"these cheap graves are used as a matter of course by all
those to whom the cost is of importance." Although the
report conceded that it was, of course, necessary for "a
large class of the population to possess graves at a cheap
rate," the method of disposal which characterised such
interments clearly posed a public nuisance. The committee
hesitated to give specific details of the problem, however,
for

> It would show want of consideration for the
> feelings of others were we to relate the further
> particulars which we have observed, and which
> have been communicated to us, arising from the
> overcrowded state of our parish Grave-yard; and
> we think that this short statement of facts will
> be sufficient to show that the unrestricted use
> of it cannot be much longer allowed, consistently
> with proper sanitary regulations, or with the
> feelings of those whose relatives are buried
> within it.[297]

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[296] WDY/81. <u>Report on the Burial Grounds in the Borough of Kendal,</u>
1850.

[297] WDY/81. <u>Report on the Burial Grounds in the Borough of Kendal,</u>
1850.

St George's church posed even more formidable problems. Near to the river, the graves in this ground were exposed to frequent flooding

> which has always been deemed most pernicious: for the decomposed matter is thereby carried through the sandy substratum in the neighbourhood of house and wells, and especially underneath the body of the church itself to be raised through the soil into the heated interior with imperceptible exhalation.[298]

Other graveyards in the town were likewise described as inadequate. Most posed a health threat due to overcrowding, proximity to housing, and in many cases, closeness to the river. The report estimated that the projected lifespan of the burial grounds being used was short, and strongly urged that a cemetery be provided.

In other places local groups also seem to have acted on their own initiative. In 1851 a vestry meeting was called to consider the fate of the churchyard of St. Mary's Parish Church, Ulverston. Those assembled admitted knowing very little about the Burial Acts, per se, but expressed concern over the Parish churchyard which was "in a crowded state and its enlargement desirable."[299] Although repairs were subsequently made to the fabric of the church, it is not clear if attempts were made to improve the burial ground, for in 1867 complaints about the churchyard were still being made. It was not simply lack of space that was cause for concern, it was the neglect of the churchyard in general, for

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[298] WDY/81. Report on the Burial Grounds in the Borough of Kendal, 1850.

[299] BPR/2 I2 41. Documents pertaining to enlargement of St. Mary's churchyard, 1851.

the state of the Burial Ground is such as to be a
cause of painful regret to all who witness it or
have friends or relatives interred within its
precincts...the wanton manner in which so many of
the tombstones have been broken, and ...the
careless irreverence which turns 'God's Acre'
into a playground - a place for idle lounging -
or even worse, a place where even more sinful
actions desecrated the sanctity of the place. [300]

As a short-term measure the graveyard was tidied up
with the help of donations from local worthies. This may
have improved the aesthetics of the churchyard and the
morals of the local populace, but it did not solve the
problem of diminishing space. In April, 1874, there was
some discussion over whether to extend the existing burial
grounds or establish a cemetery. A committee was
appointed to look into the matter, and it was resolved to
create a cemetery and to form a burial board.[301]

Clearly, the threat posed to public health was an
overriding concern of the local boards who undertook
studies of their local churchyards. Over the latter part
of the nineteenth century many unhygienic churchyards in
Cumbria were closed under the terms of the Burial Acts.
(See figure 5.) By 1876 eleven burial grounds had been
either completely or partially closed in Westmorland as a
result of Orders in Council, and in Cumberland thirty-seven

[300] BPR/2 I2 41. Documents pertaining to enlargement of St. Mary's
churchyard, 1851.

[301] Ulverston Mirror, 4 April 1874.

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FIGURE 5. CLOSURE OF OVERCROWDED BURIAL GROUNDS AND OPENING OF NEW CEMETERIES UNDER
THE TERMS OF THE OF THE BURIAL ACTS, FURNESS AND CARTMEL,
CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND, 1850-1876

	Population	Total Number of Burial Grounds	Number Closed by Order in Council	New Cemeteries Opened
Furness and Cartmel	53,986	44	2	2
Westmorland	65,010	119	11	3
Cumberland	220,253	176	37	8

Adapted from the Return of Population and Burial Places in England and Wales
Showing the Number Opened and Closed and Other Particulars. PP 1877.

burial grounds had been either completely or partially closed. In the Furness district two had been closed. [302]

Bodies could still be interred within the closed churchyards in certain circumstances, however, and where burial was still permitted, regulations designed to ensure more sanitary interment were rigorously applied. Following the closure of the churchyard of Holy Trinity in Ulverston in 1857, permission for burial was granted to persons who wished to be buried in family graves already existing and having room, provided that the graves were five feet deep or more and could be opened with minimal disturbance to remains. It was also ruled that no unwalled grave should be reopened within fourteen years after the burial of a person above twelve years of age, or within eight years after the burial of a child under twelve, except to bury another family member. In this event, a layer of soil at least a foot thick had to be left undisturbed. If the soil was found to be offensive, it was to be closed immediately. In addition, no coffin was to be buried in any unwalled grave less than four feet deep, with the exception of children under twelve who were to be buried at three feet or more.[303]

At Dalton-in-Furness, burials within the church itself were still permitted under certain circumstances until March 7, 1860, and within the churchyard until November 1,

[302] Return of the Population and Burial Places in England and Wales Showing the Number Opened and Closed and other Particulars, PP 1877 (257) LXVL 131 144-160, (Lancashire), 374-376, (Westmorland), 42-47, (Cumberland).

[303] BPR/3 I39. An official communication stating the regulations for Burial Grounds provided under the Burial Acts, and their application to burial grounds in Ulverston, 1857.

1892. Interments were allowed in brick vaults which had been in existence on November 14, 1859. Burial was only permitted so long as each coffin was separately entombed in brick or stonework, and properly cemented.[304]

Ultimately, as more and more churchyards were perceived to be a threat to public health, it became apparent to many communities that measures must be taken to acquire new burial grounds. Whereas, at a national level, many churchyards were unable to expand when full because of the close proximity of housing, churchyards in Cumbria, even many of those in more heavily populated areas, were often able to add on extensions when necessary. Density of population was never so pressing here, and although many of the oldest grounds were closed, the routine extension of existing burial grounds continued in many areas.

As we saw in chapter one, in rural Cumbria it had been common for petitions to be made for the consecration of new burial grounds in areas where access to parish churches was difficult. The reduction in parish size and the consequent increase in the number of parish churches throughout the nineteenth century had also allowed for an increase in burying places. Throughout the nineteenth century, in the light of the burial crisis, many new graveyards continued to be opened under ecclesiastical authority. (See figure 6.)

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[304] BPR/1 I3/2/1.Correspondence relating to the excavation of graves in Dalton Church burial ground, 1860-1903.

FIGURE 6, PART 1. PARISHES IN WHICH A NEW PORTION OF GROUND CONSECRATED, 1832-1862.

Name of Parish Archdeaconry of Westmorland	Date of Consecration of New Ground	If Purchased by the Parish	If Purchased by Voluntary Subscription	If Presented as a Gift
Bowness Cemetery, Windermere	1856	Parishes		
St Mary, Applethwaite, Windermere	"		Subscription	
Cockermouth Cemetery		Parishes		
Lindale-in-Cartmel	1857	Parishes		
Stavely-in-Kendal	1858	Parishes		
Hutton Roof	1859	Parishes		
Egton-cum-Newland	1860			Free Gift
Embleton	"	Parishes		
Loweswater	"	Parishes		
Haverthwaite	"	Parishes		
Lowick	1861			Free Gift
St Margaret's, Low Wray, Hawkshead	1862			Free Gift
Crosthwaite	1861	Parishes		
New Hutton	"	Parishes		
Moresby	"	Parishes		
Dalton Cemetery	1862	Parishes		
Millom	"			Free Gift
Blawith	"	Parishes		

FIGURE 6, PART 2. PARISHES IN WHICH A NEW PORTION OF GROUND CONSECRATED, 1832-1862.

Name of Parish Archdeaconry of Carlisle	Date of Consecration of New Ground	If Purchased by the Parish	If Purchased by Voluntary Subscription	If Presented as a Gift
Penrith	1836	Parish		
Maryport	1837			Free Gift
St John's, Keswick	1838			Free Gift
St John's, Houghton	1840			Free Gift
St Paul's Holme Eden	1845			Free Gift
Crosthwaite	1847			Free Gift
Soulby	1849			Free Gift
St John's, Holme Cultram	"			Free Gift
St Paul's, Holme Cultram	"		Subscription	
St Cuthbert's, Holme Cultram	"		Subscription	
Rocliffe	"			Free Gift
Penrith	1850		Subscription	
Patterdale	1853			Free Gift
St Mary's, Gillsland	1854			Free Gift
Scotby				Free Gift
Carlisle Cemetery	1856	Parishes		
Wigton Cemetery	"	Parishes		
Cross Canonby Cemetery	"	Parishes		
Broughton-in-Bridekirk	"		Subscription	
Westnewton-in-Bromfield	1857			Free Gift
Lowther	"			Free Gift
Farlam	1860			Free Gift
Sebergham	1861	Parishioners		
Culgraith-in-Kirkland	"	Parishioners		
Brampton	"	Parishioners		
Kirkby Stephen Cemetery	"	Parishioners		
Orton	"			Free Gift
Wythburn-in-Crosthwaite	1862	Old Chapelyard		

FIGURE 6, PART 3. PARISHES IN WHICH A NEW PORTION OF GROUND CONSECRATED, 1832-1862.

Name of Parish Diocese of Chester	Date of Consecration of New Ground	If Purchased by the Parish	If Purchased by Voluntary Subscription	If Presented as a Gift
Holy Trinity, Ulverston	1832			
Trinity, Casterton, Kirkby Lonsdale	1833			Free Gift
Brigham	1835	Parish		
Seemunthy, Brigham	"	Parish		
Brathay Trinity, Hawkshead	1836			Free Gift
St John's, Heversham	"			Free Gift
St Thomas, Kendal	1837			Free Gift
Milnethorpe, Heversham	"			Free Gift
St John, Yealand Conyers, Warton	1838			
Grayrigg, Kendal	"			Free Gift
Trinity, Holme, Burton-in-Kendal	1839			Free Gift
Stavely, Cartmel	1841			
Langdale, Grasmere	1849			Free Gift
Drigg, Cumberland	"			Free Gift
Longsleddale, Kendal	1850			
St John's, Workington	1853			
Ulverston	"	Parish		
Holy Trinity, Bardsea	"			Free Gift
Preston Patrick, Burton-in-Kendal	"			Free Gift
St Mary's, Ambleside, Windermere	1854		Subscription	
St Annes, Thwaites	"			Free Gift
Kendal Cemetery	1855	Burial Board		
St Bees Cemetery	"	Burial Board		

Adapted from <u>A Return of All Parishes in England and Wales in Which Any New Portion of Ground Has Been Consecrated to Serve as a Churchyard During the Last 30 Years.</u> PP 1863.

In the aftermath of the Burial Acts of mid-century the church purchased many new burial grounds either utilising parish funds or appealing for voluntary subscriptions. At Aldingham the vicar funded the churchyard extension from the fees he charged for burial of non-parishioners.[305] However, when the Reverend Canon Smith penned an article to the Barrow News in 1884, advocating the creation of a new burial ground for lower Holker, he was in favour of funding the enterprise by recourse to the public rates, as this was "more in accordance with the spirit of the age."[306] This idea was not popular, however, and in the event, subscriptions were collected to fund the enterprise, the Furness Railway and the Duke of Devonshire being the most generous subscribers, each donating 100 pounds.[307] Often land itself was given by local benefactors, the donor reserving the right to keep back a portion for the use of his/her own family. [308] When Satterthwaite churchyard was extended in 1866 the land was made available by deed of gift from Montague Ainslie of Grizedale Hall, Hawkshead.[309]

Other donations might be made for specific purposes, volunteers frequently carrying out the necessary work, further minimising costs. When Lowick churchyard was extended, largely through the generosity of the Montagues and the Machells, various local people subscribed money for

[305] BDX/178. Aldingham Parish Magazine, May 1891.

[306] Barrow News, 3 May 1884.

[307] BDX/105. Report of the Committee Appointed to Purchase a Burial Ground for the Parish of Flookburgh (1890), 4.

[308] It was normal for one sixth of the total to be reserved. When the Brathay churchyard was extended, the Redmayne family reserved this portion for its own use. WPR/64. Grave Space Books, Brathay Church.

[309] BPR/30 I1/5. Documents relating to the extension of Seathwaite Church.

the making of paths, planting of trees and shrubs and rebuilding the walls, and local farmers hauled material in their carts.[310] Egton churchyard was extended between 1856-58, and again money was raised by subscription, the Duke of Buccleugh and local gentry giving most, to a total of over eighty eight pounds. Once again, tenant farmers contributed a day's work and occasionally more.[311]

These graveyard extensions (or in some cases separate pieces of ground at some distance from the church) were administered in much the same way as the original churchyards. Although individual burials were now more strictly regulated in terms of depth of grave, grave construction and allowable materials, there was little substantive difference in the way the grounds operated. Burial fees were higher to offset the greater expense of superior grave construction, but choice of grave continued to be limited, and there was no division of the ground into distinct areas. Most blatant discrimination continued to be reserved for non-parishioners who were required to pay double fees at least. (See figure 7.)

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[310] BPR/18 I4 7-11.Documents relating to the extension of Lowick churchyard. In 1884 the churchyard at the village of Dendron was extended by purchasing part of an adjoining orchard at the cost of one hundred and twenty pounds an acre. Half an acre was purchased by subscription. Mrs. Coulton of Dendron House gave twenty pounds, and the Duke of Devonshire gave ten pounds. Some of the necessary work was carried out by volunteers, mainly carting and clearing of land. In 1889 the graveyard was finally closed. An order in council was sent to the incumbent listing those persons, who, by virtue of part ownership of a walled family grave, still had the right of burial there under the conditions earlier described for all existing burial grounds. BPR/31 I 22 1-11. Correspondence relating to the enlargement and subsequent closure of Dendron churchyard.

[311] BPR/26 I 14. Document pertaining to the extension of Egton churchyard.

FIGURE 7. FEES FOR NEW BURIAL GROUND AT FLOOKBURGH.

Nature of Interment	Vicar			Clerk and Sexton			Total		
	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
Interment of Adult over 12 years	0	2	6	0	5	0	0	7	6
Interment of Child 4-12 years	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	6	0
Interment of Child under 4 years	0	1	6	0	2	6	0	4	0
Interment of Child Still-born				0	2	0	0	2	0
Grave-space 9ft by 4ft	2	2	0				2	0	0
Extra for digging ground for a vault, 6ft by 3 ft				0	1	6	0	1	6
Ditto for each additional foot deep over 6 feet				0	1	0	0	1	0
Headstones	1	1	0				1	1	0
Headstone with edge stone not exceeding 8ft by 3ft	2	2	0				2	2	0
Bier and cloth							0	0	9
All fees for non-parishioners to be charged at double rates									

Adapted from The Table of Fees for Parishioners, Burial Ground, Parish of Flookburgh, 1890. Fees for this church-administered ground reflected those charged in the churchyards. Note that the bier and pall were available at a modest charge.

In stark contrast, the burial grounds purchased and managed by the newly-formed Burial Boards were run on very different lines. Here efficiency, profitability and rational land-use dictated a new ethos which conflicted sharply with traditional ways of interment. Under the terms of the Burial Acts Burial Boards were given authority to borrow money in order to purchase land for cemeteries on the security of the public rates, on the understanding that General Board of Health be repaid by "annual instalments out of fees arising from interments for a maximum of thirty years."[312]

Many communities took the initiative. Following the closure of the Dalton churchyard in 1860 a Burial Board of eight local worthies under the chairmanship of the then vicar of Dalton, the Rev. J.M. Morgan, was formed. In 1861 the Board purchased a piece of land of just over three acres called "Mary Bank Close" from the trustees of a Joseph Ormandy, with the view to constructing a cemetery. In 1862 this was augmented by a second purchase, of a similar size, this time from the Furness Railway Company.

The Kendal Board also made a purchase of land to accommodate a new cemetery. In January 1855, John Wakefield, gentleman, of Sedgewick House in Heversham, sold two parcels of land to the Burial Board of the townships of Kendal, Kirkland and Nethergrave, for £1150. The land known as "Lord's Close" became known as Parkside Cemetery.[313]

In contrast to the parish churchyards and their extensions, cemeteries under the jurisdiction of the Burial

[312] Report on a General Scheme of Extramural Sepulture for Country Towns, 27.

[313] DRC/10. Details of sale of land for Kendal cemetery.

Boards tended to be on a much larger scale and were established on the periphery of the town where more space was available and allowed for future expansion. Bearing in mind the importance of suitable soil and adequate drainage for sanitary disposal, it was crucial for boards to select appropriate sites. This was not always easy, especially in areas of poor or thin soil. Ulverston had a particularly difficult time, and a light-hearted debate took place in the pages of the Ulverston Mirror. One reader suggested a rocky piece of land adjacent to the town known as Hoad Hill. Another felt it to be entirely inappropriate. He proclaimed:

> Until cremation supersedes by lawful authority our present custom and mode of disposing of our dead, I should certainly prefer "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" to being shelved upon a ledge of rock.[314]

Another reader agreed that interment in rock could pose severe problems:

> it will be necessary that the gravedigger be supplied with a sufficient quantity of blasting powder, dynamite or gun cotton in order that he may overcome the "rocky" difficulties he would daily meet with in the performance of his hole-making duties.[315]

Ultimately a more suitable site was found and a cemetery was opened in 1878 at a place known as Dragley Beck.

The purchase of land for cemeteries was no small undertaking, and large debts were often incurred in the process. But a loan taken out for land purchase was only

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[314] Ulverston Mirror, 25 April 1874.

[315] Ulverston Mirror, 18 April 1874.

FIGURE 8. LOANS GRANTED TO DALTON BURIAL BOARD FOR CEMETERY PURPOSES UNDER THE TERMS OF THE BURIAL ACTS, 1861-1871. Adapted from J.Tyson, Dalton-in-Furness District - Local Board Accounts, p. 79.

YEAR		£.	s.	d.		
1861	...	1600	0	0	at	4%
1862	...	2400	0	0	"	"
1863	...	700	0	0	"	"
1865	...	200	0	0	"	"
1871	...	1500	0	0	"	"
1871	...	1000	0	0	"	6%

TOTAL		7400	0	0		
		6328	0	0 Repaid by 31/3/1887		

FIGURE 9. ACCOUNTS OF THE DALTON BURIAL BOARD FOR YEAR ENDING 25 MARCH, 1887. Adapted from J. Tyson, Dalton-in-Furness District - Local Board Accounts, p.83.

RECEIPTS.	£.	s.	d.	PAYMENTS.	£.	s.	d.
Vaults.........29		1	6	Maintenance	227	0	0
Interments....152		1	0	Fees.............	68	2	6
Hearse Account..7		5	0	Trade Accounts...	39	10	5
Grass...........9		3	6	Sundries.........	12	2	6
Grants..........0		18	0	Clerk's Salary...	15	0	0
Bank Interest...8		10	4	Interest on loans	65	14	9
Overseers of				Sinking Fund.....	38	10	4
the Poor......296		0	0	Balance in hand..	36	18	10
	502	19	4		502	19	4

the beginning of the substantial expenditure necessary to facilitate sanitary disposal. (See figures 8 and 9.) Cemetery creation usually necessitated the construction of chapels and other administrative buildings. At Dalton, a board room, a mortuary chapel, a registrar's residence, offices and a hearse-house were all constructed.

In addition, overall costs of burial were increased by more exacting interment procedures. Sturdy graves did not come cheaply. In conformity with new regulations aimed at making burial more hygienic, strict rules now applied. Sanitary regulations required more labour in grave construction and additional materials. Coffins now had to be buried to a minimum of six feet, sometimes more, and if a coffin was placed in a bricked grave or vault, as opposed to an earth grave, it had to be covered by slabs made airtight with cement.

To add to their financial burdens, burial boards often found themselves required to pay compensation to parties who deemed themselves disadvantaged by cemetery construction. Cemeteries were not always greeted with enthusiasm by the church. As far as individual clerics were concerned, pecuniary interests sometimes took precedence over concerns for more sanitary disposal. As we have seen, some clergymen were inclined to look upon their stewardship of "god's acre" as a business enterprise. They jealously guarded their burial fees, and the cemeteries effectively deprived some of them of this type of income. To keep the peace, burial boards often agreed to pay incumbents compensation.[316]

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[316] BPR/1. 13/4/2, 13/10. Letters from Ecclesiastical Commission granting compensation to Vicar of Dalton, 1875. In France the uneasy relationship between ecclesiastical and municipal authorities was the

A similar situation could arise when a new cemetery was created in close proximity to an existing ground. Prior to 1871 inhabitants of the town of Barrow had the right of burial within the cemetery at Dalton, three miles away. The rapid increase in the population of Barrow from the late fifties which saw the mushrooming of a new industrial town, soon made such an arrangement impractical. Agitation came to a head when the original Dalton cemetery became full and an extension was required. Under the terms of the Barrow-in-Furness Corporation Act, Barrow acquired the right to take care of its own burials. A site for a new cemetery was duly agreed upon, and the ground, was opened by the Bishop of Carlisle in June of 1873.[317]

At first the Vicar of Dalton continued to perform the burial service for Anglicans in Barrow, as he had in the Dalton cemetery. Later it was decided to transfer this duty to a cleric from Barrow. It thus became necessary for Barrow Corporation to pay seventy-five pounds per annum to the vicar of Dalton in lieu of lost burial fees, and twelve pounds ten to the then parish clerk. But this was not all; in 1873 the Barrow Burial Board found itself agreeing to pay the sum of two thousand seven hundred pounds to the Dalton local board for loss of revenue to Dalton cemetery.[318]

High standards of maintenance also had to be budgeted for. The clean, orderly, more efficiently-run cemeteries aspired to present a far more pleasing appearance than the unkempt and often unsavoury churchyards which they

cause of frequent disputes. See Thomas Kselman, Death and the Afterlife, 189.

[317] Barrow Pilot, 10 May 1873.

[318] Barrow Pilot, 6 Sept 1873.

replaced. Indeed, one of Chadwick's stated aims was to restore dignity to burial practises, which, for rich and poor alike, but especially for the poor, had become, in his view, sordid if not grotesque. It was considered important that cemeteries be the antithesis of the sordid and foul-smelling churchyards. Local authorities reflected these concerns, and a great deal of time and effort was expended in the careful planning of the lay-out of the new grounds.

Cemeteries were usually designed by architects, and some of the more romantically-inclined envisioned them as places of tranquillity and beauty, an escape from all that was unpleasant about urban life.[319] It was suggested that cemeteries should be morally uplifting, and instructive to the working classes. In fact, part of their function was to educate the uneducated. One of the chief proponents of cemetery reform, J.C. Louden, visualised cemeteries as botanic gardens, replete with many different varieties of plants and shrubs. Visits to such places, he believed, would improve the morals and taste of the working classes, and would even "cultivate intellect".[320]

Architects from Lancaster and a landscape gardener from Liverpool were appointed to design the spacious Barrow cemetery. In its initial stages, it was envisioned as park-like and beautiful, providing recreational facilities as well as space for hygienic burial. An early artist's impression depicts it as a miniature Versailles, with imposing tree-lined walkways and fountains. There are

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[319] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 42.

[320] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 82. 42. In America, too, cemeteries had an important didactic function. As well as providing for reflection and contemplation, they were to stress anti-modernism, anti-urbanism and democracy, and a reverence for tradition. See Farrell, Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920.

marquees, and a picturesque lake (in reality the reservoir
for the steelworks) provides opportunities for boating.
Everywhere people are strolling and picnicking, and there
is even an archery tournament in progress.[321]

Although this fanciful ideal was not achieved in
reality, the ambience of the new burial grounds was clearly
a priority. Grass was kept neatly trimmed by granting
grazing rights to local sheep farmers, and all private
graves were required to be kept in good repair by the
owners.[322] Local newspapers of the period often offered
suggestions for beautifying the cemeteries, and at meetings
of the Burial Board the aesthetics of the burial grounds
were frequently debated.   In July 1885 the Dalton Burial
Board considered planting roses and installing more seats
as it would be "a beautiful place to sit in fine weather."
It was agreed to purchase garden seats and benches for the
purpose, although it was also decided that the aesthetic
education of working classes should not supersede spiritual
instruction.   The cemetery gates were to be kept locked on
Sunday mornings so that people should not be deterred from
attending church. [323] In 1891 the Board discussed cutting
down several trees but on reflection decided against it as
they were considered "the ornament of the cemetery".
Clearly, the aesthetics of burial was not taken lightly.

But romance strolled hand in hand with pragmatism
along the imposing walkways of the new cemeteries. With an
eye to keeping costs to a minimum, efficiency was stressed,
strict rules were enforced, and many fines were imposed.

[321] Unknown artist's impression of the proposed cemetery in Barrow,
unnamed and undated. Barrow Town Hall, private office.

[322] Barrow News, 17 Jan 1891.

[323] Barrow News, 18 July 1885.

At Dalton the hours of interment were limited to between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. For persons insisting on morning funerals, an extra ten and six was charged. And woe betide anyone who was late! At Dalton and Barrow a fine was also imposed for tardiness. Sunday funerals were discouraged by a hefty fine, and anyone bringing a hearse into the cemetery was subject to a fee of one shilling for repair of the ground.[324]

It was not only time which Burial Boards were determined to manage efficiently - use of space was also closely regulated. The architect's pencil clearly subdivided the land according to intended use. One of the results was the segregation of religious denominations. In the Barrow cemetery an Anglican, a Nonconformist and a Roman Catholic area were designated. The Anglican portion was by far the largest, the Nonconformist the second in size, and the Roman Catholic the smallest, reflecting the differential proportions of denominations in the town.

In the churchyards denominations had not been segregated (although dissenters often constructed burial grounds of their own), and this overt segregation in the cemeteries could sometimes lead to discord. Dalton had an Anglican and a Nonconformist section, each with its own separate mortuary chapel and entrance to the cemetery. There was a degree of controversy over this in 1874. It was felt by some that Nonconformists should be allowed to use the gate set aside for the established church, as this was more attractive and they were being discriminated against. The Burial Board was quick to defend itself from criticism, however. It assured all concerned that "the

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[324] BPR/I 22/7. Table of Fees, Rules and Regulations, Dalton Cemetery, 1873.

greatest care was taken to make the Nonconformist entrance, chapel and ground quite as attractive and pleasing as the portion belonging to the Established Church." The paper noted, perhaps mischievously, that in the burial board election of that week only Anglicans had been elected to the board.[325]

Not only was segregation on the basis of religious denomination a feature of land allocation in the new cemeteries, so was discrimination on the basis of the category of the grave and its location. With heavy financial obligations, Burial Boards aimed to run the cemeteries on business-like principles, and a comprehensive scale of fees and charges pertaining to graves and miscellaneous services was devised. (See figure 10.) Burials were to be as profitable as possible, and chief among the innovations in burial was the introduction of the purchased grave.

In the old churchyards there had always been a number of "enclosed" or "private" graves which had an air of permanence about them (and which did not always meet with clerical approval). Yet those who occupied them were not usually considered to have exclusive right to their plot - at least in principle. In the cemetery, however, a much more explicit distinction was made between "ordinary" "common" or "public" graves and those deemed "private".

[325] Ulverston Mirror, 4 April 1874. Segregation of denominations within the French cemeteries was often a cause of acrimony between various religious and secular authorities. Kselman, Death and the Afterlife, 189.

FIGURE 10, PART 1. FEES FOR DALTON CEMETERY.

	Board's charges			Consecrated Ground			Unconsecrated Ground			Total Charges		
	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
Interment of Child under the age of 7 Letter A	0	5	6	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	7	6
Interment of Child 7-16 Letter A	0	6	6	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	8	6
Interment of Adults Letter A	0	7	6	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	9	6
Single Private Grave Letter B	1	7	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	1	10	0
Single Brick Vault Letter B	1	11	6	1	11	6	1	11	6	3	3	0
Double Brick Vault Letter B	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	6	6	0
Single Brick Vault Letter C	4	4	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	6	6	0
Double Brick Vault Letter C	8	8	0	4	4	0	4	4	0	12	12	0
Interment of Still-born Child	0	2	6	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	3	6
Re-opening a Vault or Grave, Letter A	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	5	0	0	10	0

Adapted from Table of Fees and Charges for Dalton Cemetery,1873. The cemeteries

offered a greater selection of graves at increased costs.(Compare with figure 7)

FIGURE 10, PART 2. FEES FOR DALTON CEMETERY.

	Board's charges			Consecrated Ground			Unconsecrated Ground			Total Charges		
	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d	£	s	d
Re-opening a Vault or Grave, Letter B	0	7	6	0	10	6	0	10	6	0	18	0
Re-opening a Vault or Grave, Letter C	0	10	0	0	10	6	0	10	6	1	0	6
Tablet in Chapel	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	4	4	0
Tomb over a Brick Grave or Vault	2	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	5	0	0
Erecting a headstone Letter A	0	5	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	0
Erecting a headstone Letter B	0	7	6	1	11	6	1	11	6	1	19	0
Erecting a headstone Letter C	0	10	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	10	0
Erecting a footstone Letter A	0	2	0							0	2	0
Erecting a footstone Letter B	0	3	0							0	3	0
Erecting a footstone Letter C	0	4	0							0	4	0
Grant and Registration for exclusive right of burial										0	2	0
For every future Certificate of Ownership										0	1	0

Adapted from Table of Fees and Charges for Dalton Cemetery,1873. The cemeteries offered a greater selection of graves at increased costs.(Compare with figure 7)

Whereas common graves were merely "rented" for an
indeterminate period, private graves were granted in
perpetuity, and the grave receipts issued on the purchase of
such a grave agreed to "hold the same to the said --- his
heirs and assigns for ever."[326] Purchased graves thus
constituted private property. One could now choose to
become in death, as in life, an owner-occupier.

This distinction between the private and the "rented"
was further emphasised by a corresponding classification of
the ground itself. At Dragley Beck the ground was divided
into first and second class ground, and fees differed
accordingly. Larger cemeteries had more classifications.
It was common for the area to be subdivided into four or
more areas, alphabetically designated. The cheaper graves
were invariably to be found in what was designated "A class
ground," and the more expensive purchased graves in the B or
C areas.

The division of the cemetery was based on its perceived
"desirability." At Dalton the cemetery occupied a hillside,
and the ground given over to "A class" graves covered the
majority of the lower part of the hill. The most desirable
C class ground was at a higher elevation and the
intermediate B class ground lay between them.[327] Barrow
cemetery's "Select Grave" section again occupied the summit
of a hill, commanding an impressive view of the sea and
close to the mortuary chapels. The least desirable A
section (with no view) was at the bottom of the hill. [328]

[326] BSUD/D/C. Dalton cemetery, grave grant books, 1860-1892.

[327] BSUD/D/S.Plans for Dalton Cemetery.

[328] BPR(B)Ba/C (24). Barrow Borough Council Records Survey. Cemetery
Files, 1885.

This propensity for classification of both ground and grave led to a complex system of pricing. In 1873 an earthen (rented) A Class adult grave in the Dalton cemetery cost nine shillings and six pence. For a B Class earthen grave, a charge of one pound ten shillings was made.[329] In the Barrow cemetery fees were rather higher than those for Dalton: an A class earthen grave cost ten and six. Single private graves (letter B), were two pounds five shillings in Barrow, letter C were five pounds eight and six, and a "select position" could be had for ten pounds fourteen.[330]

From the Board's point of view, the sale of the more expensive graves as opposed to the cheaper "public graves" was preferable. Persons buried in the cheapest 'rented' section not only had an inferior location to contend with, they sometimes had fewer rights. Kendal cemetery was similarly divided into three areas designated A, B, and C. Burial in the A section was cheapest, and persons buried here had no say in the position of the grave. Nor were they permitted to erect a headstone or tombstone. The board clearly stated that it maintained ownership of this ground and reserved the right to use it again whenever necessary and when permitted by law. By contrast, grave-spaces in the B and C sections were sold and carried with them an exclusive right of burial which could be passed on to next of kin. They could be personally selected and commemorative stonework was permitted.[331]

Indeed, the monuments in the new cemeteries could be quite striking, and far more elaborate than those in the

[329] J.Tyson, Dalton-in-Furness Local Board Accounts, (1882-96), 82.

[330] BRR(B)Ba/C (24). Barrow Cemetery Files, 1874-1875.

[331] WPR/7.Regulations for the Cemetery at Kendal.

churchyards. James Walvin has described Victorian cemetery statuary as "high art," and James Stevens Curl has expressed similar admiration for mortuary architecture.[332] Dominating the most desirable spots in the cemeteries, the ostentatious tombs and obelisks of the wealthy may have been seen by the aesthetically-minded boards as a fitting adornment for the superior sites. In the ornate memorials of the affluent, the Burial Boards could congratulate themselves on uniting aesthetics, rational land use and profitability.

If to be interred on a hilltop in a "select" grave with a panoramic view and an impressive monument represented the summit of achievement in death, the pauper grave symbolised its antithesis - failure. Although it was the stated aim of the Chadwick commission to improve burial practises for the poor, the more hygienic cemeteries with their sights set on cost-efficient management and good business practise often discriminated against the poor far more than the old churchyards had done. Within the rural churchyard in Cumbria even the destitute could expect a degree of dignity in death; and in the grounds of the older parish churches where a "decent" grave was perhaps harder to achieve, rich and poor alike suffered the indignities of overcrowding.

The zeal of the burial authorities for classification of graves and their occupants resulted in a new stress on pauper burial as a distinct category. Under the Burial Acts, new cemeteries were required to state whether they accepted "pauper bodies." Not all did, but where they were accepted, they were usually placed in multiple graves in the A section.[333] In the Barrow cemetery, for example, pauper

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[332] Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 369. James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death.

[333] Return of Population and Burial Places in England and Wales PP

graves were dug deep enough to hold four adult coffins.[334]
Not only were the poor deprived of the customary observances
of the community, they might have to share their graves with
strangers.

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This chapter has revealed that burial reform in Cumbria
appeared to reflect the situation in the larger cities. The
increasing concern over unsanitary burial practises which
reached a state of crisis in the mid-nineteenth century with
the publication of Edwin Chadwick's reports changed the
nature of interments throughout the country. The new stress
on hygiene and aesthetics did not come cheaply, and in order
to keep within their budgets, Burial Boards needed to adopt
principles of good business management. The creation of
multiple categories of hygienic graves of different prices,
many of which could be purchased in perpetuity, generated
revenues which could be used to offset the costs of
maintenance and administration and at the same time be used
to repay outstanding debts to creditors. Indeed, the
elaborate private grave in a prime location served the dual
function of increasing the income of the Burial Board while
simultaneously beautifying the cemetery.

But hygienic burial had other consequences. Whereas
the ground of the churchyard had been regarded as common

1877 (257) LXVI, 131.

[334] Ba/c (24). Barrow Cemetery Files, 1874-1875.

property in which all had the right to be laid to rest, a custom perpetuated in the new burial grounds run by church authorities, the cemeteries under the control of the Burial Boards permitted individuals to claim a portion for themselves and their kindred. Social discrimination in the country churchyards of Cumbria, although it had certainly existed, had been understated. Interspersed between the substantial tombs of the elite minority were the simpler earth graves of the humble majority. Most had been content to "rent" their space until such time as it was required for another. Indeed, in the new church-run cemeteries this principle was still upheld. Graves were not offered for sale and there were far fewer categories to choose from.

In offering graves for sale and dividing up the graveyard into areas which were rated unequally in terms of desirability, the municipal cemeteries created a hierarchy where members of the wealthiest families could now proclaim their higher status in death, as they had in life. The individual grave acquired the status of personal property, and the graveyard, once common ground shared by the local community, could more readily be appropriated by those preferring to emphasise social distance over collectivity.

Within the hygienic burial grounds aesthetics, efficiency and social discrimination combined in a curious mix. Most significantly, as Kselman and others have observed, it was the creation of the private grave that more than anything underscored the "conflict between individual and collective values." [335] This conflict was not new. Prior to the momentous changes of the mid-nineteenth century, popular death culture was already characterised by

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[335] Kselman, Death and the Afterlife, 188.

a tension between self-interest and collectivity. The
stress on social discrimination in death introduced by the
Burial Acts served to emphasise and exacerbate an existing
paradox.

FIGURE 11. INTERMENTS IN THE BARROW CEMETERY FOR THE YEAR

ENDING JULY 1ST, 1874. From Barrow Cemetery Files.

Consecrated Division

Number of graves sold and occupied
Select Position 7
Letter C.................8
Letter B.................62
Letter A (public graves)........75

                               152

Number of interments............603
Total Receipts...............£492 9s. 6d.

Average amount received from each grave space..£3 4s. 9d.
Average amount received from each interment....£0 16s. 4d.

Unconsecrated Division

Number of graves sold and occupied
Select position..............5
Letter C.................6
Letter B.................12
Letter A (public graves).........9

                               32

Number of interments..........49
Total Receipts...........£105 11s. 6d.
Average amount received from each grave space...£3 6s. 0d
Average amount received from each interment.....£2 3s. 1d.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RITUALS OF RICH FOLK

THE FUNERAL AS STATUS SYMBOL

In considering the expenses of funerals, the
arrangements and consequent expenses of the
wealthy are of importance, less perhaps for
themselves than as governing by example
arrangements and expenses of the poorest classes,
even to the adoption of such arrangements, and
consequently expensive outlay as to have hired
bearers and mutes with silk fittings even at the
funeral of a common labourer.[336]

...the two men who stand at the doors being
supposed to be the two porters of the castle, with
their staves, in black; the man who heads the
procession, wearing a scarf, being a
representative of a herald-at-arms; the man who
carries a plume of feathers on his head being an
esquire, who bears a shield and casque, with its
plume of feathers; the pall-bearers, with batons,
being representatives of knights-companions-at-
arms....[337]

What was at stake in these closely patterned,
repetitive actions was nothing less than the
reconstitution of the social order and one's place
in it.[338]

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[336] Report of the Select Committee on the Improvement of Health in
Towns: Supplementary Report on Interment in Towns (Edwin Chadwick,
1843), in Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Burial Reform, 70.

[337] Report of the Select Committee on the Improvement of Health in
Towns: Supplementary Report on Interment in Towns (Edwin Chadwick,
1843), in Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 273.

[338] Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual, xiii.

The evidence suggests that the opening of the cemeteries in Cumbria in the mid-nineteenth century played a key role in exacerbating social discrimination in death. The division of the new burial grounds into areas of greater and lesser desirability, and the offering of graves for sale, effectively separated the rich from the poor. The fact that many of those who could afford it now interred deceased relatives in substantial private graves often embellished with sizable and expensive memorials served to highlight a growing conflict between self-interest and collectivism in popular death culture.

This tension not only manifested itself in the burial, it was reflected in the organisation of the funeral. New cemeteries tended to be on the periphery of urban areas, where land was both cheaper and more readily available, and this often meant longer, more complicated journeys for mourners. In order to cope with more complex logistical problems, families increasingly placed themselves in the hands of commercial undertakers. This had profound consequences. Not only did it serve, to some extent, to remove death from "everyday social experience,"[339] in the words of Ruth Richardson it

> presaged a shift of meaning from the funerals the antiquaries witnessed and recorded. It represented an invasion of commerce into the rite of passage; the substitution of cash for affective and older, more traditional social relations.[340]

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[339] Nigel Llewellyn, The Art of Death, 77.

[340] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 4.

Contemporaries complained that unscrupulous undertakers often exploited the vanity of the affluent in order to line their own pockets. For their part, many of the wealthy seemed only too willing to pay,[341] for as Richardson has pointed out, many of the features of the commercialised nineteenth-century funeral had their origins in much older rituals "originally the preserve of the nobility."[342] She argues that in appropriating such rites the middle classes were recreating the inherent symbolism replete in such customs in order to articulate similar statements about wealth and power. Within this closely-regulated protocol elements such as clothing, emblems, and the composition and ordering of the cortege imparted meanings which were well-understood by those participating, as well as by the spectators who turned out to watch. This type of conspicuous consumption set a new standard in funerary etiquette and had implications even for those at the bottom of the social ladder, for historians have suggested that this very public show of "respectability"
helped redefine popular notions of "decency" in death in accordance with the more indulgent and individualistic standards of the affluent.

This chapter uses a wide range of sources - family papers, undertakers' accounts, newspaper articles and obituaries, as well as oral archives - to examine the funeral as status symbol in Cumbria. In order to highlight the symbolic functions of the ornate Victorian funeral, the analysis begins by examining the extent to which the

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[341] David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," 187-243.

[342] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 272.

aristocratic and gentry-style funerals of the pre-industrial period served as a model for nineteenth-century obsequies of the better-off. It argues that with urbanisation and the opening of the cemeteries, the aristocratic way of death of the medieval and early modern periods experienced a renaissance. Not only were rituals reminiscent of the heraldic tradition apparent in the funerals of the wealthy; the very public nature of middle-class obsequies served to increase social pressure on those lower down the social scale to adopt similar types of extravagance. Newspaper obituaries from the market town of Ulverston, and from Barrow, a heavy engineering and shipbuilding centre, indicate that the press made it their business to keep their readership informed of the flamboyant funerals of the social elite. Indeed, working-class people routinely lined the streets to gawk at them, and oral sources suggest that some more humble folk aspired to make a similarly grand exit themselves.

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Several historians have suggested that conspicuous consumption had been an enduring feature of funerals of the social elite prior to the nineteenth century. Christopher Daniell, for example, notes that in medieval times the rich used the funeral cortege to convey both religious and social meanings.[343] As well as eliciting prayers for the soul, it was an "outward sign of power and prestige," for "An

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[343] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial, 45.

impressive procession ... helped the surviving family

emphasise their continuing influence on earth."[344]

In their studies of "heraldic" and royal obsequies of
the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries several
historians have revealed the ways in which the funeral
accomplished this function. Ralph Giesey has noted how
social hierarchy was indicated by the precise ordering of
the cortege. In his study of the royal funerals in France
in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries he claims that the
sequence in which mourners walked was so serious a matter
that it sometimes led to violent disputes among
participants.[345] Olivia Bland has explained the symbolic
significance of the fabrics worn at such events. She argues
that cloth supplied for mourners at royal funerals was of
different lengths and qualities according to the rank of the
wearer. Instructions were supplied on how each garment
should be made and worn, and this again was dependant on
social status.[346] Clare Gittings has described how noble
funerals in England were meticulously managed by the College
of Heralds who dictated all aspects with the precision of a
military manoeuvre. She concurs that the style and quality
of mourning dress and who was to wear it, the ordering of
the processional, the emblems on show, the numbers of
participants involved, the quantity of the accoutrements,

[344] Christopher Daniell, Death and Burial, 46.

[345] In 1547, at the funeral of Francis I, for example, an attempt by
the Bishop of Paris to walk directly in front of the king's effigy (a
very prestigious position) was thwarted when the Master of the Horse
made his horse rear, threateningly. Ralph E. Giesey, The Royal Funeral
Ceremony in Renaissance France (Geneva: Libraire E. Droz, 1960), 40.

[346] Olivia Bland, The Royal Way of Death, 18.

and even the identity of the chief mourners all reflected the status of the deceased in a very explicit way.[347]

Such affairs could be expensive. Lawrence Stone has claimed that noble funerals would typically cost the equivalent of a nobleman's annual salary. One of the most expensive on record, he notes, was that of the Earl of Northumberland at Beverley in 1489, which cost over £1000. Most of the expense in this case went toward the purchase of black cloth for the decking the chariot, the hearse, and the house, and supplying mourning costumes. The rest was split between the great feast which followed and the fees charged by the heralds.[348]

Etiquette then, was used to impart meaning about status and power, and this visual language was well understood by participants and spectators alike. As Norbert Elias has shown, outward appearance was crucial to the aristocracy, and etiquette in all its forms served to emphasise one's position relative to others. Overt materialism was frequently used by the elite as a way of maintaining social position, and was proof of "respect for the same social ideals."[349] Luxury was a "means of social self-assertion," and opulence a sign of rank and status.[350]

Sharon Strocchia has made similar observations. In her study of funerals in Renaissance Florence, she stresses the role of excessive display in reinforcing the social and political hierarchy. Not only did conspicuous consumption

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[347] Clare Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, 26.

[348] Lawrence Stone, The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 576.

[349] Norbert Elias, The Court Society, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwelll, 1983), 65.

[350] Norbert Elias, The Court Society, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwelll, 1983), 38.

signify the wealth of the participants, it effectively excluded social inferiors. Most notably, by matching the style and quality of mourning garments to social rank, sumptuary laws enabled the funeral cortege to become a vehicle for displaying one's social position with absolute precision.[351]

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One Cumbrian funeral which serves as a graphic example of heraldic funerary protocol was that of Lord William Dacre which took place in Carlisle Cathedral in 1563. Close analysis suggests this was a richly symbolic event which articulated powerful statements about the social order and Dacre's place in it. Although it took place some three centuries prior to the passage of the Burial Acts, as this chapter will reveal, much of its symbolic content was to resurface in the middle-class funerals of the late nineteenth-century.

The ability of the cortege to impress onlookers was of paramount importance in this kind of event. Its size, its social composition, the emblems on view and the quality and style of its numerous material trappings were designed to produce a formidable spectacle. [352] Dacre's processional was headed by two of the lord's porters or "conductors" carrying black staves, who were succeeded by twenty-three paupers. Next came the cathedral choir, the priests and the dean, then a man bearing the Dacre standard, and the lord's

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[351] Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual, 60-70. See also Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes, 144.

[352] The following description and analysis is based on an article by M.E. James, "Two Tudor Funerals", C.W.A.A.S. LXVI (1966): 165-178.

retainers. A second prominent emblem followed on: the great banner displaying family escutcheons.

The most important part of the cortege was the coffin, and immediately before it walked the organisers of the ritual, the heralds, colourfully adorned in armorial tabards, one of their number carrying the Dacre coat-of-arms. There were six pall bearers, four assistants, and servants displaying banner-roles. Chief mourners were the sons of the deceased, and as the most important persons present, they followed immediately behind the coffin. The bishop and other clerics succeeded them, followed by the mayor and corporation of Carlisle. The lord's servants and large numbers of gentlemen mourners brought up the rear.

A careful reading of this ritual reveals that although the form was infused with religious significance, political power, military achievements and social rank underpinned much of the imagery. Pomp and pageantry were everything, and the emblems were particularly meaningful. The battle flag, or standard, was intended to reflect Dacre's military competence, the great banner celebrated the family's political power and its confidence in the continuity of the line; the coat-of-arms confirmed Dacre's honourable status, and the banner-roles drew attention to the family's ancient lineage, kin connections and family alliances.

Dacre's funeral differed in one important aspect from most elite funerals of the era in that his most obvious symbols of power: his sword, gauntlets, helmet, and shield were not on full view. Normally these emblems were carried upside down by stewards in the procession. The records make no mention of these; but tradition prevailed when they were later offered to the cleric at the conclusion of the ceremony, who in turn presented them to the heir, a symbolic

act signifying humility before God and confirming the
continuance of the family line.

If military might and political power were reflected in
the proud display of emblems, Dacre's social position was
celebrated in the careful selection of chief mourners and
pall-bearers. Custom dictated that these participants, all
highly visible, should be of the same status and sex as the
deceased, so that there should be no mistaking the gender
and the precise rank of the departed.[353]

In contrast to the pall bearers, whose function was
largely symbolic, under bearers, who actually bore the full
weight of the coffin, had a much more arduous task. Often
completely invisible under the pall, such persons were
usually selected for their strength, and tended to be of
humble background. The under bearer's task could be
daunting. The weight of an elaborate coffin was usually
considerable. Coffin style and construction were again,
indicators of status. Although we are not provided with
details about Dacre's coffin, it was normal for nobility to
be buried in triple layers. Typically these were elm within
a lead shell encased in an outer oak coffin. It was not
uncommon for as many as fourteen under bearers to be
required.[354]

It is tempting to see the size of Dacre's cortege as a
testament to the amount of grief his passing elicited. Yet
emotional considerations were not a high priority in this
type of funeral. Indeed, it was crucial that grief should
be suppressed. There is no mention of a widow, nor of any
female mourners being present, and this was often the case

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[353] Julian Litten, The English Way of Death, chapter 2.

[354] Julian Litten, The English Way of Death, chapter 4.

at the funeral of a great man. The supposed predisposition
of females to uncontrolled shows of passion was felt to
compromise the dignity of such an event. Perhaps even more
important, an unrestrained acknowledgment of loss could
underscore weakness, contradicting the underlying message of
unassailable and abiding power which the ritual was designed
to convey. [355]

Nor should the presence of large numbers of paupers be
read as altruism on the part of the family, or the devotion
of the poor to a benevolent lord. In Catholic eschatology
the well being of the soul was central to all funerary
rites, and this concern survived the coming of
Protestantism. A belief in the beneficial effects of pauper
prayers, particularly in relation to the soul, meant that
the poor were regular attenders at funerals of the rich.
More paupers meant more prayers, and an early release of the
soul from purgatory.[356] As for the poor themselves, they
received gifts of warm clothing, food, drink and money

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[355] Sharon Strocchia notes that the exclusion of women from noble
funerals according to sumptuary laws was indicative of women's marginal
status. Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual, 10-12. Phyllis Cunnington
and Catherine Lucas also note that women played little or no part in
great men's funerals. Women mourners were common, however, at the
funerals of females. Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas 217,
Costumes, 185. The lesser power of females relative to males perhaps
explains this willingness to risk emotional outbursts at women's
funerals.

[356] The practise of offering prayers and masses for the dead had been
an important part of Catholic eschatology. Chantries were established
for this purpose and chantry priests undertook to conduct masses at
regular intervals after the death. They would commonly be sung on the
third, seventh and thirtieth day, and might be said annually for many
years. At such times food, clothing and money might be distributed to
the poor. The chantries were officially suppressed in 1547. Although
outwardly repudiated, however, many aspects of Catholic doctrine
lingered after the Reformation. Litten The English Way of Death, chapter
1.

(dole) in return for their devotions, and were probably only too glad to participate. [357]

The inclusion of a large number of mourners in the cortege was intended to ensure the degree of spectacle commensurate with the influence, socially, politically and militarily, of a great leader. Dacre had been a powerful border warlord who had allied himself with other prominent gentry families in the surrounding region. He had commanded a large tenantry and exerted his influence over a wide area. Thus the size of the cortege, the number of prominent people included, and the emblems on show, were all carefully combined to indicate his precise rank in the social order.

The noble funeral's stress on the status of the deceased was also reflected in the amount of mourning fabric which was purchased, and in the manner in which mourning materials and other accoutrements were distributed amongst mourners. It might even be indicated in the ways in which funeral lists were drawn up. In 1701, the aristocratic Elizabeth Preston of Holker Hall, Cartmel, had a funeral akin in scale to that of the Dacre family. Although we do not have a detailed description of her cortege, a list of funeral requisites is revealing.

As previously noted, historians have referred to the liberal amounts of black cloth which might be purchased for an aristocratic funeral. Madam Preston's obsequies necessitated the purchase of fifty yards of black material for hanging in the parlour (probably where her cadaver lay in state), also for decking the pew and "burying place." [358]

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[357] However, Sharon Strocchia has referred to such paupers as "ceremonial prisoners". Sharon Strocchia, Death and Ritual, 64.

[358] It was common practise to drape copious amounts of black drapery around the interior of the house and church. Lawrence Stone, The Crisis

Another thirty-six yards of material were purchased to
equip the bearers with scarves and hatbands, and a further
twenty yards was similarly provided for the chief
mourners.[359]

By the time of this funeral, certain modifications to
the aristocratic rites had occurred. In Dacre's day black
hooded mourning gowns had been common at funerals, but by
the eighteenth century more modern costumes had been adopted
and black scarves and gloves, as well as hats bound in black
bands, were now conventional items of mourning attire. The
symbolic function of such items, both religious and social,
was very important. A pair of gloves often accompanied by a
memorial card were common gifts to guests, prompted in part
by a desire to keep alive the memory of the deceased and,
once again, to elicit prayers for the benefit of the soul.[360]
But gloves, hatbands and scarves were also frequently used
to denote the recipient's social status.

The funeral accounts of Madam Preston imply that
social discrimination was an overriding consideration in the
organisation of this funeral and that this informed the
etiquette observed. The quality of mourning was carefully
matched to the social status of the recipient. At the top
of the list of funerary items made out for her funeral we
read that twenty four "best" gloves and hatbands were to be
supplied for the most distinguished male mourners. Lower
down the list (and the social ladder) three dozen men and
two dozen women were to be supplied with "shamy" gloves, and
at the lower end of the scale, the "common people" were

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of the Aristocracy, 576.

[359] "The funeral accounts of Madam Preston," on public view in the
museum at Holker Hall.

[360] John Morley, Death, Heaven and the Victorians, 21.

given twenty-three dozen gloves for males and twenty-eight dozen for females - of a quality inferior to the first two categories.[361] Whether the "common people" (presumably tenantry) took an active part in the funeral is not known, but the fact that they were supplied with gloves suggests that they may have done. If so, the cortege would have included in excess of 700 persons.

This link between social status and the quality of funerary items is also highlighted in another gentry funeral. In West Cumbria the Senhouse family buried each of their two sons prematurely. Joseph Senhouse was twenty when he was buried in the family tomb at Cross Canonby Church in 1718. William was buried nine years later. For the latter funeral the pallbearers, all local gentry, were provided with white hatbands, gloves and scarves. Four and a half dozen of the "best glased white gloves, the men's being topt" were provided to attenders of the highest social class, at a shilling a pair, and six pairs of good quality children's gloves were also distributed. Five dozen pairs of inferior quality gloves were given to tenants, servants, farmers and salters, at sixpence a pair.[362]

Records for this funeral also clearly indicate how food served at funerals could also be used to reinforce hierarchy. "All invited" (that is all those summoned by written invitation) had "cold meat, burnt wine and biscake"

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[361] Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas also provide examples of funerals where the quality of the mourning material was carefully matched to that of the mourner. Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes, 144-196.

[362] White was commonly used at funerals of children and virgins. Edward Hughes, North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century, II, Cumberland and Westmorland, 1700-1830 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 70.

whereas the tenants and all the neighbours who came "uninvited" had "common biscake and hot ale."[363]

The Senhouse funeral appears to have been a small-scale affair in comparison with those held for Dacre or Preston, reflecting the family's lower position on the social ladder. Nevertheless, in a gesture of benevolence to the poor the family included a vast number of the local population. In aristocratic style they distributed dole to about 600 poor people.[364]

The aristocratic funerals described above were replete with symbolic forms stressing the high social status and the affluence of the deceased and the bereaved family. Social discrimination was blatant not only in the organisation and composition of the cortege, but in the imperative to match the quality of funerary gift or refreshment, to the "quality" of the recipient in each case. In these class-conscious affairs, although community involvement was an important feature, it was a hierarchical community wherein

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[363] Edward Hughes, North Country Life in the Eighteenth Century, II, Cumberland and Westmorland, 1700-1830, 70.

[364] William Fleming notes that funeral dole (or doles) was given to the poor in the village of Pennington until 1819. William Fleming, The Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book of William Fleming of Pennington, 1789-1819, 662. Elizabeth Taylor, a wealthy widow from Finsthwaite, left one pound seven and six to poor people in the village upon her death in the 1770's. Patrick David Robert Borwick, " An English Provincial Society: North Lancashire 1770-1820" (PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1994), 416. Sometimes memorials were erected as a permanent reminder of the benevolence of the dole-givers. Roskel's memorial tablet within Cartmel Priory dictates that "the Poor Inhabitants of ye townships of Holker and Allithwaite are to receive ye summe of thirty pounds the Interest thereof to be distributed yearly for ever." In the church of St. Mary Magdalene at Broughton-in-Furness is inscribed a tablet which states the desire of Jane Taylor, widow, to bequeath money for the instruction of poor scholars, also for distribution among the poor householders of Broughton. To this day a fresh loaf is placed each week on a shelf in Cartmel Priory in memory of James Briggs of Swallowmire who died in 1703 and bequeathed bread to the indigent of the parish for ever.(Personal observations).

those at the top publicly bestowed charity upon those at the
bottom. This was a collectivity in which the bereaved
family loudly proclaimed its high status and luxuriated in
the spectacle which the rituals of death could provide.
Religious in origin, charitable acts could also be used for
social purposes. Benevolence was contingent upon affluence,
and a public gesture ensured all were aware from whence it
came.

These elitist rituals provided the model which gave
form and meaning to so many fashionable nineteenth-century
funerals. The funeral of the Duke of Wellington in 1852,
for example, was an incredibly sumptuous affair, recreating
in the urban environment of the industrial age, the
splendour of the early modern heraldic funeral in all its
magnificence. The duke was laid to rest in four substantial
coffins, his spectacular departure eagerly scrutinised by
thousands of onlookers. As Pat Jalland has observed, "the
triumphant funeral car alone cost £11,000, while The
Observer calculated that £80,000 changed hands for seats for
the funeral."[365] Although Jalland argues that this was an
extraordinary event, there can be little doubt that it
served to emphasize the role of the ornate funeral in
articulating social status. Ruth Richardson has claimed
that "huge numbers of less eminent personages also enjoyed
fairly spectacular displays."[366] Indeed, much of the
symbolism of an earlier era resurfaced in the funerals of
the nineteenth-century social elite. In staging

[365] Pat Jalland, "Death, Grief and Mourning in the Upper-Class
Family, 1860-1914," in Ralph Houlebrooke, ed. Death, Ritual and
Bereavement, 171-194, 184.

[366] Ruth Richardson. "Why Was Death so Big in Victorian Britain?" in
Ralph Houlebrooke, ed. Death, Ritual and Bereavement, 105-117, 116.

materialistic displays on the death of a relative, many affluent Victorians were perpetuating a tradition long embraced by the most wealthy families in the land.

In her study of death, grief and mourning in the upper-class family, Pat Jalland notes that "death in Victorian Britain has been surprisingly neglected."[367] Jalland's more recent work, Death in the Victorian Family, is an attempt to remedy what she sees as a paucity. It comprises an examination of the emotional and spiritual aspects of death and dying, and elucidates what the Victorians understood by the term "a good death."[368] Yet Jalland is only partially right, for although the Victorian rituals of death have not been subjected to the depth of analysis which heraldic funerals have attracted, some valuable scholarship does exist.

Ruth Richardson, for example, has undertaken a penetrating examination of the effects of the Anatomy Acts. She posits that the elaborate burials of the middle classes of the early nineteenth century were in part a practical response to a fear of body snatchers. When the passage of the Acts in the 1830's effectively removed this threat by consigning pauper bodies to the anatomists' slab, fashionable people thereafter used extravagant funerals and fine memorials as an affirmation of their social distance from the workhouse.

In fairness to Jalland, it has to be admitted that many other discussions of the Victorian way of death have tended to be either largely descriptive, or highly subjective in

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[367] Pat Jalland, "Death, Grief and Mourning," 171-194, 171.

[368] Pat Jalland, Death in the Victorian Family.

tone.[369] Yet even the mainly descriptive scholarship is valuable insofar as it highlights the extent to which nineteenth-century rituals drew on the noble funerals of the early-modern period. James Stevens Curl's portrayal of the Victorian funeral reveals that, as in the heraldic funeral, the Victorian cortege was closely regulated in terms of its components, as well as the order in which the mourners processed. Among the most notable features were the "mutes" - men who led the procession and whose main purpose seems to have been to look glum. These fellows, who wore enormous black crepe sashes tied diagonally across the shoulder, and carried "wands" similarly adorned, were modelled on the funeral conductors of the early-modern period. Equally as intriguing was the featherman who carried a plate of black ostrich feathers on his head - the nineteenth-century version of the herald displaying the bereaved family's coat-of-arms.[370]

Appropriate clothing was also an important part of nineteenth-century funerary etiquette, as it had been for noble funerals. Lou Taylor, Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas have described the intricacies of nineteenth-century mourning wear, which could be particularly daunting for female mourners.[371] Although their "delicate constitutions" often prevented genteel ladies from attending the funeral itself, women were expected to wear mourning garments for a considerable period after a death,

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[369] See, for example, David Cannadine's stinging condemnation of Victorian funerary rites in "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," 187-243.

[370] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 1-21.

[371] Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes, 196-198. Lou Taylor, Mourning Dress: a Costume and Social History (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1993), 133-163.

depending on the closeness of their relationship to the deceased.[372] Fashion dictated the wearing of constricting clothing of uncomfortable crepe, including voluminous dresses, and undergarments threaded with black ribbon of the appropriate width. Also considered obligatory were bonnets which made it difficult to turn the head, as well as assorted accessories including gloves, fans, parasols and jet jewellery. This strict sartorial protocol could cause acute anxiety for mourners. A widow wearing a veil of the wrong length, for example, or a gentleman with too narrow a crepe band around his hat, was likely to undergo social censure.[373]

Several historians have turned their attention to the economic, as well as the social and cultural ramifications of ornate funerals and prolonged mourning. Funerary fashions supported a huge industry which manufactured fabrics, clothing, jewellery and a plethora of assorted mourning paraphernalia. Nigel Llewellyn has noted that middle-class aspirations were aided and abetted by changes in technology. He explains how developments in the manufacture of fabrics and clothing meant that by the early decades of the nineteenth century mourning wear could now be mass-produced.[374] Cunnington and Lucas have described the rise, in the 1830's, of the firm of Courtaulds, whose production of crepe exploded by 1500% in the first twenty years.[375] James Stevens Curl has explained how the larger

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[372] In the nineteenth century royal women did not attend funerals, and this set a precedent for "respectable" women. Olivia Bland, The Royal Way of Death, 107.

[373] Lou Taylor, Mourning Dress, 120.

[374] Nigel Llewellyn, The Art of Death, 91.

[375] Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes, 150.

retailers opened mourning departments, and notes that in 1841 Jays of London was established. Modelled on the French mourning houses, it soon became the most fashionable suppliers of mourning wear in the country.[376] Mourning establishments promised their patrons fast, efficient service. Most completed orders within twenty-four hours, and Trevor May has claimed that in so doing they made socially acceptable the wearing of ready-made clothing.[377]

Some provincial towns benefited greatly from the "dismal trade". James Walvin has observed that the increasing demand for jet for use in mourning jewellery gave a much-needed boost to the local economy of Whitby. By the 1870's the industry was thriving.[378] Ursula Priestly has described how the town of Norwich had a flourishing industry in black crepe and bombazine throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. She explains how demand was influenced to a great extent by ladies magazines which "were at pains to stress the link between mourning dress and current fashion."[379]

The example set by Queen Victoria, who mourned the Prince Consort for twenty years, did much to stimulate this connection, and many of the social elite were quick to emulate the royal example. Indeed, persons who regarded themselves as fashionable not only mourned their own family members, but also observed "court mourning" for members of the royal family or important members of state.

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[376] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 11.

[377] Trevor May, The Victorian Undertaker, (Princes Riseborough: Shire Publications, 1996), 37.

[378] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 363.

[379] Ursula Priestly, "Norwich and the Mourning Trade," Costume (Spring 1989): 47-55, 54.

The ornate funeral and its attendant rituals of
mourning played an important role in middle-class culture.
In a penetrating study, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall
have described the important role played by rituals and
etiquette generally in carving out a social identity for an
emerging middle class. They observe that in the early
nineteenth century

> Middle-class men's and women's part in rituals of
> various kinds and appearances in various places
> was being plotted and codified according to
> developing notions of gentility and
> respectability.[380]

"Politeness" was used as a vehicle for discriminating
between the sophisticated and the vulgar, people of quality
and their social inferiors: common folk.

But Davidoff has also stressed that the observance of
mourning was understood as a social obligation on the part
of the middle classes. It was a way of "demonstrating
'decent' behaviour to the working class."[381] That the more
humble were receptive to the example set by their "betters"
has been argued by several historians.[382] Ursula Priestly
claims that

> all but the very poor felt it essential to stage a
> conspicuous display of black for the funeral
> itself and, in varying degrees, for the lengthy
> period of mourning which followed.[383]

[380] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes, Men and
Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850 (London: Routledge, 1987),
409.

[381] Leonora Davidoff, The Best Circles, (London: Croom Helm, 1973),
56.

[382] See, for example, Gareth Stedman Jones, "Working-class Culture
and Working-class Politics in London, 1870-1900: Notes on the Remaking
of a Working Class", 460-508.

[383] Ursula Priestly, "Norwich and the Mourning Trade," 47-55, 50.

Stevens Curl agrees, claiming that those lower down the social scale often ruined themselves in their efforts to emulate the customs of the rich.[384]

In Paul Johnson's view, the strict protocol and the materialism which characterised the death rituals of the middle classes was reworked by the more lowly in accordance with their own brand of "decency." It was of tremendous importance to the working classes to provide a "respectable" send-off for their kin, and, like their social superiors, they also sought to achieve this by the use of overt display.[385]

There is evidence to suggest that aspiring families from the middle ranks of society in Cumbria fashioned sophisticated funerals in a style similar to those described by the foregoing historians, and that these materialistic rituals were observed and emulated to an extent by the working classes. The rising tide of undertakers who sold their services to these social climbers modified the aristocratic style to suit this growing clientele: as noted, pages bearing trays of black ostrich feathers now replaced the heralds carrying the emblems of the deceased, and the lord's stewards gave way to "mutes." These were changes in form, but not in function. As in the heraldic funerals, individual and family status could still be gauged by the degree of spectacle involved. [386]

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[384] James Stevens Curl, The Victorian Celebration of Death, 20.

[385] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, Chapters 2 and 8.

[386] The first recorded undertaker in England was William Russell of London, who began trading in 1675. Julian Litten, The English Way of Death, 17.

James Stockdale was a member of the rising middle class of Cumbria who was determined to depart this life in style. The son of an enterprising father for whom he was named, he managed his father's business interests on his death. Stockdale senior had built a cotton mill, and owned ships, iron mines and furnaces. Not only had he been prominent in the economic life of the locality, but he had possessions in the West Indies and prior to the American Revolution he had business interests in the United States.

James Stockdale junior died in 1823, and whereas earlier Stockdales had been buried in accordance with the less flamboyant customs characteristic of the indigenous farming community, this particular gentleman aspired to gentility in a way his forbears had not. The guests at his funeral were all prominent males who, in gentry style, appear to have received printed invitations.[387] The eight pallbearers were all of a similar social standing to the deceased, and the entourage included two "mutes."

The most distinguished non-attender was the local aristocrat, Lord Cavendish. He had certainly been invited, and due to his inability to attend, a hatband, scarf and gloves were sent to his residence "as a remembrance of a similar token of respect from the Holker family to the late Mr. Stockdale on the death of the Late Lord G. Cavendish."[388] The sending of funerary mementoes to selected guests could clearly be used to strengthen social alliances. The gift of gloves, a hatband and a scarf affirmed connections to a

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[387] Social discrimination is again underscored in the manner of invitation. Printed invitations were commonly sent out to the most socially prominent funeral guests, whereas the community as a whole would simply attend bidden or "uninvited." (See chapter 1).

[388] BD/HJ/76/28.The funeral accounts of the Stockdale family.

social superior, thus confirming the Stockdales' own
position as members (or aspiring members) of the social
elite.

Further evidence that funerals could affirm social
standing and demonstrate affluence is revealed in the
documentation relating to the Machell funeral of 1826, three
years later. The Machells were of indigenous minor gentry
stock and in the eighteenth century they had become active
in local iron mining. They were also magistrates. At his
death Thomas Machell left an estate in excess of £3768. His
funeral expenses amounted to almost £140 - no mean amount.
The funeral account mentioned the purchase of 141 yards of
"rich ducape silk" as well as liberal amounts of black crepe
and ribbon. It called for the use of a "Best Black Silk
Pall" and also three "Black Cloth Cloaks."

Two members of this family had been recipients of
hatbands and gloves at the Stockdale funeral, one member
having the privilege of acting as pall-bearer. When Thomas
Machell died, his family also made a liberal distribution of
memorabilia, some going in the direction of the Stockdales.
Eight pall-bearers and twelve chief mourners
(including two representatives of the Stockdale family) were
supplied with silk scarves, hatbands and gloves, six more
gentlemen were supplied with silk hatbands and gloves, and
fourteen tenants received crepe hatbands and gloves.

Here again we see social distinctions being made, the
most distinguished gentlemen receiving the superior gifts.
Social position was also intimated in the way in which the
funeral list was drawn up. There was a clear attempt to
single out the gentlemen pall-bearers who took pride of
place at the head of the list of guests and who were all
designated "esquire". Mourners became progressively less

distinguished towards the middle and end of the list, with under bearers the most lowly. The latter were all local men of humble status and each was paid ten shillings and sixpence for his efforts.[389]

The funeral meal could also provide an opportunity for highlighting differential social status, the quantity and quality of the fare provided indicating the financial and social standing of both host and guest.[390] William Fleming noted how, in the early nineteenth century, social discrimination could be quite blatant at funerals of the affluent in his area:

> It is the singular Custom, still followed at
> Dalton by the more respectable inhabitants at
> funerals, to divide the people who attend the
> Interment into three Classes: The First Class
> consists of the richest and nearest relations, who
> have a warm dinner provided -The Second, consists
> of the poorest and more distant Relations,
> together with their richer Acquaintance and
> Friends, who partake of a cold Dinner - and the
> Third, of the Farmers and people in the Town who
> are not Relations or opulent acquaintance, then
> have bread and cheese.[391]

Sources suggest that it was common for better-placed families to have meals catered at local hostelries. The mourners at the funeral of Isabel Briggs of Pennington in 1817, "dined on an excellent hot dinner at the Commercial

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[389] BDX 100/14.Funeral accounts of the Machell family.

[390] For the symbolic use of food and feasting see Bonnie Huskins, "From Haute Cuisine to Ox Roasts: Public Feasting and the Negotiation of Class in Mid-19th-Century Saint John and Halifax," Labour/Le Travail 37 (Spring 1996): 9-33, Elaine Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," and Gervase Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England," Journal of British Studies 33 (1994): 430-446.

[391] William Fleming, Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book, 4 1063.

Inn, Ulverston,"[392] and prior to the funeral of the draper, Robert Townson, in 1813, a meal was eaten at the Bradylls Arms in the same town.[393] The funeral accounts for Thomas Machell note that forty one guests dined at a cost of two shillings and sixpence each, with four shillings and sixpence spent on ale, and four shillings on hay and corn (presumably for the horses which drew the carriages, and not the guests!). [394] The Machell family invited five labourers to the feast. This might have been a generous tribute to employees who had provided good service, but equally, it might represent a throwback to the giving of dole to the poor in return for much-needed prayers for the soul. As we have seen, the dispensing of charity was an important component of the aristocratic rites. The giving of "dole" was one of the distinguishing features of funerals of the rich. In 1822 The Lonsdale Magazine could still report that at the funerals of the better-off "a deal of money and provisions was usually given to the poor."[395]

The funerals so far described were staged by a minority of better-placed rural folk who were still burying their dead in the local churchyards. As towns grew, churchyards closed, and cemeteries opened, the few undertakers who had catered for gentry clients now expanded their operations to provide town-dwellers with similar opportunities to use funerals to indicate social status. Socially-aspiring families increasingly turned to paid professionals to

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[392] William Fleming, Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book, 3141.

[393] William Fleming, Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book, 2692-4.

[394] BDX/100/14.

[395] Lonsdale Magazine III (1822) XXXIII, 877. The pronunciation "de-yal" of the word "dole" was apparently very common. Rev. Canon Simpson, Kirkby Stephen Parish Magazine, (1877), 153.

orchestrate their family obsequies, and found them only too willing to help them achieve an "impressive" event. As had been the case with heraldic and gentry funerals, theatrical effect was achieved in part through the quality and quantity of goods on display. Conspicuous consumption was a measure of the depth of the deceased's purse and could be used to indicate social standing in the community. In the urban environment a substantial coffin and a fine retinue of carriages was considered the mark of affluence, especially if accompanied by high-ranking mourners. A close examination of the newspapers serving towns in the Furness area reveals that many people staged such flamboyant rituals in the decades after the opening of the Dalton, Ulverston and Barrow cemeteries. The fact that they received so much coverage in the local press is in itself testament to their ability to capture public interest.

The distance from the church to cemetery was a major factor prompting undertakers to encourage the use of horse-drawn hearses and mourning coaches. It also held the promise of increased profitability. Undertakers often arranged to hire them from cab proprietors. In Ulverston the Sun hotel regularly hired out vehicles, and in the latter part of the nineteenth century many Barrow businesses advertised in the local press.[396] William Skiels, hearse, coach and cab proprietor, was proud to announce that he was

[396] John Forshaw, proprietor of Greengate Livery Stables, not only supplied cabs for funerals but also for weddings and picnic parties. Charles Bros and Ward of Barrow, coach builders and harness makers, also supplied hearses and mourning coaches as well as coaches for weddings and picnics. Barrow News, 2 Jan 1897.

a member of the telephone Exchange number 33, and had
"communication with all principal works and business houses
in the town,"[397] and Ward and Wilkins announced that they
had the "largest and most select stock of carriages in the
District in every size and variety, to carry from two to
twenty-five...."[398]

The families whose long retinues of carriages drew the
attention of the local newspapers were usually those who had
also secured expensive private plots for interment.
Newspapers dutifully noted all relevant details for the
edification of their readership. The mortal remains of a
Dr. Hall were interred in the C section of the Dalton
cemetery in 1892. His body was encased in a solid brick
vault overlain by a slab very close to the Anglican chapel.
The distinguished gentleman had been a surgeon, and The
Barrow News noted that he left a "fortune estimated at six
figures." The paper also recorded that he had a double
coffin, and that the outside one was of oak with "heavy and
handsome brass mountings." His hearse was attended by
twelve bearers each supplied with hatbands and gloves.
There were four mourning coaches and numerous carriages, and
many distinguished people followed his cortege.[399]

As the above description illustrates, newspaper reports
made much of the style and quality of coffins of
distinguished persons, also of the number of carriages in
attendance including those "sent" to represent families
unable to attend personally. For the funeral of Mr. T.A.
Mercer, borough treasurer and assistant overseer of Barrow,

the local newspaper noted that the coffin was made of Danzig oak and that sixteen carriages had been counted.[400] Similarly, for the funeral of Doctor Stark, member of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, and Founder of the Presbyterian Church in Barrow, seventeen carriages were in attendance and the oak coffin sported "extra heavy brass mountings".[401]

A large turnout was interpreted as indicative of the degree of "respect" the deceased had commanded in life. The press was always quick to estimate the numbers present, including those who came to watch. When Mr. Alfred Blechynden, the late manager of the Engineering Department of Naval Construction and Armaments at Barrow was laid to rest in his double coffin of Danzig oak, the thousands of onlookers thronging the route to the Barrow cemetery must have served to affirm his social importance; however, the closure of the engineering side of the shipyard that afternoon probably had something to do with it. Spectacular funerals could be a source of entertainment.[402] But of special importance to the press were the number of socially prominent mourners in attendance. A great number of celebrated males were "noticed" in Mr. Blechynden's cortege. Similarly, when Captain Summer was interred at Dalton Cemetery in 1883, the sharp eyes of the reporter noted that he was followed to the grave by a large number of friends, "amongst whom were recognised either personally or

[400] Barrow News, 20 March 1897.
[401] Barrow News, 26 Oct 1895.
[402] Barrow News, 27 Feb 1897.

represented by their carriages, Captain Porter, Councillor Fisher..." and numerous other worthies. [403]

If the quality of the coffin and the size and social composition of the cortege were clear symbols of social standing, and the number of spectators a testament to the degree of "respect" felt for the deceased, the industrialist Schneider qualified as one of the most important and highly regarded men in the area. He was certainly one of the region's leading industrialists and investors, and he had played a major role in the development of Barrow.[404] His funeral was a tremendously large affair. Although it took place outside Barrow, the site of his thriving ironworks, the flags in the town flew at half mast, and Barrow Town Hall tolled at the time of the funeral. The Barrow News expressed the hope that "all places of business in the town will be closed from 1-5pm as a mark of respect," and special carriages were provided to take people via the Furness Railway and Lake Windermere to the funeral at the village of Bowness where the family lived, a distance of about sixteen miles. The cortege was enormous. Headed by Freemasons, it included family servants, public officials, many socially-prominent males, Barrow Corporation and numerous empty carriages sent by people unable to attend.[405]

Again, closely paralleling the traditional funerals of the nobility, the majority of the funerals reported in the press were overwhelmingly male affairs. At Dr. Stark's funeral there is no mention of female mourners despite a long list of males. At the funeral of T.A. Mercer, who left

[403] Barrow News, 17 March 1883.

[404] J.D. Marshall and J. Walton, The Lake Counties, 39.

[405] Barrow News, 15 Nov 1887.

a widow, the six chief mourners were male, the widow simply sending a wreath. In contrast to the heraldic funerals, this custom seems to have prevailed even when a woman died, and where adult daughters survived. The cortege of Mrs. Myles Kennedy included leading local dignitaries borne in mourning coaches and private carriages, and followed on foot by large numbers of gentlemen and tradesmen. Despite having several daughters, all the mourners "noticed" by the newspaper were male.[406] Prevailing nineteenth-century ideas about the innate delicacy of respectable women probably accounts for this.[407]

Just as the noble funeral placed great emphasis on the quality of mourning fabrics, so middle-class etiquette demanded that mourners pay a great deal of attention to appropriate mourning attire. Membership of respectable society dictated that one kept abreast of changing styles and despite the great distance, Jays of London advertised regularly in the Barrow Pilot throughout the 1870's. They reassured polite society that their

> experienced dressmakers and milliners [are] ready
> to travel to any part of the kingdom, free of
> expense to purchasers, when the exigencies of
> sudden or unexpected mourning require the
> execution of mourning orders. They take with them
> dresses, bonnets, and millinery besides material
> at one shilling per yard and upwards from the
> piece, all marked in plain figures and at the same
> price as if purchased at Jay's mourning warehouse
> in Regent Street. [408]

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[406] Barrow News, 12 Nov 1887.

[407] As noted earlier, women had often been in attendance in large numbers for noble women's funerals, although not for men's. Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas report that by the Victorian era it had become uncommon for middle-class or aristocratic women to attend funerals for either sex. Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costumes, 237.

[408] Barrow Pilot, 1 Jan 1873. Jays was the first mourning warehouse

A rival firm, also with a Regent Street address, advertised in the same decade in the Ulverston Mirror. Baker and Crisps announced that it catered for "every grade of mourning," and that prices started at sixpence per yard.[409] A Manchester-based supplier also advertised locally its supply of "costumes and mantles." Mourning orders could be satisfied, it claimed, "at one day's notice."[410]

Private family papers reveal that Cumbrian families sometimes dealt with the fashionable suppliers of the capital. When John Jackson, printer, stationer, and bookseller of Ulverston died in November 1878, followed later in the same week by his wife, their son Thomas immediately sent to Clarks of Regent Street in London for a black twill mourning coat, vest and trousers to a total of five pounds fifteen shillings and sixpence. They were sent up promptly by passenger train.[411]

It is likely that most people acquired their funerary items locally, however, and there was no shortage of mourning outfitters to choose from, all offering prompt,

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on French lines to open in England. Phyllis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, Costume, 23. The company sent a representative to supervise the funeral of a newspaper proprietor whose body was embalmed and sent by train from London to Ulverston. Barrow News, 2 March 1901.

[409] Ulverston Mirror, 24 Jan 1874.

[410] Barrow News, 12 Jan 1901.

[411] BD/hj/21. Jackson family papers. The prompt service elicited by funeral orders can be gauged by the following quote from an 1882 edition of Leisure Hour :

> from all parts of the country telegrams and letters are continually coming in and packages are continually going out by carrier and fast train, all labelled "immediately for funeral" to ensure quick delivery. If anyone wants a parcel to go promptly and surely to hand, he has only to label it with these mystic words, and the railway men will pounce upon it and be off with it at a run.

in Trevor May, The Victorian Undertaker, 56.

efficient service.[412] Birketts of Ulverston gave special
attention to mourning orders, completing a full suit in six
hours.[413] Thompson and Pearson of Duke Street in Barrow
declared that their mourning department carried "all the new
fabrics for the season suitable for Family and Complimentary
mourning." They offered hat bands, scarves, hoods, gloves,
shrouds, and other items.[414]

The Jacksons obtained many of their items locally. A
Thomas Watts supplied Miss Jackson with two pairs of gloves
at five shillings and sixpence each and six pairs at three
and sixpence each, also thirty four yards of black French
cachenine and twenty yards of crepe. James Mason, "Linen
and Woollen Draper, Silk Mercier, Haberdasher, Hosier,
Glover, Laceman, Hatter and Tea Dealer," supplied many other
funerary items to a total of over twenty-three pounds.
These included coffin liners, a shroud, kid gloves, calf
gloves, a silk hat and two cloth hatbands. He also provided
a pall, and made mourning suits.[415]

Mourning was a serious business, and fashionable people
were careful to follow the complicated rules of mourning
etiquette which prevailed. Indeed, middle-class magazines
offered a plethora of advice on the subject. Some people
went to absurd lengths in the name of respectability. A
local dressmaker had the following memory of a particular
widow from Ulverston who made arrangements for mourning wear

[412] Robinsons in Barrow took advantage of the Queen's death in 1901
to advertise its large selection of black gloves and ties, and
encouraged people to show their respect by purchasing them for the
occasion. Clearly, respectability bestowed benefits on those seeking and
those supplying it. Barrow News, 26 Jan 1901.

[413] The Furness Year Book, 1900.

[414] Barrow Pilot, 11 Jan 1873.

[415] BD/hj/21. The Jackson family papers.

upon the death of her husband. Not only did the widow wear black, so did the family's pet poodle:

> and when we got the mourning order we got the
> mourning order for the dog. It had a crepe
> bow...on its neck, and when she went into half
> mourning as they did do, the dog went into half
> mourning and wore a mauve bow. When they went out
> of mourning it had a white one again. [416]

Such absurdities were by no means unusual, and drew increasing criticism. Nationally, many began to speak out against the expense incurred and the attitudes which underpinned such pretentious behaviour. In 1875, The National Funeral and Mourning Association was formed, followed in 1880 by The Church of England Burial, Funeral and Mourning Reform Association.

Objections to ornate funerals and burials came from numerous directions. Many critics were motivated by religious imperatives, others by aesthetic concerns. Often the two combined. Many reformers felt that simpler styles of funerals symbolised greater humility before God. Quakers had traditionally opposed all forms of ostentation, and their strong influence in Cumbria may well have helped fuel reform in this area.[417] But there was widespread disapproval amongst religious denominations throughout the country, and from the 1870's on there was increasing debate on the subject.

In 1874 a reader of the Ulverston Mirror called for a return to simpler ways of interment:

[416] Mrs. H.2.B., Lancaster University Oral History Archive.

[417] George Fox married the Cumbrian widow, Margaret Fell, and resided for much of his life in the village of Swarthmoor in Furness.

> Revive the use of the bier...discontinue wearing
> hat-bands and scarves; have no so-called ornaments
> of pagan design upon the coffin, and decency and
> reverence may be observed without the empty pomp
> and heartless display so offensive to all right-
> minded persons.[418]

Nine years later, when consecrating the new portion of the Ulverston cemetery the Lord Bishop Diggle of Carlisle preached on the same theme. He rejoiced that burial grounds were now much better maintained, but spoke out against the dangers of going to the opposite extreme. God's purpose, he said, was that the body should return to its essential elements and he felt that enclosing the body in sturdy wood or lead was against divine will and intention.[419]

As a solution, the Earth to Earth Society advocated inexpensive "environmentally friendly" wicker coffins. More controversial was the suggestion put forward by a handful of progressive free-thinkers who favoured a more novel type of disposal. George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and other well-known agnostics were at the forefront of the movement which had seized public attention with the publication by the queen's surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson, of Cremation:the Treatment of the Body After Death in 1874. In the same year Thompson founded the Cremation Society of England. Cremation was both a response to, and a symptom of, a growing emphasis on rationalism and utilitarianism. The cremationists were motivated by desires to implement efficient and sanitary disposal of the dead, to save valuable land, and also to minimise expense. In 1885 the first crematorium was opened at Woking, amid protests from

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[418] Ulverston Mirror, 6 June 1874.

[419] Barrow News, 25 March 1883.

local residents. A second was opened in Manchester three years later.[420] Although the movement was slow to gain public approval, it served to open the public's eyes to alternatives to the pomp and circumstance which attended so many funerals of the day.[421]

Another factor mediating against complicated and expensive funerary customs was increasing public impatience with the prolonged seclusion of Queen Victoria following Albert's death. The prince died in 1861, and his widow embarked upon a protracted period of withdrawal from social contact. By the 1870's there was a growing consensus that her period of bereavement was unreasonable, and that court mourning was intruding far too much into the life of "society." This, too, was a period when women's fashions generally were coming under fire both from the medical profession, and from more progressive women demanding more practical and healthy styles of dress. Sales of crepe began to decline in the 1880's, and it is noteworthy that it was during this decade that Jays ceased to advertise in the Cumbrian press. In 1892 the Princess of Wales set a new - and welcome - precedent when she dispensed with crepe altogether when mourning the Duke of Clarence.[422]

But there was another, important reason for the growing concern about ornate funerals. The Ulverston Mirror of 1874, lamented the vanity of those who fell victim to fashion:

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[420] Venetia Newall, "Folklore and Cremation," Folklore 2 (1985):139-154, 140. Clare Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, 91.

[421] The growth of cremation was slow until the Second World War. In 1985, almost 70% of disposals in Great Britain were cremations. Venetia Newall, "Folklore and Cremation," 140.

[422] Ursula Priestly, "Norwich and the Mourning Trade," 54.

> So strong is the hold which the custom of having
> costly funerals has on people of all ranks - so
> submissive are we all to the Moloch of fashion in
> this respect - that however poor a man's family
> may be, they feel it incumbent upon them to expend
> all their limited resources....The emulation which
> exists between people in their mode of living is
> also extended to the interment of the dead....It
> is indeed plainly evident that worldly, and not
> religious motives have a great deal to do with our
> funerals.[423]

It was commonly believed that in emulating their "betters"
the poor were spending much more than they could really
afford.[424] Although the above writer singles out the poor,
one senses an underlying impatience with society at large,
and in particular with those who should be setting an
example. There were many social commentators, most notably
Edwin Chadwick, who felt that in perpetuating a tradition
where the amount of black drapery, the quality of mourning
wear, the style of coffin and the number of carriages and
miscellaneous trappings were all symbols of social power,
middle-class funerals were failing to acknowledge the
traditional corollary of privilege: social responsibility.

The nineteenth-century writer, Mrs. Bosanquet,
disavowed any such obligation to the less fortunate. She
was unabashedly outspoken in her admonition of working-class
excess, laying the blame fairly and squarely on their love
of show

> ...the greatest festival of all is perhaps the
> funeral...the poverty of the family makes no
> difference in their eagerness, and the little

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[423] *Ulverston Mirror,* 23 May 1874.

[424] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 364.

> nest-egg which a man has provided to help his
> widow through the first months of widowhood is
> often lavished within a few days of death. I have
> known a woman have a hearse with four horses, and
> a carriage and a pair, for her husband's funeral,
> and within two weeks apply to the Guardians to
> feed her family. [425]

The crux of the matter, as far as Mrs. Bosanquet and her supporters were concerned, was that in aping their social superiors, the poor risked becoming a burden on the parish.

That some poorer folk were swept along by the tide of fashion cannot be doubted. By the turn of the twentieth century middle-class standards of respectability in matters funereal had clearly permeated working-class sensibilities. When organising a funeral, many ordinary people felt under pressure to make an impression by providing a goodly number of horses and carriages, as this working-class man remembers:

> if you could afford it you had two black horses,
> if not just one, and then it was a case of how
> many carriages you'd have and if it was a small
> one, a carriage and a pair. They always had a long
> carriage that held six and there was just the
> hearse and the carriage and everybody to find out
> what kind of a funeral it was used to say how many
> carriages did they have? [426]

A similar sentiment is expressed in the memory of two women from a council estate in Kendal. Interestingly, for some

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[425] Mrs. Bernard Bosanquet, <u>Rich and Poor</u>, (1899), 126, in Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, <u>Burial Reform</u>, 75.

[426] Mr. B.1 B. Lancaster University Oral History Archive.

working-class people "decency" itself was now measured in more overtly materialistic terms:

> Everybody had to have a "decent" funeral. It was like a tradition, you had to have a "decent" funeral. You had to provide at least some carriages and later on cars. [427]

Social emulation may have been one more reason why some of the more affluent were now keen to adopt more simple styles. If common folk were now jumping on the bandwagon, it was perhaps time for the "better sort" to jump off.

But if some pleaded for moderation, whatever their motives, others failed to heed the call. Perhaps the most impressive funeral to be documented for the late Victorian period in Cumbria came at the height of the debate over funerary pomp. It was that of the late Colonel Bousfield which took place in the village of Coniston, in 1883. It is a remarkably graphic account giving a rare glimpse of the degree of pageantry which could still occur.

Headed by a detachment of one hundred of the First Lancashire Rifle Volunteers brought up by train from Liverpool, and a number of local officers, the cortege included an attendant bearing on his head a huge bunch of black ostrich plumes. He was followed by the funeral car drawn by four "magnificent black horses." The body was encased within a triple coffin: an inner shell, a lead coffin, and an outer coffin of polished oak "richly studded with silver" and bedecked with wreathes. The inscription plate was of silver, and atop the coffin was a crimson, gold-laced cushion with the sword, cap and belt of the

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[427] Marjorie and Mary Noble, personal interview, 1991.

deceased. Following the hearse were eight mourning coaches. The four pall bearers were all officers and dignitaries, whereas the fourteen under bearers were all local residents. The village church which received the coffin was elaborately bedecked with yards of black cloth, and the south aisle of the church as well as the pulpit were completely covered. The deceased was laid to rest in the family vault, the sides of which were "beautifully ornamented with flowers on a ground of moss."[428]

Within this impressive ritual we can detect echoes of the heraldic funerals of old: the proud bearing of the deceased's weapons and uniform, symbols of his rank, the careful choice of pallbearers to parallel his social and military status, humble under bearers to do the lifting, a triple coffin, expensively emblazoned, yards of black material and a secure family vault.

Here, then, in the late Victorian period, we have the epitome of the funeral as status symbol, a display designed as much to impress onlookers and enhance the mourners' sense of importance as much as an aid to assuage grief. In this spectacular panoply the older traditions typical of the age of Lord Dacre and his contemporaries resurfaced with a new gloss.

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The above evidence confirms what historians have discovered for other areas, and suggests that funerals of the nineteenth-century social elite of Cumbria could be extremely materialistic affairs and that they were often used to make a social statement. Rooted in the aristocratic

[428] Barrow News, 2 June 1883.

tradition they were replete with symbolic forms stressing
the high social status and the affluence of the bereaved
family. The incorporation of material goods and theatrical
effect enhanced family and personal prestige and carried
with it the badge of "respectability" for all those who
desired incorporation into the ranks of "polite" society.
This type of funeral, with its feathermen, mutes and
assorted paraphernalia, has caught the attention of many
historians of death, and it has been argued that not only
the middle classes, but also those at the lower end of the
social ladder put away their hard-earned money to secure
such a ritual to mark their own demise.

But although there is ample evidence that the
fashionable middle-class funeral was alive and well in
nineteenth-century Cumbria, it is less easy to gauge the
extent to which working-class people emulated these
extravagant rites. True, there was a body of opinion which
held that the poor were being led astray by their betters.
And as we have seen, in this era of the suburban cemetery
there were now families for whom the number of mourning
coaches and carriages was the chief determinant of "decency"
in death. Clearly, the fashionable funeral set a standard
of sorts for those wishing to aspire to it, and, like
private burial, further exacerbated tensions between older
collective attitudes and a developing ethos which celebrated
the individual within the context of family. But the
efficacy of this pressure to conform to middle-class
standards can only be accurately assessed when measured
against trends which pulled in the opposite direction. It
is to an examination of popular death customs within the
urban environment to which we will now turn.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TENACITY OF TRADITION

DEATH AND THE WORKING CLASSES IN BARROW

Although mutuality was often conditioned by
economic necessity, it was also part of the
inherited cultural equipment of working-class
people.[429]

The range of help provided by neighbours was
immense: children were minded; the sick and the
dying were fed and nursed: clothes were passed on,
funeral teas prepared for the mourners; the dead
laid out....[430]

Popular death culture was much more robust than
was perhaps the case for other aspects of 'old'
popular culture.[431]

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[429] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 9.

[430] Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place, 187.

[431] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 29.

The antithesis of the fashionable funeral was the stigma of the pauper grave: the singling out for inferior treatment of those too poor either to fund their own funerals or to secure their own interment. Some scholars have argued that it was in response to such undignified treatment that many working-class people were driven to stage a more materialistic affair than they could really afford.[432] Others have argued that although the pauper grave was a great source of fear, the humble were at heart as individualistic as their middle-class counterparts. According to this view, it was largely personal pride which caused them, like their middle-class counterparts, to use funerals to affirm social position. Indeed, some historians have insisted that the fact that so many working-class people resorted to burial insurance in the latter part of the nineteenth century is incontestable proof that individualism displaced any sense of community responsibility.[433]

The danger of focusing on the growth of materialistic individualism in popular death rites - a process which should not be underestimated - is that one can ignore the endurance of many older customs rooted in collectivity. This chapter will demonstrate that notwithstanding the growing number of people who used ostentatious funerals to jockey for position within the working-class hierarchy, there were many others who did not. It will also suggest

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[432] James Walvin, "Dust to Dust," 353-375. Ruth Richardson has argued that the threat of dissection lent urgency to the situation, as under the terms of the Anatomy Act, of 1832 "unclaimed" pauper bodies could be appropriated by the medical schools. See Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute.

[433] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, chapters 2 and 8.

that although economic necessity may have played an important part in encouraging continued reliance on traditional ways, this was only a partial explanation.

Historians have argued that many aspects of rural culture successfully transplanted themselves within the urban landscape, and that they had cultural as well as economic significance. Indeed, E. P. Thompson has claimed that rural customs of many kinds formed the basis of much of the emerging urban culture of the working classes, sustaining a value system at odds with the dominant code of more affluent society and claiming an integrity of its own.[434] Patrick Joyce, Ross McKibbin, Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, Ellen Ross, and F.M.L. Thompson, are just a few of the many historians who have given credence to this hypothesis by showing that many pre-industrial behaviours and ideas maintained their dynamism in the cities because they retained meaning and value for those who observed them.[435] Indeed, Patrick Joyce has noted that "In the transition to a more stable and organised urban way of life the legacy of older and more violent and spontaneous ways was a powerful one."[436] Leisure activities, courtship rites, attitudes toward pre-marital sex, and strategies for coping with the unfamiliarity of industrial work, all drew on long-established values and behaviours which continued to

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[434] This is an underlying theme in E.P.Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class.

[435] See, for example, Ross McKibbin, The Ideologies of Class, especially chapter 5; Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, Love in the Time of Victoria; Ellen Ross, "Survival Networks: Women's Neighbourhood Sharing in London Before World War 1," History Workshop 15 (Spring 1983): 4-27; and F.M.L. Thompson, "Town and City," 1-78.

[436] Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, 286.

play an important part in working-class lifestyles in the towns of the nineteenth century.

Many historians have stressed that practices endured even in the face of middle-class cultural "colonisation," as working-class people continued to operate in accordance with familiar community norms. Misunderstood by an elite who never tired of trying to "improve" their manners and morals, they continued to live by their own values,[437] refusing to adopt "an individualistic standard of measurement."[438] As Peter Bailey has observed, working-class behaviours

> formed part of an independent working-class
> culture with its own patterns of behavioural
> consistency and homogeneity, a culture with a
> tangential rather than an emulative relationship
> to that of the middle classes. [439]

Social emulation might boost personal self-esteem, but adherence to familiar ways could offer something perhaps more valuable. Peter Stearns has argued that many working-class people feared change, and instead sought stability. Traditionalism "made sense" and "Once in the city, they sought to re-establish as much of their past cultural world as they could."[440] Well-worn customs could provide a

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[437] Although Gareth Stedman Jones claims that by the 1870's this culture had refashioned itself, he also makes plain that it drew on older forms distinctive to the working-class experience, and remained resistant to middle-class attempts to "improve" it. Gareth Stedman Jones "Working-class Culture and Working-class Politics in London, 1870-1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class," 460-508.

[438] Peter N. Stearns, "The Effort at Continuity in Working-class Culture," Journal of Modern History 52 4 (Dec. 1980): 626-655, 627.

[439] Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand Up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-class Respectability," Journal of Social History 12 3 (Spring 1979):336-353,347.

[440] Peter N. Stearns, "The Effort at Continuity in Working-class Culture," 628.

valuable anchor amid the turmoil of urbanisation and the accelerated pace of industrial life.

This tenacity of tradition is well-illustrated in the continuing vigour, in the urban environment, of many popular customs surrounding death and burial. Ruth Richardson and Elizabeth Roberts have noted the continued importance of neighbourhood forms of support for the dying and the bereaved even into the present century.[441] Whereas Roberts places such help within the context of informal systems of reciprocal aid common to urban working-class neighbourhoods in general, Richardson stresses the persistence of many of the traditional folk beliefs relating to death and specifically to the corpse, ideas whose potency imbued mortuary customs with a metaphysical significance. But even where death customs had lost touch with their spiritual roots, she argues, they continued to hold cultural power.[442] Understood simply as "the thing to do," they continued to exert moral force.

It was not only informal neighbourhood deathways which successfully adapted themselves to the industrial towns. Throughout the nineteenth century local friendly societies were complemented and in many cases replaced by the branches of the Affiliated Orders of Friendly Societies, which continued to help alleviate the financial burdens of bereaved members. Historians have noted that the affiliated orders carried many of the customs of the small, rural societies into the larger industrial towns, where they continued to thrive. As Geoffrey Crossick has

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[441] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 4, Elizabeth Roberts, A Woman's Place, especially chapter 5.

[442] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 21.

observed, "The structure and the organisation persisted, the ceremonies and the ritual continued...."[443] Indeed, Patrick Joyce has claimed that "In their provision of benefit and fellowship the friendly societies were perhaps the central institution in working-class life."[444]

Somewhat ironically, it was within the urban environment that the ritualistic aspect of death - with its roots in the rural world - reached its fullest expression. David Neave has described how the funerals of the affiliated orders could be extremely large affairs. Far from an attempt to emulate elite funerary forms, Neave argues that such events represented the expression of a distinctive working-class "respectability" at odds with that of polite society which often condemned such ceremonies as "ludicrous" or "grotesque."[445] Crossick agrees. Such events, although flamboyant, were by no means emulative of elite conventions. Such behaviours were "related closely to the societies' own provision for ritual, their own terminology, their own traditions...."[446] Rather than signifying the importance of individual social status and wealth, society funerals articulated an alternative concept of dignity and "respectability" which emanated from the working-class experience itself.

This chapter argues that popular death customs, like many other aspects of traditional rural culture, successfully transferred themselves into the urban environment. In Cumbria social pressure to conform to more

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[443] Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society, 198.

[444] Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, 289.

[445] David Neave, Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside, 91-92.

[446] Crossick, An Artisan Elite, 197.

fashionable types of funerary rites may have been strong;
indeed, the power of social emulation may well have won over
many less affluent people. Yet popular deathways also
remained a vigorous element of the working-class way of
life. Using evidence from churchwarden's accounts, family
papers, newspaper reports, undertaker's accounts, oral
archives, and friendly society records, this chapter focuses
largely on the most heavily industrialised town in late
nineteenth-century Cumbria: the shipbuilding town of Barrow.
It suggests that although popular rituals may have survived
in part simply because most people did not have the
resources to emulate their "betters", economic necessity was
only part of the reason for their persistence. Indigenous
working-class death customs retained a vitality which was
due to a significant degree to their ability to retain their
cultural potency. Such customs did more than satisfy
economic self-interest: they also gave expression to a
distinct cultural identity which continued to value the
collective aspect of the mutual ideal.

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As we saw in chapter two, in the eighteenth century
local friendly societies had formally endorsed a commitment
to the provision of aid, financial and practical, for
bereaved (and sick) members and their families, as had the
medieval guilds before them. Such help was an aspect of
community support which had its roots in the customary
mutuality of the village and was premised on the
understanding that personal security could best be achieved
by collective means. Such societies, prone to financial
failure, had often excluded persons considered too great a

drain on funds, and thus collectivism had often found itself in direct conflict with self-interest.

Within the urban environment, however, the collective aspect of organised mutuality came to the fore. The nineteenth century saw the spectacular success of a new type of friendly society better able to function on a co-operative basis. In 1810 the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows had begun in Salford. The next half century saw the phenomenal growth of the Affiliated Orders of Friendly Societies as branches sprang up all over the north-west of England. By mid-century the unstable and often short-lived local societies were rapidly being overshadowed by a broadly-based, centralised, and much more efficient organisation.

Industrialisation was an important catalyst to the growth of the affiliated orders. Local clubs had found it increasingly difficult to deal effectively with the growing mobility of an industrial labour force, and when members left the locality they necessarily forfeited their membership and the security it had provided. By contrast, branches of the affiliated orders co-operated with one another over great distances and were much better adapted to this fluidity of movement. As the web of the affiliated orders stretched out across the north-west, permitting worker mobility in a way that the local societies had not, curious names like the Ancient Order of Foresters, the Oddfellows, the National Order of the Free Gardeners, and the Druids passed into common usage.

From societies submitting returns to the registrar of friendly societies in 1872, it was estimated that national membership of all types of society was somewhere in the region of 4 million, with 8 million beneficiaries. Other

sources claimed that close to half of the male population of England belonged to some kind of friendly society by 1850.[447] This made it the single largest working-class institution. By 1872 there were over 32,000 societies, registered and non-registered, with funds of over £11 million. At this time the affiliated orders accounted for about one third of the total membership.[448]

Despite popular perceptions that the movement was largely confined to the heavily industrialised areas, it was strong throughout Cumbria, not only in the towns but also in the countryside. Under the terms of the Northcote commission, which investigated friendly societies between 1871-1874, a detailed analysis was undertaken of the Penrith Union, and this was judged to be representative of the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland. This examination revealed the substantial support which friendly societies enjoyed in this area, particularly the affiliated orders. With a population of 22,322 in 1861, the Penrith Union boasted a total of ten societies, eight of which were branches of the affiliated orders. The largest, a branch of the United Ancient Order of Druids in Penrith, had a membership of over 400. Officials estimated that approximately one-third of the male population of the region belonged to a branch of the affiliated orders. [449]

Throughout Cumbria, Oddfellows, Foresters, Free Gardeners and other clubs sprang up in rural areas, market

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[447] W.R.Greg, "Investments for the Working Classes," Edinburgh Review XCV (1852): 407, in Harold Perkin, The Origins of English Society, 382.

[448] P.H.J.H. Gosden, Self-Help, 74.

[449] From the Appendix to the Report on Scotland and the Northern Counties, Northcote Commission, PP 1874, 146-152. Also Appendix to the Report on the Four Northern Counties of England, 168-169.

FIGURE 12, PART 1. A LIST OF THE AFFILIATED ORDERS

OF FRIENDLY SOCIETIES IN THE COUNTY OF WESTMORLAND.

Name of Society	Meeting Place	Date Established
Court Mountain Foresters #551 AOF	Unicorn Inn, Ambleside	1851
Loyal Windermere Lodge #1077 IOF Manchester Unity	Commercial Inn, Ambleside	1855
Loyal Pembroke Lodge # 1368 IOF	Crown and Cushion, Appleby	1852
Court Clifford # 700 AOF	Coach and Horses, Appleby	1851
Earl of Lonsdale IOO	Brampton	1853
Royal Windermere Foresters Benefit Society	Stags Head, Bowness	1855
Lord Clifford Lodge # 1631 IOO Manchester Unity	Shoulder of Mutton, Brough	1856
United Order of Oddfellows	Burton	1842
North Briton Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	Blue Bell Inn, Burton	1853
British Protector Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	Punch Bowl, Crosthwaite	1853
Loyal Lowther Lodge #409 United Ancient Order of Druids	Lowther Castle Inn, Hackthorpe	1854
St. Peters Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	Oddfellows Hall, Highgate, Kendal	1852, 1855
Loyal Nelson IOO, Manchester Unity	As Above	1853

Taken from The Official Return of the Registrar,
John Tidd Pratt, 1857.
AOF - Ancient Order of Foresters.
IOF - Independent Order of Foresters.
IOO - Independent Order of Oddfellows.

FIGURE 12, PART 2. A LIST OF THE AFFILIATED ORDERS OF FRIENDLY SOCIETIES IN THE COUNTY OF WESTMORLAND.

Name of Society	Meeting Place	Date Established
Orphans Protection Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	As Above	1853
Court Sir Robert Peel, 2390 Ancient Order of Foresters	Kings Arms, Holme	1853
Court Thor, AOF	Forresters Hall, Kirkby Thor	1854
Lonsdale Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	Fleece Inn, Kirkby Lonsdale	1852
Loyal Eden Lodge of IOO, Manchester Unity	Pack Horse Inn, Kirkby Stephen	1853
Burton-in-Kendal District, Grand United Order of Oddfellows	The Plough, Lupton	1852
South Westmorland District AOF	Bulls Head, Milnethorpe	1853
Court Youthful Queen, #644 AOF	As Above	1852
Loyal Helvellyn Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	White Lion Inn, Patterdale	1856
Shap Abbey Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	Greyhound Inn, Shap	1853
Independent Order of Rechabites, Salford Unity	Temperance Hotel, Kendal	1856
St. Thomas Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	White Horse, Kendal	1854
Free Templars Lodge, IOO, Manchester Unity	New Inn, Temple Sowerby	1852
Kirkby Lonsdale District, IOO, Manchester Unity	Townend, Kirkby Lonsdale	1851

Taken from The Official Return of the Registrar, John Tidd Pratt, 1857.
AOF - Ancient Order of Foresters.
IOF - Independent Order of Foresters.
IOO - Independent Order of Oddfellows.

towns, and the emerging industrial centres on the coast, everywhere vying with the older local societies. Unlike the independent clubs many of these new associations drew their memberships from "high risk" groups. In 1836, for example, the "Loyal Furness Abbey Lodge" of the Independent Order of Oddfellows had been formed in the mining town of Dalton at the George and Dragon public house. In 1841 the membership of this lodge was 130 and by 1863 it had swollen to 330. The vast majority of members were iron-ore miners.[450]

One reason why the affiliated orders were more likely to include members employed in dangerous occupations was the greater financial stability enjoyed by individual clubs. As in the early organisations, regular subscriptions paid into the society ensured a benefit payable to next of kin to cover the costs of burial. But greater actuarial competency and an ethos of co-operation between branches broadly scattered over wide areas gave greater financial confidence to the affiliated orders.

Lodges tended to form themselves into "districts" and to offer aid to ailing branches within their region. In 1838 the "Ulverston District" of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows had been formed by the amalgamation of four lodges: the Furness Abbey, the Furness, the Morecambe Bay and St Mary's, Cartmel, and by 1905 there were fifteen lodges extending across a wide area.[451] Similarly, in 1869, when several "courts" of the Ancient Foresters were established in the Furness area it was generally agreed by the membership that "a district should be formed, for the purpose of providing a common fund to bury deceased

[450] Francis Leach, Barrow-in-Furness, its Rise and Progress (Barrow: Daily Times, 1872), 100-116.

[451] Francis Leach, Barrow-in-Furness, 100-116.

members...."[452] This type of co-operation meant that the costs of burials could be shared if necessary, thus removing the strain from individual societies.[453] A more secure financial base both encouraged and was aided by the easy transference of members between branches when the former relocated in search of work. In addition, efficient communication between branches and a more sophisticated infrastructure meant that long-distance memberships were also possible.

The case of Henry Sprout is a good example of the ability of the affiliated orders to adapt to member mobility in a way impossible for the small local societies. During his working life Henry Sprout was a night watchman at an iron ore mine in the Dalton area. He was a member of the "Rose of Furness Lodge" of the Ancient Order of Oddfellows, and he continued to make regular contributions to this lodge even after leaving the area to reside in Bolton, some hundred miles away in south Lancashire. At his death in 1891, Henry's widow received ten pounds fifteen shillings to defray her husband's burial expenses. Thereafter Jane Sprout continued to make an annual widow's payment of one shilling to the lodge until her own death in 1899. The "Rose of Furness" paid a funeral benefit to the value of two pounds for her funeral in Radcliffe, near Bolton. [454]

[452] Francis Leach, Barrow-in-Furness, 162.

[453] The Northcote Commission noted in 1871 that the Court Inglewood of the Ancient Order of Oddfellows in the Penrith Union received a district transfer of £27 to supplement its funeral fund. From the Appendix to the Report on Scotland and the Northern Counties, Northcote Commission, PP 1874, 148. The Bowness branch of the Oddfellows frequently engaged in interbranch transfers between 1870 and 1878. WDSO 20. Records of the Bowness Branch of Oddfellows, 1870-1878.

[454] BDSO/5. Records from the Rose of Furness Lodge, Ancient Order of Oddfellows, Dalton-in-Furness, 1897.

This example also highlights a change in policy with regard to spouses. Whereas in the independent societies widows appear to have been expected to set aside a portion of the benefit paid to them on the death of their husband for their own use, the affiliated orders permitted widows to continue to subscribe in their own right. This may well have been a factor contributing to the success of the affiliated orders.

A dense network of branches promoting better contact and co-operation meant increased security for individual members as well as the clubs to which they belonged, and thus many of the courts and lodges prospered and enjoyed a longer life expectancy than the local societies. The Loyal Beacon Lodge of Oddfellows of Penrith had over £5,500 in its fund in 1871, for example, [455] and the accounts of the Oddfellows in Kendal showed a large membership in that town between 1837-1879, the oldest member having attained the age of sixty-three years. Several members had been on the books for over twenty years.[456]

It is clear then, that the superior management and organisation of the affiliated orders provided a greater degree of security for their members and their spouses than the less stable independent societies had been able to offer. This, in turn, made organised mutuality more attractive, as working-class people gained peace of mind from knowing that their financial needs at death would be met. Less overtly discriminatory than the local societies, and committed to co-operation between branches, the

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[455] Appendix to the Report on Scotland and the Northern Counties, 148.

[456] WDSO-67/3. Membership list of the Oddfellows, Kendal.

affiliated orders served to strengthen the collective aspect of mutual aid.

This spirit of collectivity was also articulated in the less formal neighbourhood support networks which continued to be an important feature of death culture in Cumbrian towns. Apart from the wake, which does not seem to have survived the social and structural changes of the industrial period, most other aspects of rural community-based customs endured. It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which folk beliefs continued to pervade such rituals, but as Richardson has suggested, notions of decency in death often continued even when their metaphysical underpinnings were long forgotten.[457] They retained cultural importance because they were commonly understood as "the thing to do".

In Cumbrian towns, after 1850, the laying-out of the body was still regarded as the responsibility of local women. As one elderly woman, remembering the early part of the present century, relates:

> there were always women who did this sort of
> thing. I remember, there were quite a lot of
> deaths, of mothers and of children, and there was
> always one or two women that you could call on.[458]

Neighbours continued to come to the aid of the bereaved in other ways. In the towns, monetary donations were just as important as they had been in the countryside. A woman from Dalton remembered frequent collections to cover the costs of coffins in the early years of the twentieth century; and a Barrow woman from a poor family remembering

[457] Ruth Richardson, Death, Dissection and the Destitute, 21.

[458] Marjorie Noble, personal interview, 1990.

the same period, recalled how neighbours collected for flowers for her father's funeral and gave the left-over money to her mother.[459] Other gestures of reciprocity might also be made. For example, women sometimes offered to bake for a bereaved family or look after children.[460]

Viewing the body also remained a popular ritual. In Dalton, in the early part of the twentieth century

> They used to come and knock at the door and come in and lift the veil, there was a veil over the face, you know, and they just used to lift it, and have a look and put it back again.[461]

Even the passing of an infant was of community concern:

> I can remember the lady next door she had twins, and one died, and I can remember going in to see that baby, and it had all these little forget-me-nots, oh I shall never forget it, and it must be well over seventy years ago. And it had all these artificial forget-me-nots all over it. A little baby only a month old. It was in the sitting room.[462]

That death remained a communal affair necessitating the ritual acknowledgement of all in the immediate locality was also apparent. Not only did the passing-bell survive until at least the Second World War; until the 1960's and even later, neighbours continued to draw their blinds.[463]

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[459] Mrs A.2.B. Oral History Archive, Lancaster University; Mrs. Atkinson, personal interview, 1990.

[460] Eleanor Mackie, personal interview, 1990.

[461] Minnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1990.

[462] Mrs. Atkinson, personal interview, 1990.

[463] Of the forty respondents I interviewed in 1990, most remembered the passing bell being rung prior to the 1930's, and all remembered the

Funerals continued to be large, attended not only by family and friends, but entire neighbourhoods, and oral forms of invitation adapted themselves well to the towns. In 1883 the Dalton parish clerk called on individual homes as the official funeral "bidder."[464] The custom of making public funeral announcements also continued; in 1874 a James Crewsdon was the funeral crier for Ulverston,[465] and in Egremont the funeral bellman was still announcing deaths in 1900.[466]

As in the countryside, a large turnout, as well as showing respect for a neighbour, ensured a team of bearers able to share the burden. Help with "lifting" might be just as necessary in this urban environment as it had been in the days of the old corpse roads. In fact, the rural-style walking funerals remained very common in Cumbrian towns, even within living memory, with friends, neighbours and family members taking it in turns to carry the coffin often considerable distances to the cemetery, just as their forbears had done when churchyards were few and far between. As this elderly woman remembers, in the mining town of Egremont, at the turn of the century, "nearly everyone got carried. You were well off if you had a hearse....the biggest part of funerals they used to carry them."[467] In Barrow, even when a horse-drawn hearse was used, the mourners often followed on foot, "...you just walked, walked

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drawing of the blinds for the death of a neighbour until within the last forty years.

[464] BPR/1 C5/2.2 Regulations for Using the Hearse Belonging to the Parish of Dalton, 1840-1913.

[465] Ulverston Mirror, 24 Jan 1874.

[466] Minnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1990.

[467] Minnie Callaghan. personal interview, 1990.

through the town, over the bridge, up Dalton Road, up Abbey Road and up to the cemetery."[468]

Folk whose parents and grandparents had been accustomed to arduous treks along rough mountain tracks in foul weather were less likely to be intimidated by the paved streets which led to the cemetery, however lengthy. Indeed, in comparison with the parish churchyards, which had often been many miles distant from some of the remoter villages, town cemeteries were often more conveniently situated.

Other aspects of rural culture also survived. As we have seen, it had been customary in rural parishes for churches to provide a bier and a pall for use at funerals, either free of charge or for a modest fee, and under the terms of the burial acts of 1852 Burial Boards were encouraged to provide the same. In many urban areas this does not appear to have happened; thus professional undertakers stepped in to provide an impressive horse-drawn hearse as the principal part of their "package." In Cumbria, however, the Boards did supply these items and many people made use of them.[469] In Dalton, a hearse, along with a bier and pall were all available. The cost was two shillings, and this included the cost of horse-hire, also saddlers' and other miscellaneous fees. Significantly, allowances were made for parishioners of limited means. The rules for use of the hearse stated that for "Every labourer or any part of his family or Journeyman Mechanic when taken to any Church for Burial his or her friends to pay one

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[468] Mr. H.2 B. Oral History Archive, Lancaster University.

[469] St. Mary's, Ulverston had a bier and a funeral pall, and the accounts for Flookbrough burial ground show that a bier and pall were purchased for this parish. BPR/1 C5/2.2. Details of burials at St Mary's, Ulverston. BDX/105. Report on the purchase of Flookbrough Burial Ground.

shilling and six."[470] Members of the Ulverston Burial Board were equally keen to ensure that this customary service should remain within reach of all who needed it. They charged two shillings and sixpence for the hearse they provided "so that poor people could get a funeral performed for twelve shillings." Such charges were similar to those imposed by many of the country churches.[471]

Even when transportation was provided privately it could be fairly unsophisticated. In the countryside farm carts or packhorses had been used to convey the deceased to the grave; similarly, in the towns function was often more important than fashion. Barrow Carting and Trading Company Limited advertised its services to the bereaved of Barrow throughout the 1870's. This enterprising business conveyed all manner of cargo: furniture, coal and firewood as well as corpses.[472] And although elegant ostrich-plumed horses were seen on occasion, those drawing Barrow hearses were usually sturdy beasts on loan from the fire brigade.[473]

Clearly, many Cumbrian townspeople expected to organise the various aspects of death and burial in the same way as their predecessors had done in the countryside - without recourse to undertakers to any great extent. Indeed,

[470] BPR/13/10. Hearse Account and Rules for Use of Hearse, St. Mary's, Parish Church, Dalton, 1840-1913.

[471] Ulverston Mirror 11 April 1874. Two and six seems to have been fairly standard. In 1877 a late inhabitant of Brampton made a gift of a hearse to Brampton church. Two and six was charged for use by parishioners and former parishioners, and ten shillings for others.

WPR/15. Brampton Hearse Account. The same fee was charged for use of the wheeled bier purchased by Heversham church in 1908. BPR/31 I19.

[472] Barrow News, 19 April 1903.

[473] James E. Walton, Tales of Old Dalton, (Ulverston: Dalton with Newton Town Council,1993), 63. If a fire occurred during a funeral, the "old nags in the cab rank" would be pressed into service. Mrs. H.2.B. Oral History Archive, Lancaster University.

professional undertakers per se were few and far between in
Cumbrian towns. As in the countryside, where undertaking
had been a sideline of joinery, many were joiners first and
foremost. William Hartley of Barrow showed the same
eclecticism as his rural counterparts when he advertised his
services as a cabinet maker, upholsterer, paperhanger and
chair maker.[474] James Grundy, Mr J. Tickle, and Thomas Slee,
were a few of the most colourful names to associate
themselves with joinery, building, and undertaking in The
Barrow News in the last three decades of the century. Even
William Ormandy, whose widow carried on his business after
his death and arranged the funerals of many of the middle-
class families in the later decades of the nineteenth
century, did undertaking only as a sideline.[475]

But professional undertakers did exist. There were at
least two such businesses in Barrow in the late nineteenth
century. Both offered their clients a full range of
services if required. But economy rather than
fashionability was stressed. William Baythorpe, who was
also a joiner, offered "Funerals Completely Furnished at the
Most Economical Prices...." [476] More popular was Mrs.
Swarbrick, who, like Mrs. Ormandy, carried on her husband's
business after his death. She combined the hiring out of
cabs for all occasions with complete undertaking

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[474] Ulverston Mirror, 24 January 1874.

[475] Some general joiners emphasised either their undertaking services
or their joinery work depending on the circumstances. The bills sent out
by Samuel Sheldon of Millom stressed his skills as a builder and
contractor when doing general work, but when collecting for funeral
services his letterhead portrayed him as "complete funeral furnisher".
BD/TB/3/9. Samuel Sheldon's bills, 1920.

[476] Barrow News, 1 Dec. 1883.

arrangements and she ran a permanent advertisement in The Barrow News for upwards of thirty years.[477]

One of the commonest complaints levelled against undertakers in London was that they never revealed their prices beforehand. A lack of standardisation of charges was bemoaned, for identical services offered by the same undertaker could fluctuate greatly, the social class of the buyer apparently being the most important determinant of the costs. Chadwick lamented this fact in his report, and there were periodic calls for government intervention to combat exploitation of a vulnerable clientele.

Mrs. Swarbrick, however, provided a detailed scale of her charges in her newspaper advertisement. She assured prospective customers that her "fixed scale of charges [were] regulated to suit all customers, and with a strict regard to economy in every detail."[478] Families dealing with Mrs Swarbrick, and readers of the newspaper generally, were left in no doubt about the costs involved.

In making an appeal to economy Mrs Swarbrick did not pander, at least overtly, to the social snobbery so often associated with funerals of the wealthy. However, the fact that her prices were common knowledge meant that status-

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[477] Swarbrick's also supplied carriages for weddings and picnics. Barrow News weekly advertisements, 1874-1904.

[478] In 1883 Mrs. Swarbrick was offering adult funerals, including a coffin, shroud, hearse, carriage and grave starting at three pounds ten and infants' funerals which included provision of coffin, shroud, carriage and grave from one pound five shillings. Barrow News, 11 July 1885. By 1891 children's funerals had been reduced to one pound two and six, and in 1897 they were further reduced to one pound two shillings. The reason is not clear, but increasing competition may have had something to do with it. Mrs. Swarbrick also sold coffins separately. In 1891 an adult pitch pine coffin could be had for two pounds and ten shillings. Barrow News, 10 Nov 1883. She also offered adult oak coffins for two pounds fifteen. Barrow News, 6 March 1897.

conscious spectators could more easily calculate the costs of the funerals of their neighbours; thus there was always the opportunity to make an impression by purchasing Mrs. Swarbrick's very best. But if her ability to conduct funerals "to suit all classes" (as another advertisement claimed) hinted that she was capable of furnishing more sophisticated as well as cheaper affairs, it also suggested that social norms rather than individual aspiration might dictate what was deemed "suitable" for each class.[479]

Mrs. Swarbrick was almost never referred to in the local press in connection with the funerals of the affluent. She aimed at customers lower down the social scale, and the fact that her coffin prices were listed in her newspaper advertisement indicates that she was prepared to sell them separately and thus expected that many families would look elsewhere for help with other aspects of the funeral. Judging by the longevity of her business enterprise she was very successful. Swarbrick's advertisements ran for at least thirty-four years, her prices always on full view, and on a par with those offered by rural undertakers, with whom she had much in common.[480]

In observing fairly unsophisticated mortuary customs which had their antecedents in the rural world, the less well-off were not simply taking a cheaper option, they were acting in accordance with social conventions of long standing. That such customs possessed a moral force at odds with the materialism of the more fashion-conscious is apparent in the wording of the obituary notices of the well-

[479] Barrow News, 4 May 1901.

[480] Barrow News, 2 Jan 1904. Swarbrick's prices were similar to those charged by an unknown joiner in the Broughton-in-Furness area operating between 1912-1930. WDB/58.

off, and suggests that social pressure was not simply exercised from the "top down," but also came from below.

Although the word "impressive" was frequently used by the local newspapers to describe the material trappings of an elaborate funeral, the adjectives "simple" or "plain" cropped up just as often. Occasionally one senses an uncomfortable fit between the two, suggesting that an appeal to the latter represented an atonement for excess. The eminent gentleman, Myles Kennedy, reposed in expensive layers of elm, lead, and oak, yet his outer coffin was modestly described as constituting just "plain wood."[481] Mrs. Massicks of Millom, wife of the manager of the Lonsdale Iron Works, was also laid to rest in triple layers: a shell within a lead coffin, the two encased in a handsome polished oak coffin with "ornamental silver furniture" and a "massive silver plate." Rather incongruously the latter bore a "simple inscription" denoting her identity.[482]

Sometimes this subtle deference to restraint was given more tangible expression. In the prime section of the Dalton cemetery alongside the remains of the illustrious Dr. Hall, lie those of the Reverend Morgan. When the vicar died in 1898 the pulpit, the lectern and the vicar's stall were all draped in black, and the coffin, of polished oak, with brass mountings, was covered with a "handsome purple pall with a crimson cross." The Barrow newspaper described it as the "largest and most impressive funeral ever witnessed in Dalton cemetery." Yet for all its yards of black drapery and polished wood, the funeral of the reverend gentleman who keeps eternal company with the man of medicine, was a

[481] Barrow News, 17 March 1883.
[482] Barrow News, 15 Jan 1898.

walking funeral. There was no horse-drawn hearse, no fine retinue of carriages. Relays of bearers carried his coffin on their shoulders, while parishioners, old and young, male and female, walked behind in solemn procession. [483] Clearly, the rustic ways of the countryside were not simply considered "second best." They were sometimes deliberately chosen.

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Just as the informal neighbourhood customs which passed into the urban environment continued to articulate values at odds with those of the commercialised funeral, so the customs of the mutual societies also served to perpetuate this discrepancy. The spirit of co-operation and collectivity which was so well-developed in the affiliated orders was articulated most dramatically in the society funerals of the towns.

The funerals of the affiliated orders placed great emphasis on regalia, for it was through distinctive forms of dress that societies could draw attention to their particular organisation. As one inhabitant of Barrow remembered, prior to the first world war:

> if they belonged to a society it was a big
> thing...if they belonged to a society they always
> walked in front, all the societies and they always
> walked in full regalia....[484]

The members of the Bowness Lodge regularly turned out to do honour to the deceased wearing black sashes, hatbands, white or black gloves, and aprons bound in black. Although sashes, hatbands and gloves were common to elite family

[483] Barrow News, 15 Jan. 1898.

[484] Mrs. H.2.B. Oral History Archive, Lancaster University.

funerals, aprons - and their association with manual work - were the unmistakable emblem of a fraternal order. And unlike the funerals of the elite, where the weighty responsibility of equipping mourners fell to the next of kin, the bereaved family was not expected to supply mourning items, nor were they distributed according to a perceived match between the quality of the item and its recipient. Neither differential social worth nor the depth of the bereaved's purse was being measured here. These emblems, rather, were symbolic of collective obligation. The regalia was provided by the society itself, each member subscribing one shilling to a common fund for its purchase. [485]

The funerals of the affiliated orders exhibited other elements of working-class culture which likewise distinguished them from those of the elite. As had been common in the local societies, demeanour was stressed as much as correct dress. The Oddfellows of Bowness who assembled at the lodge-house ready to accompany a corpse and were advised to "be steady and serious in the procession."[486] Yet the societies felt that dignity and solemnity could be enhanced by music. The friendly society funerals in Barrow were commonly headed by a brass band. Such bands were a common feature of working-class life by the late nineteenth century, and were an important component of friendly society Whitsuntide parades.[487] Indeed, brass bands played an important role in working-class leisure in Cumbria from 1860 onwards. Although they originally enjoyed middle-class

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[485] As in the local societies, palls were kept on hand. Between 1882-1887 the Kendal Branch of the National Order of Free Gardeners paid Thomas Troughton seven shillings annually for the care of the pall. WDso/161. Account of the National Order of Free Gardeners, 1882-1889.

[486] WDSO 20. Rules, Oddfellows of Ambleside and Bowness, 1870-1890.

[487] Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, 277-278.

support, possibly because of their military associations this gradually declined, and by the 1880's they had "acquired a solidly working-class image." [488]

This combination of music and regalia drew much attention, especially as society funerals were often very large. For the funeral of Mr. Robert Hartley, who died in a mining accident in Coniston in 1894, of the 800 attenders, 100 were members of the Mechanics Club who walked in procession in full regalia.[489] Similarly, for Mr. John Shepherd, another accident victim at the same quarry some seventeen years later, fellow members of the Mechanics Lodge were again in attendance.[490] For the funeral of Thomas Jackson of Dalton, secretary to the Furness Abbey Lodge of Oddfellows, there was a representation of forty members from Dalton, Barrow and Ulverston and Millom.[491]

For a large number of working-class people, then, the rituals of death offered a powerful means of asserting their own cultural identity, countering the trend towards middle-class "respectability" based on self-interest and substituting a respectability of a different kind. This is most strikingly revealed in the funeral oration used at the graveside. The following address was used in the last two decades of the nineteenth century by the Oddfellows. It was the climax of a carefully orchestrated graveside ritual, and it represented a clear acknowledgement of the funeral's function as a vehicle for making a public statement about values and attitudes - not only symbolically, but literally:

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[488] Lyn Murfin, *Popular Leisure in the Lake Counties*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 185-186.

[489] *Barrow News,* 10 Feb. 1894.

[490] *Barrow News,* 10 Dec. 1901.

[491] *Barrow News,* 17 Feb. 1894.

Some of you spectators may be anxious to know what
are our professions. We inform such that the Order
of which we have the honour to be members, is
formed on the broad basis of philanthropy. Its
object is to promote the happiness of mankind
generally but that of its own members
particularly; and we accomplish this great object
by benevolence to society at large; by the
cultivation of friendship and social and
beneficent virtues among ourselves; by mutually
supplying the wants and alleviating the distress
of each other.[492]

The funeral address of the Foresters was equally
dramatic:

We teach our members the obligations of mutual
dependence, the value of mutual help, and the
beauty of mutual sympathy. Here, by the Grave of
one who has proved the efficacy of these
principles, we reiterate our faith in them, and
restate our belief that they are necessary to the
well being of the human race. We urge their wider
acceptance and their more perfect fulfilment, in
order that the time may more speedily come when
all mankind shall be Brethren....A band of
Brothers, we are so knit together that we feel the
woes of each other, and of those dependent upon
us. It is this which has brought us here today.
Our Brother lived in the full understanding of our
principles and practises, and we fervently hope
that his life was made happy by his portion in
them.[493]

Not only was death ameliorated by collectivity in a very
practical way, but death itself helped define and reinforce
the value of collectivity.

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[492] WDS/o 20 The Night Book of Oddfellows, Bowness, 1870-78.

[493] BDSO/41/92 BRO. From the Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly
Society, "Ceremonies for use at the Funeral of a Member" Adopted by the
High Court Meeting, Glasgow, 1887. .

Such proclamations may well have confirmed many middle-class observers in their opinion that friendly societies were "respectable" institutions. Indeed, given the context in which they were uttered, the more pious may have interpreted them in purely religious terms. But clearly, this type of respectability was at odds with the self-interested individualism of the social elite. It is just as likely that the more affluent were made uneasy by such bold declarations, for they could well be interpreted as a challenge to the status quo.[494]

Newspapers routinely reported such orations. The Oddfellows service was read at the funeral of Mr. Amos Hartley, butcher, of Colton in January 1904, for example. [495] For the interment of James Johnson, lecture master of the Ulverston district of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, thirty Oddfellows formed a procession from home to the church where a fellow member "most feelingly read the funeral oration of the order."[496] At the funeral of Mr. Joseph Rawson of the Court Duke of Devonshire of Ancient Foresters in Barrow, the corpse was accompanied by the officers of his court, past and present, and the first part of the new funeral service of the order was read before a large congregation at the residence of the deceased. The body was then borne by brethren to the Baptist Chapel, where

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[494] Historians have described how, until the mid-nineteenth century, forms of public ritual could cause a great deal of anxiety for the authorities. Feasts, fairs, street processions and festivals of various kinds were commonly viewed as potential problems, as they were frequently used as a forum for popular protest. See, for example, the compilation of essays in Robert D. Storch ed. Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

[495] Barrow News, 23 Jan. 1904.

[496] Barrow News, 4 April 1892.

the concluding part of the ceremony was read at the grave by another Forester.[497]

Friendly society funerals were clearly designed to publicly endorse a commitment to the collective aspect of mutuality, and in so doing to draw more members to the cause. Whether or not the funeral oration was also intended as a political gesture is unclear, but there is no doubt that collectivism in death was greatly valued at a personal level. The emotional benefit conferred by collective demonstrations of respect is illustrated in a very touching way by an observation made by a Barrow woman remembering society funerals in the early decades of the twentieth century:

> When they got to the cemetery they'd all stand around and bury them and there was always someone there and you felt that the person that was being buried was a human proper person, not just the ordinary man out of the street who didn't belong to anyone....[498]

Clearly, to "belong" was of paramount importance. As in the rural environment, the ritual acknowledgement of the deceased's membership of a larger whole was felt to be a fitting final tribute.

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Historians have claimed that many aspects of rural culture continued to exist in the urban environment. Rather than anachronistic survivals, they "persisted precisely because of their ability to adjust and adapt to an altered

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[497] Barrow News, 14 April 1888.

[498] Mrs A.3 B. Oral History Archive, Lancaster University.

social world."[499] Indeed, in his study of Lancashire wakes, John K. Walton has suggested that "many popular customs ...survived not only in spite of, but also because of, industrialisation."[500] Perhaps surprisingly, the industrial town could actually serve to nourish practices which were essentially rural in origin, allowing them to play a prominent role in working-class urban culture.

Such customs and institutions frequently expressed popular values at odds with those of the "improving" middle classes. Patrick Joyce, Geoffrey Crossick and David Neave maintain that the success of the friendly societies, for example, provides powerful evidence of the failure of the bourgeoisie to impose its own standards of respectability on those lower down the social ladder.[501] Through their public processions, their regalia, their banners and their brass bands, friendly societies expressed - with a great deal of pride - a distinctive working-class identity.[502]

This chapter supports the above hypotheses by arguing that popular funerary customs were an important aspect of rural culture which made a successful transition to the urban world. Despite the opening of the cemeteries in the 1850's and a growing ethos of individualism and materialism in death, collectivist attitudes which had their origins in the pre-industrial environment remained strong within the urban working-class community in Cumbria. After the passage of the Burial Acts of 1852 social pressure to "keep up with

[499] Robert Storch, "Persistence and Change in Nineteenth-century Popular Culture," in Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-century England, 9.

[500] John K. Walton, "The Lancashire Wakes in the Nineteenth Century," in Storch, Popular Culture and Custom, 100-123, 120.

[501] Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, 286.

[502] Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, 277.

the Jones's" struggled against older values which still carried a great deal of cultural authority. Although many working-class people were keen to emulate their betters in matters funereal, others showed less eagerness - some, no doubt, through lack of choice - but many because they continued to adhere to a value system which still retained a great deal of moral force.

By the final decades of the nineteenth century, for the working classes of Cumbria - as for the elite - the rituals of death had become a particularly powerful way of asserting a distinct cultural identity. The Affiliated Orders of Friendly Societies, better managed and less exclusive than the smaller independent societies, had drawn in large numbers of working people. Those making personal financial provision for their own funerals were not motivated purely by self-interest. The society funeral became a forceful means of publicly affirming a commitment to the collective ideal. The regalia, the brass bands, the funeral oration, added a further dimension to a distinctive working-class version of "decency" which celebrated adherence to customs which had not only economic but also spiritual and emotional components. As historians of working-class culture have argued, there was consolation to be had in falling back on the familiar, the known, the trusted, particularly at times of intense distress. Well-rehearsed behaviours could give emotional comfort at times of crisis - and death was the ultimate crisis.

CHAPTER SIX

THE 'DEATH-HUNTERS'

BURIAL INSURANCE IN CUMBRIA

Thus grew, from what had through the centuries
been considered as part of the pious duty of the
community towards its members, a new business of
unparalleled dimensions....[503]

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[503] Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Industrial Assurance, 29.

This study has revealed that from the early eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century popular death customs rooted in mutuality were placed under increasing strain as modernisation gained impetus. Over the course of the two hundred years covered by this investigation, the tension between collectivity and individualism in popular death culture had intensified. The conflict between competing ideals which had been discernable in the exclusive character of some of the independent eighteenth-century friendly societies, was heightened by the passage of the Burial Acts in the succeeding century. From the 1850's more extravagant fashions in funerary protocol served to highlight social divisions and to stigmatise the pauper, placing increasing pressure on the working classes to adopt more materialistic standards.

But although there can be no doubt that individualism steadily gained ground, emerging stronger than ever by the end of the nineteenth century, many community-based customs remained an indispensable part of working-class life. Numerous practises which had their roots in the rural environment continued to sustain less materialistic notions of "decency" in death. This concept continued to exert moral authority within the urban environment, finding its fullest expression in the funerals of the of the Affiliated Orders of Friendly Societies. Indeed, far from signifying the importance of individualism in popular death culture, the success of the societies which had been formed to help meet the financial needs of the sick and the bereaved

symbolised the continuing importance of co-operation and collectivity in both word and deed.

But if the success of the Affiliated Orders in providing financial aid to the dying and their families was a measure of the strength of working-class collectivism, there was another side to funerary funding which derived, at least in part, from self-interest. This chapter brings the analysis to a close by turning its attention to perhaps the most significant change to occur in popular death culture in the nineteenth century. Surprisingly, it is a development which has received scant attention from historians. Partly an outgrowth of the friendly society movement, commercial burial insurance first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, and by the early decades of the twentieth it had achieved extraordinary success. The consequences for customary practices were far-reaching, for when funding for funerals became a profit-driven business, older and emergent attitudes found themselves confronting each other most directly. Indeed, it was when mutuality was appropriated by private enterprise that the tension between collectivism and individualism finally came to a head.

Although the friendly society movement had drawn in a large proportion of the working population, there had always been a significant number of poorer people who had found the weekly or monthly subscriptions beyond their means. Thus, the mid-nineteenth century saw the emergence of new types of institutions catering to this clientele. These were the Friendly Collecting Societies (which, despite their name, were not societies at all) and the Life Insurance Companies. Although the latter had traditionally catered to a middle-class clientele, they gradually began to view the working classes as a potentially lucrative new market. By the final

decades of the nineteenth century the Life Insurance Companies and Friendly Collecting Societies were providing burial insurance, on a massive scale, to the poorest sector of the working classes.

That the latter benefited from such organisations cannot be doubted. For the first time the very poor could now make preparations for death in the way that so many of their contemporaries had done for centuries. But there was an important difference between this new brand of death insurance, and that provided by the older societies. Unlike the mutual associations, which emphasised collectivism and were rooted in the fraternal ideal, the emergent organisations, often claiming to adhere to the same tenets, were grounded in an aggressive individualism motivated by the allure of ever-increasing profits.

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The commercialisation of burial insurance was another aspect of the process of modernisation which saw fundamental changes in the economic and social life of Britain. Historians have shown that as the world's first industrial economy expanded and businesses grew in scale, many areas of life were swept along on the rising tide of market forces. In addition to work-based activities, historians have noted that in many other areas - sport and leisure, for example - industrialisation brought widespread changes. Numerous activities originally under community-control evolved into undertakings pursued in the interests of profit.[504]

From the beginnings of industrialisation in the 1780's, until its maturation in the 1860's, business interests were

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[504] See, for example, Peter Bailey, ed. Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure (Milton Keynes, 1986), and Lynn Murfin, Popular Leisure in the Lake Counties.

largely unconstrained by government controls. The doctrine of laissez-faire guaranteed that the entrepreneurial spirit be given free reign, for the greater good of both the economy and society. The state preferred to intervene as little as possible. But by the mid-century public concerns about the ethics of the business world were growing. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the pursuit of profit brought with it certain problems. For example, The Lancet, Britain's leading medical journal, brought to light the widespread incidence of food contamination, and special interest groups drew attention to the environmental pollution caused by chemical manufacture. Cases of fraudulent management of companies became more common and in 1857 there were a number of bank failures.[505]

The government and the public alike were beginning to realize that, left to his own devices, the businessman was inclined to turn a blind eye to many of the social problems contingent upon the unfettered pursuit of his own interests. In response to widespread concern, the state began to take a more interventionist approach. As we have seen, Edwin Chadwick had paved the way for more direct state involvement in public welfare with his surveys of burial practises and living conditions in towns in the 1840's. The precedent he established was carried forward into the second half of the nineteenth century by a wealth of investigations not only into working-class living conditions and aspects of poverty, but also into business practices.

Perkin has claimed that it was "in the 1860's that the protection of the public at large began to take precedence

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[505] Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 440-443.

over the freedom of the industrialist"[506] In the 1850's
government commissions set about investigating such areas as
food processing, while in the 1860's they once more
subjected factories and workshops to scrutiny. Banks and
companies were subjected to investigation and found wanting,
and were subsequently more closely regulated.[507]

It is against this background of the intensification of
commercialism, and growing concerns over its ethical base,
that the development of the burial insurance industry should
be viewed. Two Tory politicians, Arnold Wilson and Herman
Levy provided in the twentieth century the most insightful
analysis of "industrial assurance," which was the rather
curious name given to this type of business. They called
attention, not only to the burdens imposed on the poor by
this system, but to the unethical practices of some of the
"societies" and companies involved. In the 1930's they
produced a thorough account of the development and
management of the industry, calling for government action to
curb abuses and provide a less onerous alternative for
poorer people.[508] Their work alerts historians to a wealth
of information contained in the government enquiries led,
respectively, by Lord Northcote between 1871-1874, Lord
Parmoor between 1919-1920, and Lord Cohen in 1933.[509]

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[506] Harold Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 440.

[507] In 1858 the Bank Act was passed, and the Company Acts were passed
between 1856-1862. Perkin, The Origins of Modern English Society, 443.

[508] Arnold Wilson and Herman Levy, Industrial Assurance, 29.

[509] Royal Commission on Friendly and Benefit Building Societies,
(Northcote Commission) PP 1871-1874 xxxiii 842. The Board of Trade
Industrial Life Assurance Committee (Parmoor Committee) PP 1919-1920
xviii 614. Committee on Industrial Assurance and Assurance on the Lives
of Children Under Ten Years of Age (Cohen Committee), PP 1932-1933 xiii
4376.

Unfortunately, few scholars have followed their lead. Apart from Gosden, who has examined commercial burial insurance as part of his detailed and informative analysis of friendly societies, the treatise by Dermot Morrah, an apologist for life insurance, and Paul Johnson who looks at burial insurance as an aspect of working-class saving, very little has been written on the subject since the monumental work of Wilson and Levy, who, themselves lamented the lack of interest in the subject.[510]

This chapter combines the information provided by the above studies, with the testimony of witnesses before the Northcote Commission and the Parmoor Committee. Although it utilises material from the enquiries generally, it draws much of its evidence from witnesses who resided in Cumbria. Government and oral sources indicate that the sale of burial insurance was widespread here, as it was throughout the north-west, and indeed, nationally.[511] This evidence reveals that it was within the context of commercial burial insurance that the conflict between collectivism and individualism in working-class death culture came to a head.

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According to Paul Johnson, the meteoric rise of commercial burial insurance in the latter decades of the nineteenth century can be largely attributed to working-class vanity and competitiveness. In common with other historians, he accounts for its success in terms of working-

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[510] P.H.J.H. Gosden, Self-Help, Dermot Morrah, A History of Industrial Life Assurance; Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending.

[511] In the interviews I conducted in 1990-91, 35 out of 40 respondents reported that their families held commercial burial insurance policies.

class love of display, and argues that the funeral was used largely as an affirmation of status in the working-class hierarchy; it was a means of demonstrating, in a highly visible manner, one's social distance from pauperism. When burial insurance became more widely available, even the poorest could indulge in the opportunity to outdo their neighbours in funerary extravagance.[512]

There were certainly people who were motivated by such desires, but chapter five revealed that in Cumbria material excess was not a feature of most working-class funerals, and where mortuary display did take place it was generally for friendly society funerals. In this context it had more to say about collective ideals, mutual organisation and community membership than individual and familial status.

Johnson has also argued that working-class self-interest manifested itself in other, more subtle ways. There was a certain pride, he argues, in being seen to pay the insurance man. In working-class neighbourhoods having the insurance agent call symbolised the financial stability and respectability of the individual family.[513] This may well be true, but the staggering number of families insured suggests that it can just as easily be understood as evidence of the power of collective mores. As one man remembers, "Oh yes, everybody had insurance. Everybody had it. There wasn't a family on the street as didn't pay the insurance man."[514] Paying the insurance man may well have been a source of personal pride, and a testament to the budgeting skills of the individual housewife, but it can

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[512] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 46.

[513] Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 46.

[514] Gilbert Robinson, personal interview, 1990.

also be seen as symbolic of compliance with neighbourhood expectations, an attempt to "fit in" rather than to set oneself apart.

Johnson's arguments are somewhat simplistic, for the development and rapid success of commercial burial insurance probably owed less to working-class pretentiousness, than to the long-standing popular custom of funding funerals by collective means. Although commercial burial insurance was part of the expansion of the insurance industry generally, it also represented an attempt by the working classes to address some of the shortcomings inherent in the friendly society movement as they saw it, and to extend the service to more people.

Insurance companies of one sort or another had been patronised by the middle classes for several centuries, and by the mid-nineteenth century the industry at large was beginning to perceive the importance which working-class people attached to financial provision for death. Although companies had dabbled in working-class death insurance in the early nineteenth century,[515] it was the British Industry Life Assurance Company, which, in 1852, was the first insurance company to aim seriously at attracting a working-class clientele.[516] In 1860 it amalgamated with the Prudential, and under that name offered so-called "industrial assurance" to poorer wage-earners as one of its wide range of insurance products. By 1872 the "Pru" was

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[515] Between 1815 and 1855 ninety-two life offices were established selling life and death insurance to all classes. Most were short-lived, seventy nine lasting less than five years. R.G. Garnett, A Century of Co-operative Insurance, 71.

[516] Dermot Morrah, A History of Industrial Life Assurance, 21.

the dominant company in the field, and had a membership in excess of one million.[517]

Commercial burial insurance also grew more directly out of the fraternal tradition itself, and was an attempt by the working classes to overcome certain obstacles within the system of mutual funeral provision as it stood. Chapter two revealed that many of the small local societies were prone to financial failure, reasons for which were not hard to see. Poor actuarial skill often meant that some clubs never really got off the ground. Others that managed to survive for long periods found that growth to maturity held its own inherent dangers. Ageing memberships and a consequent increase in the incidence and severity of illness meant that sickness benefits paid out were often far in excess of funds held, and many societies went bankrupt in old age.[518]

The dedication of money for social purposes could also cause depletion of funds in some cases, and there was growing concern that conviviality was a waste of the money that should be allocated for benefits. In the county societies sociability had often been frowned upon, but even in the affiliated branches there is evidence that by the 1870's the annual feasts and other occasions for merriment were less popular than formerly, perhaps indicating an increasing anxiety about finances.[519]

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[517] Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission, 130.

[518] F.M.Eden, The State of the Poor, 3, 619.

[519] Several Cumbrian friendly societies investigated by the Northcote Commission reported that they had given up their annual feasts and parades some years previously. It is impossible to say how widespread this was. It may have been more prevalent in this area because of the high proportion of clubs, even among the affiliated orders, which accepted honorary members who may have disapproved of conviviality. Report of the Assistant Commissioners to the Northcote Commission: Appendix to Report of Scotland and Northern Counties, PP 1874 xiii pt.ii, 385. 146-152. See also Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 64.

Malingerers were a perennial problem. Although Sir George Young might state his belief to the Northcote Commission that sickness benefit was more greatly valued among working men than any other form of benefit, the provision of such relief was obviously fraught with difficulties.[520] Fraudulent claims and de facto old age pensions could rapidly deplete a society's resources. Under such pressure, independent societies often sank without trace.

One stratagem which seemed to promise fewer problems was the abandonment of sickness and old age benefits altogether, and concentration on death insurance. Thus, the mid-century saw a resurgence of the burial society. Burial societies had always existed. Many of the very earliest friendly societies had offered only a funeral benefit, and they had continued to operate alongside the more sophisticated societies throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[521] But as a growing number of independent friendly societies experienced difficulties in the late nineteenth century, the society devoted exclusively to funeral benefit became more common.[522] In the Penrith Union, in 1871, aside from local friendly societies, and branches of the affiliated orders offering burial benefits (discussed in chapters two and five), there were also four

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[520] Report of Sir George Young to Northcote Commission, xxv. In 1892 The Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies estimated that of a total male working population of approximately 7,000,000, over 6,800,000 were insured by friendly societies against sickness. This did not include those insured by Friendly Collecting societies (see below). Gosden, Self-Help, 91.

[521] In the West Riding of Yorkshire "funeral briefs" had flourished. Families often joined for the sake of their children. Gosden, 116.

[522] The Northcote Commission concluded that by the late nineteenth century most burial societies were such by default. Sir George Young's Report to the Northcote Commission, 98.

societies devoted exclusively to burial: the Houghton Burial
Society, the Dalston Burial Society, the Carlisle Friendly
Funeral Society and the Carlisle Philanthropic Burial
Society. The largest was the Carlisle Friendly with 1800
members and funds of £1310.[523] (See figure 13.)

Burial societies also grew out of a different kind of
working-class association which likewise saw concentration
on burial benefits as a way of remaining viable. In the
early nineteenth century a centralised type of friendly
society had come into being to cater for working-class
people who did not meet the membership requirements of the
independent or affiliated associations, either because of
high-risk occupation or low, irregular income. This type of
society completely dispensed with sociability in the
interests of economy, and members either mailed in their
subscriptions or handed them over to a collector who called
weekly at their homes: hence the term "Friendly Collecting
Society."

In order to appeal to the mass of poorer people who
may not have been able to afford the higher subscriptions of
the traditional associations, the burial and collecting
societies set premiums at a much lower rate than the
friendly societies. A penny or two a week was common. To
be viable, therefore, societies needed to offset low
premiums with high memberships. Whereas the traditional
friendly societies had usually targeted employed males,
offering death and sickness benefit to members and their
spouses, the burial and collecting societies preferred to
insure whole families.

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[523] There were, in addition, several trade clubs. Mr Stanley's Report
on the Four Northern Counties, Appendix to Northcote Commission, 168-
169.

FIGURE 13. THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES OF CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND.

Name and Place of Society	Number of Members	Funds in pounds
Royal Victoria Lodge, Alston	29	46
North of England Railway Servants' Benefit Society, Carlisle	23	27
Carlisle Working Mens' Friendly Socieity	24	---
Friendly Society, Lamplugh	83	973
Bewcastle Loyal Lodge, Linebank	33	210
Free Templars' Lodge, Temple Sowerby, Penrith, IOF, Manchester Unity	181	2494
Whitehaven Shipwrights' Friendly Society	53	110
St Patrick's Burial Guild, Carlisle, * Half year's account	329	218
Cargill Gate Friendly Society, Alston	264	652
Cumberland Union Life Assurance and Sick Benefit Society *	200	12
United Ancient Order of Druids, Penrith	415	1802
United Ancient Order of Druids, Lowther Lodge, Hackthorpe	---	985
United Ancient Order of Druids, Victoria City Lodge, Carlisle	113	429
Locomotive etc. branch, Whitehaven	48	203
Locomotive etc. branch, Carlisle	116	1115
City of Carlisle Lodge, No. 523, Bolton Unity of Oddfellows	---	34
Burial Society, Houghton *	67	189
Burial Society, Dalston, Registered No, 256 *	520	603
Carlisle Friendly Funeral Society No. 201 *	1800	1310
Carlisle Philanthropic Burial Society *	89	148
IORSU Derwent Tent, Workington	138	337
IORSU Israel Tent, Harrington	21	265
IORSU Solway Tent, Maryport	154	368
IORSU Lebanon Tent, Whitehaven	100	1156
IORSU Midian Tent, Cleator Moor	111	119
IORSU Whitehaven	118	---

Taken from Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern Counties (Northcote Commission) PP 1874. The above is an incomplete record and should be regarded as a rough guide to membership. Of significance is the emergence of the Burial Societies and Friendly Collecting Societies, not previously recorded in official returns.

* Burial Societies and Friendly Collecting Societies, as opposed to Independent Friendly Societies or Affiliated Orders.

IORSU - Independent Order of Rechabites Solway Union

The smaller, local burial societies never achieved a
high rate of success; indeed it was exceptional for a burial
club to survive a generation.[524] In contrast, The Friendly
Collecting Societies, or "general societies" as they were
also known, went from strength to strength. The most
successful was The Royal Liver, founded in 1850. By 1872 it
had become the largest collecting society with a membership
of 550,000 and funds of £264,795. The Liverpool Victoria
founded in 1843 was the second largest with a membership of
200,000 and funds of £49,000, in the same year; third was
the Scottish Legal, and fourth was the United Assurance or
St. Patricks, both of the latter with substantial
memberships and impressive funds.[525] Official figures placed
the total membership of all the large collecting societies
at about half that of the affiliated orders by 1872. Most
had their headquarters in Liverpool.[526] The Royal Liver, and
St. Patricks had agencies in the Penrith Union, and
throughout Cumbria.[527]

The Friendly Collecting Societies and Industrial
Assurance Companies were, by 1900, the main suppliers of
burial insurance to the working classes. Between 1880-1900
total funds of both types of organisation increased at a

[524] Appendix to Report on Southern and Eastern Counties, Northcote
Commission, 27.

[525] Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission, 470.

[526] James Walvin has suggested that the high rate of mortality in
Liverpool and its hinterland may account for the insurance industry
originating here. James Walvin, "Dust to Dust", 365.

[527] The Carlisle Philanthropic burial society, previously mentioned,
may have been a branch of the Philanthropic general collecting society.
Northcote Commission: Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern
Counties, 146-152. By 1904 the collecting societies appeared to have
outstripped the registered friendly societies with 7.5 million members,
as opposed to 5.7 millions (although membership of the unregistered
societies may well have been close to another 6 million.) Paul Johnson,
Saving and Spending, 15.

tremendous rate. The annual premium income rose from about
£2,000,000, in 1880 to almost £19,000,000, in 1910.[528] In
1920 51,000,000, policies were in force, many families
owning multiple policies.[529]

It is clear, then, that although commercial burial
insurance owed its origins in part to the diversification of
an existing, profit-driven industry attempting to move into
new markets, it also owed a great deal to the fraternal
organisations which had a long history of offering financial
support to the bereaved. But if burial insurance itself had
undergone a transformation, the needs which it was designed
to satisfy remained the same. The funerary requirements of
the large numbers of people which commercial insurance now
drew into its net, continued to be dominated by an
overriding concern to ensure that popular standards of
decency in death would be observed. As one woman recalls,
"If you had insurance you were covered you see. You knew you
could pay for the coffin. You could have a decent burial.
And that was a great relief...."[530] A second concurs, "Oh
yes, if you could afford it you had insurance. You didn't
want to end up in a pauper's grave...."[531] For many, perhaps
most, the only real difference between the commercial and
the non-commercial types of insurance was the price. The
former was perceived as a cheaper form of friendly society:

[528] Annual premiums reached over £66 000 000 by 1936. Average sums
assured per policy were as follows: in 1898, £9, in 1913, £11, and in
1926, £15. The Insurance Agent and the Insurance Review xxxiii 392 (1
Sept. 1898), 136, and Insurance Mail Yearbook (1928) 15, in Johnson,
Saving and Spending, 35.

[529] As manual workers were estimated to make up 77% of the population
it was said to be "practically universal" among the working classes.
Routh, Occupation and Pay, 7 in Johnson, Saving and Spending, 23.

[530] Mrs. Allonby, personal interview, 1990.

[531] Eleanor Mackie, personal interview, 1990.

reflected the continued importance of collectivism in working-class death culture, rather ambiguously, it also indicated the growing influence of attitudes which pulled in the opposite direction.

When the Northcote Commission conducted its investigations into the management of friendly societies and burial insurance companies between 1871-1874, with a view to tightening existing laws, it was at pains to point out that the ethos of the new societies and companies bore little resemblance to that of the older institutions. One of the commissioners, Mr. Stanley, lauded the "friendly spirit" of the local burial societies, in which "the officers do not view their society as a mere commercial undertaking from which they derive salaries." He regretted, however, that the same could not be said of the newer types of organisation.[533]

The commission was particularly critical of the Friendly Collecting Societies. Unlike the local societies which were under the control of their members, the Friendly Collecting Societies were often governed by men who, in the view of the commissioners, had no commitment to ideals of fraternity and democratic management. Members had no voice in their administration, and there was a clear dividing line between "managers" and "policy-holders." Managers tended to be former collectors who had made it to the top of their organisation by the sharpness of their wits. Once in control they fended off the advances of other aspiring managers by administrating in an extremely non-democratic way. They commonly granted themselves absolute authority on any matter pertaining to the running the society, and

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[533] Mr. Stanley's Report to the Northcote Commission, 1874, 10, 2.

refused to consider any suggestions which might run counter
to their personal interests. In some instances the founder
of the society regarded himself as the "owner" and set
himself up as virtual dictator, having unlimited powers.

These findings were not unexpected. Rumours about the
poor management of the profit-driven societies had begun to
surface shortly after their formation. Irregular and even
illegal practices were alleged: there were accusations of
dubious bookkeeping, unscrupulous sales agents and even
embezzlement.

The commission duly verified many of these claims. It
found that the salaries the managers paid to themselves were
extremely generous and came directly out of what were deemed
the profits of the organisation. They were at liberty to
raise them as often as they liked. The commission felt that
this partly explained the extraordinarily high running
costs, which often ran at around 50%, and were generally far
in excess of that of the "ordinary insurance" bought by the
middle-classes. [534] The collecting societies and companies,
however, claimed that the employment of door-to-door
collection necessitated this expense. Yet in the local
burial societies such costs were quite modest.[535]

A particularly important focus of the enquiry was the
role of the collector. Collectors were described before the

[534] In 1874, the management costs of the United Assurance Company
averaged 46%, those of the Royal Oak were nearly 50%, and between 1868-
1871 the management costs of the Royal London Friendly Society ran at
between 49-52%. Evidence of Mr Hamilton, and Mr. Deggie, Fourth Report
of the Northcote Commission, 119.

[535] The Carlisle Friendly Funeral, a local collecting society had
management costs of only 12.3%. The Loyal Beacon Lodge of Oddfellows in
the Penrith Union reported management costs of a mere 5%. Fourth Report
of the Northcote Commission, 94.

commission as the "pivot of the whole system."[536]   The
consensus among witnesses was that there was a great demand
for door-to-door collection. [537]   A Mr. J. R. Wood, agent to
the Royal Liver in Penrith, felt that most members in his
society would not pay unless he called. Mr. T. Richardson,
agent for the Loyal Philanthropic in the same town, stated
that some of his clients did in fact come to his house to
pay, but that most would not. Mrs. Isabella Stephenson,
formerly agent for the Burial Society of St. Patricks, had
similar feelings. She reported that many policies had
lapsed because there was no agent currently in her district.
Members also expressed their preference for door-to-door
collection. A member of the Royal Liver stated that he
quarrelled with the agent because the latter had requested
that the money be brought to him to save him time. [538]

Clients obviously appreciated the collection of weekly
premiums at their homes. But collectors were not supplied
simply for the convenience of the policy-holders. Far more
important as far as the organisations were concerned, agents
were required to sell. In most of the large collecting
societies agents were paid by commission only and were under
a great deal of pressure to obtain new members. Agents were
constantly schooled in ways to effect the maximum amount of
sales; they were advised that it was vital to make one's
visit as soon as possible after pay-day, for example, and as
agents normally dealt with housewives, it was a great
advantage to be a "ladies man." It was common to circulate

[536] Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission, 104.

[537] They tended to be poorly educated working-class males. A man who
was too well educated, the management feared, would be intimidating to
clients. Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission, 109.

[538] Appendix to the Report on Scotland and the Northern Counties,
146-152.

honours lists of the most successful agents, or to hold the threat of dismissal over the heads of those who consistently failed to improve on their previous week's figures.

As they were not required to submit detailed reports to superiors it was extremely easy for collectors to employ dishonest practises to achieve increased sales. The fact that it was more lucrative to push new policies than to maintain those already established (the highest rate of commission was paid on new policies sold) sometimes led to unethical tactics on the part of the over-zealous.[539] Customers might be encouraged to drop perfectly good policies, losing all paid-in premiums up until that point, in order to take up new ones and thus provide "procurement fees" for the benefit of the collector.[540]

Unethical behaviour on the part of collectors was so widespread that a Mr. Traverse felt that many people were induced to join "against their will." This was the alleged reason for so many lapsed policies; poor families, persuaded to buy a policy against their better judgement, were often unable to keep up premiums for any length of time, and forfeited their membership and with it all premiums paid in up till that point.[541]

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[539] Evidence of Mr. Liversage, *Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission,* 113.

[540] Unlike ordinary insurance, the industrial assurance policies did not carry a surrender value. In the case of ordinary insurance the holder had a certain proportion of his premiums returned to him if he was unable to keep up premiums. In the case of industrial assurance the policy-holder suffered loss of everything paid in. *Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1920,* 10-11. The Prudential was the first organisation to offer a surrender value in the form of a "free paid up policy" in 1878. In 1923 free policies were made compulsory after five years of payments under the terms of the Industrial Insurance Act. Wilson and Levy, *Industrial Assurance,* 363.

[541] Evidence of Mr, Traverse, *Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern Counties, Northcote Commission,* 114.

Unscrupulous agents might even deliberately allow a policy to lapse. This could be achieved by simply failing to call to collect the premium. This had the added advantage that it freed up time for the agent to solicit for new business elsewhere. As it was the member's responsibility to report an agent for failing to call, the policy-holder was at a distinct disadvantage. The following evidence from Mr. Jos Black, engine driver, of Penrith, was typical of many people called upon to give their impressions of the manner in which the agents did business, and is testament to the vulnerability of the policy-holder and the potential for unethical behaviour on the part of the agent:

> I have been a member of the Royal Liver for
> fourteen years, my wife for eleven, and my four
> children for shorter periods from their childhood.
> We have had no benefit for any of these, and now
> we have left the society because the collector,
> who lives a few doors from us, would not call
> regularly and let us get out of benefit, so we
> gave it up and have lost all the money we paid in.
> I paid a penny a week each for myself, my wife
> and four children. We scarcely know what to
> do....[542]

Unethical behaviour was not confined to the societies. Companies routinely "poached" members from rival organisations. This meant the forfeiture of the policyholders' premiums. In the words of Mr Thomas Fletcher, agent with the Prudential in the Penrith area, "I have got several members from the Royal Liver and the Philanthropic. They lose all their money, as they would if they left us

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[542] Evidence of Mr. Jos Black, Penrith, Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern Counties, Northcote Commission, 152.

voluntarily."[543] Mr Fletcher obviously felt this to be a legitimate practise, but he was keen to imply blatant exploitation by his rivals:

> I never saw a policy of the Liver. The collector may give a card and initial it and receive the money and never let the office know. All the collector has to do is to drop the member out of benefit if he thinks a death is likely to happen.[544]

Sometimes policyholders would be transferred to other offices - frequently non-existent - without their knowledge, to the financial advantage of the agents.

In order to maximise sales, collectors would often encourage the purchase of policies for elderly and distant relatives, who would often be insured without their knowledge. These were people for whom the policy-holder would have no realistic expectation of having to pay funeral costs. A policy sold to someone not having an "insurable interest" in that life (unless a spouse or child of the policy-holder, in the case of the collecting societies) was in contravention of the act of 1774, when concern was expressed over insurances becoming a form of gambling which might even lead to murder. Yet it was extremely difficult to prove lack of insurable interest, and agents keen to sell as many policies as possible found it convenient not to ask too many probing questions. "Life-of-another" policies were a very lucrative product, whether legal or not.[545]

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[543] Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern Counties, Northcote Commission, 153.

[544] Appendix to Report on Scotland and Northern Counties, Northcote Commission, 153.

[545] The selling of multiple policies was so extensive that in 1870 in Preston, with a population of 86,000, there were nine local burial societies, having a membership of 92,269, a number of agencies of the Royal Liver, and Liverpool Victoria, and 9,679 policies with the

It would appear, then, that the image presented by historians of the amiable insurance man with the best interests of his clients at heart is misleading. According to the Northcote Commission he (or she) was motivated primarily by the prospect of making a sale, often resorting to unethical, if not illegal practices in order to do so. Rather than a financial advisor encouraging his neighbours to save, as Johnson and Morrah have claimed, he was bent on encouraging them to spend as much as possible.

To rectify the multiple problems it uncovered, the Northcote Commission called for numerous reforms.[546] However, the Friendly Societies Act of 1875, which was the chief result of the enquiry, was a watered-down version of the recommendations of the final 1874 report, at least as far as burial insurance was concerned. The Act did little to improve or regulate the system of private insurance. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century irregular practises were still widespread. Societies would periodically be started up only to fail, taking policy-holders' money with them. There were on-going struggles between managers and would-be managers. But all the while the largest organisations continued to grow. By 1888 the membership of the Friendly Collecting Societies totalled

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Prudential. Northcote Commission (Fourth Report), 106. People wanting to obtain greater benefits on an individual life commonly took out several policies on the same life, rather than rewrite the policy for a greater value. The Act of 1909 extended the definition of "insurable interest" and legalised about 10 million previously illegal policies. However, illegal policies were still regularly issued. Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 21.

[546] These included limitations on policies sold on children's lives, the extension of a scheme to provide insurance through the post office, previously introduced, and the same legal status for companies and societies. It also recommended that all members be supplied with rules, and with written notice fourteen days prior to the lapsing a policy. Collectors were to be prohibited from sitting on a committee of management. Northcote Commission, Recommendations, paragraph 925.

half of all registered friendly societies. Ninety per cent belonged to the Royal Liver, the Liverpool Victoria Legal, the Royal London and the Blackburn Philanthropic. The Scottish Legal had become very large in Scotland. These giants pulled into the lead, and between 1880 and 1887 the membership of the four largest increased by 52.75% and their funds by nearly 66%.[547]

In 1888 a more deliberate attempt was made by the government to police burial insurance. A Select Committee was set up with the specific intent of examining collecting societies and companies which dealt in burial insurance. Once again the same kinds of abuses came to light. Numerous reforms were posited, few were implemented. The reasons for the failure of the state to effect reform are many and complex, and the details fall beyond the scope of this discussion. Suffice to say that legislation was piecemeal with loopholes for those determined to circumvent it, and the victims of burial insurance malpractice were unfamiliar with it or their rights. Then, too, the mechanisms which were put in place were often poorly thought through and impractical in their finer details. And the state was never enthusiastic about intruding too much into the workings of what were seen as private matters. The strength of the doctrine of laissez-faire, which dominated so much social thinking in the nineteenth century made the government reluctant to intervene in the affairs of individuals.

The only significant improvement to result from the enquiry was the Collecting Societies and Industrial Insurance Act of 1896 which effectively gave legal definition to the "business" of burial insurance, and set it

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[547] Gosden, Self-Help, 136.

apart from the traditional friendly society movement.
Henceforth, the new profit-making "societies" had to call
themselves Friendly Collecting Societies. [548]

The ineffectiveness of state legislation coupled with
increasing public concern ultimately led to a second Royal
Commission, headed by Lord Parmoor in 1919. Unlike the
earlier enquiry of 1871 which had fairly broad terms of
reference and looked at all types of friendly society, this
enquiry was specifically aimed at gauging the extent of
burial insurance malpractice. It revealed that not only had
widespread abuses continued despite apparent closer
regulation, but that the industry had mushroomed.

By 1919 the total amount of burial insurance premiums
received was £25,000,000 nationally, and 51,000,000 policies
were in existence. Seventy thousand agents were employed.
Eighteen companies were registered under the Companies Act.
Fifty-six collecting societies were also registered. The
average premium was twopence halfpenny per week and the
average sum assured was between £11 and £12. Of the
£25,000,000 in annual premiums the committee estimated that
£14,000,000 was paid out in benefits and that 11,000,000
were absorbed in management fees. [549]

Evidence of malpractice was overwhelming. As in the
earlier enquiry, numerous witnesses, policy-holders, as well
as officials from the societies and companies testified to
the importance of house-to-house collections in securing
sales. Mr David Jones, former general secretary to the
National Amalgamated Union of Life Assurance workers

[548] Gosden, Self-Help, 138-141.

[549] Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919, 1-2.

emphasised the "pressure for increase" imposed upon the collector:

> An agent has to make an increase; if he does not make an increase he has ultimately to leave the agency....in order to get this increase the agent very frequently has to canvass for additional insurances in houses where he calls.[550]

Sometimes "special canvassers" might accompany the agent on his rounds. These were men, often friends of the agent, who were particularly skilful in the arts of persuasion. They might have no connection with the company at all, yet they were introduced as being from "head office." Their intimidation value was immense. Under interrogation, witnesses highlighted their especial importance in the selling of new policies, and the qualities necessary in agents generally:

> Q....by persuasion of these special canvassers, and by their influence over these people...being ignorant and uninformed people, they take advantage of them in order to obtain increase?
>
> A. This has largely been prevalent in the past.
>
> Q. A pushing agent is required?
>
> A. Yes.
>
> Q. A man who will do business in spite of opposition, who will struggle to force insurances down the throats of the public which they, at any rate, do not think they want?
>
> A. Generally speaking, those are the people who are promoted. [551]

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[550] *Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919,* 60.

[551] *Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919,* 65. The pressure upon agents was tremendous. Not only were they constantly under threat of dismissal for poor performance, pensions were often dependent on a steady increase in business. Some agents were so desperate that they invented policies and paid the premiums themselves. Wilson and Levy,

The pressure for increase was unrelenting. Mr Mashford, former agent, invited to respond to the suggestion that people might not want this type of insurance, replied, "Yes, and they regret they ever started it."

> Q. They regret they started it and they drop the policy?
>
> A. That is so.[552]

Mr. J. Clarke, Vice-President of the Federation of Insurance Workers and the President of the Royal Liver Agents and Employees Union, was of the same mind. His response provided an insightful glimpse of the rationale which many collectors used to justify their persuasiveness. The reluctance of the working-classes to purchase this sort of insurance should not deter the agent, for he had the best interests of the purchaser at heart.

> Q. ...if it were not for the agents, this business would not be done?
>
> A. It would be dead.
>
> Q. Therefore, the agents create it?
>
> A. Yes, and it wants some creating. As Mr Palmer said this morning, it is not done by putting a brass plate on the outside of the wall. I had one on mine for five years and never had a single applicant.
>
> Q. Does this not rather show that the public do not demand this form of insurance?

Industrial Assurance, 246-248.

[552] Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919, 85.

A. The public does not always know what is good for them.[553]

This argument that the agents knew better than the clients was reiterated by many witnesses. The working classes needed to be persuaded to buy policies for their own good. They were by nature feckless, and unless coerced would fritter away their money in useless ways. The collector was performing a moral duty in encouraging thrift. Gullible and irresponsible, the poor must be coerced into saving for a funeral.[554] Left unstated was the obvious fact that what was "good" for the poor, was even better for the insurance agencies.

As the above evidence from the enquiries makes clear, the selling of burial insurance was tainted with irregularities of all descriptions. From top to bottom the societies and companies were riddled with malpractice of one sort or another. There can be no doubt that over-selling of burial insurance took place on a grand scale, and that many people were coerced, against their better judgement, into buying policies they did not really want, and certainly could not afford.

Yet not all agents were driven by avarice and fear to exploit their clients. The commission found examples of honest agents, and noted that a genuine lack of knowledge on the part of collectors was often a cause of problems. Agents were often poorly-educated and ill-trained. There were many who were as poorly informed as their clients, and

[553] Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919, 35.

[554] Middle-class observers were often highly critical of the working classes, who should, they claimed, be able to realise that their precarious financial situation precluded undertaking any long-term financial commitments. Paul Johnson, Saving and Spending, 28.

some of the irregularities no doubt stemmed from ignorance rather than fraud. Mr. T. Richardson, agent to the Loyal Philanthropic Friendly Society of Penrith Union, testified that he was not very knowledgeable on society rules nor did he have policies in his possession. He received only an annual balance-sheet.[555] And there were agents who did feel they had a moral responsibility towards their clients. Mrs. Isabella Stephenson, former agent for the Burial Society of St. Patricks of Penrith, told how she once paid subscriptions on behalf of those who could not pay.[556]

In fact, the agents who worked for the Prudential generally came out of the enquiry looking good. The Prudential's management was found to be satisfactory for the most part, and the commission recommended that many aspects of the "Pru's" business practices should be adopted generally. Most notably, collectors were not permitted a say in management of the organisation. Agents received salaries and thus were not under the same pressure to increase sales as were agents in the societies. They were required to pay the subscriptions of members who fell into arrears, and premiums were returned to members if they lapsed completely. Although the Prudential also dismissed agents who did not increase their sales, the company encouraged agents to ensure that established members were kept on the books, and fraudulent agents were expelled. [557]

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[555] Evidence of Mr. T. Richardson, Agent to the Loyal Philanthropic Friendly Society, Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919, 153.

[556] Evidence of Mrs. Isabella Stephenson, former agent for the Burial Society of St. Patrick's, Penrith, Passfield Report to Parmoor Commission, 1919, 35.

[557] Agents could sell their books to whoever they chose, and they frequently brought high prices, often as much as thirty times the value of the premiums entered. Fourth Report of the Northcote Commission, 104.

It is clear, too, that regardless of the intentions of the insurance agent, people purchased burial insurance with a view to meeting specific needs of their own. Even one of the most dubious practices, the selling of multiple policies, might be valued by some purchasers:

> Well, you see, if you had all your relations
> insured then you could p'raps buy some new
> clothes. I mean, you might not have to pay for the
> funeral, but you would need something to wear
> wouldn't you? You couldn't go looking really
> shabby, and people didn't have very much you know.
> And they would wear them clothes afterwards for
> years....only for best mind you....[558]

In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the working classes were not as gullible as the commissioners believed them to be. The popular term for collectors, "death-hunters,"[559] suggests that many working-class people were well aware of the less-than-honest tactics which might be employed to extract money from them. As one man recalls, "Oh yes, you had to have your wits about you. I mean, it was their job to sell it to you but you didn't want to be diddled out of your money!"[560]

If the spectacular success of burial insurance can be explained in part by the over-zealous exertions of less-than-honest insurance agents, it was also due to the continued importance of mutuality in working-class death culture. Many of the witnesses before the commission underestimated the importance that working people placed on advance preparation for death. The sheer numbers of people and policies involved implies that demand could never have

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[558] Minnnie Callaghan, personal interview, 1990.

[559] Gilbert Robinson, personal interview, 1990.

[560] Mr. Robinson, personal interview, 1990.

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been entirely created by the agents and companies themselves.

As this thesis has made clear, in anticipating and making financial provision for family deaths, working-class people were perpetuating customs premised on co-operation and mutual concern. We saw in chapter two that planning for one's ultimate demise - and later for that of one's spouse - had been one of the chief reasons for the formation of the religious guilds, and later the friendly societies. After 1834 the threat of an undignified pauper burial bereft of esteemed communal rituals only strengthened the resolve of poorer people to ensure that their burial would be "decent" in their own terms. For many, notwithstanding the safety-net of informal communal aid, there was reassurance to be had in the premeditated pooling of resources to help defray funeral costs.

Evidence suggests that many members of the Friendly Collecting Societies and Insurance Companies had been previously insured through the traditional friendly societies, switching to commercial insurance only when the mutual associations failed.[561] For others who had been unable to join a fraternal society through irregular income or high-risk employment, commercial burial insurance now offered an affordable way of participating in a working-class custom of long standing.

Despite their criticisms of working-class financial irresponsibility, and people's lack of interest in "saving" for a funeral, the companies and the collecting societies realised only too well the importance the working classes attached to mutual funding of death; after all, most of

[561] F.M.Eden, The State of the Poor, 3, 619.

those employed in insurance were working-class people
themselves.[562] Indeed, their shrewdness in exploiting the
collective ideal to their own advantage was one important
reason why commercial burial insurance avoided state
regulation for so long. When challenged, the collecting
societies were particularly vociferous in defending
themselves by an appeal to the tenets of mutuality they
claimed to uphold. The collecting society was a working-
class institution, they argued, grown out of working-class
soil, and it represented the fundamental values of working-
class life: hard work, thrift, mutuality. It was the desire
of every respectable working man to bury his loved ones
decently. This had been one of the tenets of the early
friendly societies, and should be respected. The government
had no business interfering in this most sacred, most
sensitive, and most personal of matters.

The paradox, was, of course, that many people employed
by the societies and the companies often operated according
to business principles in direct contradiction to the
collectivity and mutuality they claimed to revere. For
these individuals, maximization of profit took precedence
over mutual concern. Any vestige of old-fashioned
brotherhood had long since disappeared. As far as many of
the purveyors of commercial insurance were concerned,
mutuality was dead, a victim to their own avaricious self-
interest.

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[562] Wilson and Levy, Industrial Assurance, 395.

This chapter has argued that a growing tension between individualism and collectivism in popular death culture came to a head over the issue of commercial burial insurance, and that the growth of such insurance was a more complex process than many historians have realised. Scholars have argued that the phenomenal success of the industry was rooted in the self-interest of large numbers of working-class people who, over the course of the nineteenth century, began to use funerary display to satisfy personal vanity. According to this line of argument, not only were such people attempting to demonstrate their high status within the working-class hierarchy, they were publicly distancing themselves from pauperism.

This analysis does not deny that a proportion of working-class people fell into this category, yet it has emphasised that other factors must also be taken into consideration if a full understanding of the modernisation of popular death culture is to be achieved. This final chapter has revealed that the success of commercial burial insurance owed much to the mutual tradition in working-class culture. Although part of the rise of the life insurance industry in general, commercial burial insurance also represented a working-class attempt to improve the financial viability of many ailing independent friendly societies, while at the same time extending death benefits to those who had not been able to afford to join the fraternal associations. It succeeded in large part because of the importance working-class people continued to attach to making provision for a funeral in keeping with community norms, and their conviction that by making regular subscriptions to a common fund this could be achieved. Poorer folk probably had no realistic expectation that their

funerals would mirror the colourful events staged by the mutual associations, but they valued them; and in hiding behind the name of the Friendly Collecting Society, commercial insurance "societies" did little to dispel the illusion that "members" were participating in the same type of organisation which had created this powerful symbol of working-class collectivity.

In meeting a very real demand, commercial burial insurance capitalised on it. The companies and collecting societies exploited popular mutuality to erect a structure of immense proportions, a mammoth enterprise which manipulated the ideal of collectivity to further the personal careers of self-serving individuals. The story of its triumph mirrors the rise to power of many business enterprises in the latter part of the nineteenth century; and the growing public concerns over its mode of operation reflect increasing anxieties about the ethical underpinnings of the entrepreneurial ideal generally. As the state's laissez-faire attitudes gradually gave way to a more interventionist approach, many businesses came under government scrutiny, and commercial burial insurance, in common with many other unregulated enterprises, was found guilty of placing individual and corporate profit ahead of the public good.

CONCLUSION

...the very term "culture", with its cosy invocation of consensus, may serve to distract attention from social and cultural contradictions, from the fractures and oppositions within the whole.[563]

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[563] E.P. Thompson, _Customs in Common_, 6.

This thesis has documented changes and continuities in popular death culture in the county of Cumbria between, roughly, 1700 and 1920. Historians have stressed that modernisation brought about many changes in death and burial during this period, and the evidence for this area serves to support this general hypothesis. Between the early eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries many aspects of death were transformed, as established community-based customs made way for professional undertakers, municipal cemeteries and insurance companies, each endeavouring to deal with death in a more efficient and businesslike manner.

But such changes did not signal the simple defeat of the old and the provincial by the new and the urban. Although ways of dealing with death were in many cases radically altered, the process of change was complex, and was characterised by struggle and resistance. Many customs persisted, and where changes occurred they often did so because working-class people had good reasons for desiring them. Indeed, the evolution of popular burial practices parallels the process of acceptance, co-option and rejection found in other aspects of working-class response to modernisation.

This thesis has taken as its underlying premise the concept that ritual expression has much to reveal about the values and attitudes of ordinary people who have left few written records. It also postulates that more conventional sources benefit from being used in conjunction with folklore and oral testimony. In focusing on a discrete geographical area, and in taking a "bottom-up" approach, this study has sought to test the hypotheses of historians of death who have based their conclusions on data gleaned from more

general studies, often heavily reliant on written
documentation generated by the social elite.

Ranging across a broad spectrum of topics which began
with folk beliefs, and concluding with the management of the
insurance industry, it has revealed how these apparently
disparate areas were linked by the common thread of
mutuality, and it has examined the ways in which this ideal
struggled against a growing stress on self-interest as the
forces of modernism gained momentum.

It began with an analysis of the ways in which ordinary
people coped with death in rural environment. In the pre-
industrial context the event of death had formed the
centrepiece of a neighbourhood drama, a phenomenon which set
in motion a ritualistic collective response intended both to
afford practical support to the dying and the bereaved and
to ensure the observance of commonly-held standards of
dignity. Neighbourhood help with the deathbed, and
community participation in funerals was part of an
established tradition of mutual aid, which encompassed many
aspects of life, and was a means of survival for many.

The counterpart of this informal, spontaneous form of
help was the support offered by membership in a mutual
association. The friendly society movement perpetuated the
practice, originally offered by the religious and craft
guilds, of offering mutual aid to the bereaved. Within this
more structured environment, the funeral cortege and the
associated sociability became a powerful way of expressing
collective norms and pride in association. Yet at the same
time collectivism found itself competing with self-interest,
as levies gave way to advance subscriptions as a way of
funding funerals, and many clubs deliberately excluded those
who presented too great a drain on resources.

This tension between collectivism and individualism was further emphasised with the government's drive toward sanitary reform. The closure of many churchyards and the opening of the cemeteries put increasing pressure on working-class people to conform to a more sophisticated definition of decency in death, central to which was ownership of a private grave in perpetuity. As the more "respectable" withdrew from neighbourhood reciprocity, in favour of customs symbolic of personal or familial wealth and social position, the management of the funeral fell increasingly to professional undertakers who emphasised materialistic display.

Despite a growing trend to use mortuary practices as indicators of individual social status, collective forms of support in death continued to be valued by many working people. Like other rural ways transplanted to the urban setting, death customs provided a sense of security and stability for many who had weathered the storms of industrialisation. Indeed, such familiar ways carried moral power, providing a cultural alternative to the practices of the wealthy. This was expressed most forcefully in the funerals of the Affiliated Orders of Friendly Societies, which incorporated rituals which were replete with symbolic and literal endorsements of fraternity.

It was through the commercialisation of burial insurance that modernisation made its most forceful impact on popular death culture. Paradoxically, the success of this new type of business was to a large degree attributable to the continuing vigour of older attitudes. To a certain extent an offshoot of the fraternal movement, commercial insurance succeeded because it continued to satisfy an enduring need among common people to ensure a decent burial

- while at the same time exploiting that need for its own pecuniary gain.

Although the trends noted above describe processes at work in Cumbria, there is no reason to assume that they did not apply more broadly. Much of the historiography for other regions, and for England generally, suggests that similar situations and developments may have prevailed in other areas. Rural death customs found in Cumbria have been noted in other places, for example, and the work of other historians on local friendly societies has often drawn conclusions similar to those given here. Burial reform affected all parts of the country, and commercial burial insurance was sold throughout Britain. Thus, there is good reason to suppose that the evidence produced here has a validity beyond the geographical area from which it was drawn.

One of the most significant contributions of this study to the history of death lies in its new perspective on the process of modernisation. As noted, a major trend within the historiography to date has been the charting of the rise of individualism and its effects upon mortuary customs and attitudes generally. Many such studies have tended to examine the middle classes, who relied on the services supplied by professional undertakers; however, there is a noticeable paucity of studies which look at the coping mechanisms of the less well-off, and the tenacity of customs rooted in collectivism.

Although several informative works on popular death customs do exist, few historians have attempted to locate their findings within a sophisticated theoretical framework. Very little has been written on the role of the working-

class funeral in articulating co-operation and mutual
concern, and one of the major consequences of the
modernisation of death - the rise of commercial burial
insurance - has been all but ignored.

But apart from providing new insights into aspects of
death per se, this thesis reveals that death studies can be
a rich source for social historians generally. Among the
many topics which this study has illuminated are the
importance of working-class neighbourhood networks and
mutual support, the power of folk beliefs, the origin and
evolution of popular notions of decency, and the principles
which underpinned social relationships. Death also has much
to reveal about the ways in which etiquette and ritual were
used to create class identity.

Sharon Strocchia has argued that death rituals help to
show "fundamental changes in attitudes and mentalities."[564]
This thesis has argued that they have just as much to tell
us about continuities. We have seen that popular deathways
can disclose much about the ways in which popular culture in
general adapted to change. Many rural customs successfully
reproduced themselves in the urban environment, retaining a
cultural potency, and to a great extent remaining resistant
to middle class attempts to "improve" them. Clearly, death
customs had much in common with other aspects of working-
class culture which continued to flourish in the towns, and
they played an important role in defining working-class
identity.

Death studies also can add a very useful dimension to
the study of fraternal associations. Although working-class
organisation has been a focal point of much labour history,

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[564] Sharon Strocchia, xiv.

friendly societies have not received the attention they deserve; the friendly society involvement with death has been noted by only a handful of historians, and then usually in a cursory manner. This is a pity, for close examination of the role of friendly societies in death has the potential to greatly enrich the debate on their ideological underpinnings.

The study of death also draws attention to another area barely broached by English historians: the role of the cemetery in facilitating and reflecting continuity and change. The sanitary reforms as applied to burial had profound consequences. Yet, unlike their French counterparts, few English historians have given them more than a second glance. As we have seen, the new burial grounds have much to tell about social discrimination, aesthetics, concerns over the rational use of space, and the relationship between the state and local government.

Then, too, the subject of death illuminates in a very significant way the changing economic and political climate of the late nineteenth century. The evolution of burial insurance, from a service provided by mutual associations, to a commodity sold for profit, reflects the intensification of commercialisation of many aspects of life - and death, and the greater willingness of the state to intrude into areas at one time considered private.

Women's history can also benefit from a closer scrutiny of funerary customs. We have seen that class and gender played an important part in death culture. Women of the social elite were expected to reflect familial connections in their observance of prolonged mourning, yet were excluded from funerals because of their alleged "delicacy" or propensity for emotion. Working-class women, by contrast,

not only played a large part in post-mortem care, they were often instrumental in running undertaking businesses. Such striking differences in expectations have much to reveal about social attitudes to women generally, as well articulating ideas about social class.

But, perhaps most important of all, death customs can warn against drawing too close a correlation between cultural ideals and social class. Although this thesis has been at pains to make a distinction between what Richardson has called "class-bound death cultures," it has also argued that there was a basic tension within working-class culture itself. When the conflict between individualism and collectivism in popular death-culture reached crisis point it did so because the self-interest of a minority of enterprising working-class individuals began to compromise the best interests of their peers.

E. P. Thompson has cautioned that culture is not monolithic. Indeed, it contains inconsistencies, as competing interests pull in different directions.[565] This thesis has charted one aspect of this ambiguity. It has revealed that the process of modernism as it affected death culture cannot be interpreted as a growing conflict between class ideologies purely and simply; it represented an intensifying struggle between diverging mores within working-class culture itself.

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[565] E.P. Thompson, Customs in Common, 6.

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BPR/3 I39. Correspondence between Whitehall and the Churchwardens of Holy Trinity Parish Church, Ulverston, over closure of graveyard, 1857-1878.

BPR/5 I5. Index book for graves in Ireleth churchyard, 1860-1930.

BPR/6 I 4/ 1. 2. Burials at Broughton, 1813-1966.

BPR/6 I9. Plan of graveyard, Broughton.

BPR/6 I9, I 13/2. Burial Certificate counterfoils, 1891-1932.

BPR/7 02. Vestry Minutes, Ulpha.

BPR/8 I9. Table of Fees, Seathwaite Church, 1876.

BPR/8. Vestry Minutes, Seathwaite.

BPR/9 VI 1. Vestry Minutes and churchwardens' accounts, Woodland.

BPR/10 W1. 1,2,3. Vestry Minutes and churchwardens' accounts, Millom.

BPR/12 C10/6 Documents pertaining to Table of Fees for churches and cemeteries, 1931.

BRR/13/2 1. Burials permitted after Order in Council, St. Mary's, Dalton.

BPR/13/4 1. 2. Details of burials in St. Mary's.

BPR/13/10. Details of burials in St. Mary's.

BPR/13/24 6. Copy of Burial Act, 1900, with Table of Fees for St. Mary's.

BPR/14/5 2. Subscription book in aid of widows of men drowned at Park Mine, n.d.

BPR/14 C 1-2. Church accounts, Urswick.

BPR/1712/53. Documents pertaining to Colton churchyard extension, 1886.

BPR/18 I4 7-11. Documents relating to fees and extension of Lowick graveyard, 1846-1908.

BPR/18 I4/7. Table of fees, Holy Trinity Church, Ulverston, 1891.

BPR/18 I 4/8. Table of Fees, Colton Parish Church, n.d.

BPR/19 I 2-6. Burial plots, Lowick Churchyard.

BPR/21 C3. Churchwardens' accounts, Lowick, n.d.

BPR/26. I 14. Document pertaining to extension of Egton Churchyard.

BPR/29 I 2/6 1, 2. Document pertaining to extension of Satterthwaite churchyard.

BPR/30 I1/5. Burial notebook kept by Sexton, Rusland. 1888-1908.
BPR/31 I 22 1-11. Documents pertaining to extension of Dendron churchyard, 1884-1889.

BPR/31 I 22 19. Table of Fees and Charges, Dendron Cemetery, 1915.

BPR/31 I 22 V1. Vestry Minutes, 1835-1928, Dalton.

BPR/I 22/7. Table of Fees, Rules and Regulations, Dalton Cemetery, 1873.

BPR/32 I2/6.H2. Table of fees, St. Michael's, Rampside, 1891.

BSUD/D/C. Dalton Cemetery grave grant books, 1860-1892.

BSUD/D/S. Surveyors dept. plans for Dalton Cemetery, 124.

Monumental Inscription Books for the following churches:

St. Mary Magdalene, Broughton-in-Furness
Chapel of St. John Baptist, Ulpha
St Anthony's, Cartmel Fell
Cartmel Priory
St Mary's, Dalton-in-Furness
St. Michael's, Hawkshead
St. James's, Whitehaven
Holy Trinity, Whitehaven
St. George's Millom

CUMBRIA RECORD OFFICE, KENDAL

DRC/10. Documents pertaining to churchyard extensions: Selside Church, 1839; Underbarrow Chapel, 1820; Casterton Church, 1833; Grayrigg Church, 1838. Document pertaining to sale of land for Kendal Cemetery, 1855.

DRC/10. Details of Bargain and Sale of land for Kendal Cemetery, 1855.

WD/AG. Funeral expenses, Henry Atkinson, 1838. Assorted mourning cards.

WD/AG. Box 33. Grant of grave space, Kendal Cemetery, 1903.

WDB/35. [425] Crosthwaite Cemetery Plan, n.d.

WDB/35. [852] [621] Kendal Cemetery Plan, 1866.

WBD/35. [859] Casterton Churchyard and Cemetery Plan, n.d.

WDB/58. Accounts of an unknown undertaker, Broughton-in-Furness area, 1912-1933.

WD/MM. Funeral expenses, Christopher Longmire, 1873.

WD/MM. Box 69, 6. Funeral arrangements of Isaac Wilson of Kirkland, 1840's.

WD/Rad/072/abcdf. Documents relating to the funeral of Mary Muckelt of Dalton, 1765.

WDRC/10. Plan of Parkside Cemetery, Kendal, 1855.

WDSO/20. Documents pertaining to Oddfellows of Bowness and Ambleside, 1870-90.

WDSO/67/3. Membership list, Oddfellows, Kendal, 1837-79.

WDSO/67/1, 4-9. Details of Katherine Parr Lodge of Oddfellows, n.d.

WDSO/76. Accounts of Westmorland Division of Forresters, Kendal, 1845-1860.

WDSO/134. Details of Rechabites, Kendal, n.d.

WDSO/161. Accounts, United National Order of Free Gardeners, Kendal, 1882-1889.

WDSO/220/A2567. Account Book of the Royal Union Society, 1841.

WDX/148/F97-132. Gibson family papers.

WDX/148/129. Undertaker's invoice, 1909.

WDX/313 Box 3. Manuscript copy of The Country Funeral - A Poem by William Robinson. Hill Top, Nov. 1769.

WDY/81. Report on the Burial Grounds in the Borough of Kendal, 1850.
WDY/276. Newspaper article on Kirkby Stephen Bidding Bell, 1885.

WPR/3. Plan of Crosthwaite Burial Ground, 1861.

WPR/7. Regulations for Kendal Cemetery, 1854.

WPR/8. Churchyard documents, Heversham Churchyard, 1885-1908.

WPR/15. Brampton Hearse Account, 1877-1924.

WPR/16. Note relating to Shap church fees, 1867.

WPR/60. Table of fees, Garsdale Church, 1895.

WPR/62. Table of Fees, Troutbeck Church, 1883.

WPR/62/I49-51. Troutbeck Churchyard Plan, 1882-1952.

WPR/63. Register of graves, Ambleside graveyard, 1854-1908.

WPR/64. Grave space books, Brathay Church, n.d.

WQR/SFB. Returns of the New Union Society of Kirkby Lonsdale, 1840. Rules of the Milnthorpe Friendly Society, 1832. Rulebook for the Charity Stock, Kirkby Stephen, 1792. A list of the Friendly Societies in the County of Westmoreland, 1857. Rules of the Burton Friendly Society, 1828.

CUMBRIA RECORD OFFICE, WHITEHAVEN

D/CU. Miscellaneous documents related to friendly societies, including Rules of the Amicable, Society, Cockermouth, n.d, and Sisterly Society of Whitehaven Account Book, 1832-1849.

Cumberland Friendly Society Rules and Orders, 1775-1792, no publisher, printed by J. Ware and Son.

LANCASHIRE RECORD OFFICE, PRESTON

WRW/L. A collection of wills (part of a collection transcribed and kindly made available by Mr. Kevin Lancaster of the Sedbergh Local History Society).

BARROW REFERENCE LIBRARY

Fell, T.K, Legendary and Folklore in Furness. Manuscript
Z2606, n.d.

Fleming, William. The Manuscript Diary and Commonplace Book
of William Fleming of Pennington, 1798-1819.

Tyson, J. Dalton-in-Furness District Local Board - Accounts
(1882-96).

MISCELLANEOUS PRIMARY SOURCES

Documents relating to the funeral of Madam Preston. The
museum, Holker Hall.

Account Books of Mr. Wren of Newby Bridge. 1820-1999.

Watercolour of Artist's Impression of Barrow Cemetery, circa
1850. Artist unknown. Barrow Town Hall, Barrow-in-Furness.

The South Westmorland News Book, 1827-1831, compiled by The
Holme and District Local History Society, 1992.

ORAL SOURCES

Transcripts, Ambleside History Archive

CG. Respondent born Ambleside, 1900. Father woodcutting
machinist.

FC. Respondent born Ambleside, 1922. Father a quarryman.

Transcripts, Author's Personal Archive, Kendal

Marjorie Noble, Born 1918.

Mary Noble,   " 1914.

Laura Dennison,   "   1906.

Eleanor Mackie,   "   1910.

Gilbert Parkinson, " 1913.

Marjorie Prickett, " 1912.

Mrs. Atkinson,   " 1903.

Minnie Callaghan,   " 1898.

Gilbert Robinson,   " 1899.

Mrs. Allonby,   " 1896.

Transcripts, Oral History Archive, Centre for North West
Regional Studies, Lancaster University

Respondents, all born in Barrow

Mrs. A. 2 B. Born 1904. Father a boilermaker.

Mrs. A. 3. B. Born 1892. Father a caretaker and boilerman.

Mr. B. 1. B. Born 1897. Father a coachman, later a
caretaker.

Mr. C.1. B. Born 1900. Father a joiner.

Mrs. H.1.B. Father a boilermaker, later railway labourer and
dredger.

Mrs. H.2.B. Born 1885. Father a carter for railway.

Mr. H.2.B. Born 1888. Father a manager of a baker's shop,
clerk.

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APPENDIX A

THE COUNTRY FUNERAL
A POEM

Oh death! Thou terror of the guilty mind!
At thy approach, the slanderer, who erstwhile
With lying tongue blasted his neighbour's name;
And hurt the peace of families all round,
At thy approach he trembles to frown
Of violated truth, and owns his guilt;
So truth for once, sincerely from his lips,
With tears and groans in broken accents bursts
Then, with uplifted eyes, wishes he ne'er
Had existence, or had dumb been born;
In lucid intervals he prays for time
To wash away the stains his venom spread;
Then raves again, and with a curse expires!
      Ye rural folk, beware, and not indulge
This shameful vice, the foul deformed child
Of envy and of malice, sprung from hell!
Rather your neighbour cherish with due praise;
Let faults be softened, or in silence die;
Forgive and be forgiven-----All are frail!
But hark! The passing bell, with doleful sound,
Revives the idea of forgotten graves!---
Just now, some father, mother, wife or child,
Some tender lover or endearing friend,
Put off their passions, and take leave of life,
While the soul quits its prison made of clay!
No cares, no heartaches, no distress, no pain,
No feuds, domestics, or the fear of ills,
Shall these, with various tortures, longer plague;
No more shall they feel the oppressors gripe,
No more endure the pangs of slighted love;
---The proudest tyrants vent their rage in vain,
      Ah, what is strength? What is superior wi--
What riches? Beauty what?---Death levels all!
Look at that corpse; scarce cold!--will that wan cheek
Which yesterday excelled the fairest flower,
Resume its roses? of that eye its fire?
Ah no!--- the feast's prepared, the table place'd,
Made of black coffins, and the solemn grace,
An epitaph, in elegiac strains;
A skull, the musty cup!---soon will the worm
Thy kindred worm, ring the finger proud,
Where late the glittering diamond glowed; or else

Crouching in dimples, where the graces dwelt,
In many folds, luxuriant, riot there!
While the sleek flesh, with high-sauc'd lustrous food,
Pampered, soon loathsome to the sight and smell,
By putrefication dwindled into dust,
And the gorg'd worms gape for another corpse!
      Tomorrow you're invited to attend
At nine the funeral of old Darby's Joan;
The feast will be at one --- two hundred bid!
---Oh jolly vanity and pageant vile,
Mistaken pride, and visionary pomp,
Attended with unnecessary cost,
Oft ill-afforded, wanted by the living;
A mockery, not an honour to the dead!
See! Poor old Darby leaning o'er the corpse of his lov'd
Joan; the statue he of grief,
With sorrow motionless, scarce seems alive!
Their children, bathed in tears for their dear loss,
Of life regardless, wish to share her tomb!
---Is this a time for feasting? Shall the board
Be loaded with rich viands?-- Yes; at the top
The large sirloin swells proudly; - here the ham
That long adorned the chimney;---there the poultry
That lately swarmed i' the yard the dishes fill,
Whilst baked meats numberless the tables crowd,
And goblets with strong liquor overflow!
The glass, the pipe, the jocund tale goes round
As formerly on their nuptial day,
Or when their heir was christened with high glee!
Say, is it decent thus to gormandise,
To play the glutton, and to make a noise
At such a season? Is't not wicked waste?--
Perhaps some few intoxicated reel
From the repast, unmindful of their friend,
Who breathless lies close by, and shou'd inspire
Religious thoughts, and force the bleeding tear,
Pathetically tender, from the heart!---
Is there no helpless, half-starved widow near,
No hungry orphans pale with meagre want,
Whom with a thousandth part of this vile feast
You might relieve, and with your charity
Snatch from the jaws of death and gaping grave
Yes, yes, the world's too full of such as these,
And whom relieving you would heaven obtain!
      Take good example from the adjacent town *
They feast not for the dead; a modest glass
Of wine suffices; and the like

In many villages and townships round.
    Oh my dear Hutton neighbours! Ye, with whom
I late have lived, and often from my soul
Condemned funeral feasts, I now once more
Desire you to leave them off, ---and not displease
Your maker, nor disturb the peaceful dead!

            Hill Top, November 1769,
            William Robinson

* Kendal

APPENDIX B

MR. WREN'S ACCOUNTS, NEWBY BRIDGE, 1842-1847
A SAMPLE OF TWENTY-FIVE CONSECUTIVE ENTRIES

The Wren family, of the village of Newby Bridge near
Ulverston has undertaken funerals for over 170 years.

Joseph Bell
Oak Coffin 40/- Plate 2/6 Shroud 5/-
Chappel fees 4/6 Bidding 1/6 Total £2   13   6

William Lewis
Coffin 16/- Shroud 5/- Fees 4/6 Hearse 17/-
Paid travel arrangements   15/- £2   2   2

Baby
Coffin and plate 4/-

Eleanor Knipe
Coffin 15/- Plate 2/6 Shroud 5/- Total £1   2   6

Boy, five years
Coffin 7/- Shroud 3/- Fees 3/6 Total 13/6

James Taylor
Coffin 25/- Shroud 6/- Ribbon 6d. Total   £1   11   6

Mary Airey
Coffin 18/- Shroud 5/- Fees 8/- Total £1   11   0

Child
Coffin 4/- Plate 8d. Total 4/8

Elizabeth Bell
Coffin 38/- Plate 2/6 Shroud 5/- Fees 9/-
Total £2   14   6

Agnes Backhouse
Coffin 35/- Plate 2/6 Shroud 5/- Fees 4/6
Total £2   7   0

Child
Coffin 7/- Plate 1/6 Shroud 4/- Fees 6/6 Total 19/-

Isabella Atkinson
Coffin and Plate 15/- Shroud 5/- Fees 7/- Total £1   7   0

James Knipe
Coffin and Plate 20/6   Shroud 5/-   Fees 7/-
Total £1 12 6

Elisabeth Fell
Coffin and Plate 16/6   Shroud 5/-   Total £1 1 6

Child
Coffin 15/6 Plate 2/6 Shroud 4/-   Total £1 2 0

Jane Fleming
Coffin 40/-   Shroud 16/3   Plate 4/-
Fees 4/6 Hearse 15/-   Total £3   19 0

Child
Coffin and plate 5/-   Ditto

John Barlow
Coffin 42/-   Shroud 15/-   Fees 9/-   Total £3 7 0

John Robinson
Coffin 42/-   Shroud 5/-   Fees 4/6 Total £2 11 6

Child
Coffin and Plate 5/-

Elisabeth Holme
Coffin 15/- Plate 2/6 Shroud and cap 6/6 Total £1 4 0

Child
Coffin 10/- Plate 2/- Shroud 3/6   Total 15/-

Agnes Cleater
Oak Coffin ---- Shroud 16/-   2 1/2 yards of black cloth
£2 3 9
Engraved plate 25/- Chloride of lime 1/- Cap 2/6
Two journeys to Ulverston 7/- Fees 14/6
Toll bars 5/3 Attendance 7/-
Paid Parker Sun Inn Hearse and Horses to Dalton £2 3 6
Coach from landing to Dalton and back
Sarah Dawson for refreshment and horses etc.
Carriage to Dalton and back
Post Boys and Ostlers   Total   £18 6 6

Rev. James Long
Oak Coffin £4   Spanish Mahogany £3
Packing case and cord for coffin
Flannel Mattress and dress £2   10   0
Attendance at Newby Bridge and took to Milnethorpe
Lead coffin   Total £19 0 0

Elizabeth Johnson
Coffin 15/-   Plate 2/6   Shroud 5/- Fees 7/-
Total £1 9 6