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Chapter 1

Temporalities of Transience and the Mortuary

Landscape: the Example of Natural Burial

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Since 1993 interring the dead in a natural burial ground has been a disposal option in the UK. Drawing on a study conducted in Great Britain between 2007 and 2010¹, this chapter asks how natural burial might inform experiences of passage or transience at the time of death. Natural burial grounds typically contain few traditional symbols of death; there are no broken columns or draped urns to signify a boundary between life and death, no references to a Christian afterlife in inscriptions, marble crosses, bibles, angels or cherubs. Instead, the dead ‘disappear’, often into woodland or fields where only ephemeral markers stand for their passage (Hockey et al. 2012). How, then, can such sites generate experiential knowledge of death?

As we show, such ‘knowledge’ might be less a matter of cognitions or well-articulated beliefs, and more a case of emotionally-generated understandings particular to individuals or families. Taking the form of approximations, intimations and negotiations, such understandings may reflect differing values and priorities, as well as diverse relationships with the dead. With the senses as their source, they may become evident in memories and imaginings that enable continuities to be created and the temporalities of passage between being alive and being dead to be accessed. Time, we therefore argue, can be both ‘found’ and ‘made’ in such settings. Transitions between seasons, for example, and associated changes in vegetation and weather,

provide evidence of temporal change; once ‘found’ in this way, time can also be ‘made’ through practices which allow the absence of the dead to be engaged with. For example, as a new and less common disposal option, natural burial affords mourners more extended ‘ritual’ time than cremation. This feature, plus the personal support owners and managers often provide, enables mourners to ‘make’ more time for the funeral and indeed to involve themselves with the deceased in the days prior to their burial.

Where these conditions are in place, ‘passing’ may assume a particular material or tangible form, becoming a process of change and continuity. In this respect, as our data evidence, natural burial can enable the kind of liminal period (van Gennep [1909] 1960) that makes rather than simply marks changes.

‘Passing on’, ‘Passing away’, ‘Passed’

Practices such as dressing the body and actively participating in the funeral are not, however, unique to natural burial. Instead, like natural burial itself, they contribute to a strand of cultural change that has been occurring in the UK since the late 20th century. In part, it is a form of resistance to traditional deathways which not only involve removing or sequestering the dead, but are also often at odds with ambivalent belief systems. Open to alternatives that promise more direct or personal engagement between the living and the dead, between bereaved people and society, members of many western societies now disparage euphemistic phrases for announcing a death – ‘laid to rest’, ‘gone to meet his Maker’, ‘departed’. Yet there is no unified cultural consensus; ‘passed on’, ‘passed away’ and ‘passed’ remain in routine use to soften the news. Within this mix of new and more traditional mortuary cultures, then, what the

concept or metaphor of ‘passage’ might actually refer to is uncertain, particularly in the absence of a consensus of belief as to what happens to someone when they die. While passing ‘on’ or ‘away’ hint at a location that is not ‘here’, ‘passing’ simply suggests movement.

Meanwhile the process of dying has become well-defined and extended – partly through medical debates which pursue precise definitions of death in order to support organ harvesting (Lock 2002). Yet journeys once mapped through limbo or purgatory towards a permanent afterlife have become less persuasive. Bereavement, similarly, has been re-configured, now no longer an extended, structured pathway once evidenced in the sequencing of 19th-century women’s mourning dress (Taylor 1983). Even mid-20th century staged models of a grief ‘process’ (Kübler-Ross 1969) have been supplanted by the more fluid notion of ‘continuing’ bonds (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996) between the living and the dead.

To borrow irreverently from the UK comedy, *Blackadder*, then -when the down-trodden servant, Baldrick, wants to know what caused the First World War, he can only frame his question as: ‘how did the one state of affairs become the other?’ His struggle for words resonates with the similar challenge of understanding how the state of ‘being alive’ becomes the state of ‘being dead’. Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen call for attention to ‘the mutual inter-dependence in people’s lives of the materially present and the materially absent’ (2010:4). In their view, absences make themselves felt - sensuously, emotionally and ideationally (ibid.: 3), acquiring a potentially challenging presence within the here-and-now.

In relation to the dead, however, it is not simply their static immanence within the everyday, or at key calendrical moments. The challenge or uncertainty associated with their simultaneous absence and presence pertains to the dynamic nature of what

has happened, the process whereby someone who has irrefutably been is now no longer. Materially, this transition is evidenced in the transformation of vital embodiment into decaying corpse. Both the living and the dead body are, at particular points, present. Yet, while one embodies the presence of the individual, the presence of the other confirms their absence. This chapter therefore addresses the interplay of absence and presence, so exploring the scope and limitations of mortuary culture - as a set of materially-grounded practices and entities, to enable human beings to understand how 'the one state of affairs becomes the other'.

Ambivalence and Sequestration

Not a self-evident pair, these terms nonetheless intersect within many western social environments where death neither elicits a consensus as to its nature or aftermath, nor occurs within everyday settings. This is not to impute a false collectivity to members of traditional societies among whom much anthropological work is rooted, to stake some exclusive western claim to experiences of difference and doubt. It is, however, to highlight 'a shift into a this-worldliness in Europe through the second half of the 20th century' (Davies 2005:57), one within which the idea of a heavenly afterlife is 'more therapeutic than theological' (ibid.:58).

It is in relation to such settings that the 'sequestration thesis' was developed. Its critical focus included the containment of the dying within medicalised hospital space where their families and friends became similarly marginalised; once dead, their corpse was likely to 'de-materialise' at least temporarily, under the custodianship of the funeral director, or, in the case of an unexplained death, become a possession of the coroner. Sociologists such as Elias (1985), Giddens (1991), Bauman (1992),

Mellor and Shilling (1993) and Seale (1998), as well as anthropologists such as Gorer (1965) cited urbanisation, industrialisation, professionalization and secularisation as core to the sequestration of death-related practices and environments. Earlier in the 20th century, individuals familiar to the dying person and their family, the priest, the layer-out, the carpenter and the sexton, were likely to accompany their passage. By the second half of that century, however, the doctor, the funeral director and Bereavement Services were occupying the bed-side and the grave-side (Illich 1975; Parsons 1999). As Jupp and Walter said in 1999 '[m]ost English people die in old age, out of sight, in hospital or nursing and residential homes. These are the all-too-frequent unseen deaths of the confused elderly, victims of strokes, or in coronary care or suffering Alzheimer's' (1999:278).

As a result, the 'passing' of someone known, respected and perhaps loved, became a less 'knowable' process of change, if indeed it was experienced as a process at all – or simply remained a medically-defined event, the cessation of brain-stem activity. After death, until the legitimization of 'continuing bonds' (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996) in the late 20th century, even retaining the belongings of the dead was likely to be a covert, even furtive, pursuit. However, while Davies identifies a place for 'default religion' where the Christian church offers 'the easier option for people, even those with little or no active religious belief or commitment (Davies 2005: 58), he views its current mix of 'personal readings or personal music as markers of individuality set within the traditional framework' (ibid.: 59), as a response now vulnerable to alternative ritual options.

Evidence of ambivalent beliefs and sequestered practices might therefore seem to undermine any 'mutual inter-dependence in people's lives of the materially present and the materially absent' (Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen 2010:4), at least in ways that

allow death and its temporalities to be ‘known’ and understood. As the introduction to this collection explains, its aim is to ‘explore how particular sensuous and material qualities constitute frameworks for reflecting on or understanding the temporality of death and decay’. Yet according to the sequestration thesis, members of western societies became all but starved of such qualities - in the name of professionalism, hygiene, convenience and ‘care’ of bereaved people’s sensibilities and a deteriorating body. These conditions were, moreover, likely to be experienced without resort to a socially-authenticated belief system which might render ‘death’ accessible or meaningful.

The sequestration thesis has, however, been challenged as an all-encompassing account of western deathways (Hockey 2011). Empirical evidence of other sites and practices complicates the idea that Europe is an ‘exceptional case’ when compared with parts of the world where religious beliefs and practices proliferate (Davies 2005: 56). While natural burial has no affiliation with ideas about a heavenly afterlife, it does stand for an explicit set of belief and values, ones which our data suggest can support engaged participation in the passage of someone who has died. It is this orientation which many of those who choose alternatives to traditional deathways have espoused. Davies describes natural burial emerging ‘from an interplay between science of an intuitively acceptable kind and a sense of self that is not dependent upon either belief in an otherworldly afterlife or the fragility of the enduring memories of one’s descendants’, something he encapsulates in the concept of ‘ecological immortality’ (ibid.:87).

Into the Field

The study drawn on here combines perspectives from landscape architecture, social anthropology and sociology. It has generated a geographical information system (GIS) data-base of all the natural burial grounds in the UK, a survey of 20 such sites that included interviews with owners/managers plus a photographic and textual record of the site, ethnographic work at four natural burial grounds which represented a diversity of providers: a farmer, a charitable trust, a local authority and a funeral director, and an ongoing observational study at one site with data recorded photographically and textually. This extensive material relating to one among a number of new or alternative deathways in the UK allows us a particular perspective on the concept or metaphor of passage.

Natural burial originated at Carlisle municipal cemetery in the UK in 1993. Here the manager, Ken West, established a new area of the cemetery where only a tree would mark a grave, a response born out of his own disillusionment with chemically-resourced maintenance practices which undermined the cemetery's ecological stability, as well as a conversation with two single women who wished to somehow avoid being buried in an unvisited grave with decaying headstone and curtilage (see West 2010).

Ken West's approach to natural burial reflects Davies' (2005) notion of 'ecological immortality', a morally-esteemed bodily merger with a sustainable environment. It gives form to the metaphors of 'passing away' or 'passing on' since an explicit emphasis on 'passing away' into a wider organic milieu also means 'passing on' one's habitat to future generations, for example by being buried into a habitat that is thereby protected. This orientation is enhanced by site owners/managers who ban or discourage embalming and hardwood coffins, the corpse thereby disintegrating readily into the landscape. Indeed, at Green Lane Burial

Field in Powys, Wales, bodies are interred relatively close to the surface of the burial field; their decomposition is thus accelerated through readier access to air and water. Above the surface of the grave, as noted, little of an immutable nature marks the deceased's passage. Headstones, grave curtilage, informal memorials and, in some cases, site boundaries and signage which help define UK burial grounds (Rugg 2000) may well be missing. In many ways, then, the deceased simply disappears into an anonymous landscape, the materiality of this process potentially making 'passing' more imaginable. Amy Salter², whose father was buried in woodland at the East Meon site, said:

INSERT FIG. 1.1 HERE

Fig 1.1 No other form of memorialization is permitted other than a native oak tree planted on each grave. (September 2012)

Yeah, down there and the same with the flowers on top of him are turning over and the colours going out of them, and all, I feel, I don't think it's horrible personally, I just think all the water and the rain is washing through him and then he'll become part of the trees, it's not a horror image at all but I think he's not in his body so it doesn't really matter.

East Meon was among many diverse landscapes that we encountered during our study. The desire to preserve and to create particular environments which motivates many site owners/ managers, means that they may be located in existing woodland, orchards or fields – or, conversely, occupy areas that will become woodland as a result of grave-related planting, or fields that will be enhanced by a

reduction of grazing or chemical fertilisers. In this way, then, the dead help ‘pass on’ a valued landscape.

To what extent, though, can a natural burial ground afford experiences which might generate knowledge of death? People seeking to pre-purchase their grave or bury a friend or relative are more likely to experience the deep time of Great Britain’s rural heritage, something one of our participants described as both ‘a timeless experience’ and one that ‘built bridges’. Their words suggest that in transcending the unstable here-and-now of loss, timelessness can enable connection, an apparent paradox explored below.

Bringing it All Back Home

To show how natural burial has acquired its status as a more materially-grounded and participative experience of death, we present ethnographic data gathered during fieldwork at the East Meon site in the south of England. Rather than a set of routinised procedures, we observed how people’s contribution to a funeral resulted from negotiations which are key to the manager, Al’s, relationship with his clients. This was also described by bereaved people when interviewed. Unlike most cemetery managers, Al accompanied people around the site and helped them choose a grave location. This helped him assess their emotional state and available networks of support. It also allowed him to discover whether they understood what it meant to bury naturally, what a funeral in this setting might involve, and whether they might wish to consider managing it themselves. Those clearly traumatised by the death, he advised to contact a funeral director. Yet he made this suggestion gently because, as he explained:

The difficulty is... if I say... do this and do that... get rid of the men in black at the gate [funeral directors], I don't want them to feel they're having an inferior do ... doing anything lesser because they have chosen to have the funeral director there... or the minister.

Al thus practiced his established style of negotiation, ensuring that people did not envisage natural burial occupying some higher moral ground where duties of care could not be delegated to professionals. Indeed, if people were keen to participate in ways that might result in them going to pieces on the day, he would advise against this option. His was therefore a very personal relationship with bereaved people. Compared with staff at a municipal cemetery whom mourners are unlikely to meet, he felt a personal responsibility to look out for his clients and ensure everything went well on the day.

If they appeared emotionally resilient and had sufficient informal support, he would encourage them to consider an active role in arranging the burial, something he saw as a cathartic involvement that could help them work through their grief. If they were fit, he might suggest that they used the hand bier³ to transport the coffin, and then help lower it into the grave. Perhaps they might consider speaking at the burial service. Through these mechanisms, people could engage directly with the materialities of the corpse and the practicalities of disposing of it.

As a site and a practice natural burial is therefore at odds with the idea that western death is sequestered, that dying people, their families and indeed the corpse are routinely rendered passive. The question remains, however, as to whether – and if so, how - a more embodied, indeed vibrant engagement between dying, dead and

bereaved people informs understandings of death and its associated temporalities.

Without shared religious, spiritual or in some cases ecological beliefs, how were the materialities of natural burial experienced?

No Direction Home?

Our data show that site owners/ managers do see themselves undertaking something that differs from traditional mortuary culture. While templates and indeed texts are available to them (for example, West 2010), establishing a site is by no means a 'one size fits all' endeavour. For a start, the landscapes adopted are hugely varied. When a cemetery manager such as Ken West undertook his makeover of adjacent land, he adapted the cemetery's linear layout of graves and retained the practice of grave-based memorialisation. The resulting site is laid out on a grid system with rows of trees planted above the bodies, one per person. By contrast, when Andrew Gifford, a farmer, turned one of his fields into a burial ground, he drew on the model of rig and furrow⁴ ploughing, creating low embankments into which bodies could be buried (Clayden et al. 2010).

These are design issues but as people began burying their dead in such diverse settings, the idea of natural burial as a practice also came under scrutiny. The assumption that it involved a minimal footprint with only the simplest, most biodegradable marker proved counter to some bereaved people's felt needs. Whilst present at the grave, many had difficulty passively contemplating an anonymous patch of grass. Instead, like the owners/managers who designed the site, they drew on what they knew, importing contemporary memorialising practices such as weeding and

planting the soil, and creating personal shrines with rocks, benches, crosses, toys, ornaments, cards, photographs and letters.

In this way the fabric of the natural burial ground took shape; enormously diverse in geography, design, values and management style, many sites had to subsume inherent contradictions and indeed tensions. These might be between bereaved people and the site owner or manager and their guidelines or rules. Or between different family members who lacked a shared vision of natural burial and what the nature of the grave should be; or indeed between different bereaved people, some of whom saw 'nature' as an absence of traditional grave goods and memorials, others for whom the desire to create and elaborate a focus for their grief was 'only human nature' (Clayden, Hockey and Powell 2010).

The result of this lack of fixed templates or established mores is a fluid mortuary landscape in which the materialities of burying, planting and maintenance may be subject to ongoing negotiation. Our data therefore show that a resource through which individuals may seek to overcome the non-empirical nature of death – where passing can somehow be fleshed out – involves approximations, intimations, and speculations predominate. Instead of some direct correspondence between material and inchoate entities – as when the cross where Jesus died becomes an item worn round the neck that meshes with the idea of sacrifice, the ambiguities and contradictions which constitute natural burial can become a resource for creative contemplation and engagement. In addition, as we demonstrate, the decay of the body and its inevitable disappearance into an ever-changing landscape provide an absence or nothingness of the kind referred to in the introduction to this collection - something at once empty and full of untamed potential. In the sections to follow, we describe

experiences of and orientations towards time, arguing that these can enable site visitors to discover what death might mean for them.

INSERT FIG. 1.2 HERE

Fig 1.2 The rapid and unrestricted growth of herbaceous plants in spring and summer make it increasingly challenging to find and access a grave.

Finding Time

We begin with the notion of time ‘found’ and focus on the natural burial ground landscape and its implications for interring the corpse in a place where grass and brambles supplant manicured lawns, where shoulder-high summer growth may make access to a grave challenging as trees gain both width and height. While the appearance of any burial ground will undergo seasonal change, in the natural burial ground the diversity of plants and trees and their freedom from pruning provide powerful evidence of cycles of growth, decay and re-growth. Unpaved, a site’s terrain generates experiences of walking towards or sitting by a grave that contrast radically with the cemetery landscape; rain, ice, snow and indeed sustained sunshine shape the nature of both the soil and what grows upon it. Passage through such a landscape may therefore evoke particular kinds of temporal experience; the first year after the death can acquire an extended linearity, for example, as one season slowly cedes to another; subsequent years potentially generate a more cyclical temporal experience as the grave returns to some version of its original appearance, perhaps lit by spring sunshine or snow and ice bound in February.

As Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen (2010) argue, things ‘present’ themselves to us, and at the time of death this may occur in striking ways. Their presence can evoke absences which make material items ‘truly noticed’, as Gibson (2008) explains in relation to domestic objects such as a sewing box that survived her mother. Time and the temporalities of passing may thus be ‘found’ rather than actively created. They are a kind of objet trouvé which may be pressed into service in a variety of creative ways

To engage with the dynamic nature of this mortuary landscape, our study included a longitudinal project which produces a monthly visual and textual record of one of our four ethnographic sites. By taking photographs from the same six vantage points, a wealth of comparative data has been generated, so demonstrating the temporalities of this setting. Below we present observations drawn from this record:

INSERT FIG. 1.3 HERE

Fig 1.3 Taken from the same place in the burial ground these images reveal how the landscape has changed over a period of 10 years (2002, 2006, 2009, 2012 Ulley South Yorkshire)

The South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground opened in 1995, the first burial being marked with the planting of a rowan tree. Choice characterises the owner’s motivation for this project and its parallel activity of a funeral directing business. Bereaved people and those wishing to pre-purchase a grave can choose its location without conforming to a grid layout. Similarly, the owner has exercised less control over informal memorialisation than at many other natural burial grounds. Such items remain evident, although their earlier proliferation drew criticism from particular

bereaved people and resulted in the owner's attempts to curb their scale and nature. Data from the site's burial register reveals how each burial has contributed, incrementally, to its contemporary landscape. Our photographic record also shows how the emergent woodland changes with each season as new trees are included. Moreover, the absent presence of the dead, materialised through their grave site and the tree likely to be planted upon it, fosters this new woodland's identity as a sacred landscape, a quality that comes into and out of focus through the seasonal cycle of growth and decay.

Early burials at this site clustered along the field's perimeter hedge and stream, its banks now colonized by alder and willow, an immediate connection with an established nature and an anchor for anyone wishing to locate a particular grave. By 2006, however, the burial 'field' had changed significantly, the experience of walking there and contemplating the surrounding landscape now framed by the diversity of trees chosen by bereaved people. As a result the initial landmarks of hedge, stream and pathway had been supplemented by a network of semi-mature and mature trees stretching across the site which transformed the previously open field into a more intimate and private landscape.

INSERT FIG. 1.4 HERE

Fig. 1.4 These images reveal how the passing seasons dramatically change the appearance of the burial ground as individual graves come in and out of focus.

In winter its appearance is stark, untidy and uninviting, particularly in cold grey light. Short wet grass, leafless trees, the bare earth of new graves, memorial plaques and cut flowers are especially visible – and the presence of the dead more

prominent. If snow comes, the site is again transformed, not slowly as one year follows the next, but overnight, each grave now hidden under a thick blanket that briefly captures the passage of visitors and wildlife. It leaves the site looking clean and uncluttered, the trees' dark silhouettes newly prominent against a white backcloth. Towards winter's end, delicate patches of snowdrops surface, planted by bereaved people on some of the graves in previous years - evidence of the season's turning.

Change then becomes more dramatic with a flourish of colour as daffodils emerge from many of the graves. When March gives way to early summer more and more bulbs and annuals appear, evocations of seasonal gardening in more domestic settings. By the end of spring these changes have accelerated. In warm, wet weather, the grasses and herbaceous vegetation may have grown by over a meter between our monthly visits. Like the snow, this herbaceous layer conceals the graves, only their memorial trees and occasional clusters of floral plantings betraying their presence.

At this time of year the contrast between the municipal cemetery and the natural burial ground is greatest. In the former, the grass is kept short and the individual graves remain prominent; in the latter, dense vegetation creates a private, sheltered landscape. Away from the main pathway the passage of visitors is identifiable in trails of broken and folded grass, like winter footprints in the snow. Their presence in the burial ground is also evidenced in cleared patches of unwanted 'weeds' and the planting of summer bedding. Some graves display particular bereaved people's resistance to the advances of nature ; tall grass is cut back and removed, a practice Nassauer (1995) would locate among shared visual language 'cues to care'. Such 'cues', she argues, refer to landscape interventions that signal human care for that environment. At this point in the annual cycle, the natural world

is also present in what can be touched, smelled and heard, the whole site alive with insects and bird song.

By late June or early July, another kind of seasonal intervention is visible as the seeded grass is cut to the ground, something that occurs annually and radically alters the appearance and feel of the burial ground. Individual memorials and the bare earth of new graves return to view and a more managed landscape briefly usurps wild messy nature, creating the appearance of a suburban park. However, by early September the environment has changed yet again, as the new flush of growth materialises. Along with green shoots there is the red autumn colour of cherry trees and bright orange and red Rowan berries. Pumpkins and offerings of fruit supplement these during Halloween (All Souls Day) celebrations - until November brings the frost that quickly returns the burial ground to its winter state, strong winds stripping the oak trees of their remaining leaves.

As the introduction to this collection reminds us, the becoming and dissolution of the material world – here evidenced in seasonal cycles of growth and decay, constitutes a fundamental medium for the human recognition of time and temporality. Thus Mary Stanton, who had buried her father at Green Lane Natural Burial Field in Powys, said:

I think returning to the earth, at nature's pace is the best solution really. I mean it gives everybody around long enough to come to terms with it ... I think long enough for a burial site to start to heal over and plants to start to re-grow and things. It sort of ... and to return one's sort of vehicle to the earth, just on a physical level ... just seems to be the right thing to do really. And I think to actually, to actually be around an object like that and actually see it returning

to the earth, I think it's very, well it's sort of obvious but I think sometimes a body in grief needs obvious things to kind of make it plain ...'.

Within this dynamic landscape, we now consider not just the 'finding' or 'truly noticing' of temporalities, but also the 'making' of time, an active process which, we argue, enables the twin abstractions of time and death to be grasped and understandings to be shared among those who visit the site.

Making Time

Out of the materialities of weather, vegetation, earth and water, the individuals we spoke to wove a set of temporalities which located the event of a death, both spatially and temporally, creating a presence for the deceased and materialising their ongoing contribution to familial and calendrical rituals: Christmas, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween, along with existing birthdays, new births, new deaths. In that the South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground's owner had gradually discouraged extensive use of artificial decorations, one family had hung pine cone Christmas 'decorations' unobtrusively in the sweet chestnut they had planted on the deceased's grave. Leaving carved pumpkins and fruit on the grave was another 'legitimate' way of incorporating the deceased into calendrically-organised family practices. Plantings too were more than mere ornament: forget-me-not clusters grew in the footprints of mourners who had encircled a burial, re-appearing annually and now intersected by plantings from a newer adjacent grave. Spatio-temporal connections were also made by blanketing a grave with rose petals gathered in the deceased's former garden, a

gesture repeated annually at the time of their death and their birth, a conjoining of life course transitions, or forms of passing.

INSERT FIG. 1.5 HERE

Fig 1.5 Bereaved people deploy a range of purchased and often homemade grave markers to mark calendrical rituals of: Christmas, Valentine's Day and Halloween

Exposure to seasonal time, the discovery of sudden changes and cyclical repetitions, can thus resource an active making of time, a marked characteristic of natural burial more generally. When AI weighs people up and encourages participation where appropriate, East Meon's landscape itself comes into play; access to the burial area involves walking down through uneven, wooded terrain, something that affords scope for a drawn-out, measured processional dimension to the funeral, the coffin slowly borne down to the grave on either the hand bier or a horse-drawn cart.

Within our data, many people thus 'made' time for death – creating the temporalities that constituted passage, passing, passing away or passing on. Since the forms of participation they chose 'took' time, they thereby shaped new death-related temporalities. Planting a tree directly above a burial is a common way of extending the social life-time of the deceased. If it flourishes, it will, over time, come to stand in for the previous vitality of their embodied life. Indeed, its trunks, limbs, foliage and fruit can be seen to occupy a metonymic relationship with the person themselves in that its roots are often imagined to be drawing sustenance from their body. As sites which have buried using a grid system with one tree per grave have found, however, this

kind of design can become problematic. As trees mature they not only compete with one another but may also curtail access to the grave. At the Green Lane Burial Field in Powys, by contrast, trees were planted at the field edges, so providing future screening for the site. Bearing small wooden plaques with details of the deceased, they nonetheless bore no direct relationship with their grave itself. At sites such as this, however, bereaved people may find the presence of their relative or friend somehow more accessible in that evidence of other burials is absent, and again, a visit may be a way making temporal continuities of a very personal nature.

Through such practices, passing away and passing on take tangible form; the landscape that encompasses the deceased constitutes a vibrant site for continuing visits, for the re-animation of the deceased's social life. At the South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground we met a couple tending their son-in-law's grave. They recalled a previous visit and a picnic taking place at a grave across from his. Partly obscured by trees they could nonetheless hear laughter and singing as a group spanning three generations gathered around a grave. Balloons were finally released to cheers and whoops, as young children played nearby. Not only did the couple see this as very 'natural' in that people were expressing themselves uninhibitedly, in their view, but it was something they felt could not happen in a cemetery.

The natural burial ground was therefore seen to permit 'natural' behaviour and this perception underpinned many of the ways in which individuals 'made' time, not just after but also before a death. During another visit to South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground, whilst chatting with one of the grave diggers, we observed a middle-aged couple approach him with questions about the burial ground, what was permitted, whether grave locations could be chosen freely, and if gardening was allowed after burial. The husband had a life-limiting illness and when they heard

about the site on a radio programme they decided to visit together - after looking at images of the burial ground on its website. Already they were aware of the dynamic quality of this landscape, noting the large size of the trees compared the photos; it was more enclosed, felt more private than they had expected. They liked what they had seen. The grave digger was relaxed and informative with them, 'passing on' his knowledge and understanding of the site whilst preparing the grave for another person's passing, something which could not have escaped the couple. When illness brings the husband's life to an end, the grave digger they spoke to would probably prepare the man's grave and back fill it after his funeral. When the grave digger next met the wife, she would already be a widow.

This example contrasts markedly with the deathways described in the sequestration thesis. As a picturesque location, away from the institutions of the hospital and the cemetery, the natural burial ground enabled this couple to engage with future time via the materialities of becoming dead, of a body lowered into the ground and covered over with soil - of the wife's post-mortem visits as a widow. At the point when a death has occurred, however, there remains further scope for expanding and elaborating the 'moment'. Thus, what happens at death can be the outcome of anticipatory participation which not only extends the time surrounding the death but also the personhood of the deceased.

For example, when Arthur Westthorpe described the route the funeral director took when transporting his wife's body to the natural burial ground, it was likely to have been arranged previously by his wife who had contributed significantly to planning her funeral. In shaping the temporality of her final journey, then, Arthur's wife extended her personhood, her agency and her scope for affective action (Gell, 1998). Arthur said:

On the funeral day ... the journey to the woodland site went past all the places again where I'd been involved, they went on a road past Arthur Lees on, where, on, through Sheffield, that is where I started work, they passed Tinsley where I lived, they went back that way and they passed the woods where I used to play as a kid and then down the road I used to ride ... so it followed a route of my life going backwards.

... I couldn't believe it because I didn't know which way they were going to go. I thought they were going to go through Sheffield, all way, but they turned off, went over Ecclesfield and then back on the road, Tinsley, over the Tinsley bridge where I lived, up through Brinsworth where I, past the ... woods where I'd played as a young child, so it was a journey back in time.

This practice is not unusual. Another widowed man created a similar journey, re-animating the past he shared with his wife. Other members of his family had been engaged with her body and their example appears to have prompted his actions:

I went down, saw the funeral directors and all sorts of things and then I saw my daughter and my daughter-in-law fussing round, they dressed my wife and everything ... it [transporting her body] was something I could do, a little bit extra and, and someone said oh it costs you so much for a hearse and all, this, that and the other. I said well I've got a big estate car, why don't I take to her to her resting place in my car, our car? So I rang up the funeral people and they

said course you can, so I took all the back seats out and ... my wife came up here with me.

As in Arthur Westthorpe's case, Harold Riggthwaite's spatio-temporal experience resonated with time past, the married life he shared with his wife. He said:

Well I just didn't drive straight here, we went for miles round the country lanes. We went to Winchester Hill, sat up there. Chatting to her all along, all the stuff we liked doing when we were, when she was alive was driving the country lanes, we loved it, one of our favourite pastimes.

The journey had taken him about an hour and a half and when he described it he said:

I did that for her and I was talking to her all the time and was lovely ... beautiful day, it was November. Crisp and cold, beautiful sunrise and I drove all the way up here and Winchester Hill and we sat there for about twenty minutes, chatting away ... and then we drove back and, and ... there was two buzzards flying round on the road and I just said to her, we're a couple of buzzards up there look. Hope she heard me.

When Harold undertook to insert a 90-minute journey into the day of his wife's funeral he created a form of passing that reversed the day's temporality, steering him – and his wife – back into 'one of our favourite pastimes'. Moreover, the material presence of her corpse afforded him the opportunity to re-animate their

relationship within a shared landscape, in a car where she had often sat beside him. Throughout his description, he refers to 'we' and includes the reciprocal activity of 'chatting away'. Heading for the natural burial ground, he 'truly notices' the seasonal temporalities of crisp cold November weather, of the sunrise. And in the flight of buzzards he finds their coupledness materialised, the birds' passage through the sky standing in for the major transition he and his wife were undergoing.

As noted, at the burial ground itself, mourners commonly experienced a freedom from constraint as the space and time afforded by the site enabled participation in the shared materialities of the funeral and the burial. Rather than the rapid journey up the aisle of the church or into the crematorium – on the shoulders of funeral directors and mourners or wheeled on a trolley, at both Powys and East Meon, the terrain was difficult, requiring bodily control and exertion. In bad weather mourners got cold and wet while processing. Yet as Carolyn Salter described, this physical journey could evoke emotional transitions. While her mother-in-law had been against natural burial, in her view an undignified, cheapskate option, once she joined in the procession down to the grave, things changed, as Carolyn explained:

Because everything changes you doesn't it? And she's gone from all this, 'oh what's it going to be like and blah, blah, blah?', to 'that was a beautiful hearse, that horse and cart'. And it was a timeless experience and it built bridges, it was, it was a healing experience.

Diversity, Agency and Choice

When discussing East Meon natural burial ground, Carolyn Salter said she appreciated the manager, Al's open-minded approach to whatever arrangements people wanted, his resistance to imposing an imagined set of values upon them:

he didn't come across pompous or arrogant or like oh we've got all the answers because we're the green people

Al's concern not to make bereaved people feel that a conventionally distant approach to the funeral was less valid raises the question of how varying deathways intersect in the UK. Certainly natural burial could be chosen as an antidote to the depersonalising sequestration of hospital. Carolyn Salter embraced East Meon natural burial ground enthusiastically and would hear nothing against it. When interviewed she explained this in relation to the hospital treatment her father received at the end:

I really have tried to think hard of something bad to say about this place but ... if you want me to say something bad I'd say about dying in a conventional hospital situation, which is like being kept alive and poked, it's horrible, but here was brilliant.

In sites such as this, and at Green Lane Burial Field in Powys, the funeral may be felt as an unbounded period of time. Indeed some owners/managers recognise the need to signal to bereaved people when they may leave the site, thereby creating a temporal boundary without which the party may feel disoriented.

This sense of uncertainty could however animate mourners, inspiring an agency unnecessary in traditional death rites where familiarity may produce a blandness which fails to stimulate the senses, the memory or the imagination – where death remains an abstraction. Phyllis Cowell, whose mother was buried at the South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground, described her distress when the funeral director left many of her mother’s floral tributes in the hearse instead of transferring them to the grave:

I said you can't leave those flowers in car, they're my mum's. And he's trying to calm me down, somebody from the funeral directors, he says Phyllis it's all right, we'll take them up after, I says no they're my mum's flowers you've got to take them now.

This hiatus about etiquette at an unfamiliar burial ground, the practicalities of a complicated transition from hearse to grave, inspired a set of innovations which Phyllis went on to detail:

Jessie [her grand daughter] says ‘Granny can I carry some?’ And somebody just gave her a bunch of flowers and after that all the other kids came forward and you know when you wish you'd got a camera but you don't really take your camera to your mum's funeral do you? And we walked up this field, my mum was in front, the kids didn't follow because they don't know what you do at a funeral, so everybody knows that this is what you're supposed to do, get in an orderly line don't they? But kids don't know the format and there was Jessie, there was our Joanne who's a bit older and then our Harry ... so there

was all age ranges from little tots, they, and they'd all got a bouquet of flowers and they were just running up here and the sun was shining and I just said my mother would love this, she would absolutely love these kids running and laughing because they didn't know they shouldn't and, and then we just all gathered round at the top and it was absolutely beautiful.

As Phyllis suggests, it was the departures from existing practice and the inventiveness of the children, which provided a memorable occasion that led her to vividly imagine her mother's response to it. Amy Salter, Carolyn's sister, described a similar experience at East Meon site:

what was funny was we started traipsing off down there and a big trail of people and then we got down towards the bend and I suddenly realised I'd forgotten the tape machine, so my pal Simon that had come up with us, sort of, yelled to him so he ran back up and I was thinking it's fine, running is fine at funerals, you know ... because it's a break with convention isn't it? You know, you know, you don't run at funerals, it's like running in school corridors and so, and then he came back down with the tape machine and I'd sort of fallen back so I wanted to catch up with Dad, so I thought well I'm going to have to run now because otherwise I'm not going to catch up, so I said I'm sorry everybody I'm going to catch up with my dad, you know, and I sort of ran up to the front but again I thought, well I don't care actually because I want to catch up with my dad.

Time Re-configured

In conclusion, this chapter has explored one example of cultural and social practice around the time of a death. While the participation and engagement fostered by natural burial is shared by DIY funerals and informal graveside practices found in other mortuary environments, we have focussed on the way in which temporalities are ‘found’, discovered or ‘truly noticed’ in a setting where the seasonal cycles of the natural environment are accessible to people contemplating their own deaths or managing that of someone close.

In that people ‘find time’ in these settings, many of them then ‘make time’ in ways which allow far engagement with the uncertainties and abstractions of death. Re-configuring the temporal processes of dying, disposal and mourning, social life is engendered and building more nuanced understandings of death becomes a collective endeavour, thereby acquiring a local, cultural dimension. As the conventional linearity of time is ruptured, so new continuities are established through the ongoing social presence of the dead; for example, the scope for re-generating the pastimes of a marriage now ended.

As we argue, in disturbing or discarding the clock time of a conventional funeral, new kinds of familial or marital time may be established. In this way, the dead remain as agents within their own families, their passage structuring the temporalities of everyday life and the seasonal cycle of calendrical rituals. Thus death, as an abstract or speculative entity, becomes less of a rupture or departure from a deathless life and instead contributes – often via the dead themselves – to the patterning and animation of the lives of those left behind.

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² All personal names used are pseudonyms, to ensure confidentiality.

³ A slatted stretcher that rests on two wheels with handles at either end.

⁴ Rig and furrow is a medieval system of working the land which was common in upland area and is closely related to its lowland equivalent of ridge and furrow