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3	Temporalities of Transience and	3
4	the Mortuary Landscape:	4
5	the Example of Natural Burial	5
6		6
7		7
8		8
9	Jenny Hockey, Andy Clayden, Trish Green and Mark Powell	9
10		10
11		11
12		12
13		13
14	Since 1993 interring the dead in a natural burial ground has been a disposal option	14
15	in the UK. Drawing on a study conducted in Great Britain between 2007 and	15
16	2010, ¹ this chapter asks how natural burial might inform experiences of passage	16
17	or transience at the time of death. Natural burial grounds typically contain few	17
18	traditional symbols of death: there are no broken columns or draped urns to	18
19	signify a boundary between life and death, no references to a Christian afterlife	19
20	in inscriptions, marble crosses, bibles, angels or cherubs. Instead, the dead	20
21	‘disappear’, often into woodland or fields where only ephemeral markers stand for	21
22	their passage (Hockey et al. 2012). How, then, can such sites generate experiential	22
23	knowledge of death?	23
24	As we show, such ‘knowledge’ might be less a matter of cognitions or well-	24
25	articulated beliefs, and more a case of emotionally generated understandings	25
26	particular to individuals or families. Taking the form of approximations, intimations	26
27	and negotiations, such understandings may reflect differing values and priorities,	27
28	as well as diverse relationships with the dead. With the senses as their source,	28
29	they may become evident in memories and imaginings that enable continuities to	29
30	be created and the temporalities of passage between being alive and being dead	30
31	to be accessed. Time, we therefore argue, can be both ‘found’ and ‘made’ in such	31
32	settings. Transitions between seasons, for example, and associated changes in	32
33	vegetation and weather, provide evidence of temporal change; once ‘found’ in	33
34	this way, time can also be ‘made’ through practices that allow the absence of the	34
35	dead to be engaged with. For example, as a new and less common disposal option,	35
36	natural burial affords mourners more extended ‘ritual’ time than cremation. This	36
37	feature, plus the personal support owners and managers often provide, enables	37
38	mourners to ‘make’ more time for the funeral and indeed to involve themselves	38
39	with the deceased in the days prior to their burial.	39
40	Where these conditions are in place, ‘passing’ may assume a particular material	40
41	or tangible form, becoming a process of change <i>and</i> continuity. In this respect,	41
42		42
43	¹ We are grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding the project	43
44	‘Back to Nature? The Cultural, Social and Emotional Implications of Natural Burial’.	44

1 as our data evidence, natural burial can enable the kind of liminal period (Van 1
 2 Gennep [1909] 1960) that *makes* rather than simply marks changes. 2
 3 3
 4 4
 5 **‘Passing on’, ‘Passing away’, ‘Passed’** 5
 6 6
 7 Practices such as dressing the body and actively participating in the funeral are 7
 8 not, however, unique to natural burial. Instead, like natural burial itself, they 8
 9 contribute to a strand of cultural change that has been occurring in the UK since 9
 10 the late twentieth century. In part, it is a form of resistance to traditional deathways 10
 11 that not only involve removing or sequestering the dead, but are also often at odds 11
 12 with ambivalent belief systems. Open to alternatives that promise more direct or 12
 13 personal engagement between the living and the dead, between bereaved people and 13
 14 society, members of many Western societies now disparage *euphemistic* phrases for 14
 15 announcing a death – ‘laid to rest’, ‘gone to meet his Maker’, ‘departed’. Yet there 15
 16 is no unified cultural consensus; ‘passed on’, ‘passed away’ and ‘passed’ remain 16
 17 in routine use to soften the news. Within this mix of new and more traditional 17
 18 mortuary cultures, then, what the concept or metaphor of ‘passage’ might actually 18
 19 refer to is uncertain, particularly in the absence of a consensus of belief as to what 19
 20 happens to someone when they die. While passing ‘on’ or ‘away’ hint at a location 20
 21 that is not ‘here’, ‘passing’ simply suggests movement. 21
 22 Meanwhile the process of *dying* has become well defined and extended – 22
 23 partly through medical debates that pursue precise definitions of death in order 23
 24 to support organ harvesting (Lock 2002). Yet journeys once mapped through 24
 25 limbo or purgatory towards a permanent afterlife have become less persuasive. 25
 26 Bereavement, similarly, has been re-configured, now no longer an extended, 26
 27 structured pathway once evidenced in the sequencing of nineteenth-century 27
 28 women’s mourning dress (Taylor 1983). Even mid-twentieth-century staged 28
 29 models of a grief ‘process’ (Kübler-Ross 1969) have been supplanted by the more 29
 30 fluid notion of ‘continuing’ bonds (Klass, Silverman and Nickman 1996) between 30
 31 the living and the dead. 31
 32 To borrow irreverently from the UK comedy *Blackadder*, when the downtrodden 32
 33 servant, Baldrick, wants to know what caused the First World War, he can only 33
 34 frame his question as, ‘How did the one state of affairs become the other?’ His 34
 35 struggle for words resonates with the similar challenge of understanding how 35
 36 the state of ‘being alive’ becomes the state of ‘being dead’. Bille, Hastrup and 36
 37 Sørensen call for attention to ‘the mutual inter-dependence in people’s lives of 37
 38 the materially present and the materially absent’ (2010: 4). In their view, absences 38
 39 make themselves *felt* – sensuously, emotionally and ideationally (ibid.: 3) – 39
 40 acquiring a potentially challenging presence within the here and now. 40
 41 In relation to the dead, however, it is not simply their static immanence 41
 42 within the everyday, or at key calendrical moments. The challenge or uncertainty 42
 43 associated with their simultaneous absence and presence pertains to the dynamic 43
 44 nature of what has happened, the process whereby someone who has irrefutably 44

1 *been* is now no longer. Materially, this transition is evidenced in the transformation 1
 2 of vital embodiment into decaying corpse. Both the living and the dead body are, at 2
 3 particular points, present. Yet, while one embodies the presence of the individual, 3
 4 the presence of the other confirms their absence. This chapter therefore addresses 4
 5 the interplay of absence and presence, so exploring the scope and limitations of 5
 6 mortuary culture as a set of materially grounded practices and entities, to enable 6
 7 human beings to understand how ‘the one state of affairs becomes the other’. 7

8 8
 9 9

10 **Ambivalence and Sequestration** 10

11 11

12 Not a self-evident pair, these terms nonetheless intersect within many Western 12
 13 social environments where death neither elicits a consensus as to its nature or 13
 14 aftermath, nor occurs within everyday settings. This is not to impute a false 14
 15 collectivity to members of traditional societies among whom much anthropological 15
 16 work is rooted, to stake some exclusive Western claim to experiences of difference 16
 17 and doubt. It is, however, to highlight ‘a shift into a this-worldliness in Europe 17
 18 through the second half of the 20th century’ (Davies 2005: 57), one within which 18
 19 the idea of a heavenly afterlife is ‘more therapeutic than theological’ (ibid.: 58). 19

20 It is in relation to such settings that the ‘sequestration thesis’ was developed. 20
 21 Its critical focus included the containment of the dying within medicalised 21
 22 hospital space where their families and friends became similarly marginalised; 22
 23 once dead, their corpse was likely to ‘de-materialise’ at least temporarily, under 23
 24 the custodianship of the funeral director, or, in the case of an unexplained death, 24
 25 become a possession of the coroner. Sociologists such as Elias (1985), Giddens 25
 26 (1991), Bauman (1992), Mellor and Shilling (1993) and Seale (1998), as well 26
 27 as anthropologists such as Gorer (1965), cited urbanisation, industrialisation, 27
 28 professionalisation and secularisation as core to the sequestration of death-related 28
 29 practices and environments. Earlier in the twentieth century, individuals familiar 29
 30 to the dying person and their family, the priest, the layer-out, the carpenter and 30
 31 the sexton, were likely to accompany their passage. By the second half of that 31
 32 century, however, the doctor, the funeral director and Bereavement Services were 32
 33 occupying the bedside and the graveside (Illich 1975; Parsons 1999). As Jupp 33
 34 and Walter wrote in 1999, ‘[m]ost English people die in old age, out of sight, in 34
 35 hospital or nursing and residential homes. These are the all-too-frequent unseen 35
 36 deaths of the confused elderly, victims of strokes, or in coronary care or suffering 36
 37 Alzheimer’s’ (278). 37

38 As a result, the ‘passing’ of someone known, respected and perhaps loved, 38
 39 became a less ‘knowable’ process of change, if indeed it was experienced as a 39
 40 process at all, or simply remained a medically defined *event*, the cessation of brain- 40
 41 stem activity. After death, until the legitimization of ‘continuing bonds’ (Klass, 41
 42 Silverman and Nickman 1996) in the late twentieth century, even retaining the 42
 43 belongings of the dead was likely to be a covert, even furtive, pursuit. However, 43
 44 while Davies identifies a place for ‘default religion’ where the Christian church 44

1 offers ‘the easier option for people, even those with little or no active religious 1
2 belief or commitment (Davies 2005: 58), he views its current mix of ‘personal 2
3 readings or personal music as markers of individuality set within the traditional 3
4 framework’ (ibid.: 59), as a response now vulnerable to alternative ritual options. 4
5 Evidence of ambivalent beliefs and sequestered practices might therefore seem 5
6 to undermine any ‘mutual inter-dependence in people’s lives of the materially 6
7 present and the materially absent’ (Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen 2010: 4), at least 7
8 in ways that allow death and its temporalities to be ‘known’ and understood. 8
9 As the Introduction to this collection explains, its aim is to ‘explore how 9
10 particular sensuous and material qualities constitute frameworks for reflecting 10
11 on or understanding the temporality of death and decay’. Yet according to the 11
12 sequestration thesis, members of Western societies became all but starved of such 12
13 qualities – in the name of professionalism, hygiene, convenience and ‘care’ of 13
14 bereaved people’s sensibilities and a deteriorating body. These conditions were, 14
15 moreover, likely to be experienced without resort to a socially authenticated belief 15
16 system that might render ‘death’ accessible or meaningful. 16
17 The sequestration thesis has, however, been challenged as an all-encompassing 17
18 account of Western deathways (Hockey 2011). Empirical evidence of other sites 18
19 and practices complicates the idea that Europe is an ‘exceptional case’ when 19
20 compared with parts of the world where religious beliefs and practices proliferate 20
21 (Davies 2005: 56). While natural burial has no affiliation with ideas about a 21
22 heavenly afterlife, it does stand for an explicit set of belief and values, ones that our 22
23 data suggest can support engaged participation in the passage of someone who has 23
24 died. It is this orientation that many of those who choose alternatives to traditional 24
25 deathways have espoused. Davies describes natural burial emerging ‘from an 25
26 interplay between science of an intuitively acceptable kind and a sense of self that 26
27 is not dependent upon either belief in an otherworldly afterlife or the fragility of 27
28 the enduring memories of one’s descendants’, something he encapsulates in the 28
29 concept of ‘ecological immortality’ (ibid.: 87). 29
30 30
31 31
32 **Into the Field** 32
33 33
34 The study drawn on here combines perspectives from landscape architecture, 34
35 social anthropology and sociology. It has generated a geographic information 35
36 system (GIS) database of all the natural burial grounds in the UK, a survey of 20 36
37 such sites that included interviews with owners/managers plus a photographic and 37
38 textual record of the site, ethnographic work at four natural burial grounds that 38
39 represented a diversity of providers – a farmer, a charitable trust, a local authority 39
40 and a funeral director – and an ongoing observational study at one site with data 40
41 recorded photographically and textually. This extensive material relating to one 41
42 among a number of new or alternative deathways in the UK allows us a particular 42
43 perspective on the concept or metaphor of passage. 43
44 44

1 Natural burial originated at Carlisle municipal cemetery in the UK in 1993. 1
 2 Here the manager, Ken West, established a new area of the cemetery where only 2
 3 a tree would mark a grave, a response born of his own disillusionment with 3
 4 chemically resourced maintenance practices that undermined the cemetery's 4
 5 ecological stability, as well as a conversation with two single women who wished 5
 6 to somehow avoid being buried in an unvisited grave with decaying headstone and 6
 7 curtilage (see West 2010). 7

8 Ken West's approach to natural burial reflects Davies's (2005) notion of 8
 9 'ecological immortality', a morally esteemed bodily merger with a sustainable 9
 10 environment. It gives form to the metaphors of 'passing away' or 'passing on' 10
 11 since an explicit emphasis on 'passing away' into a wider organic milieu also 11
 12 means 'passing on' one's habitat to future generations, for example by being 12
 13 buried into a habitat that is thereby protected. This orientation is enhanced by site 13
 14 owners/managers who ban or discourage embalming and hardwood coffins, the 14
 15 corpse thereby disintegrating readily into the landscape. Indeed, at Green Lane 15
 16 Burial Field in Powys, Wales, bodies are interred relatively close to the surface 16
 17 of the burial field; their decomposition is thus accelerated through readier access 17
 18 to air and water. Above the surface of the grave, as noted, little of an immutable 18
 19 nature marks the deceased's passage. Headstones, grave curtilage, informal 19
 20 memorials and, in some cases, site boundaries and signage that help define 20
 21 UK burial grounds (Rugg 2000) may well be missing. In many ways, then, the 21
 22 deceased simply disappears into an anonymous landscape, the materiality of this 22
 23 process potentially making 'passing' more imaginable. Amy Salter,² whose father 23
 24 was buried in woodland at the East Meon site, said: 24
 25 25

26 Yeah, down there and the same with the flowers on top of him are turning over 26
 27 and the colours going out of them, and all, I feel, I don't think it's horrible 27
 28 personally, I just think all the water and the rain is washing through him and then 28
 29 he'll become part of the trees, it's not a horror image at all but I think he's not in 29
 30 his body so it doesn't really matter. 30
 31 31

32 East Meon was among many diverse landscapes that we encountered during our 32
 33 study. The desire to preserve and to create particular environments that motivates 33
 34 many site owners/managers, means that they may be located in existing woodland, 34
 35 orchards or fields – or, conversely, occupy areas that will *become* woodland as 35
 36 a result of grave-related planting, or fields that will be enhanced by a reduction 36
 37 of grazing or chemical fertilisers. In this way, then, the dead help 'pass on' a 37
 38 valued landscape. 38

39 To what extent, though, can a natural burial ground afford experiences 39
 40 that might generate knowledge of death? People seeking to pre-purchase their 40
 41 grave or bury a friend or relative are more likely to experience the deep time 41
 42 of Great Britain's rural heritage, something one of our participants described as 42
 43 _____ 43

44 ² All personal names used are pseudonyms, to ensure confidentiality. 44



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

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 that are key to 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

1 death, he advised to contact a funeral director. Yet he made this suggestion gently 1
 2 because, as he explained: 2
 3 3
 4 The difficulty is ... if I say ... do this and do that ... get rid of the men in 4
 5 black at the gate [funeral directors], I don't want them to feel they're having 5
 6 an inferior do ... doing anything lesser because they have chosen to have the 6
 7 funeral director there ... or the minister. 7
 8 8
 9 Al thus practised his established style of negotiation, ensuring that people did not 9
 10 envisage natural burial occupying some higher moral ground where duties of care 10
 11 could not be delegated to professionals. Indeed, if people were keen to participate 11
 12 in ways that might result in their going to pieces on the day, he would advise 12
 13 against this option. His was therefore a very personal relationship with bereaved 13
 14 people. Compared with staff at a municipal cemetery whom mourners are unlikely 14
 15 to meet, he felt a personal responsibility to look out for his clients and ensure 15
 16 everything went well on the day. 16
 17 If his clients appeared emotionally resilient and had sufficient informal 17
 18 support, Al would encourage them to consider an active role in arranging the 18
 19 burial, something he saw as a cathartic involvement that could help them work 19
 20 through their grief. If they were fit, he might suggest that they used the hand 20
 21 bier³ to transport the coffin, and then help lower it into the grave. Perhaps they 21
 22 might consider speaking at the burial service. Through these mechanisms, people 22
 23 could engage directly with the materialities of the corpse and the practicalities of 23
 24 disposing of it. 24
 25 As a site and a practice natural burial is therefore at odds with the idea 25
 26 that Western death is sequestered, that dying people, their families and indeed 26
 27 the corpse are routinely rendered passive. The question remains, however, as 27
 28 to whether – and if so, how – a more embodied, indeed vibrant engagement 28
 29 between dying, dead and bereaved people informs understandings of death and 29
 30 its associated temporalities. Without shared religious, spiritual or in some cases 30
 31 ecological beliefs, how were the materialities of natural burial experienced? 31
 32 32
 33 33
 34 **No Direction Home?** 34
 35 35
 36 Our data show that site owners/managers do see themselves undertaking something 36
 37 that differs from traditional mortuary culture. While templates and indeed texts are 37
 38 available to them (for example, West 2010), establishing a site is by no means a 38
 39 'one-size-fits-all' endeavour. For a start, the landscapes adopted are hugely varied. 39
 40 When Ken West, a cemetery manager, undertook his makeover of adjacent land, he 40
 41 adapted the cemetery's linear layout of graves and retained the practice of grave- 41
 42 based memorialisation. The resulting site is laid out on a grid system with rows of 42
 43 _____ 43
 44 3 A slatted stretcher that rests on two wheels with handles at either end. 44

1 trees planted above the bodies, one per person. By contrast, when Andrew Gifford, 1
 2 a farmer, turned one of his fields into a burial ground, he drew on the model of 2
 3 rigg-and-furrow⁴ ploughing, creating low embankments into which bodies could 3
 4 be buried (Clayden et al. 2010). 4

5 These are design issues, but as people began burying their dead in such diverse 5
 6 settings, the idea of natural burial as a *practice* also came under scrutiny. The 6
 7 assumption that it involved a minimal footprint with only the simplest, most 7
 8 bio-degradable marker proved counter to some bereaved people's felt needs. While 8
 9 present at the grave, many had difficulty passively contemplating an anonymous 9
 10 patch of grass. Instead, like the owners/managers who designed the site, they drew 10
 11 on what they knew, importing contemporary memorialising practices such as 11
 12 weeding and planting the soil, and creating personal shrines with rocks, benches, 12
 13 crosses, toys, ornaments, cards, photographs and letters. 13

14 In this way the fabric of the natural burial ground took shape; enormously 14
 15 diverse in geography, design, values and management style, many sites had to 15
 16 subsume inherent contradictions and indeed tensions. These might be between 16
 17 bereaved people and the site owner/manager and their guidelines or rules; or 17
 18 between different family members who lacked a shared vision of natural burial 18
 19 and what the nature of the grave should be; or indeed between different bereaved 19
 20 people, some of whom saw 'nature' as an absence of traditional grave goods and 20
 21 memorials, others for whom the desire to create and elaborate a focus for their 21
 22 grief was only 'human nature' (Clayden, Hockey and Powell 2010: 157). 22

23 The result of this lack of fixed templates or established mores is a fluid mortuary 23
 24 landscape in which the materialities of burying, planting and maintenance may be 24
 25 subject to ongoing negotiation. Our data therefore show that a resource through 25
 26 which individuals may seek to overcome the non-empirical nature of death – where 26
 27 passing can somehow be fleshed out – involves approximations and intimations, 27
 28 while speculations predominate. Instead of some direct correspondence between 28
 29 material and inchoate entities – as when the cross where Jesus died becomes an 29
 30 item worn round the neck that meshes with the *idea* of sacrifice –, the ambiguities 30
 31 and contradictions that constitute natural burial can become a resource for creative 31
 32 contemplation and engagement. In addition, as we demonstrate, the decay of the 32
 33 body and its inevitable disappearance into an ever-changing landscape provide an 33
 34 absence or nothingness of the kind referred to in the Introduction to this collection – 34
 35 something at once empty and full of untamed potential. In the sections to follow, 35
 36 we describe experiences of and orientations towards time, arguing that these can 36
 37 enable site visitors to discover what death might mean for them. 37

38 38
 39 39
 40 40
 41 41
 42 42
 43 4 'Rig and furrow' is a medieval system of working the land that was common in 43
 44 upland areas and is closely related to its lowland equivalent of ridge and furrow. 44



22 **Figure 1.2** The rapid and unrestricted growth of herbaceous plants in
 23 **spring and summer make it increasingly challenging to find**
 24 **and access a grave**

27 **Finding Time**

29 We begin with the notion of time ‘found’ and focus on the natural burial ground
 30 landscape and its implications for interring the corpse in a place where grass and
 31 brambles supplant manicured lawns, where shoulder-high summer growth may
 32 make access to a grave challenging as trees gain both width and height. While
 33 the appearance of any burial ground will undergo seasonal change, in the natural
 34 burial ground the diversity of plants and trees and their freedom from pruning
 35 provide powerful evidence of cycles of growth, decay and re-growth. Unpaved, a
 36 site’s terrain generates experiences of walking towards or sitting by a grave that
 37 contrast radically with the cemetery landscape; rain, ice, snow and indeed sustained
 38 sunshine shape the nature of both the soil and what grows upon it. Passage through
 39 such a landscape may therefore evoke particular kinds of temporal experience:
 40 the first year after the death can acquire an extended linearity, for example, as
 41 one season slowly cedes to another; subsequent years potentially generate a more
 42 cyclical temporal experience as the grave returns to some version of its original
 43 appearance, perhaps lit by spring sunshine or snow- and ice bound in February.
 44

1 As Bille, Hastrup and Sørensen (2010) argue, things ‘present’ themselves to us, 1
 2 and at the time of death this may occur in striking ways. Their presence can evoke 2
 3 absences which make material items ‘truly noticed’, as Gibson (2008) explains in 3
 4 relation to domestic objects such as a sewing box that survived her mother. Time 4
 5 and the temporalities of passing may thus be ‘found’ rather than actively created. 5
 6 They are a kind of *objet trouvé* that may be pressed into service in a variety of 6
 7 creative ways. 7

8 To engage with the dynamic nature of this mortuary landscape, our study 8
 9 included a longitudinal project that produces a monthly visual and textual record 9
 10 of one of our four ethnographic sites. By taking photographs from the same six 10
 11 vantage points, a wealth of comparative data has been generated, so demonstrating 11
 12 the temporalities of this setting. Below we present observations drawn from 12
 13 this record. 13

14 The South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground opened in 1995, the first burial 14
 15 being marked with the planting of a rowan tree. Choice characterises the owner’s 15
 16 motivation for this project and its parallel activity of a funeral-directing business. 16
 17 Bereaved people and those wishing to pre-purchase a grave can choose its location 17
 18 18

19 19

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41 **Figure 1.3** Taken from the same place in the burial ground, these images 41
 42 reveal how the landscape has changed over a period of 10 years 42
 43 (2002, 2006, 2009, 2012, Ulley South Yorkshire) 43
 44 44

1 without conforming to a grid layout. Similarly, the owner has exercised less 1
2 control over informal memorialisation than at many other natural burial grounds. 2
3 Such items remain evident, although their earlier proliferation drew criticism from 3
4 some bereaved people and resulted in the owner's attempts to curb their scale and 4
5 nature. Data from the site's burial register reveal how each burial has contributed, 5
6 incrementally, to its contemporary landscape. Our photographic record also shows 6
7 how the emergent woodland changes with each season as new trees are included. 7
8 Moreover, the absent presence of the dead, materialised through their gravesite 8
9 and the tree likely to be planted upon it, fosters this new woodland's identity as a 9
10 sacred landscape, a quality that comes into and out of focus through the seasonal 10
11 cycle of growth and decay. 11

12 Early burials at this site clustered along the field's perimeter hedge and stream, 12
13 its banks now colonised by alder and willow, an immediate connection with an 13
14 established nature and an anchor for anyone wishing to locate a particular grave. 14
15 By 2006, however, the burial 'field' had changed significantly, the experience of 15
16 walking there and contemplating the surrounding landscape now framed by the 16
17 diversity of trees chosen by bereaved people. As a result the initial landmarks of 17
18 hedge, stream and pathway had been supplemented by a network of semi-mature 18
19 and mature trees stretching across the site, which transformed the previously open 19
20 field into a more intimate and private landscape. 20

21 In winter the site's appearance is stark, untidy and uninviting, particularly 21
22 in cold grey light. Short wet grass, leafless trees, the bare earth of new graves, 22
23 memorial plaques and cut flowers are especially visible – and the presence of the 23
24 dead more prominent. If snow comes, the site is again transformed, not slowly 24
25 as one year follows the next, but overnight, each grave now hidden under a thick 25
26 blanket that briefly captures the passage of visitors and wildlife. It leaves the site 26
27 looking clean and uncluttered, the trees' dark silhouettes newly prominent against 27
28 a white backcloth. Towards winter's end, delicate patches of snowdrops surface, 28
29 planted by bereaved people on some of the graves in previous years – evidence of 29
30 the season's turning. 30

31 Change then becomes more dramatic with a flourish of colour as daffodils 31
32 emerge from many of the graves. When March gives way to early summer more 32
33 and more bulbs and annuals appear, evocations of seasonal gardening in more 33
34 domestic settings. By the end of spring these changes have accelerated. In warm, 34
35 wet weather, the grasses and herbaceous vegetation may have grown by over a 35
36 meter between our monthly visits. Like the snow, this herbaceous layer conceals 36
37 the graves, only their memorial trees and occasional clusters of floral plantings 37
38 betraying their presence. 38

39 At this time of year the contrast between the municipal cemetery and the natural 39
40 burial ground is greatest. In the former, the grass is kept short and the individual 40
41 graves remain prominent; in the latter, dense vegetation creates a private, sheltered 41
42 landscape. Away from the main pathway the passage of visitors is identifiable in 42
43 trails of broken and folded grass, like winter footprints in the snow. Their presence 43
44 in the burial ground is also evidenced in cleared patches of unwanted 'weeds' 44



Figure 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.

1 and the planting of summer bedding. A number of graves display some bereaved 1
 2 people's resistance to the advances of nature: tall grass is cut back and removed, 2
 3 a practice Nassauer (1995) would locate among shared visual language 'cues to 3
 4 care'. Such 'cues', she argues, refer to landscape interventions that signal human 4
 5 care for that environment. At this point in the annual cycle, the natural world is 5
 6 also present in what can be touched, smelled and heard, the whole site alive with 6
 7 insects and birdsong. 7

8 By late June or early July, another kind of seasonal intervention is visible as 8
 9 the seeded grass is cut to the ground, something that occurs annually and radically 9
 10 alters the appearance and feel of the burial ground. Individual memorials and the 10
 11 bare earth of new graves return to view and a more managed landscape briefly 11
 12 usurps wild messy nature, creating the appearance of a suburban park. However, 12
 13 by early September the environment has changed yet again, as the new flush of 13
 14 growth materialises. Along with green shoots there is the red autumn colour of 14
 15 cherry trees and bright orange and red rowan berries. Pumpkins and offerings 15
 16 of fruit supplement these during Halloween (All Souls' Day) celebrations – until 16
 17 November brings the frost that quickly returns the burial ground to its winter state, 17
 18 strong winds stripping the oak trees of their remaining leaves. 18

19 As the Introduction to this collection reminds us, the becoming and dissolution 19
 20 of the material world – here evidenced in seasonal cycles of growth and 20
 21 decay – constitutes a fundamental medium for the human recognition of time and 21
 22 temporality. Thus Mary Stanton, who had buried her father at Green Lane Burial 22
 23 Field in Powys, said: 23

24 24
 25 I think returning to the earth, at nature's pace, is the best solution really. I mean, 25
 26 it gives everybody around long enough to come to terms with it ... I think long 26
 27 enough for a burial site to start to heal over and plants to start to re-grow and 27
 28 things. It sort of ... and to return one's sort of vehicle to the earth, just on a 28
 29 physical level ... just seems to be the right thing to do really. And I think to 29
 30 actually, to actually be around an object like that and actually see it returning to 30
 31 the earth, I think it's very, well, it's sort of obvious, but I think sometimes a body 31
 32 in grief needs obvious things to kind of make it plain ... 32

33 33
 34 Within this dynamic landscape, we now consider not just the 'finding' or 'truly 34
 35 noticing' of temporalities, but also the 'making' of time, an active process that, 35
 36 we argue, enables the twin abstractions of time and death to be grasped and 36
 37 understandings to be shared among those who visit the site. 37

38 38
 39 39

40 **Making Time** 40
 41 41

42 Out of the materialities of weather, vegetation, earth and water, the individuals 42
 43 we spoke to wove a set of temporalities that located the event of a death, both 43
 44 spatially and temporally, creating a presence for the deceased and materialising 44

1 their ongoing contribution to familial and calendrical rituals: Christmas, 1
 2 Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Halloween, along with existing birthdays, new 2
 3 births, new deaths. As the South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground's owner had 3
 4 gradually discouraged extensive use of artificial decorations, one family had hung 4
 5 pine cone Christmas 'decorations' unobtrusively in the sweet chestnut they had 5
 6 planted on the deceased's grave. Leaving carved pumpkins and fruit on the grave 6
 7 was another 'legitimate' way of incorporating the deceased into calendrically 7
 8 organised family practices. Plantings too were more than mere ornament: 8
 9 forget-me-not clusters grew in the footprints of mourners who had encircled a 9
 10 burial, re-appearing annually and now intersected by plantings from a newer 10
 11 adjacent grave. Spatio-temporal connections were also made by blanketing a 11
 12 grave with rose petals gathered in the deceased's former garden, a gesture repeated 12
 13 annually at the time of their death and their birth, a conjoining of life-course 13
 14 transitions, or forms of passing. 14

15 Exposure to seasonal time, the discovery of sudden changes and cyclical 15
 16 repetitions, can thus resource an active making of time, a marked characteristic 16
 17 of natural burial more generally. When Al weighs people up and encourages 17
 18 participation where appropriate, East Meon's landscape itself comes into play: 18
 19 access to the burial area involves walking down through uneven, wooded terrain, 19
 20 something that affords scope for a drawn-out, measured processional dimension 20
 21 to the funeral, the coffin slowly borne down to the grave on either the hand bier or 21
 22 a horse-drawn cart. 22

23 Within our data, many people thus 'made' time for death – creating the 23
 24 temporalities that constituted passage, passing, passing away or passing on. Since 24
 25 the forms of participation they chose 'took' time, they thereby shaped new death- 25
 26 related temporalities. Planting a tree directly above a burial is a common way of 26
 27 extending the social life-time of the deceased. If it flourishes, it will, over time, 27
 28 come to stand in for the previous vitality of their embodied life. Indeed, its trunks, 28
 29 limbs, foliage and fruit can be seen to occupy a metonymic relationship with the 29
 30 person themselves in that its roots are often imagined to be drawing sustenance 30
 31 from their body. As sites that have buried using a grid system with one tree per 31
 32 grave have found, however, this kind of design can become problematic. As trees 32
 33 mature they not only compete with one another but may also curtail access to the 33
 34 grave. At the Green Lane Burial Field in Powys, by contrast, trees were planted at 34
 35 the field edges, so providing future screening for the site. Bearing small wooden 35
 36 plaques with details of the deceased, they nonetheless bore no direct relationship 36
 37 with their grave itself. At sites such as this, however, bereaved people may find 37
 38 the presence of their relative or friend somehow more accessible in that evidence 38
 39 of other burials is absent, and again, a visit may be a way of making temporal 39
 40 continuities of a very personal nature. 40

41 Through such practices, passing away and passing on take tangible form: the 41
 42 landscape that encompasses the deceased constitutes a vibrant site for continuing 42
 43 visits, for the re-animation of the deceased's social life. At the South Yorkshire 43
 44 Woodland Burial Ground we met a couple tending their son-in-law's grave. They 44



Figure 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

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, while chatting with one of the grave diggers, we observed a middle-aged couple approach him with questions about the burial ground, what

1 was permitted, whether grave locations could be chosen freely and if gardening 1
 2 was allowed after burial. The husband had a life-limiting illness and when they 2
 3 heard about the site on a radio programme they decided to visit together – after 3
 4 looking at images of the burial ground on its website. Already they were aware of 4
 5 the dynamic quality of this landscape, noting the large size of the trees compared 5
 6 with how they appeared in the photos; it was more enclosed, felt more private than 6
 7 they had expected. They liked what they had seen. The grave digger was relaxed 7
 8 and informative with them, ‘passing on’ his knowledge and understanding of the 8
 9 site while preparing the grave for another person’s passing, something that could 9
 10 not have escaped the couple. When illness brings the husband’s life to an end, the 10
 11 grave digger they spoke to will probably prepare the man’s grave and back fill it 11
 12 after his funeral. When the grave digger next meets the wife, she will already be 12
 13 a widow. 13

14 This example contrasts markedly with the deathways described in the 14
 15 sequestration thesis. As a picturesque location, away from the institutions of the 15
 16 hospital and the cemetery, the natural burial ground enabled this couple to engage 16
 17 with future time via the materialities of becoming dead, of a body lowered into 17
 18 the ground and covered over with soil – of the wife’s post-mortem visits as a 18
 19 widow. At the point when a death has occurred, however, there remains further 19
 20 scope for expanding and elaborating the ‘moment’. Thus, what happens at death 20
 21 can be the outcome of *anticipatory* participation, which not only extends the time 21
 22 surrounding the death but also the personhood of the deceased. 22

23 For example, when Arthur Westthorpe described the route the funeral director 23
 24 took when transporting his wife’s body to the natural burial ground, he felt it 24
 25 was likely to have been arranged previously by his wife, who had contributed 25
 26 significantly to planning her funeral. In shaping the temporality of her final 26
 27 journey, then, Arthur’s wife extended her personhood, her agency and her scope 27
 28 for affective action (Gell 1998). Arthur said: 28

29
 30 On the funeral day ... the journey to the woodland site went past all the places 30
 31 again where I’d been involved, they went on a road past Arthur Lees on, where, 31
 32 on, through Sheffield, that is where I started work, they passed Tinsley where I 32
 33 lived, they went back that way and they passed the woods where I used to play 33
 34 as a kid and then down the road I used to ride ... so it followed a route of my 34
 35 life going backwards. 35

36
 37 ... I couldn’t believe it because I didn’t know which way they were going to 37
 38 go. I thought they were going to go through Sheffield, all way, but they turned 38
 39 off, went over Ecclesfield and then back on the road, Tinsley, over the Tinsley 39
 40 bridge where I lived, up through Brinsworth where I, past the ... woods where 40
 41 I’d played as a young child, so it was a journey back in time. 41

42
 43
 44

1 This practice is not unusual. Another widowed man created a similar journey, re- 1
 2 animating the past he shared with his wife. Other members of his family had been 2
 3 engaged with her body and their example appears to have prompted his actions: 3
 4 4
 5 I went down, saw the funeral directors and all sorts of things and then I saw 5
 6 my daughter and my daughter-in-law fussing round, they dressed my wife and 6
 7 everything ... it [transporting her body] was something I could do, a little bit 7
 8 extra and, and someone said, oh it costs you so much for a hearse and all, this, 8
 9 that and the other. I said, well I've got a big estate car, why don't I take her to 9
 10 her resting place in my car, our car? So I rang up the funeral people and they 10
 11 said course you can, so I took all the back seats out and ... my wife came up 11
 12 here with me. 12
 13 13
 14 As in Arthur Westthorpe's case, Harold Riggthwaite's spatio-temporal experience 14
 15 resonated with time past, the married life he shared with his wife. He said: 15
 16 16
 17 Well I just didn't drive straight here, we went for miles round the country lanes. 17
 18 We went to Winchester Hill, sat up there. Chatting to her all along, all the stuff 18
 19 we liked doing when we were, when she was alive was driving the country lanes, 19
 20 we loved it, one of our favourite pastimes. 20
 21 21
 22 The journey had taken him about an hour and a half and when he described it 22
 23 he said: 23
 24 24
 25 I did that for her and I was talking to her all the time and was lovely ... beautiful 25
 26 day, it was November. Crisp and cold, beautiful sunrise and I drove all the way 26
 27 up here and Winchester Hill and we sat there for about twenty minutes, chatting 27
 28 away ... and then we drove back and, and ... there was two buzzards flying 28
 29 round on the road and I just said to her, we're a couple of buzzards up there, 29
 30 look. Hope she heard me. 30
 31 31
 32 When Harold undertook to insert a 90-minute journey into the day of his wife's 32
 33 funeral he created a form of passing that reversed the day's temporality, steering 33
 34 him – and his wife – back into 'one of our favourite pastimes'. Moreover, the 34
 35 material presence of her corpse afforded him the opportunity to re-animate their 35
 36 relationship within a shared landscape, in a car where she had often sat beside him. 36
 37 Throughout his description, he refers to 'we' and includes the reciprocal activity 37
 38 of 'chatting away'. Heading for the natural burial ground, he keenly notes the 38
 39 seasonal temporalities of crisp cold November weather, of the sunrise. And in the 39
 40 flight of buzzards he finds their coupledness materialised, the birds' passage through 40
 41 the sky standing in for the major transition he and his wife were undergoing. 41
 42 As noted, at the burial ground itself, mourners commonly experienced a freedom 42
 43 from constraint as the space and time afforded by the site enabled participation in 43
 44 the shared materialities of the funeral and the burial. Rather than the rapid journey 44

1 up the aisle of the church or into the crematorium – on the shoulders of funeral 1
 2 directors and mourners or wheeled on a trolley – at both Powys and East Meon 2
 3 the terrain was difficult, requiring bodily control and exertion. In bad weather 3
 4 mourners got cold and wet while processing. Yet as Carolyn Salter described, this 4
 5 physical journey could evoke emotional transitions. While her mother-in-law had 5
 6 been against natural burial, in her view an undignified, cheapskate option, once she 6
 7 joined in the procession down to the grave, things changed, as Carolyn explained: 7
 8
 9 Because everything changes you, doesn't it? And she's gone from all this, "Oh, 9
 10 what's it going to be like and blah, blah, blah?", to, "That was a beautiful hearse, 10
 11 that horse and cart". And it was a timeless experience and it built bridges, it was, 11
 12 it was a healing experience. 12
 13
 14
 15 **Diversity, Agency and Choice** 15
 16
 17 When discussing East Meon natural burial ground, Carolyn Salter said she 17
 18 appreciated manager Al's open-minded approach to whatever arrangements 18
 19 people wanted, his resistance to imposing an imagined set of values upon them: 19
 20 'he didn't come across pompous or arrogant or like, oh, we've got all the answers 20
 21 because we're the green people'. 21
 22 Al's concern not to make bereaved people feel that a conventionally distant 22
 23 approach to the funeral was less valid raises the question of how varying 23
 24 deathways intersect in the UK. Certainly natural burial could be chosen as an 24
 25 antidote to the depersonalising sequestration of hospital. Carolyn Salter embraced 25
 26 East Meon natural burial ground enthusiastically and would hear nothing against 26
 27 it. When interviewed she explained this in relation to the hospital treatment her 27
 28 father received at the end: 28
 29
 30 I really have tried to think hard of something bad to say about this place, but ... 30
 31 if you want me to say something bad I'd say about dying in a conventional 31
 32 hospital situation, which is like being kept alive and poked, it's horrible, but 32
 33 here was brilliant. 33
 34
 35 In sites such as this, and at Green Lane Burial Field in Powys, the funeral may be 35
 36 felt as an unbounded period of time. Indeed some owners/managers recognise the 36
 37 need to signal to bereaved people when they may leave the site, thereby creating a 37
 38 temporal boundary without which the party may feel disoriented. 38
 39 This sense of uncertainty could, however, animate mourners, inspiring an 39
 40 agency unnecessary in traditional death rites where familiarity may produce 40
 41 a blandness that fails to stimulate the senses, the memory or the imagination – 41
 42 where death remains an abstraction. Phyllis Cowell, whose mother was buried 42
 43 at the South Yorkshire Woodland Burial Ground, described her distress when the 43
 44

1 funeral director left many of her mother's floral tributes in the hearse instead of 1
2 transferring them to the grave: 2
3 3
4 I said, you can't leave those flowers in car, they're my mum's. And he's trying 4
5 to calm me down, somebody from the funeral directors, he says, Phyllis it's all 5
6 right, we'll take them up after, I says, no they're my mum's flowers you've got 6
7 to take them now. 7
8 8
9 This hiatus about etiquette at an unfamiliar burial ground, the practicalities of a 9
10 complicated transition from hearse to grave, inspired a set of innovations, which 10
11 Phyllis went on to detail: 11
12 12
13 Jessie [her grand-daughter] says, "Granny can I carry some?" And somebody 13
14 just gave her a bunch of flowers and after that all the other kids came forward 14
15 and you know when you wish you'd got a camera but you don't really take your 15
16 camera to your mum's funeral do you? And we walked up this field, my mum 16
17 was in front, the kids didn't follow because they don't know what you do at a 17
18 funeral, so everybody knows that this is what you're supposed to do, get in an 18
19 orderly line don't they? But kids don't know the format and there was Jessie, 19
20 there was our Joanne who's a bit older and then our Harry ... so there was all age 20
21 ranges from little tots, they, and they'd all got a bouquet of flowers and they were 21
22 just running up here and the sun was shining and I just said my mother would 22
23 love this, she would absolutely love these kids running and laughing because 23
24 they didn't know they shouldn't and, and then we just all gathered round at the 24
25 top and it was absolutely beautiful. 25
26 26
27 As Phyllis suggests, it was the departures from existing practice and the 27
28 inventiveness of the children that provided a memorable occasion leading her to 28
29 vividly imagine her mother's response to it. Amy Salter, Carolyn's sister, described 29
30 a similar experience at East Meon site: 30
31 31
32 what was funny was we started traipsing off down there and a big trail of people 32
33 and then we got down towards the bend and I suddenly realised I'd forgotten the 33
34 tape machine, so my pal Simon that had come up with us, sort of, yelled to him 34
35 so he ran back up and I was thinking it's fine, running is fine at funerals, you 35
36 know ... because it's a break with convention isn't it? You know, you know, you 36
37 don't run at funerals, it's like running in school corridors and so, and then he 37
38 came back down with the tape machine and I'd sort of fallen back so I wanted 38
39 to catch up with Dad, so I thought, well, I'm going to have to run now because 39
40 otherwise I'm not going to catch up, so I said I'm sorry everybody I'm going 40
41 to catch up with my dad, you know, and I sort of ran up to the front but again 41
42 I thought, well I don't care actually, because I want to catch up with my dad. 42
43 43
44 44

1	Time Re-Configured	1
2		2
3	In conclusion, this chapter has explored one example of cultural and social practice	3
4	around the time of a death. While the participation and engagement fostered by	4
5	natural burial is shared by DIY funerals and informal graveside practices found in	5
6	other mortuary environments, we have focussed on the way in which temporalities	6
7	are ‘found’, discovered or ‘truly noticed’ in a setting where the seasonal cycles of	7
8	the natural environment are accessible to people contemplating their own deaths	8
9	or managing that of someone close.	9
10	In that people ‘find time’ in these settings, many of them then ‘make time’	10
11	in ways that allow for engagement with the uncertainties and abstractions of	11
12	death. Re-configuring the temporal processes of dying, disposal and mourning,	12
13	social life is engendered while building more nuanced understandings of death	13
14	becomes a collective endeavour, thereby acquiring a local, cultural dimension. As	14
15	the conventional linearity of time is ruptured, so new continuities are established	15
16	through the ongoing social presence of the dead: for example, the scope for re-	16
17	generating the pastimes of a marriage now ended.	17
18	As we argue, in disturbing or discarding the clock time of a conventional	18
19	funeral, new kinds of familial or marital time may be established. In this way,	19
20	the dead remain as agents within their own families, their passage structuring the	20
21	temporalities of everyday life and the seasonal cycle of calendrical rituals. Thus	21
22	death, as an abstract or speculative entity, becomes less of a rupture or departure	22
23	from a deathless life and instead contributes – often via the dead themselves – to	23
24	the patterning and animation of the lives of those left behind.	24
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26		26
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