PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF HISTORICAL, ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL LITERATURE ON THE DISPOSAL OF DEAD BODIES IN BRITAIN

FOR THE CORPSE PROJECT

DR RICHARD BARNETT

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… someone will forever be surprising

A hunger in himself to be more serious,

And gravitating with it to this ground,

Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,

If only that so many dead lie round.

Philip Larkin, 'Church Going'

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

1.1. Scope, remit and research questions

This report sets out to review a selection of Anglophone scholarly literature on the history, archaeology and anthropology of methods of disposing of the bodies of the dead in Britain. In doing so, it aims to generate evidence and conclusions that contribute to the aims of The Corpse Project. Its analysis is structured around two research questions:

- What factors have determined historical and contemporary patterns of corpse disposal?

- What factors have led to changes in these patterns?

In the spirit of The Corpse Project, this report deals not with the broader themes of death and dying, but with the specific historical and cultural issues around the disposal of dead human bodies. Nevertheless this subject shares borders with many contemporary fields of research on death: grief and mourning; funerary ritual; concepts of the good death; urban planning and architecture; murder, war and atrocity; patterns of religion and spirituality; the history of the emotions; and so on. In a short report it is simply impossible to do full justice to this rich and polyphonic literature. This is therefore presented as a preliminary survey of the territory, identifying important directions for future research, and addressing these domains of scholarship only as they intersect directly with its research questions.

The Corpse Project is based in the UK, and in the first instance aims to contribute to the evolution of British practices and attitudes around the disposal of dead bodies. Over the last two centuries Britain has become one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse of Western nations, and we wish to encourage a process of reflection on the range of British traditions around the disposal of the dead. The historical record shows that British institutions and individuals played a significant early role in all the major recent shifts in disposal practices (suburban cemeteries, cremation, the natural burial movement). For these reasons, this report focuses on the British case and its connections with parallel developments in Europe, the US, and the rest of the world.

1.2. A note on terminology

There is no single widely-accepted term for the range of techniques and practices under discussion in this report. Archaeologists and anthropologists speak of 'mortuary practices', but this is not in common usage and also includes a broader set of activities around grief, mourning and memorialisation. 'Disposal' is more precise, but carries the implication – completely contrary to the ethos of The Corpse Project – that dead bodies are primarily waste material and should be treated as such. For the sake of brevity this report will use 'disposal', while acknowledging the weight of Douglas Davies' observation: '[disposal is] an odd word that makes sense for

descriptive and analytical purposes but which finds little resonance in the lexicon of the bereaved or service providers' (Davies, 2015, p 104).

1.3. Acknowledgements

2. Contexts For Changing Patterns of Disposal Before the Nineteenth Century

2.1. British archaeology

Archaeological surveys of the British landscape have revealed instances of almost all known practices, techniques and locations for disposing of the dead. Studies have shown that, over the last ten thousand years and more, the residents of these islands have buried and cremated and excarnated and embalmed their dead. They interred bodies or ashes in the earth, in the chambers of barrows and houses for the dead, in ships large and small, in grand ritual landscapes like Stonehenge, and beneath domestic hearths at the centre of family life. They buried their dead with nothing, or a few objects from daily life, or chariots, jewellery and the bodies of horses, servants or slaves. They carried the bones of significant individuals around for decades, possibly centuries, before burying (or perhaps losing) them. They may have exposed bodies to wild birds and predators at sites like Woodhenge and Seahenge, and some evidence suggests they ate the flesh of their dead. In one instance – a grave excavated in the village of Cladh Hallan on South Uist – they seem to have assembled a composite 'corpse' from the remains of several individuals who had been immersed in peat bogs.[1]

The historian Ronald Hutton and others have pointed out the strict limitations that must apply to any conclusions drawn on this subject (Hutton, 2013; Parker Pearson, 2012; Downes & Pollard, 1999). By definition we have no textual evidence for rituals, beliefs or cosmologies in British prehistory, and without this interpretations of archaeological material must remain tentative. Does a burial without grave goods, for instance, indicate material poverty, or a wealthy individual's desire to acknowledge the transience of worldly power? Does cannibalism signify respect for ancestors or contempt for enemies? We might also note the practical constraints on different forms of disposal: cremation demands wood, burial requires deep and stable soil. Though archaeologists have long concluded that their discipline cannot establish *what* prehistoric people thought, scholars working in the comparatively new discipline of cognitive archaeology argue that we can gain some insights into *how* they thought.

Disposal and the rituals around it have two general functions, concealment and transformation: concealing the physical reality of the dead and decaying corpse, and transforming it into a new symbolic reality rooted in memory and forgetting, grief and love. The historian Stephen Prothero argues that 'a dead body represents at least two forms of decay (each of them dangerous): the material decay of the corpse itself and the societal decay caused by the withdrawal of the deceased from social life' (Prothero, 1999, p 4). Archaeological evidence shows that in many times and places disposal practices had several stages, and may have been seen as a process rather than a single event – the maintenance of a relationship between the living and the dead, alongside relationships between families and tribes.

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[1] For a review of the archaeological literature on British disposal practices see Hutton, 2013,

Moving from broad themes to specific cases, the archaeologist Mike Parker Pearson has put forward one of the most influential and controversial interpretations of British Neolithic disposal practices (Parker Pearson, 2012). Parker Pearson identified a distinction between the mutable, perishable and mortal world of the living, associated with flesh and wood, and the permanent, unchanging and immortal world of the dead, associated with stone and bone. His Stonehenge Riverside Project read the Durrington Walls / Wiltshire Avon / Stonehenge landscape as a ritual complex dedicated to turning the dead into ancestors, ensuring they returned to the living in the acceptable form of memories and stories rather than in more troublesome manifestations. The archaeologist Tony Pollard has applied this framework to another characteristic form of disposal in the British Neolithic:

> Excarnation ensured the successful passage between life and death with the corpse reduced to clean bones, which could then be disposed of safely and perhaps at times even utilised as a form of material culture in rituals related to the worship of the ancestors. (Pollard in Downes & Pollard, 1999, p 33)

Other scholars have linked these processes of ancestorship with the staking of political or territorial claims. In his analysis of the Iron Age farming communities of East Yorkshire, the archaeologist Bill Bevan noted that cemeteries were located near trackways and in fields, so that they became part of everyday life without the need for special visits. Bevan concluded that:

> The marking of burials placed the symbolised right to existence and occupation of a geographical locality in the past. The dead were turned into the ancestors of the group, who then had an active role in the world and actions of the living. (Bevan in Downes & Pollard, 1999, p 89)

In many instances throughout British prehistory, the location of disposal sites seems to have been used to assert ownership, notions of community and continuity, and the boundaries between different territories or between this world and the next.

2.2. Parish graveyards and the Reformation

Moving from prehistory to the historical record, the major factor determining patterns of disposal in medieval and early modern Britain was the dominance of the Catholic Church. By the ninth century burial had been decisively established as the appropriate form of disposal for Catholic Christians, and by the eleventh century parish churchyard burial was practiced across Europe (Laqueur, 2015, p 138). This reflected not only the political and spiritual power of the Church but also the structure of European states. Parishes were the basic units of secular and ecclesiastical administration, and their churchyards held the bodies of those who died as communicating Catholics and parish residents. In this sense, parish graveyards represented a physical community and a spiritual communion. The funerary rituals of medieval Catholicism were conservative, prescriptive and austere:

> The churchyard was not primarily a space for individual commemoration or for mourning at a family grave; indeed, there was, as we will see, technically no such thing, even if custom allowed it. Passersby would have seen a few temporary wooded markers; there were wreaths or in some cases plaques

inside the church, but outside there was little that was intended to be permanent. (Laqueur, 2015, p 138)

Scholars have tended to assume that this conservatism was reflected in burial practices, with the only major distinctions being the location of burial (with the higher-status parishioners buried inside the church and lower-status residents outside in the graveyard), and the erection of stone memorials for the very wealthiest. More recent archaeological work has shown that, although certain traditions (for instance laying the body on its back, facing east) were widely observed, much greater diversity is visible in other aspects such as grave goods and clothes, the presence or absence of a coffin, and the depth of burial (Dr Elma Brenner, pers. comm.).

Though parish graveyards were identified in poetry and prayer as the last resting place of parishioners, this did not mean that the bones of the faithful would remain permanently in the soil. Many parishes practised secondary interment in ossuaries, a practical and respectful way of making space in burial grounds riddled with centuries of the dead (Laqueur, 2015, p 103). Though ossuaries could be found all over Europe, the historian Elizabeth Musgrave has highlighted their particular role in the Catholic culture of Brittany. Built on a monumental scale as part of the ritual landscape of the walled churchyard, and decorated with the figure of Ankou, the winged and skeletal embodiment of Death (who shouts 'Je vous tous tue' – 'I will kill you all'), Breton ossuaries were 'appropriate structures for the long-term storage of human remains in an appropriately dignified repository' (Musgrave in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 65).

The influence of the Protestant Reformation on European attitudes to death and the dead body has been widely discussed (Greenblatt, 2001; Watkins, 2013; Laqueur, 2015). The Protestant critique of purgatory, and with it the end of a strong theological justification for prayers for the dead, had a profound effect on church architecture (the dissolution of chantry chapels), ritual (the abolition of masses for the dead) and funeral rites: 'Funerals now focused less on the future of the deceased and more on sentiment for the bereaved. Efforts previously expended on praying for the souls of the dead were transferred to the care and protection of the corpse' (Glennys Howarth in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 121). Though Breton ossuaries remained in use until the French Revolution, most British ossuaries had been emptied by the late seventeenth century. Bunhill Fields, London's great nonconformist burial ground, began as the 'bone-hill' created when the charnel house of St Paul's Cathedral was cleared out.

As the historian Thomas Laqueur has pointed out, however, the great theological and political rupture of the Reformation had little impact on patterns of disposal (Laqueur, 2015, p 101). Parishes continued to bury their dead in churches and churchyards, and privately-owned burial plots remained very rare until the early eighteenth century. The great change in European patterns of disposal came later, as the powers of state churches, Catholic or Protestant, were gradually curtailed, and as the great cities of the industrial age began to grow and sprawl.

3. BURIAL REFORM AND THE URBAN LANDSCAPE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century a form of disposal prevalent in Europe for a thousand years – parish churchyard burial – was rapidly replaced by a new regime based around large suburban cemeteries, owned and administered by private companies or local governments rather than churches. The debates around this revolution in disposal practices reflect a historically specific set of concerns: the challenges of maintaining public order and public health in the new industrial cities; the growing influence of science and medicine in public life; the romanticisation of an increasingly remote rural past; and the urban middle-class values of hygiene, efficiency, private property, rationality and respectability.

Scholars have identified two demographic factors underlying this shift. The historian Douglas Davies highlights the rapid population growth and urbanisation that characterised late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, particularly Britain (Davies, 2015, p 15). Suburban cemeteries were, as the anthropologist Doris Francis has noted, part of a wider civic project to bring order and beauty to the chaos of large cities (Francis, 2003, p 225). Laqueur, meanwhile, points to the rise of Protestant nonconformity: many parishes, particularly urban ones, had growing numbers of residents who were not, in the view of state churches, communicating Christians, and so could not be buried in traditional parish graveyards (Laqueur, 2015, p 173).

The first and most influential example of a European suburban cemetery is usually taken to be Père Lachaise in Paris, founded in 1804. Though a programme of clearing the city's medieval churchyards had begun in 1785, with the foundation of the Catacombs, Père Lachaise itself has been read as an expression of Revolutionary values: a rejection of *ancien regime* superstition, and an embrace of Enlightenment rationality and Classical pastoral landscape (Laqueur, 2015, p 272). Laid out across 110 acres of land on the eastern edge of Paris, Père Lachaise resembled a bourgeois suburb, with a grand gateway entrance, paved and named avenues, and well-tended lawns and trees. It was initially unpopular, considered too far from the city centre, but the number of burials began to increase after the remains of several celebrated Parisians – Jean de la Fontaine, Molière, Peter Abélard and Héloïse d'Argenteuil – were moved there. Like the suburbs it aped, Père Lachaise quickly became a site for architectural one-up-man-ship, with Classical temples and extravagant statuary.

Père Lachaise's influence on the subsequent development of suburban cemeteries has been contested. George Carden, an early English proponent of 'garden cemeteries', visited Père Lachaise and was inspired by its design. Carden went on to found the General Cemetery Company, which in 1832 opened the General Cemetery of All Souls at Kensal Green, the first of London's 'Magnificent Seven' garden cemeteries. But as the historian Julie Rugg has shown, Père Lachaise faced widespread criticism in England when it opened, and came into favour only after the foundation of Kensal Green. Rugg locates the origins of British burial reform in a group of nonconformist cemetery companies, the first of which was the Rusholme Road Proprietary Cemetery, established in Manchester in 1820 (Rugg in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 112).

In the British case, the immediate cause of the shift from parish churchyard burial to interment in large suburban cemeteries was the 'burials crisis' of the 1830s and 1840s, and the 1848 cholera epidemic (Jupp, 2006, p 39). This was a period of wider transformation in public policy, characterised by a movement from *laissez-faire* political economy to the interventionism pioneered in the Public Health Act 1848. Burial reform offered a microcosm of the issues facing urban planners, administrators and physicians. Public scandals like Enon Chapel in 1839 (in which twelve thousand bodies were crammed into a tiny city crypt) and the Spa Fields burial ground in 1845 (in which hundred of bodies were secretly exhumed and burned shortly after burial) led two London clinicians, Joseph Rogers and George Walker, to found the National Society for the Abolition of Burials in Towns. Medieval parish graveyards in cities were, they argued, overcrowded and offensive, and according to contemporary medical theory decomposing bodies were partially responsible for the noxious miasmas that were seen to cause epidemic disease. The urban dead were evidently not resting but rotting, and hygiene became a central term in the rhetoric of reformers.

This strategy proved highly effective. The Metropolitan Interments Act 1850 gave the General Board of Health authority over burial in London, with the power to close existing burial grounds and open new cemeteries. An amendment act two years later extended these powers across the country, and in 1854 the powers of the General Board of Health passed to the Local Government Board. As Laqueur has observed, there is a paradox in this emphasis on health and hygiene. Though concepts of infectious disease changed radically through the nineteenth century, the notion that corpses caused disease proved enduring. But reformers had little hard evidence for their claim that the dead were killing the living, and modern scientists have concluded that, except in exceptional circumstances such as epidemics, dead bodies do not typically represent a serious threat to the health of the living. Laqueur and others have concluded that this preoccupation with hygiene reflects the rise to power of a new urban middle class, who sought to place their values of rationality, efficiency, cleanliness (physical and moral), respectability and individuality at the heart of Victorian life and death (Laqueur, 2015, p 216). These values also found physical expression in the landscape of the garden cemetery:

> It was spacious, open to anyone who could pay, landscaped, gardenlike, with huge and diverse communities of the dead serenely planted in specific graves, many owned in perpetuity, gathered at the periphery of the settlements of the living, and oriented toward a calm, melancholy but sweet eternal repose. (Laqueur, 2015, p 113)

If the consolations of the next world were beginning to recede from view, if the dying could no longer hope to reawaken in paradise, suburban cemeteries could at least offer a well-kept garden in which the dead could sleep. In this sense they appealed to the British bourgeoisie's growing obsession with lost rural landscapes, spacious, verdant and unpolluted. In the US burial reform movement, a generation later, this aspect of cemetery design carried a slightly different construction:

> Having cleared the wilderness, urban Americans now celebrated the rustic and venerated the moral instruction of nature. The large, ornamented rural cemetery became an essential element of, and a didactic counterpart to, the commercial society it mirrored. (Francis, 2003, p 225)

Garden cemeteries were also, in most cases, commercial ventures, capitalised and sold as stocks like any other business. Burial plots, like houses, could be bought freehold or rented for a fixed term, and presented as a solid investment for the future of one's family. Just as cheap rail travel had driven the expansion of the suburbs, so it made suburban cemeteries more accessible and more appealing to more and more people. If old parish churchyards were spaces for a community, the new suburban cemeteries were spaces for a society (Laqueur, 2015, p 210).

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that mid-nineteenth cemetery reform depended upon broad and historically contingent social, political and cultural factors: industrialisation and urbanisation, concerns over hygiene and public health, and the emergence of a professional urban bourgeoisie. Against this background, small advocacy groups played a decisive part in specific local changes: programmes of education, the establishment of pilot projects, obtaining government support for new practices, and legal reforms.

4. THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CREMATION MOVEMENT

How does a controversial practice, put forward by a radical minority, become an accepted convention? The historian and minister Peter Jupp has pointed out that in the late nineteenth century cremation was not the obvious, natural or necessary successor to churchyard or cemetery burial (Jupp, 2006, p 11). As Laqueur notes, there were no strong economic incentives, no new scientific or technological developments, no great shifts in religious doctrine pushing Europeans towards the adoption of cremation (Laqueur, 2015, p 493). Indeed, to many observers it seemed at odds with the Christian doctrine of the physical resurrection of the dead, and in European law burning a body to ashes had typically been a punishment reserved for the most serious crimes. In Britain the first experiments in cremation took place less than a century after the last judicial burnings (with the abolition, in 1790, of burning at the stake for women convicted of petty treason).

If this is the case, why was cremation adopted so rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in so many nations at once? For Laqueur, cremation lay at the nexus of contemporary European cultural preoccupations:

> Cremation by the 1870s had become a way of mobilising the dead in a whole range of overlapping enterprises and projects: modernism and the march of progress, the regime of life, radical and not-so-radical new classicism; anticlericalism and laicisation, spiritualism, heterodox and liberal religions, socialism and materialism. (Laqueur, 2015, p 493)

More specifically, the historian Eva Åhrén connects the rise of cremation with two of the main factors driving the shift from parish graveyard burial to suburban cemeteries: the 'vast discourse on hygiene' that characterised mid-nineteenth century public and political life, and the middle-class values of rationality and technological efficiency (Åhrén, 2009, p 144). She argues that these factors changed the meaning of burial from rest and peace to restlessness and decay: '[Cremation] ash was sterile and could not hurt anyone; it could not infect people or come back to haunt the living' (Åhrén, 2009, p 148). Jupp acknowledges the importance of these factors, but also argues that the rise of cremation, particularly in Britain, is at least partly a story of coincidence (Jupp, 2006, p 186). Cremation happened to appear just before the great demographic shift in British death rates, and alongside the upheavals of two world wars.

Cremation first began to appear in the lexicon of the European cultural elite in the late eighteenth century (Hoare, 2015). A revival of interest in Classical attitudes to life and death, and a sceptical disdain for Christianity, led a number of *philosophes* to express a desire to be cremated in the Roman manner. The first public cremation in modern Europe seems to have been that of Charles Nicolas Beauvais de Préau, a physician and a member of the French Revolutionary Convention, in Montpellier in 1794. The Revolutionary government legalised cremation in the following year, as part of their campaign against the traditions of the Catholic *ancien regime*, but the conservative reaction to the Revolution across Europe seems to have temporarily silenced any wider interest in Classical open-pyre cremation.

The 1850s and 1860s witnessed a revival of interest in cremation. From 1856 a group of Parisian enthusiasts published a journal, *La Cremation*, and in 1869 an international medical congress in Florence denounced burial as unhygienic and praised cremation as modern and efficient (Prothero, 1999, p 9). The leading early researcher and activist – Ludovico Brunetti, Professor of Anatomical Pathology at the University of Padua – saw his own work in the context of the Italian Risorgimento, as part of a 'vigorous anti-clerical campaign' (Jupp, 2006, p 56). Brunetti displayed the results of his experiments at the 1873 Vienna Exposition, showing that in two hours a pyre of well-seasoned wood could reduce a human body to two kilograms of ash. Though his early work was based on open-pyre cremation, by the mid-1870s both he and the German industrial firm Siemens were developing crematoria based on industrial reverbatory furnaces.

In their campaigns early cremation reformers drew on a shared set of arguments over the aesthetic, emotional and physical horrors of putrefaction. What burial did slowly, inefficiently and disgustingly, they claimed, cremation did swiftly, cleanly and hygienically (Laqueur, 2015, p 500). In his essay 'Cremation: the treatment of the body after death', published in 1874, the English surgeon Sir Henry Thompson 'inverted the rhetoric of rest: a body buried was a body alive and restless with decay; only cremation into inert inorganic ash would lead to swift rest' (Jupp, 2006, p 47). Though Thompson's essay also made a case for the economic value of cremated remains as fertiliser, and claimed that cremation would save agricultural land, his vivid descriptions of the horrors of burial seem to have had the greatest impact on his readers.

After seeing Brunetti's work in Vienna Thompson founded the British Cremation Society, a group dominated by leading physicians and scientists. The Society repeated Brunetti's experiments in industrial furnaces belonging to the Maudslay foundry, obtaining even better results, and in 1878 built a wood-fired crematorium at the London Necropolis Company's Brookwood Cemetery in Woking, to a design by the Italian cremationist Paolo Gorini (Jupp, 2006, p 58). Though cremation was not specifically forbidden under English law, and the Society's crematorium had been used successfully in 1879 to cremate a dead horse, local opposition persuaded the Home Secretary to prohibit further cremations. This legal stalemate continued until the prosecution of William Price, a Welsh physician and druid, in 1884. Price had attempted to cremate the body of his infant son, but was arrested and charged with the illegal disposal of a corpse. At his trial the judge, James Stephens, ruled that cremation was not in itself illegal, so long as it did not amount to a public nuisance, and Price was acquitted. Stephens' ruling became the basis of a new governmental settlement around cremation: open pyres would be forbidden, as they might constitute a public nuisance, but crematoria could now operate without the threat of prosecution. On 26 March 1885 the first explicitly legal British cremation, that of the painter and poet Jeanette Pickersgill, took place at Woking.

Jupp has highlighted the importance of the British case, as the first modern European nation to popularise cremation (Jupp, 2006, p ix). Equally striking, however, is the near-simultaneous appearance of cremation campaigns in several different national contexts, all drawing on the rhetoric of hygiene. Åhrén has linked the Swedish campaign for cremation reform to the 'intense modernisation' of Swedish society from the 1870s (Åhrén, 2009, p 7). A group of physicians, engineers, artists and intellectuals established a Swedish Cremation Society in 1882, and opened

a crematorium in Stockholm in 1887. Åhrén argues that cremation fitted well with the values of Swedish modernity: efficiency, order and hygiene, but also community, solidarity, and a return to nature. In Germany, meanwhile, the impetus for cremation reform came from a coalition of physicians and socialists who 'aligned modern cremation with their freedom-loving ancestors who had burned their dead in the primeval forests' (Hoare, 2015, online).

The historian Karen Pomeroy Flood has shown that American interest in cremation began in the early 1870s, with the establishment of periodicals such as *Columbarium* and *The Modern Cremationist* (Flood, 2001, p 171). (Though some Native American tribes cremated their dead, this precedent seems to have been unacceptable at a time of open warfare between the Plains Indians and the US Army.) The first modern American cremation took place in 1876 in Washington, Pennsylvania. Henry Steel Olcott, the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, presided over the ceremony, and in its first decade cremation seems to have been associated in American popular culture with Eastern mysticism. Later advocates of cremation, secular and Christian, sought to distance themselves from these pagan associations. For secular cremationists, the technique was not only hygienic but also expressed the ultimate materiality of human life; for reform-minded Christians, it symbolised the flight of the immortal spirit from transient corporality:

> If the problem was the liminal status of corpses, the solution provided by the technology of cremation was a clear break between life and death and a reaffirmation of the belief that the spirit alone carried identity. (Flood, 2001, p 17)

Controversy over cremation was most intense in Italy, where doctors, scientists and progressivists took it up as an emblem of secular modernity in their struggles with the Vatican. Italian Freemasons played a significant role in campaigning for and constructing crematoria, and in 1876 a Freemason, Alberto Keller, became the first modern Italian to be cremated. Unlike Britain, however, this test case did not mark a turning-point in cultural attitudes. Giuseppe Garibaldi, one of the leaders of the Risorgimento, had expressed a strong preference for cremation on a wood pyre in the Roman manner, but after six weeks of argument following his death in 1882 he was buried with a state funeral, and in 1886 the Catholic Church condemned cremation as 'a public profession of irreligion and materialism' (Laqueur, 2015, p 528).

By 1900 cremation had been shown to be legal in many jurisdictions, and campaigning groups across Europe and the US had established successful pilot crematoria. In Britain the Cremation Act 1902 gave local burial boards the power to build and maintain crematoria, suggesting that cremation was now seen as 'local government's best way of discharging its obligations' to dispose of the dead (Jupp, 2006, p xvi). By the outbreak of the First World War Britain had thirteen crematoria, all located in cities and conurbations, seven of which were municipal. By the eve of the Second World War many more had been built – 21 by 1930, 54 by 1939 – but the national cremation rate stood at only 3.5%. Jupp argues that the reluctance of the British urban working class to embrace cremation can be traced to its higher cost, the additional paperwork it required (certificates from two physicians, compared with one for burial), and its ambiguous status as a self-consciously radical alternative to the established tradition of churchyard or cemetery burial (Jupp, 2006, p 97).

British cremation rates began to rise significantly during and after the Second World War: 9.1% in 1945, 19.3% in 1952, 55.4% in 1970 (Jupp, 2006, p 125). Jupp and others have identified a number of factors contributing to this shift: the hospitalisation of death; the growing capacity of the British crematorium system (with 148 crematoria in operation by 1960); increasing disquiet with the burial of paupers in common pits; the £20 Death Grant provided under the National Insurance Act 1946; the growing interest of funeral directors in the technique (discussed in the next section); and the wider context of the post-war social-democratic consensus, in which cremation figured as 'the democratic way of disposal' (Jupp, 2006, p 125; Laqueur, 2015; Davies, 2015). Jupp also adds a socio-economic dimension:

> In the twentieth century the cost, in time and money, of the upkeep of a grave, the purchase of a gravestone, the maintenance of a link to a specific locality, all became too irksome for a population increasingly mobile both geographically and socially. (Jupp, 2006, p 11)

At the beginning of the twentieth century the US was the leading Western nation for cremations, with 1,996 on record in 1899 (Prothero, 1999, p 107). As the historian Stephen Prothero has pointed out, this raises two questions: why did cremation not take off more rapidly in the US, and why did it not die out completely? (Prothero, 1999, p 128) Prothero identifies several factors inhibiting widespread enthusiasm for cremation: cultural inertia; the large capital investment required to build crematoria; the emergence and dominance of the 'lawn-park cemetery'; little or no governmental interest in legislation or funds to support crematoria; opposition from undertakers; and an almost complete lack of interest from large sections of the population: women, the working classes, and African-Americans (Prothero, 1999, p 128). The rhetoric of cremation advocates could be counterproductive, and he also argues that many Americans saw the continued emphasis on hygiene (which by the 1920s had become 'a rebellion in search of a cause') and the agricultural value of ashes as sacrilegious or disrespectful.

Set against this, Prothero argues that the US cremation movement survived because of its continued appeal to the urban bourgeoisie and a wide range of 'advanced spiritual positions'; the willingness of cremation advocates to reach accommodation with existing practices such as burial; and growing support from mainstream Protestant ministers, who saw cremation as a way of re-establishing the tradition of churchyard burial without concerns over hygiene and aesthetics (Prothero, 1999, p 128). Lack of state support established a significant distinction between the US and the UK: while most British crematoria were municipal, American crematoria were and remain private enterprises. Cremation rates began to rise after the Second World War, from 4% in 1960 to 25% in 1999 and around 75% at the time of writing. Different nations took different attitudes to the disposal of cremated remains. The Golders Green crematorium in London had a large lawn dedicated to the scattering of ashes, but until the Second World War burial of cremated remains was commonplace in Britain and the US.

In her study of cremation in Sweden, Åhrén has identified one of the great paradoxes in the history of the technique. On one hand, cremationists – self-consciously seeking to establish an alternative to traditional Christian burial – were 'free to design the entire process as they desired, from the rituals to the actual cremation to the disposal of the ashes' (Åhrén, 2009, p 138). Indeed, the very first

European crematorium, opened in Milan in 1876, had no space dedicated to ritual, and those attending cremations were encouraged to watch the immolation of the body through a peephole in the furnace door. On the other hand, in almost all cases:

> it was taken for granted that the practice of cremation should contain a ritual element. Other possibilities are conceivable: both Christian and anti-church cremationists could have made arguments for not surrounding cremation with rituals. Crematoriums could have been simple, functional facilities for the handling of corpses. (Åhrén, 2009, p 138)

Åhrén argues that this points towards a larger tension in the history of cremation. The significance of new crematoria was precisely that they *were* industrial: though burning a body on an open pyre carried (for better or worse) associations of prehistoric primitivism, campaigners for cremation had built their case around the claim that purpose-built crematoria would reduce bodies to ash in a clean, hygienic, and distinctively modern way. But these same advocates also came to see that the widespread acceptance of cremation depended on concealing the destructive nature of the industrial processing to which bodies were subjected. As Åhrén has said, 'the technology must provide service without being seen'; Laqueur quotes the rather more pungent words of the German architecture critic Fritz Schumacher, who argued that the history of crematorium design could be understood as 'an aesthetic struggle against the chimney' (Åhrén, 2009, p 138; Laqueur, 2015, p 490).

Early crematoria addressed this tension by borrowing styles already associated with European church architecture. The Hamburg crematorium consisted of a Renaissance chapel with an industrial furnace in its crypt; the Dortmund columbarium performed the same trick with a neoclassical rotunda; and the Helsingborg crematorium concealed its chimney within a column topped by a gold sculpture (Laqueur, 2015, p 543; Åhrén, 2009, p 137). Most influentially, Ernest George, architect of Golders Green, developed 'a new landscape of mourning' drawing on the garden cemeteries and the British country house tradition: a porte-cochere entrance, quiet cloisters, and a separate exit for mourners into a garden (Jupp, 2006, p 91).

Though this new form of disposal came to prominence in the age of architectural modernism, the central dictum of that movement – form follows function – has never been applied to crematoria. There is no funereal equivalent of Richard Rogers' Lloyds Building: even in more radical recent designs, crematoria are typically modelled on chapels or temples, with the machinery of incineration kept out of view, except for a symbolic curtain or trapdoor through which the coffin passes (Grainger, 2008). The public face is calming and neutral; the private side is matter-of-fact and mechanical. Åhrén argues that this 'architecture of reluctance' (as the architectural historian Hilary J Grainger has called it) is a response to two related sets of strongly negative associations: the sense that bodies were being subjected to industrial processing, which George sought to neutralise with his pastoral 'landscape of mourning' at Golders Green; and the Holocaust, in which functionally-designed crematoria became part of the machinery of genocide. As she says, cremation has never been and perhaps never will be 'merely a practical, rational issue' (Åhrén, 2009, p 138).

The literature reviewed in this section shows that, as in the case of burial reform, the emergence of cremation depended on broad and historically contingent social, political and cultural factors. More specifically it suggests that, in gaining support for a

new form of disposal, technical details are less important than the frameworks of feeling and meaning built around it, and the ways in which these frameworks can be made to address prevailing cultural concerns (hygiene, efficiency, environmentalism, personal choice, and so on). In the European Christian tradition funeral rituals have been closely associated with techniques and locations of disposal, and this relationship has carried over into the architecture and the cultural niche of crematoria. But technologies such as cremation offer the possibility of decoupling disposal and the rituals around it, allowing us to rethink the cultural processes of grieving, commemoration and ultimate disposal.

5. THE RISE OF THE FUNERAL INDUSTRY

Alongside the major shifts in disposal patterns discussed in previous sections, scholars have identified a significant shift in the treatment of the body between death and disposal. Well into the nineteenth century all European societies observed a broad set of traditions in which families would keep the bodies of family members at home, washing them and laying them out, before carrying them to the parish church for funeral and burial. From the mid-nineteenth century it became increasingly common, across Britain, the US, and much of Europe, for a new professional group to assume responsibility for dealing with the dead. Undertakers would collect a body shortly after death, store it and perhaps embalm it, make most of the arrangements for disposal, and transport the body to a church or crematorium.

Flood, Jupp, Prothero and Davies have identified four general themes in the emergence of undertaking, and its growth into a powerful 'funeral industry' in the twentieth century: professionalization in many areas of Western life (law, medicine, education and so on); the breakdown of pre-industrial networks of extended family and kinship; the dominance of consumer capitalism, in which the choice of coffin, monument and funeral rites became a final expression of personal identity; and the end of the Christian social and theological hegemony, with an increasing diversification and personalisation of spiritual positions (Flood, 2001; Jupp, 2006; Prothero, 1999; Davies, 2015).

Though a handful of London-based firms had begun to specialise in planning aristocratic and royal funerals as early as the late seventeenth century, the roots of the modern funeral industry are usually traced to the early nineteenth century. In this period British and American carpenters who specialised in coffin-making began to arrange funeral services and transport for mourners and the body (Flood, 2001, p 69). The early history of undertaking in the US has received most attention from historians, and Flood argues that it is best understood as the confluence of a technique (embalming) and two specific local contexts (the American Civil War and the Protestant response to scientific modernity).

By the 1840s a small number of US undertakers were practising embalming as a way of preserving the appearance of bodies for open-coffin funerals, but the technique was mostly associated with medical research and education (Flood, 2001, p 22). This was a period of great expansion in US medical education, and dissection rooms and anatomy museums relied on techniques that could reliably and durably preserve anatomical detail. Funerary embalming gained nationwide attention and popularity during the American Civil War: if a soldier died hundreds of miles from his home, embalming could offer his family the possibility of a dignified final encounter with a face they recognised. Flood argues that the professionalization of American undertakers in the decades after the war was directly linked to their claims to mastery over this technique (Flood, 2001, p 22).

Embalming enabled American undertakers to present a 'natural-looking' corpse for a funeral, raising the deeply problematic question of what it meant for a corpse to look 'natural', but it also placed the body (or, more accurately, an idealised and commodified reconstruction of the body) at the centre of US funerary ritual, and at the centre of an increasingly profitable industry. Flood notes the linguistic shift from 'coffin' to 'casket' in the catalogues and adverts of late-nineteenth-century US funeral

directors, reflecting the move away from the traditional plain wooden box and towards grander structures of metal, glass and fabric (Flood, 2001, p 71). In this context, embalming also became a way of providing a refined and dignified death after a refined and dignified life, making sure that decomposing corpses would not spoil expensive caskets. By the early twentieth century some American undertakers were practicing 'demisurgery' – procedures intended to reconstruct the appearance of dead bodies after serious injury, and even to correct deformities or restore a more youthful appearance (Flood, 2001, p 219).

As American funerals became more expensive and more sophisticated, they became the subject of criticism from Protestant churches. In the late nineteenth century US Protestant ministers sought to defuse tension between Christianity and the increasingly powerful scientific establishment by emphasising the primacy of the spiritual realm over the material world. Within this rhetoric, the body was mutable and mortal and could hold no permanent components of identity, and so embalming and lavish funerals could be challenged as vain, superficial and even blasphemous (Flood, 2001, p 9). But in emphasising the spiritual realm, Protestant ministers effectively ceded control of the the dead body to undertakers and relatives, thus in practice reinforcing the growing power of the funeral industry. A Funeral Directors' National Association of the United States was established in 1882, with several national trade journals by the end of the nineteenth century (Flood, 2001, p 75).

In Britain the late nineteenth century has typically been seen as the heyday of the 'Victorian celebration of death' (Curl, 1972). Disagreement continues over the interpretation of this cultural movement – broadly speaking, whether it represents an extravagant and counterproductive denial of the reality of death, or an equally theatrical but therapeutic embracing of mortality (Davies, 2015). It is also striking that while embalming became central to US disposal practices, the technique never gained widespread popularity in Britain, and closed-coffin funerals remained the norm. What is clear is that this movement was built around the new status of undertakers as the professional group entrusted by all levels of society with the care of the dead: 'In an age of entrepreneurialism and industrialisation where the bereaved required ostentation but lacked the leisure to organise it, demand for a specialist agency spiralled' (Howarth in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 131). Howarth also notes a small but telling detail: the tradition of keeping a body at home between death and funeral declined in parallel with the disappearance of the 'best parlour' or 'front room' in working-class houses (Howarth in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 131).

Though late-nineteenth-century British undertakers typically stored bodies in public mortuaries, these carried associations with pauperism and indigence, and from the 1930s undertakers' premises began to include private 'chapels of rest'. Through the 1930s and 1940s the relationship between the funeral industry and cremation began to shift:

> As long as traditional features of undertaker-led funerals included tailor-made coffins for the dead who were on show at home and horse-drawn funeral parades acting as business advertisements, cremation held few attractions for undertakers as a simpler, more discreet and less profitable mode of disposal. [By the late 1940s] the developing technologies of motor transport, refrigeration and embalming offered undertakers economies of scale that would make cremation increasingly attractive and profitable. (Jupp, 2006, p 122)

The US funeral industry reached the zenith of its cultural and economic dominance in the twenty years after the end of the Second World War (Prothero, 1999, p 165). In these affluent years funerals, like cars and houses, became emblems of conspicuous consumption, reflecting a wider mass-cultural movement towards conformity and homogenisation. Prothero identifies 1963 as a turning point in attitudes: in this year the Catholic Church relaxed its ban on cremation, the assassination of John F Kennedy provoked a cultural turn towards cynicism, doubt and simplicity, and Jessica Mitford published *The American way of death* (Prothero, 1999, p 165).

Mitford's book is widely cited as the most influential text in the modern history of disposal practices. She criticised the US funeral industry for overpricing its products and services and, more seriously, for putting pressure on vulnerable and grieving relatives. A good modern funeral was, she argued, inexpensive yet dignified, centred on cremation and with no embalming or ostentatious ritual. *The American way of death* sparked an intense debate over the value and role of the funeral industry in American life, and in 1975 the US Federal Trade Commission published a set of draft regulations for undertakers:

> Fees could not be hidden in the price of the casket; consumers could choose from a menu of choices what they wanted, and could reject 'package deals'; local legal requirements (embalming is not usually one of them) had to be disclosed; and the wishes of those who wanted minimalist services (body pickup and cremation only) had to be respected. (Green, 2008, p 81)

One response to this criticism was the emergence of the natural death movement (discussed in the next section); another was the appearance of 'a new brand of cremation entrepreneurs who viewed the [high] average cost of funerals as opportunity rather than scourge' (Prothero, 1999, p 174). In 1971 the Californian biochemist Thomas B Weber established the Telophase Society, an organisation that would pick up a corpse, cremate it without ceremony and scatter the ashes, usually at sea, all for $250 – only a little more than the death benefit provided by US Social Security, and roughly a fifth of the typical cost of a funeral. Weber faced widespread criticism from the funeral industry, which attempted to put him out of business by arguing that he did not operate within the regulatory framework for undertakers set down in US law, but this model continues to be popular and profitable (Prothero, 1999, p 174).

In Britain the major recent development in the funeral industry has been the emergence of another successful business model, that of consolidation among a few large companies. By 2015 Co-op Funeralcare, a subsidiary of the Co-operative Group, had become the largest funeral director in Britain, operating 900 funeral homes (many of which were still run under their original family names) and five crematoria. At the time of writing Co-op Funeralcare has sold its crematoria to Dignity PLC, and it is estimated that these two firms together represent around a third of the British funeral market. Their mass-market business model has faced criticism, notably in a 2012 Channel 4 *Dispatches* film, 'Undercover Undertaker', which alleged disrespectful treatment of bodies in the Co-op's mass storage facilities.

Recent scholars have sought to contextualise and reinterpret Mitford's critique of the funeral industry and the responses to it. Mitford's own taste for austerity and simplicity – a taste some critics have linked to her own family background in the English aristocracy – led her to dismiss embalming, open-casket funeral and lavish

ritual as inherently vulgar, an imposition by a greedy industry rather than a genuine choice by bereaved families. Though at the time some framed her work as a counter-cultural assault on Christian tradition, Prothero argues that this view is misplaced:

> Neither Mitford nor the [Federal Trade Commission] nor the new cremation entrepreneurs were preaching an end to religion or ritual. What they were preaching were alternatives to the embalm-and-bury regime. In the sixties and seventies, as in the Gilded Age, the cremation movement fostered not secularisation but the diversification of religion and ritualization. (Prothero, 1999, p 176)

In his study of cremation in Britain Jupp argues that this diversification has opened up new possibilities for funeral reform, moving away from adversarial critique and towards a new spirit of collaboration (Jupp, 2006, p 93). Åhrén also takes a more moderate view, arguing that the professionalization of death does not necessarily indicate expropriation, loss of control or a diminution of care. It can and often does signify love, respect and an enlargement of symbolic meaning:

> Turning the dead over to the professional care of a funeral home … can be viewed as a new type of act of love, a new way of showing respect for the dead in which the undertaker's skills are a valued part. Even the cost of the funeral home's services can be viewed as symbolic: the deceased is worth the expense. The continuity-creating effect of funeral rites remains, but now the funeral director is the unifying leader of these rites. In an era of great social mobility, the undertaker's knowledge may also be a guarantee that everything is done right and that social etiquette is upheld. (Ahren, 2009, p 95)

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that the emergence and rise to dominance of the funeral industry was rooted in a series of broad social, cultural and economic shifts: the end of the Christian hegemony; the rise of consumer capitalism; and the professionalization of death. The funeral industry has been one of the most controversial elements of twentieth-century patterns of disposal, and its practices provoked widespread criticism in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. More recent authors have argued that this criticism should be seen in its own cultural and political context, and that co-operation rather than opposition offers the most fruitful prospects for disposal reform.

6. CONTEXTS FOR CHANGING PATTERNS OF DISPOSAL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century has witnessed historically unprecedented cultural, intellectual, political, economic and demographic transformations. As Jupp has observed, the influence of these transformations can be traced in changing patterns of disposal:

> [C]ommercialisation and the intrusion of the profit motive; individualisation and the setting of personal preference before the common good; municipalisation and the enhanced role of public services in personal and family life; secularisation and the dwindling of a supernatural frame of reference to daily life; and consumerisation, the exercise of the element of choice and the ascription of value to a widening range of goods. (Jupp, 2006, p xvi)

Jupp's list is suggestive but not exhaustive, and it requires a number of additions and footnotes – most importantly, the impact of war and atrocity. Twentieth-century European culture, developing in the shadow of two world wars of unparalleled destruction and the enduring threat of a third, has faced two great questions: how to commemorate mass death, and how to mourn and memorialise those who have no marked graves, whose bodies were destroyed in warfare or genocide. One response has been to put this absence at the heart of public commemoration, an idea taken up in many twentieth-century public memorials, from the Cenotaph on Whitehall to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

Other memorials have addressed the anonymity of mass industrialised death by collecting and holding unidentified remains from battlefields. Many states have revived the medieval tradition of ossuaries, most famously at Douaumont near the battlefield of Verdun in France, which holds the bones of around 130,000 combatants. Laqueur has reflected on the role that the remains of the dead have played in the subsequent politics of atrocity. In the nations affected by the Holocaust, and in Spain, Chile and Argentina, exhumation, forensic study and dignified reburial have been a central part of efforts to come to terms with mass murder, genocide and 'disappearances' (Laqueur, 2015, p 347). With the exceptions of Åhrén (discussed in section 4) and Laqueur, however, recent scholars have not explored the impact of the Holocaust – particularly the use of crematoria to destroy the bodies of victims – on post-war attitudes and practices around disposal. More research and reflection here seems necessary.

Modern global warfare has also provoked some unexpected cross-cultural encounters around disposal. The legal historian Stephen White has told the story of the only officially-sanctioned open-pyre cremations in modern British history (White in Jupp & Howarth, 1997). On the South Downs above Patcham, a suburb of Brighton, a white marble dome on eight columns commemorates 53 Hindu and Sikh soldiers who served in the British Army during the First World War. After being wounded on the Western Front they were brought to hospitals in Brighton, but died and were cremated here with full religious rites. Though the Home Office initially advised that open-pyre cremation was illegal, it quickly revised this decision, recommending that cremations be regarded as 'extra-legal' and simply asking Army

authorities to keep a record of those cremated and their cause of death. As White has shown, this decision was as much political as humanitarian:

> Britain had involved its Dominions in the war without consulting them and bringing Indians to fight in Europe had been controversial. The War and India Offices were especially concerned that nothing done in the treatment of the soldiers should fuel political agitation against British rule in India. (White in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 135)

A second series of open-pyre cremations took place in the mid-1930s, in the grounds of the London Cremation Company's crematorium at Woking. After long and delicate negotiations with the Foreign Office and the Home Office, the government of Nepal received permission to cremate the bodies of high-ranking Nepalese diplomats and politicians who died in Britain (White in Jupp & Howarth, 1997, p 135).

Jupp has observed that the cultural influence of two world wars on British attitudes to death was far from straightforward – not so much an abandonment of Christian spirituality and consolation as a rejection of the established Church and 'the rituals associated with the Victorian way of death' (Jupp, 2006, p 99). This complexity has persisted in post-war trends towards secularisation and individualisation. Davies takes the Beatles' 'Eleanor Rigby', released on *Revolver* in 1966, as a symbol of shifting cultural attitudes towards the old regime of death and disposal, and the emergence of a new emphasis, initially countercultural but entering the mainstream from the mid-1960s, on love and intimacy over ritual and formality (Davies, 2015, p 379).

Though figures for church attendance in Britain have declined steadily over the twentieth century, the historian Carl Watkins points out that secularisation is not a simple trend. In recent surveys two thirds of British people say they believe in a soul, 40% say they believe in ghosts, and around half say they believe in some kind of life after death (Watkins, 2013, p xvii). The language of grief and condolence remains religious (the dead at peace or gone to a better place, reunion with those gone before, the souls of the dead in the care of angels), and many people who do not attend church regularly choose burial or cremation according to a Christian ritual.

Prothero shows that, despite its roots in a nineteenth-century agenda of radical secular rationalism, the rise of cremation – even direct cremation on the Telophase Society model – has not led to a decline in funerals, memorial services or other forms of ritual around death (Prothero, 1999, p 201). He argues that recent trends in disposal are best understood not as a consequence of secularisation, but as an expression of cultural and spiritual diversity and the privileging of individual choice and identity. Many companies now offer forms of 'mobile memorialisation' – cremated remains incorporated into jewellery, small urns or even tattoo ink – and a personal act of remembrance for a dead friend or relative is as likely to involve the perusal of their Facebook page in memorial mode (an option available since 2009) as a physical journey to their grave or the site at which their ashes were scattered.

One of the most significant and controversial themes in recent British history has been immigration and cultural diversity. Though writers since Daniel Defoe have commented on the cosmopolitan nature of British culture and identity, and conflicted British attitudes to immigrants and refugees, these factors acquired new political prominence with the dissolution of the British Empire in the decade after

the Second World War. Most of the scholarship reviewed here does not engage with the attitudes and practices of cultural, religious or ethnic minorities in Britain, and this is one of the most significant and unfortunate gaps in an otherwise rich and thoughtful body of literature. The small body of work on this subject suggests, broadly, that most traditions have found a satisfactory way of working within the established British legal and cultural framework for disposal, with burial grounds for Jewish and Muslim communities and modified cremation for Sikhs and Hindus (Afiouni in Garbaye & Schnapper, 2014; Black, 1987; Firth, 1997; Languani, 2006). What is less clear is how the attitudes and practices of all parties have been transformed by these cultural encounters – an area urgently in need of further research. One recent case suggests that historical and religious precedent can provide a foundation for innovative practice in the British context. In 2006 Newcastle City Council refused to grant the Hindu campaigner Davender Ghai a permit for a cremation site in Northumberland. Four years later this decision was overturned by the Court of Appeal, which concluded that Hindu cremation practices could be accommodated within current cremation legislation – though further issues around planning permission and air quality legislation remain unresolved.[2]

These cultural developments have, of course, run in parallel with material demographic changes in patterns of death in Britain: longer lives; greatly reduced infant and child mortality; a shift from acute infections to chronic diseases like cancer, heart disease and dementia as the major causes of death; and the institutionalisation of dying and death (Jupp, 2006, p 186). Since the mid-twentieth century the NHS, rather than the Church, has taken responsibility for the care of the dying. When they die most modern British people will have been on a medical journey lasting months, years or even decades, centred on the body and its gradual failure. Critics of the funeral industry (discussed in the previous section) have typically seen the hospitalisation of death as part of a wider movement towards greater medical control over more aspects of our lives, and the parallels between the natural death movement and the natural birth movement are striking. Both emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s from the same educated, radical middle-class milieu; both appealed to a romanticised vision of an older, pre-industrial tradition offering a more 'natural' relationship with the materiality of the body; and both challenged the role of scientific medicine in one of the turning-points of human life.

The anthropologist James Green argues that the 'modern ecoburial movement' began in Britain in the 1980s, with the work of Ken West, then Bereavement Services Manager at the Carlisle Cemetery. Within a Victorian garden cemetery West laid out a special section for inexpensive and 'natural' burials: no embalming, no grave goods, bodies laid in the earth in cotton shrouds or biodegradable coffins (Green, 2008). West called his practice 'natural burial', though different groups have applied a range of terms, each freighted with distinct meaning: woodland burial, green burial, eco-burial. Though West's version of natural burial has its roots in a Christian tradition of burial, and drew inspiration from his own childhood in the 'arcadia' of 1960s Britain, he has repeatedly insisted that his practice is progressive: 'taking the best from the past, adding present day knowledge, and creating a new sustainable way forward' (West, 2010).

Several authors have noted the practical and rhetorical parallels between natural burial and the emergence of the organic farming movement. In the Carlisle cemetery

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2 See news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/8507811.stm

West's natural burial plot is not kept as neat and tidy as the rest of the cemetery: no chemical weedkillers are used, and once the soil has settled over the graves oak saplings and wild flowers are planted (Green, 2008, check pp). Advocates of natural burial and organic farming both use the rhetoric of a natural cycle governing the health of the planet, to which human life ultimately belongs (Davies, 2015, p 350). Though the early history of the natural burial movement focused on projects like West's, culminating in the foundation of the Natural Death Centre in 1991, more recent initiatives have begun to explore technological options for environmentally friendly disposal techniques. Resomation, in which the body is dissolved in a strong alkaline solution, was developed by the Scottish engineer Sandy Sullivan in 2007, and has been taken up in the US, but a British pilot project is still at the stage of planning permission.

The natural burial movement has appealed to different cultural strands in Britain and the US. British practitioners have tended to position their work in relation to the widespread cultural preoccupation with landscape and the nation's rural history; indeed, the establishment of a woodland burial site became a storyline in BBC Radio 4's long-running farming serial *The Archers* in 2011. According to Green, however, eco-burial and other alternative disposal practices appeal to a quite different aspect of American culture:

> [N]on-commercial choice at the end of life and emphasis on individuality, even quirky individuality, from burial in concrete fish havens on the ocean floor to dispersal in a rocket's red glare in the summer night's sky. Body display, headstones, obituaries, and online memorials all speak to the specialness of the one who died. (Green, 2008, p 189)

The literature reviewed in this section has shown that patterns of disposal in twentieth-century Britain, and attitudes towards death, grief and commemoration, have been strongly shaped by the collective experience of two world wars, by growing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, and by post-war cultural shifts towards individualism, consumerism and religious and spiritual diversity. These factors have generated a sometimes tense, sometimes fruitful relationship with traditional forms of disposal. In the early twenty-first century diversity and individuality seem to be the crucial terms in analysing patterns of disposal. If we borrow the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of ritual as 'consecrated action', we can see that meaning and practice are closely and reciprocally connected, and it is not clear that one simply drives the other. Rather than asking whether people 'really believe' the language they use about death and afterlife, we should understand modern forms and rituals of disposal as expressions of emotional resonance, individual identity and shared cultural values.

7. CEMETERIES, REMEMBRANCE AND COMMUNITY IN MODERN URBAN LIFE

As we saw in section 2 of this report, archaeologists have argued persuasively that the dead play a central role in making communities of the living, and this notion has been taken up in anthropological studies of disposal practices. Two classic twentieth-century texts (Warner, 1959; Sloane, 1991) argued that cemeteries can be understood as 'a 'collective representation, a sacred, symbolic replica of the living community that expressed many of the community's basic beliefs and values' (Francis, 2003, p 222). One of the major themes of recent cultural history and anthropology is the fragmentation of traditional notions of community and ancestorship: in a time and place whose dominant cultural values are freedom and individuality, community tends to mean a group structured by personal connections rather than extended formal networks of kinship or patronage. So how are these contemporary cultural values expressed in contemporary disposal practices?

The anthropologist Doris Francis and her team carried out one of the largest recent investigations of British urban cemeteries (Francis et al, 2000). Francis found that the physical presence of remains was central to the way in which visitors engaged with the cemetery, whether they were visiting a particular grave or simply taking a walk. She argues that bodies, bones and ashes provide a presence to counter the social and emotional absence of the dead: in the words of one of her informants, 'Although they're dead, they're here' (Francis et al, 2000, p 44). She found great variation in patterns and trajectories of grave visitation, not necessarily declining over time. Different generations of family members picked up and left off, and visiting one grave could be a way of remembering others buried or cremated elsewhere. Aesthetics also played a role: tidying and decorating a grave, and sometimes the graves around it, could be a way of building and maintaining a relationship with the dead and their new post-mortem community. In this sense, she argues, cemeteries embody the notion of 'social interdependency across time and death':

> With the increasing mobility of the population, cemeteries have an additional role as an anchor for family and community values. Cemeteries demonstrate that society is a partnership between the past, the living and those not yet born. (Francis et al, 2000, p 49)

For this reason, Francis and others take an ambivalent attitude to proposals for re-opening large Victorian urban cemeteries by re-using grave plots. The geographer Bruce Hannon has analysed what he terms 'the forgetting rate' – the length of time it takes for a grave to be left unvisited (Jupp, 2006, p 189). But as he and Jupp point out, the meaning of forgetting is far from obvious: does it represent the fragmentation of social bonds between generations, or the successful outcome of a grieving process? And the importance of burial does not necessarily lie in visitation. Whether or not they choose to visit a grave, a family may gain comfort from knowing that a relative has been buried in a culturally or personally appropriate way. In a survey of the inhabitants of four British cities in 1994 around 60% of those surveyed said they would support the re-use of graves, provided that no burials had taken place for at least sixty years and in some cases a century (Davies & Shaw, 1995). One notable gap in the anthropological literature is a study of natural or woodland burial grounds, the visiting practices around them and the values they

encode; another is a comparative study of the visiting practices associated with Jewish and Muslim cemeteries in Britain, and other sites of disposal and commemoration in the Sikh and Hindu traditions.

In other parts of contemporary Europe different cultural and religious contexts have produced radically different rituals and processes of disposal. Nadia Seremetakis has examined burial practices in the Mani Peninsula in Greece (Seremetakis, 1991). After a funeral in the Greek Orthodox Christian tradition, bodies are buried in shallow graves or cement vaults. After three to five years older female relatives open the grave, clean the bones, 'read' the moral condition of the dead soul through divination, and then lay them in a communal ossuary. Seremetakis sees this 'drama of exhumation' as an expression of female solidarity and power, embodying distinct local attitudes to family, memory and place. In the Spanish Catholic tradition, meanwhile, the dead are typically buried in niches – cavities constructed in walls within the cemetery (Marquez-Grant & Fibiger, 2011). Niches are rented for renewable periods of five years, and this has led to a range of practices around the ultimate disposal of the dead. Some families continue to pay rent on a niche, treating it as a final resting-place; others exhume the body after five or ten years, cremate it, and bury the ashes in a family grave; still others allow local authorities to reclaim the niche, exhume the body, and take the bones to a public ossuary (Salvador Alcántara Peláez, pers. comm.). Some argue that decomposition is quicker and more environmentally friendly in niches than in the earth, though at least one recent visitor has remarked on the smell of decay that lingers around them.[3]

Francis argues that 'funerary landscapes do not simply reflect and express the cultural continuities and transformations of their communities, they also help to write that history' (Francis, 2003, p 226). The historical and anthropological studies of cemeteries reviewed in this section have emphasised the role of the dead (as physical remains and as memories) in making, structuring and reinforcing human communities. Though the nature of this role is in flux, with the rise of online and portable memorial practices, the literature suggests that a shared physical space for mourning and remembering the dead, associated in some way with their remains, will remain important. Any programme of disposal reform must acknowledge the truth of these observations, and engage with the questions they raise. What work do we want sites of disposal to do for us, individually as mourners and collectively as a society? In a diverse and multicultural age, what values do we share, and how can we express these values in our treatment of the dead? Can we make a new case for shared public space for the dead, just as we have made a case for the value of shared public space for the living? Could the two spaces be one and the same? What aspects of our history are our own funerary landscapes writing for us? Whatever we do, we must build on the tremendous power of the dead to sanctify – or, if not to sanctify, then to awaken, in Larkin's words, that hunger in ourselves to be more serious.

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[3] See aviewofmadrid.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/spanish-way-of-death.html

8. CONCLUSIONS

1. British prehistory offers instances of almost all known practices, techniques and locations for disposing of the dead, and British history reveals significant diversity in patterns of disposal, even in times and places thought to have conservative and strictly enforced traditions. Scholars have argued that changing patterns of disposal in the historical and archaeological record reflect shifting notions of cosmology, community, ancestry, individuality and connection to place.

2. Case-studies of mid-nineteenth cemetery reform and the emergence of cremation in the late nineteenth century show that widespread acceptance of these new techniques and locations for disposal depended upon broad and historically contingent social, political and cultural factors. In both cases, however, small advocacy groups played a decisive part in specific local changes: programmes of education, the establishment of pilot projects, obtaining government support for new practices, and legal reforms.

3. The history of cremation suggests that, in gaining support for a new form of disposal, technical details are less important than the frameworks of feeling and meaning built around it, and the ways in which these frameworks can be made to address prevailing cultural concerns (hygiene, efficiency, environmentalism, personal choice, and so on).

4. In the European Christian tradition funeral rituals have been closely associated with techniques and locations of disposal, and this relationship has carried over into the architecture and the cultural niche of crematoria. But technologies such as cremation and, more recently, resomation offer the possibility of decoupling disposal and the rituals around it, allowing us to rethink the cultural processes of grieving, commemoration and ultimate disposal.

5. Patterns of disposal in twentieth-century Britain, and attitudes towards death, grief and commemoration, have been strongly shaped by the collective experience of two world wars, by the emergence of the funeral industry as a dominant service provider, by growing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, and by post-war cultural shifts towards individualism, consumerism and religious and spiritual diversity. These factors have generated a sometimes tense, sometimes fruitful relationship with traditional forms of disposal, and the introduction of new techniques of disposal seems likely to reinvigorate this tension.

6. Historical and anthropological studies of cemeteries have emphasised the role of the dead (as physical remains and as memories) in making, structuring and reinforcing human communities. Though the nature of this role is in flux, with the rise of online and portable memorial practices, the literature suggests that a shared physical space for mourning and remembering the dead, associated in some way with their remains, will remain important.

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As a subfield of anthropology, biological anthropology itself is further divided into several branches. All branches are united in their common application of evolutionary theory to understanding human morphology and behavior. Paleoanthropology is the study of fossil evidence for human evolution, mainly using remains from extinct hominin and other primate species to determine the morphological and behavioral changes in the human lineage, as well as the environment in which human evolution occurred. New York: Aldine de Gruyter. ^ Gail E. Husch. "Something Coming: Apocalyptic Expectation and Mid-nineteenth-century American painting - by Gail E. Husch - ...the same inward and mental nature is to be recognized in all the races of men". Google Books. Retrieved February 12, 2017. The Victorian period in British history marks the high point of British imperialism. Though the British policy of colonial expansion had begun earlier, during the nineteenth century Britain not only consolidated its existing empire, but also experienced an unprecedented expansion in its colonial possessions. This process began after the 1857 Mutiny in India, when India… The most obvious influence of colonialism on Victorian literature is evident in the colonial novels of writers like H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad. These novels, which include works like Haggard's She (1889) and Kipling's Kim (1901), are usually set in the distant lands that Britain colonized and attempt to expose the insular domestic public to the exotic strangeness of their country's colonial possessions.