

THE FUNERAL: THE MANAGEMENT OF DEATH AND ITS RITUALS  
IN A NORTHERN, INDUSTRIAL CITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the contemporary management of death in an urban setting. It provides a long overdue empirical re-appraisal of the way in which groups within society process the dead and continue to surround death with rituals. In particular, it addresses itself to a totally neglected area within British sociology, since the last major work, Geoffrey Gorer's Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain, appeared in 1965.

Researcher presence a few hours after death had occurred and participant observation and interviews throughout the subsequent actions of the bereaved, funeral directors, clergy and others within the death system, illuminated the production of ritual from a number of different standpoints. This has thrown into relief, the ordinary 'common' or 'folk religious' understandings by which actors make sense of the trauma, as well as the official interests and constraints. There was substantial recourse to secondary data in occupational journals to cross check themes and inferences.

The work takes account of the main theoretical perspectives within the literature which concentrate upon a perception of death as a 'taboo' subject, suggesting that modern society 'fears' or 'denies' it and that it has become 'dirty', 'medicalised' and 'invisible'. The thesis concludes that groups within the death system promulgate a number of differing orientations towards death so that it has been

'decontextualised' rather than denied and that there is 'ignorance' rather than 'fear'. There was an increasing trend towards the personalisation of ritual by the bereaved.

This study contributes to the sociological understanding of funeral directors and clergy as occupational groups. It also goes beyond the narrowly economic critiques and surveys to reveal the nature of the relationships and work routines underlying the production of funeral ritual in the city. The information has important implications for decision makers within many areas of death and bereavement, particularly in the light of the recent Office of Fair Trading Survey (1989) which suggests that government intervention may be necessary within the Funeral Industry in order to achieve a better standard of service for the bereaved.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Contents	iv
List of Diagrams	v
Respondents' Key	vi
Chapter One: The British Way of Death, A Sociological Vacuum	1
Chapter Two: The Transformation of The Funeral	41
Chapter Three: The Contemporary Management of Death:	
Part 1: The Death System in The City	104
Part 2: Funeral Organizations & Territories	123
Chapter Four: The Production of Ritual: the Role of the Funeral Director	168
Chapter Five: The Bereaved and The Death System: Pre-disposal Rituals	233
Chapter Six: Disposal & Post Disposal Rituals	287
Chapter Seven: Concluding Discussion	345
Bibliography	372

<u>List of Diagrams</u>	Page
1. Death system Organization and Personnel	105
2. Death at Home (expected death)	106
3. Death at Home (Unexpected death)	107
4. Death at Home (uncertainty about the cause)	110
5a. Death in Hospital (expected)	112
5b. Death in Hospital (unexpected)	112

Respondents' Key

Individual respondents are identified by disguised initials only.

Individual funeral directors are abbreviated: F.Dir.

Individual clergy are abbreviated: C/. (For example: C/AN).

Respondents interviewed during the preliminary study are differentiated by the use of /PS. (For example, TH/PS.)

The Four major Funeral Homes are abbreviated thus:

The Centralised Funeral Home: CFH

The Professional Funeral Home: PFH

The Crossroads Funeral Home: Cross.FH

The Commercial Funeral Home: Com.FH.

Other Funeral Homes are referred to as follows:

Small, Professional Funeral Home: S/PFH

Small, Joinery Funeral Home: S/JFH

## CHAPTER ONE : THE BRITISH WAY OF DEATH, A SOCIOLOGICAL VACUUM

Death is central to society and touches upon nearly every area of sociology, yet an examination of British sociological literature will reveal almost no data on the subject. Study after study dismisses death in a single sentence or with a passing reference to the deathrate. Classic community studies such as Young and Wilmott's Family and Kinship in East London (1957) and Family and Class in a London Suburb (1960), discuss death only insofar as it provides a deathrate or performs an integrative function, bringing together relatives who were hardly seen at other times. Firth et al (1970) show some interest in British death ceremonies, but only narrowly in the context of the numbers of kin attending. Henriques, Slaughter and Dennis, in Coal is our Life (1957) manage to ignore the impact and handling of death within a death-aware community.

Studies of women, dealing with the specialisation of many domestic tasks, have documented the removal of birth from the home but have casually overlooked the removal of death. Oakley's widely referenced text Housewife (1974) failed to consider the gradual exclusion of women from their traditional roles as keepers of death lore and layers out of the dead. Rosser and Harris, in The Family and Social Change (1974), examine marriage and its effects upon roles and relationships but fail to examine the equally traumatic effects of death on the family. The status and situation of recently bereaved widows has attracted the attention of some psychologists such as Hinton (1971) but has been typically neglected by sociologists.

The sociology of Work and Occupations has similarly avoided close inspection of the continuing and frustrated attempts of funeral directors to obtain recognition as 'professionals'. The sociology of the Urban environment has ignored the whole of the milieu of death, its institutions and architecture. The sociology of Religion which might appear to provide death with a natural habitat, has examined the life cycle rituals of christening and marriage but glossed over British death rituals. For example, Wilson in Religion in Secular Society (1966), devotes several pages to christening and marriage but spares one paragraph for death. Throughout the whole of British sociology, one finds that the subject of death is always set aside. A wealth of data on a segment of human society has been largely ignored and with it, a major perspective on our cultural values. (To locate data of any substance, it is necessary to turn to scattered socio-historical sources, e.g. Roberts The Classic Slum: Salford Life in the First Quarter of the Century (1973) and such sources will be utilised for the material in Chapter Two of this thesis.)

Several writers have commented upon the unusual British silence on death. Pickering (1974) regrets that 'virtually no sociological studies have been made about burials in contemporary Britain' (p.68). Palgi and Abramovitch in their comparative study: Death: A Cross Cultural Perspective (1984), were unable to locate a more up to date reference for British death rituals than Geoffrey Gorer's work - Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain (1965). Pine (1969), searching for reliable British data quotes Habenstein and Lamers (1956) quoting Gorer (1955)!

The research vacuum is all the more puzzling to American sociologists

since their concern with the sociology of Death was partly founded upon Gorer's seminal essay 'The Pornography of Death (1955). Prior to this date, any examination of death (excepting suicide, Durkheim 1897), remained the province of anthropologists and psychiatrists. Martins (1983) writing in the introduction to a series of Portuguese studies on death comments at length on the fact that there have been '...no substantial British studies' since Gorer and points out that the topic '...gets barely a mention in (that country's) considerable scholarly output.' (p.vi)

Whatever the reasons for the neglect, one consequence is that our most widely referenced British sources, apart from Gorer, are contemporary satirists such as Waugh and journalists such as Mitford. Waugh in 'The Loved One' (1948) wrote a fictional account of work in an American Funeral Home, which is much cited, and Mitford, in The American Way of Death (1963) added a chapter on British funeral customs based on one visit to one London funeral establishment. The continual citing of Waugh and Mitford in the literature, by both British and American sociologists desperate for British data, is in itself revealing. A further consequence is that an alarming amount of misinformation on the British management of death remains in circulation.

Thus Dumont and Foss (1972) quote Mitford, that '....display of the corpse is stigmatised by most Britains as being reprehensible' (p.69), a statement entirely without reliable foundation. Similarly Pine (1969) again basing himself on Mitford, asserts that 'The English tend not to view the dead body' (p.49). Yet a survey carried out by the National Association of Funeral Directors (1967) and Field (1981)

found that 64 -80% of the bereaved 'view' their deceased relatives on funeral establishment premises alone, beyond any viewing within the home or the hospital. (1)\* Palgi and Abramovitch (1984) claim that Britain in the 1980's is suffering from 'a gradual disappearance of formal ritual...expressing the breakdown of communities and the mediation of status by the state rather than by kith and kin' (p.412). This conclusion is again based upon Gorer's 1960's work, as is Martins (1983) comment that British death rituals represent 'an extreme case' (p.vi). So many questionable assertions, based on one study, now a quarter of a century old, are patently long overdue for re-examination.

#### 1.0. The work of Geoffrey Gorer: a seminal influence

Gorer's work on the management of death in Britain, besides providing the only major sociological work of its kind in the country, is also the most widely referenced throughout the world. Initially, Gorer's theoretical ideas were set out in a brief essay entitled: 'The Pornography of Death' (1955). Putting forward the theory that there had occurred 'an unremarked shift in prudery', in society, 'whereas copulation' (had) 'become more and more mentionable, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon societies, death (had) become more and more unmentionable as a natural process', (p.172). Gorer suggested that the exchange of taboos could be linked to a shift in religious beliefs. As belief in 'everlasting life declined, the physical decomposition of the body became 'too horrible to contemplate'. Following the shift, natural death could not be treated with openness and fell prey to prudish sanctions whilst unreal and violent death

\* Refers to footnote at end of chapter

was glorified in media fantasies. Gorer felt that the only way to remove the pornographic aspect of death, would be to bring death out of the closet and to re-dignify it with the full pomp and public acceptance that it had received during the Victorian era. His subsequent sociological survey: Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain (1965), set out to substantiate these ideas.

Gorer related his own experiences of death in a lengthy autobiographical introduction to the 1965 study, depicting a steady loss of ritual over time. On the death of his father in 1915 his mother had presented 'a tragic, almost a frightening figure in the full panoply of widow's weeds and unrelieved black, a crepe veil shrouding her..so that she was visibly withdrawn from the world' (p.5). When his friend's husband died in 1948 however, his most indelible memory was 'the lack of support which contemporary British society gives to the bereaved' (p.8) and his mother's death later in 1954, was even less memorable as an occasion. 'Apart from the gathering at the cremation service and letters of condolence, there was no social ritual' (p.9). Subsequently, his uncles and aunt were also cremated 'with the minimum of elaboration' (p.9). For Gorer, loss of ritual was synonymous with loss of support for the bereaved at a personal level and with an 'aberrant' condition (p.15) at societal level.

(a) The Sample

The study was based on a stratified sample of 1,628 men and women of all ages over 16, from all social classes and regions. Scheduled interviews were carried out by professional interviewers. Initially

respondents were asked: 'Have you ever attended a funeral?' (p.16) Of these, only 903 had attended a funeral within the last five years. An immediate methodological criticism is that five years is an excessively long time over which to have to recall the details of a funeral. A great deal of the behavioural interaction and details will for many of the bereaved, have passed in a blur, making accurate recollection difficult, if not impossible after such a long period.

359 respondents who had lost a close relative constituted the main sample. 80 were re-interviewed at greater length. Half the deaths in the sample occurred in hospital, 44% at home and the rest, elsewhere. Gorer found a class difference in the site of death, with deaths at home being significantly more common in families of clerical workers or unskilled workers in small towns of 50,000 - 100,000 inhabitants and in the Midlands. He advanced no conclusions for his findings, although it might be suggested that these 'home deaths' were (a) more acceptable to the working classes and petty bourgeoisie who held longer to the old ways of a culture, and/or (b) related to the regional availability of hospitals.

Most of the deceased in the survey had died alone, except for medical attendants, a situation in which one would not expect much change, given that the majority of deaths occur in the early hours of the morning when hospital visiting is relatively uncommon. Less than a quarter of Gorer's bereaved had been present when a relative died. By the 1960's then, death had been substantially removed from the home, the 'dying role' was losing its validity and a new framework of understanding, informed by medical technology, was beginning to oust the old domestic and superstitious values. However, this was taking

longer to effect in the closer knit lower socio-economic classes.

(b) Religion

Religion still guided the subsequent ritual. It was 'very rare indeed' in Britain for a dead body to be disposed of without benefit of clergy (p.30). Gorer attempted to explain the clergy's monopoly by the bereaveds' adherence to the orthodox Christian dogma that 'the soul continues to exist after death and is judged' (p.33). At the same time however, his overall thesis expressed the contrary idea that for the majority of the bereaved '..belief in the future life as taught in Christian doctrine is very uncommon today, even for the minority who make church going or prayer a consistent part of their lives..' (p.169). Two thirds of the women and a quarter of the men in his sample stated that they said private prayers daily or more frequently, however, only 14% of the men and 21% of the women went to church weekly, suggesting that religion was becoming an internal and private affair.

By the 1980's, given the continuing deterioration of church membership, one might have expected the religious framework to show signs of weakening and the appearance of an alternative civil funeral ceremony, the equivalent of the civil marriage ceremony. The fact that mourners and clergy continue to meet together to perform the same rituals whilst holding radically different perspectives and understandings of the situation (2), suggests the presence of social constraints - this will be explored in Chapter Four below.

Gorer had little to say of the clergy's role in death ritual beyond

noting the fact that 'For the great majority of the respondents, the clergyman who conducted the funeral was a technician hired to do his job in much the same fashion as the undertakers or monumental masons; a continuing relationship was no more looked for with the former than the latter' (p.40). He nevertheless advocated that the clergy should make more attempt to visit the recently bereaved in their parishes, 'even if they are not churchgoers' (p.42), a statement which suggests that the clergy were beginning to abandon the pastoral content of their role and to discriminate amongst bereaved parishioners.

Gorer's sample was eclectic with 61% Church of England, 11% Roman Catholic, 8% Methodists, 8% Church of Scotland and 'very small groups of Baptists, Congregationalists and 'Christians' (p.31). The very deep differences in ritual (for example between Roman Catholic and Anglican rites) fail to emerge subsequently in the sample. Indeed, Gorer manages to ignore such considerations and lumps all religious belief together. There is thus no discussion on whether Catholics are more ritual bound than Anglicans; or the degree to which type of religious belief affects perceived post bereavement support. (The present research will examine only Anglican death rituals in the interests of homogeneity.)

#### (c) Patterns of ritual

Gorer's general sample were not asked whether their relative had been buried or cremated, but of those re-interviewed 40% had been cremated and 27% buried (p.43). Cremation had apparently overtaken burial as the preferred ritual. Of major interest, is the fact that the prevailing patterns of death ritual uncovered by Gorer were class based and regional. Cremation was preferred in the South West and the

North East, whereas burial was preferred in Scotland. Gorer's survey, concentrating only upon the bereaved, fails to take into account predisposing structural factors, such as the financial loading (by some local authorities) of burial over cremation, the scarcity of land and the increased building of crematoria. The ritual of paying one's respects or 'viewing' a body after death was more widely preserved within the working classes than within the middle classes, although viewing was found to be 'nearly universal' (p.20) in the North West of the country. The customary family gathering at the house of the deceased before the funeral was omitted by 'nearly a third of respondents in the professional classes' (p.22). The ritual gathering of the family in the house immediately after the funeral however, was identified (apart from the religious rites accompanying the disposal of the body) as 'the most widely spread ritual of mourning in Britain today' (p.47).

The class basis of the funeral will form a major part of the discussion in Chapter Two and the effect of class differences noted within subsequent chapters. It will not be possible, given the design of the study, to provide data on regionality.

(d) The wearing of black

Dress, as an indication of the role of 'mourner' had all but vanished by 1963, although the degree to which black was retained, varied with 80% of the men but less than 50% of the women wearing black. Gorer attempted to account for the sexual discrepancy in terms of relative costs: armbands and black ties being cheaper than womens hats, dresses and coats (p.46). It might be suggested alternatively that the change ran concurrently with womens relinquishment of their

roles as carriers of death culture to the undertakers. Factors such as the increasing informality of social etiquette and the influence of fashion also undoubtedly played a part. Again there were class and regional differences in the wearing of black. Gorer found that the tendency not to wear mourning clothes on the day of the funeral was 'considerably more advanced in the upper middle and professional classes than in the rest of the community, in the South West and the Midlands and in bigger towns' (p.47).

(e) The language of death

Gorer was particularly concerned with the loss of a 'language of death' which he suggests formerly helped the bereaved to communicate their grief. 'Nowhere is the absence of an accepted social ritual more noticeable than in the first contacts between a mourner and his neighbours, acquaintances or workmates after a bereavement; should they speak of the loss or not?' (p.58). Providing few illustrations of the 'language' he makes no suggestions as to how this loss came about, especially given the continuing involvement of the clergy.

Whilst mourning dress and formal periods of mourning were shown to have been abandoned towards the end of the First World War, it is not clear that the war completely shattered the vocabulary of death. It may well have been temporarily expanded by the idiom of war, by remembrance services and the phraseology of the ex-serviceman. However, complex social changes such as the specialisation of undertakers, their promotion of business norms (death rituals became 'efficient'), the increasing inappropriateness of religious language in daily life and urbanization affecting the reliance upon domestic

superstitions and proverbs, contributed to a lack of familiarity with the old expressions.

Traces of a death language may still be found in the In Memoriam and Obituary columns of local newspapers but Gorer omitted to consider these sources in his study and concentrated upon the way in which his respondents discussed death. He found that euphemisms were used in telling children about death, the most prevalent being 'gone to heaven' and 'gone to Jesus' (p.23). Gorer concluded that '..a sizeable minority of British parents (were) using God, Jesus in communication with their children in exactly the same way as they use Santa Claus...' (p.23). Religious terms could only be used without embarrassment on a fairytale level. This suggests that any 'taboo' included open discussion of orthodox religious beliefs as well as death per se. Towler and Chamberlain (1973) comment in their paper 'Common Religion' (3) that greater tension and embarrassment was frequently caused by the mention of 'religion' during their research, 'than by probing questions which sought detailed information about the methods of contraception used by respondents' (p.14). It was also specifically the subject of religion rather than death which caused such discomfort amongst respondents.

(f) Types of death

Gorer categorized the differing types of death by relationship. Where both parents died within a short time of one another, he found that the survivor's grief was not intense since the death of parents was perceived as a natural phenomenon. The death of a child however was noted as 'The most distressing and long lasting of all griefs..' (p.106). He makes no attempt however to link the nature and quantity

of ritual to 'type of death', giving the misleading impression that all deaths suffered equally from ritual depletion. Within the present thesis, the extent of death rituals will be linked to 'type of death' within a series of case studies with the suggestion that, regardless of relationship, unexpected deaths tend to be surrounded with a greater degree of ritual than expected deaths.

Gorer's theme throughout concentrates upon the marked lack of support received by the bereaved and the supposition that rituals such as wearing black or the use of a death language, commanded or engendered support. He formulates a connection between an 'inability to get over grief and the absence of any ritual, either individual or social, lay or religious, to guide them and the people they came into contact with' (p.83). Gorer rules out individual reactions to death as providing a release from the constraints of a proscribed social ritual and presents no corroborative data from previous studies or literature which might suggest that the degree of adjustment following a death was qualitatively 'better' during the heavily ritualised Victorian period.

#### Summary

In a work devoted to the thesis that lack of ritual is maladaptive, there is a dearth of detail concerning the rituals which were undertaken at the time: the choices made by participants, the varying venues of ritual, the components of the service, the choice of coffin, the dressing of the body, the adornment of the body with jewellery, prayerbooks etc, the use of flowers and music, the vehicles chosen, the procession. As previously suggested, this may well have been impracticable given the five year memory span. But

since Gorer does not provide a clear picture of the rituals which were used in individual cases, it is difficult to accept that they were intrinsically unfulfilling for the participants, or to judge, by comparison with existing socio-historical data, that they had badly deteriorated. Whether the participants actually wanted more ritual was also not a question that Gorer appears to have posed. A basic need may have been a greater opportunity to 'talk' about the death, which is a slightly different aspect, bearing not only upon the loss of a language of death but upon the loss of significant death roles.

A major criticism is Gorer's failure to take into account the changing social conditions in his endeavour to substantiate the theory of the exchange of taboos. Social historians such as Farrell (1980) have emphasized the necessity for a close examination of social context and social structure in any study of the management of death. In regretting the loss of a stylization of grief that was contextually right for the Victorians, little recognition is given to the funeral as a reflection of changing value systems.

Dumont and Foss suggest that Gorer's work was biased by his own experiences, particularly the numerous losses of his relatives and friends. They state: 'One cannot help but think that these many shattering mourning experiences must have played some part in bringing him to the conclusion, based on his research, that the present British mourning customs have such serious social and psychological consequences for the mourners that they should be replaced with new ones (1972, p.70). Beyond any criticism however, Gorer's work has been of enormous influence. His taboo thesis, reaching the stature of an irrefutable Freudian theory, became as

Martins (1983, p.vi) notes, 'a cliché' and was absorbed into everyday language. Today in Britain, death is still referred to as 'a taboo subject' illustrating very clearly the need for new research.

#### 1.1. Key Themes in the Literature on Death post-Gorer

The bulk of the research on death following Gorer has taken 'the denial of death' as a major theme and there has been little attempt to provide alternative discussions of the contemporary management of death. The main lines of the literature have been summarised by Kellehear (1984) and Martins (1983) and their papers, providing both complementary and contrasting précis, will be used as the basis for discussion in this section.

Kellehear (1984) regrets that the denial of death perspective has resulted in an unnecessary reliance upon 'psychological' rather than purely sociological argument. Martins (1983) suggests that there is a basic theme of the idea of death as a developmental process but that researchers have a tendency to look backwards to death eutopias. British death practices are typically compared with those of the late Victorian period while American deathways are contrasted with the practices of 'some pastoral or Puritan period' (p.x). For both writers, the main lines of research within the sociology of Death encompass the denial of death, the medicalisation of death, the de-ritualisation of death and the meaninglessness of death.

##### a. The denial of death.

Gorer's survey suggested that death was being involuntarily denied by the majority of his bereaved since the social mechanism of public mourning had been dismantled. In much of the literature however, a

generalised fear of death thesis is taken for granted based on the premise that - death creates fear, respondents often profess little fear and are therefore denying their fear of death. Efforts have subsequently been devoted to discovering the source of this fear and the elements which bolster it. Farrell (1980) for example, argues that the responsibility for the fear of death sits squarely with the Catholic Church and the Middle Ages and that the removal of death from public consciousness came about as a result of the Protestant Reformation. However he also suggests that in America, clergy and funeral directors boosted this fear, conspiring 'to attain privatisation and mourners became overly protected from death' (p.130). Chapter Two will examine the extent to which similar roles were taken by British clergy and undertakers in their efforts to expand occupational control over the management of death.

Kellehear argues that a preoccupation with denial within the literature has led to an artificial personalisation of social systems and a disregard for organizational aspects. Denial has been used 'indiscriminately' to describe any avoidance of reality and 'to generalise about the individual' without regard to the social context (p.713). 'Societies do not deny death but instead organize for it' (p.720), albeit whilst emphasizing or discouraging certain traits. An exploration of the organizational basis of the management of death forms the major part of the present research. This study provides support not for Gorer's taboo thesis but for the work of writers such as Prior (1984) and Parsons and Lidz (1967) who argue that in contemporary societies, the main orientation to death is 'a mode of acceptance appropriate to our primary cultural patterns of activism' (p.134). Brief, modern rituals and private grief are viewed

as functional for society, since roles may be quickly resumed after a death. Survivors are expected to face up to death rationally and to carry out their grief work surreptitiously at home. Prior argues that 'in the western world the explanatory frameworks for death...have been increasingly medicalised, routinised and bureaucratised..' He links '..the culture of denial and dehumanization..directly..to the rise of specific social interests,' (p.56).

(b) The medicalisation of death

Studies concerned with the medicalisation of death are linked to the loss of the 'dying role' and a general estrangement from death. Kellehear argues that there has been a steady progress towards the confusion of death with disease. '..set in clinical aseptic surroundings (death) also became 'contaminating, dirty and embarrassing' (p.716).

Within hospitals, the sick role was viewed as preferable to the dying role, ( Kastenbaum and Aisenberg 1972). Medical education had left doctors unprepared for experiences with death and dying; patients minimized their symptoms in order to emphasize their trust in the doctors and their technology intensive treatments and in order to make interaction with friends and relatives easier. In addition the medicalisation of death removed control of the dying process and its rituals from the family. 'By making death more and more a matter of medical decision to withdraw life-support systems, with all the medico-legal and deontological problems involved, the dying person and the family become subordinate to techno-scientific authority', (Martins 1983,p.xii).

A recent countertrend to this personal helplessness is illustrated by the spread of hospices where patients and relatives are encouraged to accept the dying process within a supportive community. Kellehear suggests that 'the hospice movement...is encouraging a deprofessionalising of the situation of the dying and suggests that the '...tide is turning, slowly, against the technology intensive view of death as 'disease to be treated' until the end' (p.718). Palgi and Abramovitch (1984) see the hospice as providing 'one of the newer cultural modes in relating to dying people' (p.404) while noting the deplorable lack of research in this area. The push to establish and maintain hospices has come entirely from a voluntaristic movement within British society suggesting a growing dissatisfaction with the medicalisation of death and the gradual if unremarked spread of changing attitudes inimicable with a 'taboo' or 'denial'.

(c) The de-ritualisation of death

Whilst Gorer was primarily concerned with the depletion of domestic and social rituals, Martins (1983) suggests that de-ritualization was not simply 'a by-product of secularism but occurred as a result of 'liturgical modernization' within the church carried out by 'an enlightened minority divorced from oral tradition, ascriptive communities and the received natural symbols of age and gender, as well as, at the national level, from any clear central tradition' (p.xiii). In Portugal, Martins notes the dominant role of the local priest in abandoning death rituals. This was viewed as contributing to an 'increase in anti-clericalism'. Much of the discussion in Chapter Two will take account not only of the contemporary liturgical modernization which dispensed with the familiar 1928 prayerbook and introduced new flexible forms of service, but also of the consistent

and continuing efforts of the Anglican clergy to outlaw those practices of the bereaved which were held to be informed by folk religion rather than by orthodox religious beliefs. One of the recurring themes throughout the research will be the difficulty of disentangling the orthodox religious content of funeral ritual from its folk religious or pagan elements. For example, Wilson and Levy (1938) note that the apparently 'religious' ritual of casting three handfuls of earth into the grave is pagan in origin. (4). Ironically Lane (1981) remarks that Soviet ritual specialists devoted a great deal of energy to stamping out this essentially 'religious' ritual. Failing, they imbued it with a new 'secular' interpretation (p.84), (5). It is suggested in Chapter Six that both bereaved and funeral directors prove more tenacious in clinging to long established funeral rituals than the clergy, who echo the stance of negative denial theorists that the proliferation of ritual surrounding the dead is neither necessary nor healthy.

Differing from positive denial theorists who find rituals socially and psychologically beneficial, negative denial theorists (such as LeRoy Bowman (1959) and Harmer (1963)) interpret ritual as a resource which is used negatively to deny or obscure reality. It is from the latter group of theorists that the majority of the economic critiques of the funeral have arisen.

In the early days of Christianity, the burial of the dead was viewed as a sacred duty which was carried out without payment. Later, this service was increasingly exploited and heavily ritualised by the Catholic Church (James 1933). Economic critiques attacked the church and re-emerged after the Reformation to apply themselves to the

activities of undertakers. The scapegoating of contemporary funeral directors remains a sub theme within the literature. Bergen and Williams (1981) have suggested that the acceptance of 'alternative funerals' in America results from a growing disillusion with commercialised funerals and with funeral directors. Families constructing their own coffins, and burying the deceased in a grave in the back garden expressed greater satisfaction than those who relied upon funeral directors.

(d) The meaninglessness of death

Martins (1983) notes that Weber related the meaninglessness of death in the West to 'the disenchantment' or 'demagicalisation' of the world. '..for civilised man death has no meaning...because the individual life of civilised man (is) placed into an infinite 'progress'. The progressiveness gives death the imprint of meaninglessness,' (p.xiv). Aries (1974) suggests that the lack of independence and autonomy of the individual in modern society and lack of control over his or her own death, contributes to the meaninglessness where control is seen to have been appropriated by medical authorities, the legal system, local authorities and next of kin. For Gorer, ritual contributes meaning and hides the essential chaos of death. Kellehear (1983) however, disputes this point and argues that death's meaning continually changes with the current increasing individualisation contributing to the disruption of conformity and enabling more choices to be made and new meanings to be invested. Rather than circumscribed, tabooed, denied or invisible, death has become 'decontextualised' (Kastenbaum and Aisenberg 1972). Within the literature, the meaninglessness of death is often linked to the loss of a language of death and the reluctance

to discuss grief and death openly. Kellehear defends the lack of discourse somewhat weakly by referring to routinised rules of politeness. 'If sex is embarrassing and death is upsetting then it is sound interpersonal practice to avoid both the subject and the emotion aroused by it' (p.719). Martins (1983) suggests that '..the cliché'genic nature of the language of mechanistic western society' has gradually diminished our expressions of death and again notes the role of ecclesiastical modernizers who have contributed to the meaninglessness by relinquishing 'their custodianship of religious language' (p.xiv). For many others (e.g. Prior 1984) the loss of commonly accepted religious expressions of sympathy have been followed by an acceptance of medical terminology as the language of death. 'It is clinical medicine and its empiricist methodology which above all has been responsible for the deletion of human action from explanations of death and for the impersonal and bureaucratized practices which envelop the modern dead' (p.56).

Overall, developmental changes have led to a more functional, less discursive use of language including a general loss of expressionistic idiom and a daily devaluation of death images by the media. In addition, the loss of acceptable terminology for the situation of death has been compounded by the loss of the social roles of death: the dying role, the role of mourner, the role of lying in state and the role of the ancestor - all these have been devalued, their settings reduced and interaction hampered. Discussion of the key themes within the literature has centred upon contemporary understandings of death. Several theorists however, (e.g. Aries 1974, 1983; Farrell 1980), suggest that these understandings differ from those of previous centuries as a result of changes in the

'collective unconscious', or in the 'cosmology of death'. Aries in particular, stresses 'the unimportance of political and ideological change in bringing about major transformations in death attitudes' (Martins 1983, p.xvi). This runs counter to the argument within the thesis.

## 1.2. The Work of Aries - Changing Western Attitudes towards Death

After Gorer, Aries (1974,1983) is the writer most frequently cited by other sociologists. Aries himself, copiously cites Gorer, relying heavily upon the data from Death, Grief and Mourning in Contemporary Britain. Aries categorizes death and modes of dying into five ideal types spanning the centuries from the Middle Ages:

(1) the tame death; (2) the death of the self; (3) remote and imminent death; (4) the death of the other - and drawing level with Gorer's tabooed death; (5) invisible death.

The tame death: imbued with a positive quality indicated that the dying person viewed death with acceptance. The tame death appeared around the fifth century AD, disappearing at the end of the 18th century. Aries (1983) argued 'It has by now been so obliterated from our culture that it is hard for us to imagine or understand it. The ancient attitude in which death is close and familiar, yet diminished and desensitized is too different from our own view, in which it is so terrifying that we no longer dare to say its name' (p.28). The death of the self: was representative of the medieval period as traditional communities dissolved and death was redefined as the end of an individual life. The dying left instructions concerning funeral ritual and bequests in their wills, demonstrating that a certain

amount of control could be exerted. Remote and imminent death: symbolized the movement during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from acceptance to fear. Evidence drawn from the art and literature of the time portrayed death as a rapist and dwelt upon morbid eroticism. The death of the Other: emphasized the growth of affectivity between people during the major change in family relationships from the extended to the nuclear family. Increased affectivity was seen as responsible for a cult of remembrance. Ritual was viewed as a positive resource, underwriting rather than denying the separation of death. Invisible Death: draws level with Gorer's tabooed death and is attributed to changes in all four of the themes traditionally informing attitudes to death. (i) awareness of individuality, now compromised by the assumption of control by the medical profession and bureaucracy; (ii) ritual defending society against untamed nature - less relevant in complex technological settings; (iii) belief in the afterlife - weakened by competing ideologies, and (iv) belief in the existence of evil - lessened by general secularization. Change in all four parameters of the understandings informing death, induced a loss of confidence in dealing with the subject. The dying person was subsequently expected to die out of sight in hospital and death became 'dirty' (p.612), and an admission of defeat. Aries contends that the cult of tombs vanished with cremation. 'The relative of the cremated person rejects the physical reality of the site, its association with the body and the public character of the cemetery' (1983, p.577).

Amongst those critical of Aries' work is Clark (1981) who suggests that 'such broad brush strokes fail to come to grips with concrete situations.. (and) ..frequently neglect heterogeneous elements

existing in specific social settings' (p.127). Redressing the balance, Clark examines rites of passage in the context of Staithes, a small Yorkshire village. The study is important as the section on funerals provides valuable contemporary data on the management of death in a rural area which may usefully be contrasted with this research. It also embraces a similar methodological commitment in that Clark follows Towler's suggestion that it is important to 'grasp the meanings attached to various situations strictly in terms of the components of the respective people's own mental worlds' (p.162).

### 1.3. Clark: Between Pulpit and Pew: A Study of Folk Religion in a Yorkshire Village.

Clark suggests that the constant quoting of old generalisations on death arising from the studies by Gorer, Mitford and Aries together with the reluctance of sociologists to provide new data, is one reason why the whole subject has 'become an embarrassing source of unease' (p.127). The bulk of the American literature is dismissed as irrelevant to the British situation.

Using participant observation, Clark undertook a community study in 1975/76 of the nature of religious life. Ignoring 'the outward signs of religious stagnation' (p.164), he attempted to 'come to grips with the meaning which religion has for the individual'. 'Religious beliefs and practices only become intelligible within their social context and it is for this reason that more empirical studies are required which depict religion in particular localities' (p.167).

Clark follows Gorer and Aries in contrasting the 'ostentatious funerals

and protracted mourning injunctions of the victorian period' with the present 'attenuated funerary rituals', seeing the primary disjunction as the removal of death from the home into the hands of various specialists. Major factors are listed as: 1. the primacy of specialist organizations; 2. the introduction of cremation. 3. the differences emerging in ritual between church and chapel.

Substantiating Kellehear's argument on the expansion of individual choice and the decontextualisation of death, Clark presents a typology of five separate types of disposal: (i) chapel/burial, (ii) chapel/cremation, (iii) church/burial, (iv) church/cremation, (v) crematorium/cremation (p.134). Rituals attaching to church and chapel were found to have become increasingly dissimilar, with chapel rituals flourishing and the church rituals becoming attenuated. Six out of ten deaths studied by Clark resulted in burial (against the national trend); this was attributed to the geographical isolation of the village and a 'particular aversion to cremation' (p.136) and to a continuing interest in the maintenance of grave-tending as a weekend ritual. The major theme is that of the interrelatedness of folk religion and the local community, with death ritual in Staithes seen as still very much a 'community' rather than a private resource. Clark followed a number of funerals by participant observation but his study adopted a narrow focus on disposal rituals. There are few details on attitudes towards the body, hygienic treatment or embalming, towards the dressing of the body or artefacts left in coffins etc. It was noted that in all cases the standard Anglican liturgy was employed, consisting of one or two hymns, prayers and a brief address', (p.140) but there was no further information as to whether the standard Anglican liturgy was the 1928 prayerbook or

separately printed variations of this; whether the clergyman was the same person in each case, or whether the address was personalised etc. Given the emphasis upon folk religion there was also a lack of information throughout on the roles and interaction between clergy, bereaved and funeral directors beyond the statement that 'now the Co-op has it all' (p.135).

Following Aries theme, as to why the beliefs and practices surrounding death endure, Clark argues that they continue because they have a legitimising relevance in everyday life. Although in Staithes, the old women remained the holders of an extensive body of knowledge on the 'correct' way to deal with a death, the primary reason for any decline in ritual was nevertheless attributed to 'the predominance of individualism' resulting in 'the decline of adequate agents of transmission' (p.168), suggesting that the funeral directors deliberately withheld death knowledge in order to retain control. The persistence of religious ritual within the old framework in a broadly secularising culture was attributed not to corresponding clergy control but to the continuance of 'deviant religious values' (which)'can be sustained given the presence of certain structural pre-requisites' (p.163). These are: '...buffers or insulators to keep out the wider secularity and also to keep in communal religion' (p.163). Clark raises the question of whether similar folk elements persist among the 'industrial conurbations of a highly segmented and associational society' (p.166) and this will be addressed within the present research.

Although Clark argues that research on American deathways is irrelevant to the British situation, the present study, focussing on

the main role players - funeral directors and clergy as well as the bereaved, will benefit from a brief examination of work dealing with the organizational basis of the management of death.

#### 1.4. Vanderlyn Pine: Caretaker of the Dead - A study of the American Funeral Director

In Caretaker of the Dead, Pine (1975) examines the setting and organization of the American funeral home and the role of the funeral director. Employing autobiographical material, participant observation, interviews and extensive field observation, he discovered two major differences between funeral homes: (a) those with a bureaucratic orientation: the 'cosmopolitan' funeral home; (b) those with a personal service orientation: the 'community' funeral home (p.55).

Pine argues that the organization of the funeral home governs the type of service given to the bereaved by funeral directors, as well as influencing the content of their roles. The community funeral director was viewed as a serving professional; the cosmopolitan funeral director had a more loosely attached, bureaucratic orientation to work. Contrary to the writers who focus on exploitation, such as Harmer (1963) and Mitford (1963), Pine found that the funeral director seldom tried 'to force issues or talk people into decisions of any kind..' (p.91). On the other hand, the apparent 'lack of sales technique' in the unique circumstances of bereavement, was found to be more effective in the long run in achieving sales (p.94)

The body was maintained as the centrepiece of ritual. Given the shift

from 'the dying role' observed by Aries and Gorer, the appropriation of the body by specialists and a general contraction of domestic pre-disposal ritual, the ceremonial viewing of the deceased assumed a heightened importance. The attention paid to the well being of the body in the United States however, has far outweighed the attention it is accorded in Britain. Pine suggests that the American funeral director's concern with the body is natural because it draws attention to his work and his importance (p.96). It enabled the family to come to an acceptance of death and allowed the bereaved 'to behave in a death appropriate mask' (p.99). Similar behaviour within British funeral homes will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Although Pine's study was based on an analysis of funeral directors as an occupation, encompassing their role perceptions, their interactions with the bereaved etc, it omitted any analysis of their relationship with the clergy. However, there is an American literature on the subject of role conflict between funeral directors and ministers of religion. Fulton (1961), Bradfield and Myers (1980, 1987), Unruh (1976) and others have explored this theme at length. As the status of the funeral director has become enhanced over time, that of the clergy has diminished. Indeed, American funeral directors were seen to have invited further conflict by moving into the area of 'grief counselling', once exclusively the pastoral territory of the clergy.

Parallel data on funeral directors and clergy are completely lacking in Britain. Pine, in a section on 'Funerals in England' puts forward a handful of generalisations by way of contrast with his own study. He suggests for example that there are only two types of funeral home

ownership in Britain: firstly, the old fashioned family owned business, which is essentially bureaucratic and which does not aim to provide personal services but to accomplish specific tasks; and secondly the Co-operative funeral establishment which is seen as giving greater personal attention to bereaved families (p.19). This attention to the contrasting organizational structures and processes in funeral homes is highlighted in Chapters Three and Four, although it will be argued that in Britain there is more diversity than Pine asserts, while the bureaucratisation of death has been carried further in the largest establishments which include the co-operatives.

Pine further suggests, following Gorer, that there is a direct relationship between English funeral ritual and the economic status of the bereaved (p.18), a situation which again might appear more applicable to the highly insured American bereaved. He also suggests that 'somewhere between 7% and 10% of all bodies are given temporary preservation, most of them in private homes and on the bed in which they died' (p.19). Referencing Habenstein and Lamers (1956), much of this information is very out of date. Both the linkage of funeral ritual to the economic status of the bereaved together with the numbers embalmed and venue of embalming will most certainly have shown radical change.

A major difference between American and British Funeral Directors is that of the enhanced status of the State licensed American funeral director and the unresolved status of the un-registered British funeral director. The continuing 'in house' struggles for public recognition of their 'professional' status despite a general

occupational control of death knowledge, will be explored throughout the present research. In America, the rise of the funeral profession and its increasing commercialisation has been viewed as a natural phenomenon in line with accepted capitalist marketing strategies (French 1983). But a similar increase in commercialisation in Britain appears limited to the emergence of large corporations, without the corresponding growth and expansion in funeral goods and services. Factors such as the much larger 'turnovers' of clients per funeral establishment in Britain, as well as bureaucratic and institutional restraints and a natural conservatism may have proved inhibiting.

#### Summary

The impoverished state of the sociology of death in Britain has been a long standing cause for concern amongst those countries possessed of livelier debates on the subject. Martins (1983) notes 'As there is nothing that is more capable of generating metaphysical concern among human beings than the fatum or the factum of death there is perhaps some point to the avoidance of death topics by those committed to the intra-mundaneity of scholarly endeavour and social practice' (p.vii). Further explanations might be that death is perceived as a lower grade subject by British sociologists which is somehow not worthy of the dignity of academic scrutiny; or that it can be linked to the conservative nature of the British: Palgi and Abramovitch (1984) quoting Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson (1976) suggest that '...death is not a central issue for anthropologists because of their natural reluctance to intrude on people's lives at a time of anguish' (p.385).

Gorer's work skewed research towards an overriding concern with the 'taboo' or 'denial' thesis and has led to an over-emphasis upon this perspective with a societal fear of death being 'taken for granted'. The literature generally has concentrated upon the effects of socio-cultural changes on death behaviour. It has also examined the increasing bureaucratization and professionalisation of the management of death, together with the diminishing role of the clergy. The class based and regional nature of ritual and its recent 'attenuation' have been discussed, together with the exploitation of the bereaved by funeral directors. It has also been argued that death is now invisible. Lacking to date however, is a qualitative study of death, integrating its management from varying perspectives and enabling further discussion of the main themes. This will be the task of the present study, in the manner that Towler suggests, situated within the understandings of the groups involved.

## PART TWO: GENESIS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The study was carried out under a studentship linked to a survey undertaken by Towler and Toon (1981-1984) on the varieties of religious belief in an urban environment. Initially, it was intended that this study, based in the same urban area, North city, should provide a complementary survey of the varieties of religious belief and superstitions surrounding the funeral. After a preliminary reading of the literature and when the full extent of the neglect of death became apparent, the research outline was widened to encompass a contemporary ethnography of death.

a. Access to death related areas

The problems of access to death behaviour in society have been well documented. Pine (1975) notes that Sudnow (1967, p.3) found access to and observation of death related behaviour extremely difficult. Kephart (1950) acknowledged access as a major problem. Unruh (1976) gained access to funeral establishments in America but encountered resistance from funeral directors who were cautious about allowing outsiders to view embalming, corpse removal and burial. Unruh terminated his association with one funeral home when the management criticised his appearance. Mitford, writing as a journalist, found herself unable to penetrate the British professional organizations. 'Finding out about funerals in England, is if anything, an even harder job than in America. The trade associations are not anxious to correspond on the subject' (p.205). Pine (1975) attributes his lack of problems to the fact that he was himself a funeral director. 'Members of my family have been funeral directors for the last five generations...' He accepts that this may have meant that some of his ideas were subjective, but argues that 'such subjective thought' (is) 'the basis for a pertinent brand of sociology' (p.1).

Despite the obvious difficulties, it was decided that the research could only be achieved by participant observation at a number of funeral establishments, providing access on a daily basis to all of the actors and institutions concerned with the management of death. An approach was made to the Head Office of the National Association of Funeral Directors to examine back copies of the British Undertakers Association Journal. After spending some time there on a daily basis, introductions were subsequently obtained to a number of funeral establishments in North City.

Before proceeding with participant observation, two preliminary studies were carried out. Study A tested the willingness of the main actors in funeral ritual to discuss death, and sought common themes. Study B involved 'unobtrusive observation' at a number of funerals in and around the city and was designed to familiarise the researcher with the main features of funeral services and with death behaviour.

Study A used taped semi-structured interviews of an ad hoc sample of 18 respondents: 6 bereaved, 6 clergy and 6 funeral directors. In several cases the bereaved became very distressed, breaking down into tears during the interviews, but they nevertheless expressed a great deal more interest in talking about death than would have been evident from a reading of the literature. As the interviews progressed it became apparent that there were many frustrations and crossed wires between the main participants in the putting together of a funeral. There was also a certain amount of conflict, a guarding of physical and ideological territories amongst the professionals involved.

In Study B, funerals were located from the obituary columns of the local paper and attended unobtrusively. Comprehensive details of service content and clergy, bereaved and funeral personnel behaviour were noted. Both church and crematorium services were attended. No attempt was made to accompany mourners back to the funeral establishments for the funeral tea, although it was intended to accomplish this in the main study.

The predominant tasks of the two preliminary studies were to ascertain the feasibility of conducting research into an area where access was acknowledged to be a major problem and to determine the extent of any

taboo or denial of death amongst respondents which would make research problematic. A secondary task was to collate data relating to themes in the literature. Both interviews and observation ratified the earlier assumption that research on death rituals in the city needed to be conducted from a number of different vantage points and that these could best be reached by participant observation at several funeral establishments.

#### 1.6. The Main Study

##### (a) Methodology

The methodology adopted followed that of Pine, using participant observation, interviews and secondary data. Insights gained from fieldwork and interviews could be checked against secondary data. Participant observation was carried out at the four largest funeral establishments in the city for varying periods from one to three weeks at a time, with contact remaining continuous as relationships were established. Introductions (effected initially from the Head Office of the National Association of Funeral Directors) were thereafter continued by asking the owner of one firm, if he or she would telephone another firm and obtain a further introduction. As well as the longer periods spent at the largest establishments, days were also spent at seven smaller funeral homes within the city and in neighbouring towns (for comparative purposes). Two of the largest funeral corporations in the country were visited, one in London and one in the south of England. Days were also spent with a Coffin Manufacturer, an Embalming School and with national and local bereavement support organizations.

Taped and informal interviews were carried out with Cemetery and Crematoria Superintendents, office personnel, grave diggers, chapel attendants and cremator operatives. Formal and informal interviews were carried out with monumental masons, local councillors and coroners officers. One week was spent (unofficially) accompanying a coroner's officer on his rounds. Informal interviews were carried out with hospital staff, hospital chaplains, mortuary technicians, knock up men, carriage masters and catering ladies, and with students at a local polytechnic who were designing crematoria as a course component. The opening ceremonies of three new chapels of rest in various parts of the city were attended as well as formal and informal social occasions within the funeral directors' world. Formal invitations included visits to North City Council Meetings to discuss the feasibility of Funerals on the Rates, and attendance at the subsequent Conference of Municipal Authorities on the same topic; also representation at the city's first Funeral Conference which made a novel attempt to gather together under one roof, delegates of all those involved with death in the city.

The process of becoming an 'insider' within the death system was initially very slow and difficult. Historically beset with jealousies and a sharp competitiveness, funeral homes were reluctant to let into their premises someone who would later visit their competitors and might reveal their pricing structures or modes of organization. By participating in social events however, an acceptance was gained and presumably an acknowledgement that information provided, remained confidential. Some difficulties were experienced, much later (during the writing up period) when an invitation was accepted to give a talk to a Conference of seventeen Municipal Authorities which met to debate the general municipalisation of the funeral service. Erroneous

information that the researcher had been offered employment by the Council helping with the organization of a municipal funeral service within the city was circulated and for a time, caused a large amount of unfounded suspicion amongst the funeral community. However, as the data gathering for the main sample had at that time been completed, it had no effect upon the research.

(b) The Main Sample

A sample of ten funerals were followed through from start to finish at two of the largest funeral establishments. This was a lengthy procedure, involving dozens of unfinished funerals and taking several weeks to complete. The length of the procedure was dictated by organizational considerations. For example, when a phone call was made to the funeral establishment by the bereaved family requesting a funeral director, the religion of the deceased was not known in advance. Accompanying the funeral director to a house to book the funeral and later within the interaction learning that the rituals were to be Catholic or Methodist, meant that a whole morning's work had to some extent (as far as the main sample was concerned) been lost. Even where an Anglican ritual was booked and all the details and interaction noted, the funeral might still be 'lost' to the main sample, if the actual time at which the service was booked either (a) clashed with an earlier funeral being followed through or (b) had a venue so far away that it was impossible to reach it in time after a previous service the same afternoon.

The funeral directors were always vague as to the exact nature of the researcher's presence at the house. Their introductory remarks included some variation on the statement: 'Do you mind if this young lady sits

in, she's learning about the funeral business?' There were no refusals, even though many of the bereaved were in shocked and distressed states having experienced the death of their relative only a few hours earlier. Brief notes were taken of the interaction and amplified in the car immediately afterwards.

Approaching the bereaved some twelve weeks after the funeral for a taped interview, the introduction was effected as a student. It was felt that the continued guise of funeral worker might deter the bereaved from speaking freely about the funeral directors. It was necessary to disassociate from the firm and to re-present as an impartial observer. Many of the bereaved were surprised by the change of role, although not upset. There was one refusal for a follow up interview. For the same reasons, the student role was resumed when interviewing the clergy after their funeral services. Most (with one exception) were of the impression that they had never seen me before, although I had already participated in a funeral which they had conducted and which was the subject of the interview.

Fieldwork was orientated towards participating in as many stages of death behaviour as possible. This entailed following the progress of the body around the death system (collecting it from the mortuary, observing embalming and corpse dressing, noting the incidence of viewing, attending the funeral and any subsequent ceremonies, including the burying of ashes, and then interviewing the main participants. Within the funeral establishments, the 'student' label tended to fade, given a mature age (42 at the commencement of research) and the presence of the researcher it is suggested, became less obtrusive over time. Attendance at each stage of the death together with the

subsequent interviews, enabled the observation of discrepancies between actual and reported actions and explanations. All of the main sample interviews (29 in total) were taped and transcribed in full.

#### 1.7. Outline of the Thesis

CHAPTER TWO will provide a brief historical perspective illuminating the major changes over time in the management of death in Britain. Commencing with the early Victorian period eulogised by Gorer and echoed by Aries and Clark, there will be a discussion of the class nature of the funeral and the factors underpinning lavish death ritual. Moving forward, changes in rituals will be examined by analysis within a tripartite structure. Beyond any anthropological theorising (van Gennep 1960), actions carried out towards and on behalf of the body of the deceased fall naturally into three distinct areas: pre-disposal rituals, disposal rituals and post disposal rituals. Within such a framework, it is possible to highlight areas of contraction and expansion and to indicate the appearance of entirely new rituals. For the purpose of the present study, death rituals will be defined as any accepted personal or communal observance in relation to the body or memory of the deceased.

The chapter will also examine the social roles of death: the dying role, the role of the mourner, the role of the deceased lying in state and the role of ancestor. It is suggested that changes in death ritual from 1840 - 1989 were critically affected by the modernization of death management as an ongoing process and specifically by the expansion and bureaucratisation of the death system responsible for processing the body of the deceased out of society and by power struggles within that

system. Concurrently, whereas the existing literature highlights the increased 'invisibility' and 'denial' of death, the argument developed in this thesis emphasizes the changing character and location of the social roles of death and death management. This includes an increased eradication of the class basis of funeral ritual.

Having set the scene for the examination of contemporary death rituals, CHAPTER THREE will look briefly at the composition of the death system and then in some detail at the work organization of funeral directors examining Funeral Homes and Territories within the city. Four different types of Funeral Home will be discussed, together with the effect of differing organizational structures on the production of ritual and on the way in which funeral directors perceive their role. The role of the funeral director will also be examined in the light of their continuing struggles to gain recognition as a professional body and their power to influence and re-direct death ritual in society.

CHAPTER FOUR moves to the daily production of ritual within the death system in the city, to the assembly of the basic elements of the funeral and typical interactions between funeral directors and bereaved and between funeral directors and clergy. Occupational struggles between clergy and funeral directors are highlighted together with the funeral directors attempts to avoid conflict by the institution of the Tame Vicar.

CHAPTER FIVE introduces the case studies from the main sample and utilises their data to discuss interactions between the three main actors: bereaved, funeral director and clergy during the pre-disposal section of death ritual. Themes explored include the degree of

dependence of the bereaved upon funeral directors, their ignorance of the functioning of the death system, their vulnerability to exploitation, their active participation in the planning of ritual, their preferences for common religious rituals, such as the selection of pop music and the continuing acceptance of the religious framework.

CHAPTER SIX continues with interactions between the three main actors during the disposal and post disposal sections of death ritual.

Discussions within the disposal period centre around the differing perceptions of the bereaved and clergy on the function of the disposal service; the general loss of knowledge of church going behaviour, the clergy's maintenance of a 'death apartheid': their tendency to discriminate between 'C of E' types and 'church people'; and their need to 'control' both the disposal ritual and the expression of grief. In the post disposal section, the chapter explores the contraction of traditional memorialisation and the expansion of new forms of memorialisation for cremation and new common religious rituals centred upon the disposal of ashes. *The lack of clergy involvement and interest* at the post disposal stage is noted together with the bereaved's concern with a continuing 'private' state of mourning manifested by verses in the In Memoriam Column, visits to mediums, grave or crematoria visiting and an acknowledgement of the 'presence' of the deceased.

CHAPTER SEVEN draws out the main themes and conclusions on the contemporary management of death in Britain in terms of the existing literature and sets out areas for further investigation.

FOOTNOTES

1. Percentage viewing at chapels of rest: 64%. 1967 survey carried out by the National Association of Funeral Directors. Reported in *The Funeral Director*. April 1970. p216 - 217. Viewing figures: 80% quoted in *Cemetery, Crematorium and Funeral Services in the United Kingdom*. Paper given by Field B.J.A. to the 11th Federation Internationale des Associations de Thanatologues/International Federation of Thanatologists Associations Conference. Las Vegas. 1983.
2. 'Over 90% of the dead in this country are dispatched with conventional religious ceremony despite the fact that only an estimated 2.5% of people in an urban population are committed christians or church attenders.' (Martin, 1969, p.123).
3. 'Common religion' is employed to refer to the whole range of 'religious' beliefs and practices from the use of the church's rites of passage by those who are otherwise unattached to a church, to the consulting of astrologers, palmists, to the belief in the power of fate, to belief in ghosts and paranormal phenomenon.' (Towler & Chamberlain, 1973, p.8).
4. Horace: 1. 28. Aelian Var. Hist. has a dead sailor begging the passerby not to begrudge his corpse a little earth thrown on his head and bones - 'three handfuls will suffice'. (Wilson & Levy 1938, p.80).
5. 'And now comrades, in accordance with popular custom, let us throw onto the grave, three clumps of earth - of that earth which feeds us and delights us with the colours of life and gives everyone of us eternal rest.' (Gerodnik 1970 quoted in Lane 1981).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FUNERAL

Since Gorer, the bulk of the literature has been concerned with the abrupt disconnection between the lavish and open management of death during the Victorian period and the diluted form which it is presumed to have assumed thereafter. The present chapter will therefore examine the key trends, changes and contradictions in funeral ritual over time, disputing Aries' argument that death became 'invisible' primarily as a result of medicalisation, a loss of belief in the afterlife and the existence of evil, and through a societal suppression of mourning. Although touching briefly upon death rituals prior to the industrial revolution (where some indication of longevity is called for), these will not be examined in any detail. For documentation of this earlier period, see Toynbee (1971), Dill (1920), Fuller (1842) and Clarkson (1975).

The idealised expansion of Victorian ritual did not simply spring into being but was largely a product of industrialisation. It was boosted by a very long period of denial of ritual to the bulk of the population and by desire for the honour and status such ritual had for centuries bestowed on both deceased and bereaved. Victorian death rituals provided a mirror image of their social context, from the perfunctory pauper funerals of the poor to the excesses of the rich. Industry provided the embellishments of feathers, jet jewellery, and mourning gowns. Although Aries suggests that it was the growth of affectivity which resulted in the exaggerated cult of remembrance, improved transport facilities such as the expansion of the canal and railway networks were largely responsible for bringing memorialisation within the grasp of the aspiring middle classes.

Similarly, urbanization and the appearance of private cemeteries encouraged the modernization and eventual motorization of the hearse and cortege. Class and status divisions were reflected in the gradations of ritual which were thought appropriate to a particular 'station' in life. These rituals were further sponsored by the growing specialisation of undertakers who encouraged the Victorians' love of display.

## 2.0. The funeral as a class based phenomenon.

From the Roman period, the funeral had been a vehicle of class distinction ( Dill 1920). The lower classes and roman slaves avoided the humiliation of a poor funeral by banding together in funerary colleges or clubs: the antecedents of the Guilds of the Middle Ages and of the later Friendly Societies of the 1800 - 1900's (1).

Independently of the nature of religious belief - pagan/christian/catholic/protestant - the funeral was pre-eminently a social phenomenon, contributing honour and later respectability, to both the post death status of the deceased and to the continuing status of the mourner.

Gorer's work gives the impression that the drama of the Victorian funeral resulted from a particular romantic sensibility and the repression of sex; also that it somehow contained all the elements of a classic and wholesome acceptance of death now regrettably mislaid. Historical sources illustrate however, that the desire for funeral pageantry had remained strong over time, amplified by the catholic exploitation of the dead for money during the 15th and 16th centuries (James 1933) and later by the dishonour attaching to pauperism. In the 1790's, 'labourers wives, despite terrible poverty ..would

rather relinquish the comforts and blessings of assistance at their lying in, to enrich the stock and procure a handsome funeral. They had a pathetic desire to leave the world with dignity and independence and not to be shuffled off with the grudging attentions of the Parish Vestry and the Poor Law' (Fuller 1964, p.87).

Taylor (1983) suggests that much of the pageantry stemmed from the grandiose royal funerals of Europe, filtering down to the upper and middle classes at the end of the 16th century. When families whose arms were not recognized by the Court of Heralds began to perform their own heraldic funerals (p.20), the scene was set for a continuous process of diffusion. The divisive power of funeral pageantry persisted throughout the following century. Funeral display was easily graded by the onlooker. 'The grandest used horsedrawn hearses, next came walking funerals, with the coffin wheeled on a hearse and below that, the coffin pushed on a handcart' (p.39). The sense of shame attaching to poor funerals was exacerbated by the high street visibility of funeral ritual and its fundamental ceremonial aspects.

Both the spread of undertaking and the clamour for ritual were called into question by the Church of England who in forming the Church of England Burial, Funeral and Mourning Reform Association encouraged moderation and simplicity. Critiques of Gorer's ideal funeral appeared in The Ecclesiologists while undertakers were labelled 'a most crying evil' (Morley 1971). Underlying these attacks was a recognition not only of the misery of the poor but also of the fact that the clergy as a profession had begun to lose their monopoly of the management of death. For several centuries, prior to the

Reformation, the clergy themselves had reinforced the death ideology which underlay the class basis of the funeral, with individual worth being linked to ability to pay. Those who could not afford to pay for prayers for the dead, for candles, for obits (James, 1933), had their low status reinforced both in the eyes of society and also in the eyes of God.

After the Reformation although they remained in overall command of the death system, ministering to the sick, releasing the dying, overseeing the subsequent ritual and tinkering with parts of it to suit their own convenience, the clergy's lax custodianship of the dead within the burial grounds threatened to undermine their own authority. For the Romans, burial places were sanctified by the body (Wilson and Levy 1938) but the Christians were taught that the body was only sanctified when buried in consecrated ground. Rapid increases in population were not matched by increases in consecration and by the mid eighteenth century, many parish churchyards were so full of bodies that it became difficult not to dislodge one whilst making room for another. 'The coffins were only thinly covered with earth as a result of the gross overcrowding of the churchyards ..There was said to be an offensive smell of decaying bodies in the houses and shops' (Foster 1984, p.73). The casual treatment of bodies during this period, by both clergy and bereaved makes it difficult to substantiate the contentions of Gorer and Morley that the bulk of funeral ritual was underpinned by a strong belief in the resurrection. Foster (1984) describes the actions of a vicar of Hull in 1862 in levelling and asphaltting an old churchyard. 'He did this without the authority of the local Board of Health and deposited about 200 tons of human remains in a great heap in Mason street..This

gruesome operation was performed at midday and at a time when there was much fever in the town' (p.75). The general indifference to overcrowded graveyards was instrumental in assisting the entry of secular authorities into the death system (2). The rise of public health officials and the expansion of medical authority helped to promote the specialisation of undertakers and encouraged interest in cremation.

Writers such as Gorer (1965) who look backwards to death eutopias, sometimes overestimate the spread of funeral ritual. Booth (1902, p.248) estimated that in 1890, 42.7% of the population died as paupers with most of these being buried without ceremony by the Poor Law Authorities. As late as the turn of the century, funeral pageantry remained out of reach to many of the working classes but its appeal continued to be enhanced.

The desire for funeral ritual was underwritten by its communality. The structure and pageantry of the funeral provided a 'death situation', a scenario within which well defined social roles could be assumed and legitimised. Family, neighbours, friends and acquaintances were 'expected' to attend a funeral. Attendance was not a gesture of sympathy but a firm social duty within the community. Mourners were 'bid' (3) to attend (Robinson, 1862). Gosden (1961) also notes that the rules of many Friendly Societies included a provision that 'any member neglecting to attend (a funeral)..shall forfeit threepence each' (p.161). (4) The social nature of the funeral was complemented by its festive nature. The procession, the dressing up, the gloom and drama, the mysticism of the service and burial and the subsequent eating and drinking and commiserating

with the bereaved, were at one level, warmly appreciated.

Bidders began to disappear during the First World War when communities were depleted and when so many deaths could only be acknowledged by memorial services rather than the full ritual of the funeral. The disappearance of the bidder who 'knew all t' relations and all t' friends..and where to go without a list' (Funeral director SK/PS\*) was one of the first indications of the weakening of the social and communal nature of the funeral (5). After the war, mobility and new technology such as the telephone, rendered the role superfluous. A later indication of the waning communal nature of the funeral came with the discontinuance around the late 1950s, of the practice of taking the names of all mourners at a funeral and publishing the full list of those who had fulfilled their 'duty' in the local newspaper.

By the 1930's, insurance companies had taken over the role of the Friendly Societies and provided a safety net against the social disgrace of a poor burial. Proportionately more of the population now had access to funeral ritual, although one person in eleven dying in Greater London was still buried as a pauper by a Public Assistance Committee from the rates, (Wilson and Levy 1938). Over time, the state had done little to alleviate the divisive and class nature of the funeral, using it as an instrument of social control (6), demonstrating concern for the care of the dead only during wars when it was necessary to ensure continuing allegiance and patriotism. The

\* (Refer to key on page vi)

state showed scant interest in criticizing or controlling the conduct of undertakers and ignored Anthony Greenwood's (formerly Minister of Health) suggestion in 1937 that the disposal of the dead be regarded as a public function.

However, Clarke (1944) in a report entitled 'Funeral Reform' (produced for the Social Security League which was set up to promote the principles of the Beveridge Report) was one of the first critics to argue publicly for a gradual rationalisation of the Funeral Service and for a state death benefit. Questioning whether the proliferation of insurance policies could really be described as voluntary, Clarke suggested that the high rate of insurance at that time was connected with unnecessarily high charges relating to the disposal of the dead and with the persistence of the collecting agent.

In an attempt to identify the factors underlying the British population's adherence to expensive funeral ritual, she noted the following: (a) that the bereaved had to make many arrangements in a short time, (b) that they were dealing with unfamiliar matters, (c) that they were distressed, (d) that the funeral represented their last opportunity to show affection for the dead, and (e) that there was a perceived need to make a good impression in front of other relatives.

Clarke's analysis relegates the important communal aspect of ritual to the bottom of her list and enumerates a host of other factors which suggest that death has become unfamiliar, the province of a particular occupational group and a general source of anxiety. Following Clarke's report, the Beveridge Report and welfare

reforms, the government finally instituted the Death Grant in 1949. At £20.00, it went almost half way towards covering the cost of a funeral (then averaging £40 - £50). The effects of this aid helped to eradicate the class divisiveness of funeral ritual and also lessened the need to dramatise the role of the mourner. Widows especially, were no longer solely dependent upon the presence of the breadwinner. At the same time however, the death grant enhanced the opportunities for funeral ritual.

The death grant would not be increased again until 1967 when it was set at £30.00. During the 1960's the lack of aid and lack of state interest led to sporadic discussion of the municipalisation of the funeral, but as Martins (1983) notes, social criticism of the funeral in Britain consistently failed to gather momentum. The critiques proceeding from the Church after the Reformation were ignored by the populace for whom death ritual was unassailably tied in to the class structure, to a sense of worth and a place in the community. The great period of sanitary reform during the early 19th century provided an ideal opportunity for change but those made, such as the institution of private cemeteries, were easily assimilated by undertakers and eventually enhanced rather than detracted from the importance of ritual.

Radical changes in the class nature of the funeral were however slowly underway. These were instigated by the leavening effect of the death grant, the eventual endorsement of cremation as a disposal ritual, and accompanying technological changes which provided fewer visual clues to the cost of rituals (e.g. the acceptance of veneered chipboard for coffins); structural changes undermining the communal

nature of death ritual, such as urbanization, medicalisation, increasing bureaucratisation, geographical and social mobility and a general climate of secularisation.

Within three decades between the 1950's and 1970's the marked differentiation within the social classes on expenditure on funeral ritual largely disappeared. The DHSS Survey carried out in 1974 - 75, found that the differences between classes was not large, except with the lower middle class: their average total expenditure on the funeral was significantly higher at £194.00 - but 93% of respondents stated that they had not had any difficulties in raising the money for the funeral (p.68). The survey cautioned that the role of state intervention should not be overestimated in explanation, since the £30.00 death grant covered only 22% of the average funeral directors bill and only 18% of the average total funeral costs. It was concluded that since the average cost of the basic funeral was close to the minimum possible, this indicated a general desire for 'modest funerals' (p.89). The social factors of concern for keeping up an appearance in front of relatives and for the status of the deceased, which had provided the impetus for the expansion of funeral ritual for centuries, had now apparently lapsed.

The Price Commission Report (1977) validated many of the DHSS Survey findings and endorsed the implicit criticism of funeral directors which had first surfaced in Clarke's (1944) paper. The Price Report noted that the bereaved 'do not act with the prudence that they would be expected to observe in other business transactions' (p.44) They were often too upset to seek quotations from more than one funeral director and were 'more likely to go back to the funeral director

who acted for the family on a previous occasion or to follow a friends advice' (p.5). In the thirty years elapsing between Clarke's Report and that of the Price Commission, there is a suggestion that much tighter occupational control has been achieved by undertakers, now known as funeral directors, matched by a corresponding helplessness on the part of the bereaved. In terms of pageantry, there is still an identifiable lead from the top of the social hierarchy - 'widows veils' were in evidence at the funeral of the Duchess of Norfolk in 1978 and both the Queen and the Queen Mother were completely dressed in black with pearl and diamond accessories for the funeral of Earl Mountbatten in 1979 (Taylor p.283), but few now aspire to reproduce such pageantry on a personal level. Lavish death ritual has become more typically a property of the community and is now used to symbolize community rather than personal loss. The class divisions in funeral ritual have been replaced, it is suggested by divisions which truly reflect 'affectivity', with greater and more expensive ritual being provided for those suffering 'unexpected' or particularly tragic deaths.

## 2.1. Pre-disposal roles and rituals

### (a) The dying role:

Up until the 19th century, signs that the sick role was about to be abandoned and the dying role commenced, were often sought within omens or portents of death: dogs howling, bees swarming on a dead tree, etc (Obelkevich 1976). Death was interpreted within a framework of religious and superstitious values. The belief in omens, underlined the 'impotence' (Jarvis 1980) of those who became seriously ill. The dying role itself had a high profile within the

community with the deathbed itself raised to a kind of stage whereon the dying person played out a public drama (Mason 1846). Suitable 'last words' provided both moral and behavioural examples, as well as symbolizing hope. The last words spoken by the dying were also the prelude to the last rites of the church, uttered by the local clergyman, whose presence legitimised and boosted the dying role.

Until the 1950's, the dying role was typically undertaken within the home. Children were routinely socialised into an acceptance of death as a natural phenomenon (boosted by the high incidence of infant mortality and death in childhood). By the 1930's however, doubts were beginning to be expressed about the interaction of children with the dead and dying. Willoughby (1938) noted: '..you can never tell what the effect may be on young impressionable minds' (p.19). This was linked to a shift in attitudes to child rearing, whereby children came to be seen as 'inviolable, innocent, precious creatures' (Oakley 1974, p.67) which increasingly curtailed their participation. (7) From the 1950's onwards, children were shielded from death and almost simultaneously its experience was removed from their peer groups.

During the nineteenth century, hospitals were very rarely the scene of death, routinely excluding the poor because they did not want it to reflect badly on them by consigning their dead to pauper funerals (Frazer 1950). As medical science advanced however, the dying role with its crowded bedside and open acknowledgement of death, proved incompatible with hospital bureaucracy and its life oriented ideology. As suggested by Kastenbaum and Aisenburg (1972), the dying were encouraged to exchange the dying role for the less tragic role of the chronically sick. Medicalisation redefined death as an

incurable illness with an infinitely moveable boundary, rather than an inexplicable mystical human condition. Within a short period of time, hospitals had denied role players a locus for death interaction and had substantially removed the legitimising role play of the clergy. The authority of hospital chaplains was subordinated to that of the Consultants in charge.

The social role of dying became illegitimate. Restrictions on visiting hours and the bureaucratic atmosphere of the hospital, also made it unlikely that relatives would be at the side of the dying when he or she approached the moment of death. The dying role could therefore be acknowledged only within the last few hours of life; the dying person achieved death when the hospital announced it over the telephone. This 'reality-stripping' process was accentuated by further losses of control of the individual over his or her death, e.g. by technological advances enabling the cerebrally dead to be kept alive by artificial means and by legislative changes occurring during the 1960's whereby rights and obligations once enforceable through the medium of the will, were nullified. In 1965, the next of kin were enabled to cremate the dead person despite his or her wishes for burial and in 1969 only their consent was held to be necessary to remove organs from the body, regardless of the wishes of the deceased. This disregard for the wishes of the dying or deceased underwrote their impoverished social status. By the early 1980's however, hospices had begun to promote the idea that dying was an experience to be enhanced rather than despised, but since they tend to specialise within the area of cancer, the dying role remains only selectively available.

(b) The preparation of the body:

From the earliest Christian period, women took charge of the corpse. The laying out or 'streeking' was performed on a laying out board: the corpse was washed and wrapped in a winding sheet or linen shroud. Prayers were said around the dead person and the laying out women received the clothes or other possessions of the deceased as payment. All of these Christian funeral rites, in their original form, reflected Roman traditions, where the deceased was 'called three times by name, the body was washed and left with face uncovered whilst mourners wept..' (Peron Autret 1979, p.89).

Over time, women remained the carriers of death culture. During the period 1840 - 1915 which Oakley associates with a decline in the employment of married women outside the home, working class women were 'increasingly likely to follow the middle class pattern' of 'a rising belief in women's natural domesticity' (p.50). Significantly, the period of the greatest expansion of death ritual runs parallel with the confinement of women to the home and the subsequent enlargement of domestic culture when the rites of the family became markers of overweening social importance.

The superstitious and domestic etiquette of death behaviour immediately following a death, created the social role of the mourner. People in the Victorian period and earlier, were not simply bereaved, they assumed the responsibilities and behaviour of a different role in society. As a mourner, a number of clearly defined activities had to be undertaken, from the overseeing of the preparation of the body either by relatives or laying out women, to

the covering of mirrors, the opening of windows, the 'telling' of the animals (including the bees), the adornment of the house, the assumption of mourning dress, the viewing of the body and the arrangements for the disposal and post disposal rituals.

Superstitions such as the covering of mirrors owe little to orthodox religion and constitute what Clark (1981) terms 'deviant religious values'. Obelkevitch (1976) suggests that one should not overestimate the influence of orthodox religious belief during the early nineteenth century. There had been a divergence between elite and popular culture since the seventeenth century and common religious values compensated for the loss of the iconography of the medieval church: the saints, the incense and the mysticism. Following this argument, a loss of belief in the afterlife and the general secularisation which many writers (Aries 1983, Morley 1971) suggest were the major factors in the loss of death ritual, are only some of the factors contributing to its dilution. The loss of the superstitious domestic culture is of equal, if not more importance.

Although by the 1930's corpse linen was no longer part of a trousseau, the majority of people still had everything ready. This preparation denoted a continuing acceptance of death and its social roles. 'They still had everything ready..white nightdress, white socks, clean white sheets, white handkerchief for over the face, ready in a drawer..clean sheets, pillow cases, the lot. (Funeral director MX/PS). Clark (1981) notes that laying out women continued to tend the corpse into the 1980's in rural areas. In the cities they remained ubiquitous into the 1950's. 'Old midwives, not necessarily registered, helped the Doctor, attended the births and deaths, sat in

during illness and laid the body out in the house. Before the Second World War, 90% were like that. And the local funeral directors used to rely on these ladies because they were a source of supply for the work' (Funeral director MX/PS).

Laying out women then, the original carriers of death culture, held key roles in connecting undertakers with their source of revenue. Their disappearance was subsequently seen by funeral directors not only as a result of a gradual demand for 'professional people' (for qualified doctors and nurses at the time of death), but also as a result of laying out women pricing themselves out of the market. 'The problem was...there were those about, who worked for the most remuneration. Now if the Co op offered them a pound and you were only giving them ten shillings, well then they'd send all the work to Co op you see.' (Funeral director MX/PS). The role of the laying out woman was at first an aid and then became an adjunct of inter-firm competition and an obstacle to the progress of occupational control. Undertakers gradually took it upon themselves to lay out the body in the home or to take it to their funeral parlours for 'treatment'.

The medical profession were instrumental in promoting this move and thereby aided specialisation. The Medical Officer of Health in North City in 1924 in a speech to local undertakers, deplored the custom of the bereaved keeping the body within the home on the table and removing it at meal times. 'He was well aware of course, that people would not have their dead removed to a public mortuary. They didn't like it and they wouldn't have it, but he did not think there would be the same objection if private consecrated mortuaries were available. The public needed to be educated along these lines, and he

was sure that undertakers could do a great deal..in the way of impression on people the necessity of getting the burial over as soon as possible' (BUA Monthly, February 1924). Willoughby (1936) in a book of etiquette similarly illustrated the part played by the medical profession in the professionalisation of the management of death, stating that the doctor would give the name of a suitable undertaker and that the undertaker would then offer his assistance. 'In this way, the person who is perfectly ignorant of the proper procedure is passed on from one authority to another and is guided throughout with valuable information' (preface). Increasingly the proper procedures have been deflected from accepted superstitious observances and turned towards the expert advice of specialists. During this process, the dying role, together with that of the laying out woman and the bidder, began to fail.

(c). The ritual of viewing the body

Misson (1697) noted that bodies were left to lie for three or four days to give the dead person '...an Opportunity of coming to life again..' (p.90). Nevertheless, despite the advances of medical science, viewing as a ritual has survived till the present time and is often a continuous social process until the day of the funeral. Roberts (1984) noted that: 'Children made a common habit of visiting a house where someone had just passed away to ask reverently to view the body, a request that was never refused' (p.124). Throughout the 1930's the majority of friends and relative still viewed bodies in their homes. (Funeral director MX/PS): '..you would normally expect the coffin to be left open so that anybody could go and see.' Significantly, neither the miasmatic theories of the hygienists in the 1840's, nor the growth of medicine and hospitalisation per se, nor

the efforts of etiquette specialists such as Willoughby, had any lasting effect on the domestic and superstitious ritual of viewing the dead. Hole (1961) states that in 1959 normal practice in Birmingham was for the corpse to remain in the house and visitors were still expected to touch it. The pre disposal ritual of the dead 'lying in state' for viewing continued to filter down from the top and showed immense stability over time. In 1952 on the death of King George VI, 300,000 persons were estimated to have passed the coffin in Westminster. Despite their almost blanket disapproval of death ritual, the churches condoned the practice. In Leeds, in 1932, the churches had campaigned together for 'the three primary decencies' in a public housing scheme: 'a food store, a third bedroom and a place to lay out the dead'. (Ravetz 1974, p.61). Several decades elapsed before raised standards of hygiene, high rise flats and a loss of death knowledge were instrumental in undertakers assuming total control of the body and removing it from the home.

#### d. Embalming

One of the major factors enabling the continuity of viewing was the technique of embalming. This was first introduced in 1750 by John Hunter and originally involved complete evisceration of the body, excepting the brain, with the cavities being stuffed with aromatic bran - a technique most often used in vault burials. It continued until the first quarter of the nineteenth century when it was carried out by draining the body fluids. Farrell (1980) argues that the American civil war was responsible for boosting the early popularity of embalming in the United States, (thus achieving something that a variety of wars including the Crimean, the Boer, World Wars One and Two and the Korean war failed to achieve in Britain). Again,

unlike the situation in the United States, the British government took little interest in embalming and it was not until the recent Falklands War in the 1980's that a team of embalmers were actually flown to the battlefields to prepare the war dead for transportation back to Britain.

In Britain, the optimum psychological period for pressing the case for embalming would have been the late 1880's when the technology was available and the climate (for the celebration of death) acceptable. But at that time and for the following century, despite their newly formed professional association, undertakers remained small tradesmen, suspicious of the need to learn new skills, confident in their hold over death knowledge and unprepared to establish the necessary new facilities.

The British Institute of Embalmers was eventually created in 1926, after a meeting of 12 embalmers in a Soho cafe, but skilled embalmers were slow to press for recognition and it was not until 1929 that the BIE was recognized by the Board of Trade and became an incorporated company and not until the 1960's that membership of the Institute passed the 1,000 mark. This demonstration of occupational apathy has been a hallmark of British undertaking by comparison with American standards. By the 1960's the British Institute of Embalmers was still a long way from fulfilling its four original ideals: (i) the promotion of the science until it became an established part of every funeral practice; (ii) the provision of tuition and the examination of students; (iii). postgraduate training; and (iv) the recognition of embalming and embalmers by the general public and the government. Embalming eventually displayed growth in Britain not from promotion

within the profession as in the United States, but from social and technological changes in the wider society, such as geographical mobility causing delays in funerals and increasing rail, air and car travel and their concomitant ability to maim and disfigure. The tragedy of Aberfan when a coal tip demolished a school full of children in the 1960's gave British embalmers their biggest social recognition when 35 embalmers repaired the extensively injured and mud caked bodies of 128 children and 28 adults, enabling them to be viewed by relatives and friends. Embalming teams were formed that could be called out to deal with major tragedies, in particular with airline crashes. With increasing air travel, instances of death occurring abroad also multiplied and embalming became a necessity when relatives wished the dead to be brought home for burial and cremation.

By the 1980's it was estimated that 25% or 161,500 cases were being embalmed per annum, although the survey figures were not fully representative - with only a 29% return rate. In this country, embalming is not as Kellehear (1984) suggests, '*structurally a carry over of the cosmetic industry for the living*' (p.718) nor '*an affirmation of normal capitalist marketing strategy*' (p.719), but instead relates to the aspirations of a minority of funeral directors and embalmers to attain a professional status. In 1975, at the BIE Conference, a solicitor gave a talk on Registration stating that he had been asked to '*explore the various opportunities which were open to the Institute to achieve a status whereby only qualified personnel were able to practise the science of embalming*'. The speaker noted that the guiding principle was that of '*public interest*'. '*The end however, was clearly to establish a closed shop and therefore*

considerable difficulties would arise unless it could be shown that the interests of the public were protected by having a monopoly.' (Bellew 1975, p.13).

(e) Lying in state: the coffin as centrepiece

The coffin, the erstwhile original status symbol of the dead remains the central ritual artefact of the funeral. Over time, details of its composition, manufacture and cost have increasingly been withheld from the public. Undertakers have strengthened their occupational control by refusing to allow coffins to be purchased as goods without the accompanying services.

Coffins of the Victorian period were normally of elm, the joints sealed with pitch and then stuff or shoddy used to form the mattress. The shoddy was raised at the head end to form a pillow and the whole covered with a shaped piece of silk. For those who could afford it, Nottingham lace dangled over the edges hiding the tacks in the coffin. For many centuries, only the rich had been buried in coffins, thus the coffin itself, usually covered in rich velvet, became a symbol of wealth and class distinction. The poor, by stark contrast, were wrapped in a sheet, viewed in their beds and deposited into the earth sometimes without the sheet since it was often used for another burial.

Coffin acquisition later filtered down through the social scale, commissioned from the village joiner by those of the working classes who could afford it. Until the provision of electricity in the 1920's, the making of a coffin was a lengthy business, beginning with the collection of the wood, its drying out and the planing up by

hand. With the manufacture of chipboard coffins in the 1960's, traditional handmade oak and elm coffins became exceptional. The smallest undertaker could obtain chipboard coffin sets, ready to make up from the wholesaler or coffins could be obtained ready made where there was insufficient labour. The provision of wood veneered coffins with plastic silvered handles, achieved a major and striking effect on the class nature of the funeral. For the first time it was possible to buy a cheap coffin which looked to the uninitiated like oak but which cost considerably less. At the same time, the increasing popularity of cremation meant that it was less sound in consumer terms to purchase a solid oak or elm coffin that would be consigned to the flames. Finally, the standardization of ready made coffins curtailed consumer choice since undertakers could only afford to carry a handful of different 'lines'. From being individual craftsmen made status symbols, one coffin very much began to resemble another.

As a compensatory mechanism, funeral directors began to expand the interior furnishing of coffins. New lines of clothes for the corpse with matching coffin linings were introduced. The 1960's saw the beginning of the provision of coloured gowns and matching silk coverlets. The new gowns were fashioned after bridesmaids dresses for the women and after dressing gowns for the men.

f. The role of the Mourner and the wearing of mourning dress

The expansion of the mourner's role during the Victorian period was aided by the promotion of the fashion trade and textile industries and by the example of the middle classes. By the late nineteenth century, the middle classes were wearing deep mourning for a year and a day and

then assuming half mourning (Taylor 1983).

It tends to be overlooked that men also assumed the role of mourner and were subjected to a formal etiquette of their own. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the mourning 'crape' armband previously worn within the navy, was appropriated by civilians. The width of the armband was regulated by the relationship of the mourner to the deceased: this social marking out of the male mourner remained until the late 1950's (and remains during the 1980's within the armed services). Thus although women swamped themselves in black for a short period, men have continued to maintain the social symbolism of the mourner for a much longer period of time. Gorer's survey also found that that black was worn more often at funerals by men than by women.

According to Taylor (p.219), the peak years of mourning etiquette were between 1835 and 1885. The market was swamped with black gowns, shawls, gloves, hats, tablecloths, palls for coffins, palls for hearses, covers for the horses, fans and jet jewellery. Thereafter, the boom subsided, which Taylor links to a widespread crisis in trade and the slump of fabric sales. Thus the raw materials of mourning were disappearing before the advent of the first World War and the gradual onset of secularization. In common with other writers however, (e.g. Gorer 1965, Lerner 1981) Taylor suggests that the terrible slaughter of the first World War caused the major breakdown in funeral and mourning etiquette (p.267). The wearing of unrelieved black for example was destructive to general morale. Aries (1983) argued that the community reversed its role and forbade the mourning which it was responsible for imposing until the twentieth century

because it felt 'less and less involved in the death of one of its members' (p.612). In fact the primary breakdown appeared when the community felt too involved with the deaths of its members (8).

This was not the only factor. There were others that were of growing importance. With the slow exodus of women from the home, the demands of the mourning role became incompatible with those of the workplace. The strictures of lengthy mourning were also inimicable with the demands of housewifery when middle class housewives began to lose their domestic servants. Changes, shortening the formal period of mourning also filtered down from the top of the class structure. Following the death of Edward VII, there was a mourning period of one year. In 1936 The Times Court Orders for the funeral of George V carried an announcement which shortened the mourning period to nine months (Taylor 1983, p.273). And in 1952 for the death of George VI, the mourning period was further slashed from the then current period of six months, to ten weeks (p.280).

Black was nevertheless retained as the overweening feature of the funeral. '...they wanted to keep the black. It gave a funeral dignity, black.' (F.Dir.MX/PS) However it gradually vanished from lesser items such as handkerchiefs and notepaper: the economic shortages of the Second World War finally dislodged it from its former pre-eminence. The Yorkshire Post & Leeds Mercury (August, 1942), reported the diminished wearing of mourning clothes in London despite air raid and fighting casualties and advanced three reasons: that women could not spare enough coupons for an entirely black outfit; that dyers could no longer promise to execute rush orders to

convert coloured garments and that there was a growing feeling among the younger generation that the wearing of colours was not a mark of disrespect to the dead. For economic reasons, the rituals of writing letters of condolence and sending mourning cards, also began to decline.

The 1950's saw the last concerted appearance of the hat at funerals. Lurie (1981,p179) suggests that its disappearance was accompanied by 'a severe slippage of formal etiquette in society at large'. The loss of the hatted congregation also indicated the loss of rules of precedence and seating. Strangers were introduced by their first names. The loss of the element of dressing to impress at a funeral also reflects the downgrading of its communal nature.

The acceptance of cremation in the 1960's brought about a changed perception of death as an 'instant' occurrence. The old visualisations of the corpse slowly disintegrating in the grave over a period of months or years, gave the long term assumption of mourning a certain incongruity. With the abandonment of black clothing, the hat and formal rules of behaviour, mourners also eschewed the public acting out of grief. The dramatic formality of mourning had previously provided a stage on which grief could be legitimately played out by the main actors. The more low key the proceedings became in terms of dress, display and formality, the more it detracted from the role of the mourner. By the 1980's it is suggested, the role had come under extreme pressure. The dying role had already been dismantled so that the mourner could not relate naturally to the dying; pre disposal rituals had been removed from the home, reducing the venues of mourning. It followed, without the

necessity for any kind of taboo, that social interaction after bereavement would become far more problematic.

g. The funeral procession

From earliest times, mourners have always 'processed' in a solemn file after the body on its way to the ceremony of disposal. The procession dramatised the last journey and acted as a memento mori for society at large. In common with most death rituals, the procession reached its peak during the Victorian period, but it was much changed by the effects of new technology. In the latter half of the century, the Metropolitan Interment Act (Morley 1971) closed many cemeteries within the cities, making wheeled transport a necessity and affecting the slow pace of the funeral.

Initially, hearses were closed carriages resembling square boxes covered with palls. Glass sided hearses appearing in 1870 did not need a pall, which therefore began to die out, except for very grand funerals. The procession illustrates the constant adaptations made by undertakers to an apparently unchanging ritual in response to continuous change in the wider society and also underlines the interrelatedness of funeral ritual and social structure. The procession faded in glamour just before the outbreak of the First World War and subsequently held a lower profile within death ritual. One of the main factors was lack of manpower. 'Specialist teams of undertakers were sent out to the front. So there were no men left to act as mutes, featherbearers etc. The men were not there and so the rituals could not be carried out' (Litten 1983) (9). Although motor vehicles arrived after the First World War, horses were still used to draw the hearses at the outbreak of the Second World War in many

areas and not only in rural areas. In North city, horses were still in use after 1945. At the same time, in some rural areas, funerals were 'walked' even as late as the 1940's. 'There might be one cab and the rest walked. You'd to go at speed of slowest - it took you half an hour' (F.Dir.SK/PS). It was also common practice for relatives and friends to carry the coffin in the procession to the grave. Although this ritual continues at the present time where a particular request is made, as a general rule, undertakers took over after the Second World War. '..it used to be friends or relations till t'war, then during war when they wouldn't let folks off their work, it got broken off' (Fir.Dir.SK/PS).

By the 1950's most undertakers either had their own cars and motor hearses or hired them from Carriage Masters. In the changeover to the new mode of transport, undertakers were careful to replicate the original pattern and pace of the funeral retaining a sense of tradition. Later factors such as the popularity of cremation, the building of crematoria on the edges of cities and towns, the spread of car ownership and the impersonality of urban life, combined to reduce the importance of the procession as ritual. But the protocol is still observed at either end of the procession and the tenacity of these observances over centuries of rapid change indicate not only a continuing psychological and social need for ceremonial, as suggested by Pickering (1974) but also the types of techniques of occupational control utilised by funeral directors.

## 2.2. Disposal roles and rituals

(a) The disposal service and the changing attitudes of the clergy  
After centuries of clergy control of the management of death, Wilkinson (1978) suggests that by the First World War, 'the ministry of the church of England to the dying and bereaved had become confused. Biblical criticism, emphasis on a social gospel, evolution, liberal views of the love of God and a materialistic type of science had been steadily eroding the old clear cut doctrines about heaven and hell which up to the mid 19th century had been broadly held in common by the majority of Christians for centuries' (p.175). The war helped to illustrate the extent of the gulf between orthodox and common religious beliefs, as chaplains encountered good luck charms, fatalism and belief in the supernatural. (10).

Subsequently it became fashionable for the clergy to remark upon the lamentable amount of unbelief with which they were surrounded. 'How many nominal Churchmen there are! They swarm in every parish..Most people had been content to be just average Christians, middling Christians, commonplace Christians' (The Vicar of Pudsey, 1927). Some twenty years later, similar themes re-surfaced in the same paper: 'The great mass of the nation stood apart from all the churches most of them completely ignorant of the elementary truths of the Christian faith and looking upon religion as something irrelevant to their daily lives,' (The Archbishop of York, 1952).

Despite this apparent lack of belief, the religious framework of the disposal of the dead was retained and the dead (at least nominally) remained in the care of the clergy. Underlying this apparent

acceptance of church authority however, there was a growing perception of the impotence of the clergy. As Gorer (1965) noted, they had become technicians, saying the 'right words' but otherwise having little influence on the conduct of death ritual.

Nevertheless, the First World War underlined the importance of disposal rituals and illustrated how ritual was displaced within another part of the framework when they were temporarily unobtainable. During the Boer War, concession to ritual had been shown by the marking of graves with steel crosses (Longworth 1967) but the war dead, denied a burial in Britain, left large numbers of mourners without a tangible spot to mark. Lacking the emotional release of disposal rituals, the result was a temporary enlargement of 'post disposal rituals'. *Memorial services and memorialisation* increased to accommodate the bereaved's feelings of loss. Memorial booklets, photographs of overseas memorials, photographs of the deceased, together with locks of their hair or their possessions all assumed proportionately greater importance. As death became increasingly medicalised, the clergy were less often the first at the scene of death and their influence waned. Imperceptibly the business norms of undertakers began to inform death rituals rather than the metaphysical concerns of either the church or the domestic culture. Although they grudgingly began to work in harness with the lower status undertakers, clergy-undertaker occupational struggles were brought into the open as undertakers began to build bigger and better establishments, lifting religious symbolism in the process and using it for their own 'chapels'.

As the professional status of the clergy sank, so the occupational

status of undertakers rose. Contributing to this increment in status was the increasing bureaucratisation of death which made it necessary for the undertaker to have a wide range of new technical knowledge at his fingertips. In 1842 also, medical considerations and the miasmatic theory of disease had begun to oust religious principles, opening up a once narrowly religious area to a host of medical and public health officials.

The clergy continued to lose territory during the 1960's as cremation finally gained acceptance and increasingly funeral services were held in crematoria chapels instead of within the parish church. Towler and Coxon (1979) argue that 'the displacement of the churches from a central to a peripheral role in society' became a 'fait accompli' in the 1960's (p.3). 'From the years immediately prior to the First World War....the Church of England maintained the same position' (p.28). Thereafter, there would be substantial changes.

One of these changes was initiated by the growing popularity of the new method of disposal. Although the Romans had used cremation, it had fallen into disuse with the christianisation of Britain. The early cremationists (11) were regarded as much of a cranky minority group as are the present cryonicists. In 1879, the Borough analyst of Hull, lectured on the merits of this method of disposal but felt that society was not ready for it. (Foster 1984).

A crematorium built in Surrey in 1878 was unable to operate in the absence of the necessary legislation. Two bereaved males served as the catalysts for legislative changes. Hanham in Dorset cremating two relatives in 1882 and Price in Wales in 1884 cremating his five month

old child in a ten gallon cask of petroleum. Price was tried before a jury at the Cardiff Assizes and was acquitted: the decision being that cremation in England was not illegal provided that it was conducted in such a manner as not to constitute a nuisance. A later decision in the Ecclesiastical Courts agreed that it was not against canon law although it was felt to be abhorrent to Christian practice.

Several writers (e.g. Morley 1971) have argued that the introduction of cremation indicated that a profound shift in religious belief had been accomplished and that the new method of disposal together with the decline in formalised mourning were closely connected with the decay of institutional religion. Wilson and Levy (1938) on the other hand argue more convincingly that the movement owed more to the needs of sanitation and economics.

Despite the new technology its acceptance was slow. In 1885 there were three cremations; 1887: 13; 1912: 1,000; 1936: 10,000, (Morley 1971). It was not until 1960 that figures began to rise dramatically, with 204,019 cremations in that year. By 1972, the numbers had risen to 375,773. (12)

Lack of familiarity, the greater distance to crematoria, the lack of publicity and media promotion, the lack of a body and the lack of rituals relating to ashes, mitigated against its acceptance. Wilson and Levy also felt that the Imperial War Graves Commission by its custodianship of the war dead had '...tended to discourage, rather than to encourage cremation' (p.189). Nor were examples set at the top of the social hierarchy: heads of State and the British Royal Family continued to embrace burial (13).

Although Bishop Gore, one of the leaders of the Anglican church endorsed cremation in 1924 and although conferences of cremation authorities were held regularly from 1922, the new method of disposal won little acceptance. It was not until 1936 when leading cremationists from 11 European countries met to discuss their various problems and the possibility of forming a permanent international organization that cremation began to provide a new knowledge base for an expanding and largely state bureaucracy. The International Cremation Federation was officially instituted in 1937 but cremation made little progress until it was actively pushed by both private and municipal crematoria owners by the financial loading of burial over cremation. There were other crucial enabling factors such as the manufacture of cheap chipboard coffins, their acceptance by the undertakers and the public, the sympathetic landscaping of crematoria grounds, the introduction of innovative and cheaper memorials such as inscriptions in books and scrolls of remembrance, changes in the Roman Catholic attitude to cremation, increased geographical mobility negating the social duty of grave tending, increasing clergy constraints on the type of memorials allowed in churchyards and the increased building of crematoria. All of these social factors taken together it is suggested, were more heavily weighted than the primary reason given within much of the literature, that of the decline of a belief in the resurrection.

Small technological rituals and new procedures were provided to surround cremation with the requisite ceremonial which had always accompanied death; their acceptance by the bereaved confirming the importance of religiously coloured ceremonial over purely doctrinal considerations. Concomitantly the clergy suffered further losses of

authority as crematoria were furnished with prayerbooks or printed service sheets on the decisions of municipal committees. Local authorities began to dictate the exact length of time allowed for the disposal service and clergy who overran were harried to provide a quicker performance. Increasingly, religious rites were tailored to the demands of rational bureaucracy.

Overall, cremation threw open the death system to an increasing number of new occupations and served to fragment control of the management of death. The simple quartet of doctor, clergy, undertaker and mason was now augmented by an explosion of bureaucratic personnel. Ultimately it would undermine the occupational status of both the clergy and the monumental mason since these groups relied upon their enhanced pre industrial status rather than taking steps to expand and protect their territories. The undertakers however, were better organized and if they could not entirely control the management of death, determined to co-ordinate the activities of all those who did.

As funeral homes improved during the 1960's there was a tendency for the bigger establishments to build their own service chapels. In many parts of the country, the Anglican clergy mounted a rearguard action to prevent themselves becoming mere adjuncts to funeral establishments as they already were to crematoria - bishops forbade clergy to conduct services on the premises. This however only had the effect of opening the door to Methodists and other nonconformist ministers who would happily carry out funeral services for those of doubtful commitment. Pushed further and further to the edge of the death system, clergy were burdened by increasing parochial duties,

duties, especially in urban centres; by ever diminishing numbers of clergy; by a loss of social recognition in the changing nature of their role (moving towards the organization of group and committee activities) and by a further loss of confidence on the part of congregations engendered by revisionism. Fenn (1984) suggests that the period up until 1980 allowing new forms of worship to be tried out, was not used wisely. The old prayerbook was removed and the funeral service now involved mourners in giving many more responses. The loss of the religious language of death with its familiar phraseology, alienated the bereaved who were used to the old magical resonances and emphasized the gulf in understanding (14). The only area of improvement and progress was the inclusion of Prayers in the Alternative Service Book (1980) which could be used at the burial or cremation of a stillborn child. A small concession to public needs which had taken nearly a century to materialise.

Finally, cremation facilitated the introduction of individual choice into death ritual and again broadened the scope for common religious values to the detriment of orthodox religious beliefs. Mourners, supported by funeral directors, were increasingly able to put together their own personalised ritual, choosing popular songs instead of hymns. Lahr (1978) describes how playwright Joe Orton's coffin was carried down the aisle to the tape recorded music of the Beatles' 'A day in the Life'....Harold Pinter read Marion Lochhead's 'Nox Est Perpetua', Donald Pleasance read his own poem 'Hilarium Memoriam J.O.' This personal involvement in the production of ritual represented one of the few discernible steps taken by the bereaved towards accepting some responsibility for the character and production of death ritual.

### 2.3. Post disposal roles and rituals

#### a. The Funeral Tea

The ritual feast after the disposal of the dead body originally marked the entry of the deceased into the afterlife and also provided a symbolic 'last contact' between bereaved and deceased. The Romans feasted with their dead, sometimes literally beside the grave; in the Middle Ages, guild members bequeathed money to provide funeral dinners for members of their company (15). At the funerals of the rich, it was customary to take an opportunity to emphasize the ephemerality of life. As well as mulled wine and savoy biscuits, mourners were given two Naples biscuits sealed in paper to carry home. The paper itself was printed with explicit symbols such as coffins, crossbones, skulls and hourglasses, ('T.B' 1802). As life expectancy increased over time, the coffins and skulls vanished. However the festive element remained important, especially in the North of England where funeral teas included the provision of ham, beef and mutton together with alcoholic refreshments. Obelkevich (1976) suggested that the function of the funeral feast was to help survivors to adjust to the loss of the deceased and reaffirmed 'the solidarity of the community and its will to live' (p.64). There is little doubt however that the provision of the funeral tea was very much part and parcel of the whole idea of social duty. An idea which was bolstered by undertakers who began to offer the provision of the tea as a further service (Curl 1972).

Although the privations and losses of the First World war lessened the lavishness of funeral teas, they continued to form an important part of the ritual. When the Co operative Service entered the funeral business in the 1930's many of its establishments in the North of England were

built with catering rooms. In terms of active participation this could be seen as a backward step for the bereaved which added to the monopoly of the management of death by professionals. Rationing during the Second World War further reduced the concept of lavish provision although especially in the North of England, a good spread was still expected. 'They used to have some sort of tea at every funeral. They used to say if they didn't bury them with ham it were a bit of a pauper's funeral' (F.Dir.SK/PS).

During the Victorian era, the funeral tea marked the commencement of the social period of mourning. Within fifty years however, it had begun to mark the end of the mourning period. Willoughby (1936) declared: '...the best way of facing the new conditions is for a person to throw himself wholeheartedly into the work he is called upon to do and leave himself no time to think' (p.59). After the funeral tea, instead of continued mourning, it was understood that the mourner would start the long process of recovery.

Despite its tenacity, (Gorer noted that it was the most widely spread ritual of mourning in Britain in the 1960's), the funeral tea has diminished in importance. It remains only as a minor ritual based on a continuing need to support the bereaved and not to leave them immediately after the disposal ceremony. The DHSS Survey (1980) pointed out that the common theoretical argument that attendance of kin at a funeral gives support to the bereaved has validity only at a conceptual level since the bereaved are in no condition to perceive who is there. The survey argued that it was the 'other kin' who obtained a sense of solidarity, by noticing whom of their kin attended. At the funeral tea however, the bereaved are in a better state to notice who

has turned up. Thus it does have a continuing supportive function and also provides a de-briefing session: a chance to unwind after the drama of the funeral, to discuss aspects of the performance, to introduce and discuss the deceased and to 'round off' the ritual before returning to 'normality'.

(b) Ash rituals

Amongst the innovative effects of cremation was a new extension of the post disposal rituals which went some way towards countering the loss of the mourning period. After the disposal ceremony of cremation there was an opportunity to attend a further ceremony of 'ash scattering' or strewing or a ceremonial burying of the ashes. The clergy by reluctantly allowing the burial of ashes within their churchyards now enabled death to be celebrated by both a cremation and a subsequent burial. The scattering of the ashes within the crematorium also provided a further social occasion for making symbolic contact with the deceased and for the enlargement and aggrandisement of the ritual by crematoria personnel. Since the clergy played little part in ash scattering ceremonies at the crematoria they would eventually become part of the body of new common religious values informing death ritual generally.

(c) Memorialisation

In the earliest Christian churchyards, graves were marked by a cross, either of stone or wood. During the sixteenth century, the post disposal ritual of memorialisation was boosted by a growing industry specialising in the production of monuments and brasses. As with the bulk of death ritual the expansion was class based. During the attacks on funeral expenditure in the seventeenth century, it was felt that if

all classes were able to buy large monuments, the visual cues to hierarchy would be seriously undermined. Expensive memorialisation ensured that the deceased carried their high status into the afterlife, and its portraiture reassured the dying that physical death would not erase their memory.

Despite the fact that if the grave was only a temporary resting place until the resurrection, excessive expenditure on memorialisation was hardly justified, the exponential expansion of memorialisation added further weight to the suggestion that the doctrine of the resurrection carried less importance than considerations of class and status. Memory preservation was difficult if not impossible for the poor, whose graves were either unmarked or given a wooden or stone marker. Aries (1983) contends that it was 'the death of the other' and increased affectivity which led to the cult of remembrance during the Victorian period but this effectively ignores the class based nature of memorialisation and the dearth of predisposing physical and social conditions during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The fear of body snatchers from 1777 onwards (Foster 1984), encouraged the cult of memorialisation. '...those who could afford it erected iron palisades around their tombs sealed with huge slabs of stone often devoid of any christian symbol' (Wilson and Levy 1938, p.16). Graves became 'safe' again after the legislation of the First Anatomy Act in 1832 but private graves and memorialisation remained beyond the reach of the poor with common grave interments increasing in line with the rise of private cemeteries attuned to the profit motive.

Despite the fact that the early tombs formed prominent and integral pieces of church architecture, the clergy resented a growing trend

towards the democracy of death ritual. The banishment of class based cues undermined the tidy, hierarchical order within a parish whilst the encroachment of symbolism uninformed by religious doctrine promoted common religious values. 'The display of modern tombstones, monuments etc' was seen as '..a modern development which has the authority of neither early Christian rites nor of traditional English custom (and) is strongly resented by many church authorities.'

(Wilson and Levy 1938 p.100). Showing signs of concern for the dual attack on clergy authority, the Report of the Central Council for The Care of Churches (1931) strongly denounced 'the decay of public taste, the widespread lack of knowledge of what is required, the commercial outlook and methods of many providers of gravestones' (p.9).

The 'providers of gravestones' had remained craft and caste based, small businesses passed on from father to son in total occupational control: obtaining stone from local quarries, shaping it, carving the letters and fixing the monument in the churchyard. The high costs of providing memorials confined them to the upper and middle classes for several centuries but the importation of marble during the mid eighteenth century, encouraged the growth of a new class of wholesalers who began to sell the wares of the Italian masons. Later, technological changes forced improvements and diversification in the provision of memorials. For example, new technology in the shape of improved transport meant that Aberdeen granite could be used as well as local stone and the invention of the Jenny Lind, a rotary polisher which grinds surfaces allowed the introduction of polished memorials. It was inevitable, given the cluttered and lavish styles with which the Victorians decorated their buildings that this should overflow

into memorialisation. During this period the plain slab or cross was increasingly exchanged for a plethora of bird baths, angels, statuary and vaults, driving a further wedge between bereaved and clergy and providing a clear illustration of the kinds of common religious values informing understandings of the afterlife.

Two World Wars positively promoted the need for memorialisation. During the First World War, Longworth (1967) describes how masons were canvassed to see which firms were big enough to cope with the unprecedented demand for headstones. The Monumental Masons Federation undertook to cope with the provision of half a million inscribed stones in not less than six years. Contracts were set up with nine different firms and masons demobilised and trained. Longworth suggests that 'sheer quantity stimulated inventiveness' (p.72). A Lancashire firm devised a machine that could trace the patterns of badges and inscriptions onto stone, thus speeding up the cutting. At the same time, this mechanisation devalued the skill of the mason and it was therefore unsurprising that this machine would somehow be 'lost' between the wars. (Longworth 1967).

As a backlash against the ornateness of the Victorian era and a guard against the growing anarchy of public taste, the War Graves commission decided upon uniform plain headstones for the war cemeteries abroad. Some idea of the extent to which memorialisation had become a highly personal and individual ritual, rather than a Christian or religious symbol, can be derived from the extent of the public outcry over the War Graves Commissions decision. Media campaigns attacked the Commission and the general public deplored the veto on personal choice.

The passion which the subject aroused also indicated the growing importance of post disposal rituals to the public. During the wars, the need for a memorial had become less class and status based and more a recognised social and psychological necessity. By common consent the memorial was understood both as a focus for mourning and an aid to mourning and bereavement. By 1927 over 400,000 stones had been erected and a Graves Registration Commission set up, issuing photographs of graves abroad and providing relatives with travel instructions for visiting.

Between the wars, the masons reverted to their old practices and were content to remain lone craftsmen. Instead of liaising with undertakers and local authorities they remained self sufficient within their specialisation and allowed the new methods of territory expansion and self promotion used by others in the death system to pass them by. The consequences of this failure to organise and to keep abreast of modern trends would have serious repercussions for the stability of the craft. After the war granite was again available and the Scottish quarries became overworked leading to a growth of imports from Scandinavia and then from India and South Africa via Italy. Since the British masons now lacked the sophisticated machinery to prepare them, increasingly the finished products could be purchased more cheaply in Italy.

Although the dead of the Second World War amounted to approximately half that of the First World War, there was still a need for around 350,000 headstones (Longworth 1967) and this doubtless promoted a false sense of security within the occupation. The 'lost' pantograph machine which had increased the rate of inscriptions during the First

World War was discovered in a builders yard in Eastbourne and re-developed. When combined with high speed drills it enabled the carving of four headstones a day. By the 1960's and 70's large funeral corporations had begun to purchase and equip masonry branches of their own, often buying in from wholesalers and dispensing almost entirely with the services of local monumental masons. Furthermore, with the increasing interest in cremation as a new form of disposal, small businesses began to fail. From the mid nineteen sixties, with a 50% cremation rate, masons found their market slashed by half and the remaining sector progressively hampered by officialdom. There were around 27 firms of monumental masons in North City in the mid nineteen forties. By 1983, these had shrunk to 3.

The masons' disinterest in organization meant that they lacked the necessary skills and resources to direct public taste. In the absence of any concerted action on their part, the largely municipally controlled cemeteries began to abolish the use of stone kerbs and chippings and 'invented' new forms of memorialisation for the crematoria such as rosebushes, small, plastic kerbside plaques and inscriptions in books or scrolls of remembrance. Initially, columbariums had been used: large, vault like buildings containing niches for the ashes. These required too much space, were quickly filled and easily assumed a dusty, neglected appearance. Natural symbols such as shrubs, flowers and trees, were later found to be less labour intensive, they enhanced the landscape and could be replaced at will. At the same time, the Diocesan Advisory Committees made a concerted effort to re-direct public thinking on memorials and to channel it back towards orthodox religious values. Individual dioceses banned kerbs, railings, statuary, italian marble, polished

granite, leaded letters, and terms of endearment etc.

Further threats to traditional memorialisation came from new technology which allowed the manufacture of perspex headstones. Costing two thirds of those used in traditional memorials, the materials were lighter to handle, could be machine engraved and were easier to clean. Although they were the subject of experiments by the Co-operative Funeral Service at Reading, Welwyn Garden City and Manchester in 1972, over a decade later they had not been endorsed for general use. In part this was due to a concern for their flammability and in part to the belated efforts of the masons to resist their introduction through a concerted campaign. In the 1980's they acquired a public relations team, formed committees and visited Archdeacons, Chancellors and local authority representatives and set about the task of trying to persuade cremation authorities of the necessity for small memorials for cremation, rather than plastic plaques. Looking on philosophically, the funeral directors felt that these occupational strategies to remain a force within the death system and to control the course of memorialisation were 'too little and too late' (F.Dir.FR. Large Corporation).

#### 2.4. The role of the funeral director

Most upper class funerals until the Reformation were carried out by fraternities and guilds. Coffin makers were using a great deal of velvet and so annexed themselves to the Worshipful Company of Upholders or Drapers with the upholders becoming known as undertakers. Wilson and Levy (1938) date the emergence of undertakers in 1698. In rural areas, almost any tradesman could assume the temporary role of undertaker. By the eighteenth century however,

urbanization promoted more specialisation and division of labour. Undertakers multiplied in the cities and extreme competitiveness became an enduring and accepted feature of the occupation.

Undertakers were essentially tradesmen and presented little challenge to the professional and 'status' role of the clergy (Elliott 1972). Chadwick's Report (1843) suggests that undertaking in the 1840's was only followed by men of the lowest type because of the unsavoury conditions of the graveyards. Nevertheless, within a very short period of time, they had closely allied themselves with and modelled their roles upon the clergy, referring to their occupation as a 'calling' and furnishing their premises with religious symbols such as crosses and altars. Although the idea of a 'vocation' proceeded from the original Christian notion that the care and burial of the dead was the last duty one could perform for them and to that extent retained its own implicit 'sacredness', the sacred aspect of the work was increasingly used to negotiate a higher occupational status. This opportunistic rise on the backs of the profession of the clergy, who formerly monopolised abstract knowledge and authority concerning death, would later be replicated by a similar attachment to and alignment with the medical profession when they appropriated responsibility for defining death.

The growth of urbanisation in the nineteenth century and the gradual expansion of the death system to include, clergy, laying out women, bidders, parish committees, monumental masons and cemetery owners led to the undertakers moving beyond the role of tradesman and assuming the more technological role of 'co-ordinator'. Nevertheless, the expansion of the occupation remained uneven. Wilson and Levy (1938)

suggest that except in large towns, it had no widespread existence even as late as 1860 -70. But technical, social and legislative changes within the wider society inevitably contributed to its growth as a specialist group. 1893 saw the formation of the Preston Centre of undertakers with a membership which had reached 59 by 1906. Similar centres formed in other major towns and cities and despite petty jealousies were able to approach local burial boards and to effect some of the changes in cemetery regulations and mortuary facilities which had eluded them as individuals.

By the turn of the century, British undertakers had organized themselves into a semi-professional body. The seeds of the British Undertakers Association originated in a paper given at a Manchester Convention of Undertakers in 1904 by their President, H. Sherry and were formalised in 1905. The handwritten records of the society commenced with a letter to secretaries of undertakers associations in Bristol, Burnley, Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Nottingham and Preston. The first committee meeting was subsequently held in 1905 at the Midland Hotel in Birmingham for the drafting of the rules of the Association. Goals included an effort to raise 'the tone and status of the calling, and to promote the general education of its members'. In 1905 at the First Propagandist Meeting in Birmingham, the North of England Funeral Undertakers Association resolved: 'That this association declare itself in favour of a national federation being formed subject to the details being submitted to each association for consideration before settlement'. Mr. H. Sherry, the secretary stated that 'the national association was called into being in October 1905 at the instance of local associations which desired to federate with a national body in order

by co operative effort to strengthen their hands' (Hurry 1934).

One of the first efforts of the newly formed association of British Undertakers was to regulate members by defining acceptable conduct and promoting their value and integrity to the general public. In 1906 it was resolved to write to the Head Officials of insurance companies where there was evidence of agents 'touting' for funerals. At a second meeting, the objectives of raising the tone and status of the calling and raising the general education of its members in trade matters was ratified. Working to obtain the registration of undertakers was singled out as a primary goal in order to put the calling on the basis of a profession. It is notable that the words 'calling', 'profession', 'service', 'trade' and 'business' were used interchangeably throughout the meetings and that this confused nomenclature revealingly continues throughout the journals to the present time, emphasizing the mixture of occupational aims and the lack of agreed direction.

1908 saw the emergence of the newly formed British Undertakers Association Code of Ethics which laid heavy stress upon the 'peculiar' and magical nature of the job. It was not quite, but almost religious, it was not quite, but almost medical. This allowed it to absorb commonly held values from both professions. The ideal undertaker, it was inferred, needed the qualities of a clergyman as well as those of a medical practitioner together with good business sense and craftsmanship.

The Code of Ethics stressed both the need for betterment and a need

to discard unsavoury associations and acquire a mystique.

1. As an undertaker on entering the business becomes thereby entitled to all its privileges, he incurs an obligation to exert his best abilities to maintain its honour and dignity, to extend its usefulness and to exalt its standing.

2. Secrecy and delicacy when required by peculiar circumstances should be strictly observed. The obligation of secrecy extends beyond the period of our professional service.

Further pledges included those 'not to shrink from the faithful discharge of duties in time of epidemic and contagious diseases and to show willingness to withdraw where two undertakers are called at the same time to attend the same case, leaving the choice to the family.

The sense of mystique was fully exploited in the efforts to move from trade to profession. Coffins, the symbols of trade were gradually removed from undertakers windows (16) and replaced with the symbols of the church, chalices or large crosses. Their removal detracted from the recognition of the coffin as an everyday object and contributed to the increasing social invisibility of death. This considered move also symbolised the appropriation of all knowledge of death into the specialised area of the funeral home.

The First World War enhanced and improved the status of undertakers, alleviating public perceptions of their role as 'scapegoats' who preyed on the dead (17). The Secretary of the BUA attended Appeal Tribunals all over the country to prevent undertakers being sent

overseas. 'My appeal was always...that the work of a funeral director .. was work of national importance' (Hurry, 1934). The importance was underwritten by the 1918 influenza epidemic which was responsible for returning large numbers of undertakers to civil duty. Immediately after the war, in 1919, despite the increased bargaining power of their fledgling Association, the funeral trades were 'in nearly as bad a position as before since the epidemic had used all the stock of coffins and timber of 'every undertaker in the United Kingdom'. Correspondence between Whitehall and the War Office sought 'the immediate demobilisation of all skilled in this trade'..'in order to avoid a breakdown on the part of the undertakers and a consequent scandal.' (BUA Monthly 1934).

Earlier, in a move to assume greater control of the management of death, undertakers had severely limited general access to the goods and trappings of funerals. Wilson and Levy (1938) describe the Carriage Proprietors Association of 1916 as 'a trade cartel or combination'. Claiming that they had been running at a very severe loss owing to increases in wages, cost of fodder and overhead expenses', the Carriage Proprietors agreed for the first time upon a standard charge both for carriage hire to the trade and the public and for the price of funerals. 'These when put into operation and carried out loyally by the members, would place the members of the funeral trade in a position such as they had never been before'. Members further agreed, when some firms refused to join, 'to do no business with any undertaker or funeral Carriage proprietor in the area covered by the London Centre who were not members. Wilson and Levy commented in 1938 that: 'The non members clauses and price fixing arrangements are still in force and a careful study of the

operations of the Association makes it clear that it is in fact, engaged in fixing prices and creating a monopoly so far as it is in a position to do so. It is thus correct to class it as a trade cartel or combination' (p.157). These determined efforts to achieve occupational control soon included strenuous attempts to exclude all part timers. Subsequent local meetings of the BUA throughout the country voiced continuing criticism not only of midwives and laying out women but also of other interlopers such as auxiliary postmen or coal miners who tried to carry out funerals in their spare time. The period was marked by a concerted effort to develop a specialised knowledge of death that would be inaccessible to the lay person.

In addition to draining away common domestic understandings of death and removing its management from the home, undertakers began to guide death rituals along certain lines. Horse feathers did not gradually die out through some natural dilution or attenuation of ritual, but were banned by the association on the grounds that they caused suffering to the animals when wet. *Mutes* (the silent attendants of the procession who symbolized extreme grief) were temporarily removed by the manpower shortages of the war and not replaced afterwards. In the 1930's the tentative use of buses was quickly prohibited.

'unless this evil was laid by the heels it would be extending in many directions..It should be emphasized that there was no decorum in having a funeral consisting of a hearse and a bus' (BUA Monthly 1934). For a long while however, whilst they were successful in constraining ritual into manageable proportions, undertakers were unable to create a demand for new pre disposal rituals: 'During the 1940's and before, there were very, very few people who would accept..a firm who had anything other than white shrouds to

offer.' (F.Dir.MX/PS). This suggests that in some areas of ritual choice it took longer for the superstitious and common religious values to disappear. Efforts were nevertheless made to direct the course of ritual. Articles in the Association Journal of 1923 suggested however that the public could be easily manipulated. 'The mistake is oftimes made that the general public is not open for any great change. This is a delusion and is not a paying proposition either' (p.504). The underlying message was that death rituals were not unchanging and traditional but could be adapted.

Across the Atlantic, the business ethic was more enthusiastically pursued by undertakers and in the 1920's America saw the rise of the funeral home: a combination of clinic, old fashioned parlour and chapel ( Farrell 1980). The preparation and embalming theatre mimicked medical establishments; the reception rooms were decorated to resemble comfortable living rooms; and the chapel borrowed heavily from the established church. But it was not until the 1930's that a substantial number of British funeral establishments began to reflect the amalgamation of the three basic areas noted by Farrell. The BUA Journal illustrated numerous new chapels and other additions which undertakers had made to their establishments (18).

In Britain, the National and local associations tended to be dominated by those who were interested in the ideals of service with the continual stress on collective betterment and professionalisation. At the annual July conference in 1923, the President commented that 'They hoped through their deliberations together year after year to bring their profession up to the standard of the medical profession...' Yet there was a constant struggle

between progression and stability, between the old guard who deplored the new post war technology of motor hearses and the progressives who wished to be rid of horses.

By the end of the 1920's there is some evidence that the progressives were moving towards the appropriation of the body from the home well before the onset of medicalisation and the relocation of death to the hospital. Large numbers of association members throughout the country had already been instructed in 'death sanitation and temporary preservation' (19). The emphasis was entirely upon rendering the body 'medically harmless' rather than upon enhancing its looks. Stress was laid on medicine rather than ritual, although the process would be ritual enabling.

By the 1930's the existing mass of undertakers illustrated the failure of the association to weed out undesirables and part timers. In 1934 in North City five undertakers establishments could be passed in the course of a seven minute walk. 'My father used to be in the habit of missing them because they didn't particularly get on well together. The association brought out a rule, that you couldn't put up a board within two hundred yards of another funeral directors house. Father reported to the Association that Mr. X had put up a board and it was only one hundred and seventy five yards from our house.' (F.Dir. MX/PS). At that time in the city, there were reputed to be about 270 - 300 undertakers who were members of the association plus others who were not. 'So you see you had three hundred people at least, doing funerals.' Competitive enmity was slow to fade. In 1909 a BUA Meeting in North City had claimed that there was 'less jealousy and suspicion among the leading undertakers of the town and there was more general friendliness..'

The major characteristic of British undertaking thus continued to be its competitiveness and a lack of control over who should provide services as an undertaker, and what those services might comprise. For every death there was said to be an average of eight undertakers waiting for the body (20), a statistic which did little to demolish vulturistic connotations. The Associations' answer was for its members to make sure that the business that did accrue was made 'increasingly profitable. One method of achieving this was the institution of secrecy over pricing. The byelaws of the National Association had already prohibited touting for funeral orders and undignified methods of advertising, etc but the Code of Conduct also specified that it was unethical to put the prices of funerals on display. This professional ethic cut both ways since it also became a convenient and lasting cloak for overcharging and malpractice on the part of the less professionally minded. Wilson and Levy (1938) observed: 'Any inquiry into the question of costs in Great Britain is complicated by the practice of tendering for a funeral..by unitemised bill. This procedure has the effect of converting an order for a funeral into a single contract..So far as concerns Great Britain, no comprehensive information of any kind upon this subject is available' (p.120).

With the removal of coffins and funeral fees from the public gaze, the early appropriation of the body and the control of ritual, undertakers could now remark with surprise upon the ignorance' of the general public with regard to death ritual..An article in the BUA Monthly commented: ' the ordinary person knows precious little about the funeral business..He knows little of what you have to offer him. He is ready at such a time in the majority of cases to listen to any suggestion..You are not extracting money from an unwilling patient'

(BUA Monthly, January, 1934).

Having achieved much, the undertakers were secure in their market but divided in their aims and might well have drifted for further years in this apathetic state had not the Co-operative Societies begun to enter the field in large numbers with far reaching consequences. The Co-operative societies built modern funeral homes with chapels of rest and well equipped mortuaries or embalming rooms and also possessed an existing network which enabled funerals to be arranged in many parts of the country. Funeral prices were not purely profit motivated.

Furthermore the co-operatives already enjoyed considerable allegiance and trust among the working classes. By 1964 the co-operatives had taken charge of one fifth of all the deaths in Great Britain. By the end of the decade, the deep division between the co-operatives and private sector funeral directors had become a chasm with the co-operative funeral services claiming to be 'a power in the funeral profession'... 'I think we could lay claim to having given it a position in society that never existed previously' (Presidential address 1969).

Further social factors deriving from the increasing bureaucratisation of death together with the theoretical knowledge of embalming slowly enhanced the options for occupational growth, but there was little progress in the continuing attempts to achieve registration.

Registration would diminish competition, since it was decided that the Board would admit to the proposed register 'only persons of good personal character or in the case of a corporate body of good reputation, only those who have been any three years immediately preceding the commencement of the Act engaged in the business as a funeral director in the British Isles'. Admittance to the register

would be 'dependent upon a period of apprenticeship, which (would cover) three of the five years immediately preceding the commencement of the Act.' Registration would also be the most effective rope on which to hang the ever present spectre of malpractice. The BUA Journal of September 1936 confidently expected that opposition to registration would be forthcoming 'from the less efficient competitors..the cheap men down the back street..' but continuing in a subordinate relationship to the major status occupations of medicine and the church, it lacked the political muscle to persuade those in power that they were worthy of the privilege. The proposals for registration made no headway at all and the Bill was withdrawn.

Although the Second World War gave a further boost to the importance of the occupation it in no way diminished the many internal divisions and shortcomings (21) or advanced its public standing. Undertakers soldiered on in the face of shortages of timber, rationed materials and food rationing, being singled out for a rare moment of public approbation in 1943 by the *Mayor of York for their work during the blitz on the city.*

Post war changes were gradually forced upon the conservatives without the incentive of registration. Many of those who would not go to the expense of building chapels of rest and continued to carry out funerals from their front sitting rooms, went out of business or concentrated on joinery instead. As embalming took hold, actively promoted by the co-operatives, many undertakers were reluctant to spare the time needed from the business to pass the relevant exams and were unable to employ help. The ranks were further reduced by the considerable rise in overheads such as cemetery and cremation fees.

The British Undertakers' Association relabelled itself the British Funeral Directors' Association in 1935 following a growing feeling that the word 'undertaker' had unsavoury connotations. An article in the BUA Monthly (May, 1924), commented that 'The word Undertaker..carries with it a stigma...He is caricatured today as he always was, "Bows and Ends" and bits of things, "Ally Sloper" profile and other things, all of which paint him as a person to be shunned...so long as the word Undertaker is used..the uplift we are working for will be held back, because as I say of the stigma the word carries with it'.

The 1950's saw the beginning of the rise of the commercially minded within the *occupation or what was termed as 'the beginning of the big lads buying up'* (F.Dir.MX/PS), (22). The period from the 1950's - 1960's is commonly seen as 'the era of the big changes' in the management of death. Afterwards, the funeral itself was viewed as 'a completely different thing'.

By the late 1960's a typical large funeral home could cope with over 2,000 funerals per annum and employed around 33 personnel. The public were not entirely unaware of the rapidly developing big business aspect of the funeral industry and by 1969 the Government was being urged to strip the drapes from the cost of dying by referring funeral bills to the Prices and Incomes Board. The Price Commission Report (1977) stated that 'although small firms barely make a living, many of the large undertakers firms make profits that are generous or even high'. Used for generations to the little man around the corner and a strong element of personal service in the management of their death

rituals the public demonstrated unease (23) over the concept of death in the hands of big corporations. The DHSS Survey (1980) confirmed that 'Quite clearly this is an area where what counts above all is quality of service and reputation. Around the same time, a director of one of the largest funeral concerns was quoted as saying: 'It may sound awful, but we are in the business to make money. We regard it as a transport operation getting the dead from the chapel to the cemetery' (Funeral Service Journal, October, 1973). This illustrates the appearance of an enthusiastic and public entrepreneurial embrace of the profit motive by some funeral directors. Others however clung to the traditional, service orientation and in 1969 were still pushing for the Registration of Funeral Directors. Buckland (1969) pointed out that parliament would not be likely to 'entertain an idea that firms, employers or anything of that nature should be supported by an Act of Parliament - it must be individuals' (p.370). Funeral directors were advised to enter into a 'process of consultation' with the Home Office, the Board of Trade, the National Union of Funeral and Cemetery Workers, the Transport and General Workers Union, the Institute of Burial and Cremation Administration, the British Institute of Embalmers and members of the House of Lords and House of Commons' (p.371).

During this period funeral directors generally manifested a new assertiveness and confidence and went on the offensive against others such as the clergy. Battles for occupational control re-surfaced in different parts of the country. The Funeral Director Journal reported in 1964 that clergy had refused to conduct services in the chapel of a new funeral home. Refusing consecration, the archdeacon stated that if every undertaker started doing it '..We should be running about

all over the place..it would be an absolute nightmare.' There was a direct and uncompromising refusal on the part of the Anglican clergy to become part and parcel of a funeral establishment and to assume the occupationally subordinate position that this implied. For their part, funeral directors' patience with the assumption of clergy authority over death rituals evaporated. A stream of criticisms issued in the opposite direction including dissatisfaction with the clergy's often perfunctory funeral 'performances'; with the lack of pastoral visiting of the bereaved before and after funerals; with the clergy's unseemly interest in payment. 'They couldn't give a button couldn't that lot and honestly they're just not interested. And then they want twenty pounds for doing it. And you begin to feel that they are doing it purely as a business' (F.Dir. MX/PS).

During the 1960's and 70's the overt struggles for control also included increasing communication difficulties with local authorities. Small, professionally aspiring groups within local government had shown a pattern of growth and development which paralleled that of funeral directors within the area of death management. In 1906, the superintendents of the principal cemeteries in the United Kingdom were circularised with the view to forming an association. Founded in 1913, the Association was first known as The United Kingdom Association of Cemetery Superintendents. This became the National Association of Cemetery and Crematoria Superintendents in 1932 and The Institute of Burial and Cremation Authorities in 1947.

In 1971, the Co-operative Funeral Service Managers Association Conference deplored the inadequacy of day to day communication with

many local authorities and attempted to lessen their involvement by suggestion that matters affecting funerals should be dealt with by a Consultative panel composed of local funeral directors and clergy as well as representatives of the local authority. The local authorities approached quashed the take over attempt with the response that consultative panels would serve no purpose.

By the 1970's the number of funeral directors had shrunk dramatically and had split into three or four easily definable groups: 1. Large corporations in the process of absorbing small businesses but leaving the original name above the door. 2. Small rural and small urban one or two man funeral firms, grimly hanging onto their inherited territories. 3. Co-operative chains stretching across the country (with the co operatives now claiming one third of the funerals nationally per annum.) 4. Medium to large sized private firms, in the process of upgrading and expanding.

The largest split remained that between the co-operatives and the private sector, with the co operatives running their own separate training courses and having their own association journal. Although they provided a token presence at each others Conferences, there was often little interaction at ground level. A report in The Funeral Director, 1978, commented: 'As we all know there have been lifelong prejudices against the Co-op movement in many towns and also in country districts. Some members felt there was unfair trading when there were dividends offered, others felt it unjust that a Co-op Society could write a large cheque and start a business against a family firm who had worked for years to achieve slowly a prosperous business' (p.486).

By 1981 the largest private funeral concern in Britain had 80 retail funeral offices, 6 crematoria and a cemetery, employed 500 staff and during 1980 achieved a turnover of 7 millions sterling. With 15,000 funerals services it claimed to be responsible for 5% of the total deaths in England and Wales. By 1985 this achievement had been emulated by a second firm worth £17 million with 49 branches, claiming one in fifty funerals.

Counterpoints to the rapid incursion of large corporations and their attempts to control of the service area of death, were (a) the movement begun in the 1970's and stemming from that decade's public criticism and unease at the mergers and profit making, to municipalise the funeral; and (b) the formation in 1982 of the British Institute of Funeral Directors. These movements arose as expressions of dissatisfaction with the contemporary management of death, both within and outside of the funeral industry. Since its formation in 1906, membership of the then British Undertakers Association and latterly the National Association of Funeral Directors was only open to 'owners' of funeral establishments. Although in practice, managers of establishments and other staff could be elected to serve on National Association Committees, there was a growing feeling within the occupation that the NAFD had little to offer employees and that they had no recognised occupational body to guard and progress their interests. The formation of the BIFD (which was still at the discussion stage at the commencement of the present research) now attempts to 'do all such things as may be necessary or desirable for achieving, and thereafter maintaining, the professional status of members of the Institute. (Constitution of the British Institute of Funeral Directors 1982, p.1.) Members

themselves are eligible for admission when in possession of the Diploma of Funeral Directing and after at least two years practical experience of funeral directing. The movement was essentially a bid for power on behalf of 'career' funeral directors as opposed to the 'inheritors' who had for many generations had full control of the occupation.

Attempts to take control of the management of death from the outside were promoted by local authorities with Labour controlled councils (although interest was also shown by some who were predominantly Conservative). In 1979, Sheffield put forward plans for a municipal funeral service with a central transport fleet and its own staff. In 1985 the movement gathered momentum with representatives of some seventeen local authorities meeting together in conference in North City to debate the prospects for municipalisation. The comments made purported to be reflections of public disquiet nationwide (24). The movement slowly disintegrated when it was discovered that legislative changes would be necessary to enable councils to compete within the private sector. Some councils later capitulated to local funeral establishments by putting nominal Council subsidised funerals out to tender, although here again, there were attempts to control the management of such funerals. For example, in 1989 Southwark Council approached a number of funeral homes for a contracted service but the majority while offering competitive prices could not agree to the council's insistence on using only 'unionised' labour.

Over time, funeral directors assumed control over many aspects of the management of death. Failing to ratify their professional status in the eyes of the public they nevertheless retained access to

specialised knowledge which continues to develop in line with advances in medical science.

### Summary

Gorer suggested that the Victorian funeral represented an ideal way of dealing with death, but both he and Aries failed to take into account the broader social context when regretting subsequent changes. Although the basic structure of the funeral remains the same, the historical perspective illustrated that changes within each section, pre-disposal, disposal and post-disposal, occurred in response to factors in the wider society. Contrary to Aries who linked the cult of tombs and its rituals to the onset of affectivity and romanticism, the two World Wars greatly expanded interest in post disposal rituals. Concurrently it was the bureaucratization of the death system and the professionalization of a number of occupational groups that had a marked and lasting effect upon the nature of pre disposal rituals. The disposal rituals subsequently regained their importance and were extended by the acceptance of cremation. The post disposal phase continued to remain relatively free of legislative constraints and appeared to be an area open to new forms of memorialisation and ritualisation. In addition, the preliminary studies suggested a movement of superstitious and common religious beliefs from the pre-disposal stage to the post disposal stage.

Overall, one would expect to find that the large body of common religious beliefs permeating the structure will cast doubts on the arguments of those such as Gorer (1965), Morley (1971) and Aries (1974, 1983) that the bulk of funeral ritual was underpinned by a strong belief in the resurrection and that when this weakened, death

ritual and mourning began to disintegrate. Historical evidence suggests that death ritual arose from a pagan culture and that for the majority of people it continues to be underpinned by common religious values: that in the current climate of decontextualisation, death ritual will be sought for sentimental and affective reasons within the performance of religiously coloured ceremonial.

Funeral directors attempted to control death ritual, guiding it along certain lines profitable to the expansion of their establishments. Similarly the clergy made sustained efforts over time after the Reformation to modify funeral ritual and to cleanse it of its common religious values. The small occupational grouping surrounding the management of death was gradually widened over time as expanding areas were appropriated by specific power interests. From death being a matter primarily for the clergyman, the laying out woman, the undertaker and the monumental mason, it became a closed system within which professional or professionalising groups fought for further individual closures and within which actions and communications became routinised.

Increasingly, from the moment of death in the 1980's, the norms and values of bureaucracy are seen to predominate. The class nature of the funeral has vanished and the current invisibility of death is linked to a rapidly ageing population pushing the death experience into later life, to the loss of death knowledge, the loss of the social roles of death and the removal of visual cues. Ignorance rather than denial or a social 'taboo', lies at the heart of the void.

FOOTNOTES

1. By 1852 there were some 33,232 burial clubs and societies. Pearsall (1975, p.104).
2. In 1885 the Burial Act was passed, giving power to local authorities to shut up or regulate all graveyards. Daley W.A. (1924).
3. 'Bid' - to invite to a feast, as at a wedding or funeral. From the Danish At Byde - to invite. Morris (1892).
4. Robinson (1862) notes the gradual and regrettable substitution of 'requested' for 'expected', over time, indicating a lessening of social duty.
5. Fieldwork revealed the occasional usage of 'bid' by funeral directors in the phrase: 'I'll bid you my leave'.
6. Joyce (1982) describes the great 'employer' funerals. One hundred thousand people were said to have lined the streets of Bradford and Saltaire at Titus Salt's passing. 'Smaller funerals were no less revealing, calling forth illuminated addresses of condolence by the hands, which were answered by a day off with wages.' Joyce sees this as part of a process whereby 'ritual forms of working class public behaviour' (were) transformed into expressions of inclusion in and acceptance of the local and national social order'.
7. Roberts (1984) describes a girl of twelve begging a soap box from a shop, lining it with wadding, placing her stillborn sister inside, covering it with black lining from an old coat, tying it with string and taking it to the gravedigger for her mother. (p.20).
8. From Bradford alone there were 1,770 casualties after the first hour of the offensive. Wilkinson (1978,p.170).
9. Litten J. Victoria and Albert Museum. Personal communication.
10. 'The War revealed the extent of the alienation of the majority of the English male population from the life and practice of the Churches - it revealed it, it deepened it, but it certainly did not create it' Wilkinson (1978,p.7).
11. The Cremation Society was formed in 1874 with the express intention of legalising cremation.
12. In 1968, cremations exceeded burials for the first time. (Russell-Davies, 1971).
13. An exception to this was the cremation of the Duchess of Connaught in 1917. Pevette (1969).
14. Fenn (1984,p.118) notes that '..the reformed liturgies are lacking in language that taps ancient memory, the individuals unconscious, and the commonplaces of an old rhetoric that have become part of everyday life.'
15. Greaves (1981) points out that in the medieval period, doles of

food and money were given to the poor to ensure the repose of the soul.

16. 'The public exposure of coffins was becoming a thing of the past and our offices assuming the appearance of an ordinary business office' Porter (1909). Speech by North City President.

17. The dubious practices of some undertakers were the subject of satirical attack in the early eighteenth century by Richard Steele in 'The Funeral: or, grief a-la-mode', a play which was performed over a 75 year span. 'Gravedigger: I carry'd home to your House the Shroud the Gentleman was buried in last Night; I could not get his ring of (sic) very easily; therefore I brought the Finger and all; and Sir the Sexton gives his Service to you, and desires to know whether you'd have any Bodies remov'd or not: if not He'll let 'em lie in their graves a week longer.' (Act 1, Scene 1).

18. One journal article describes the erection of 'a very fine chapel' the floor of which was covered with 'a thick layer of costly Rublino, 'and what is soothing to the nerves of distressed mourners, quite noiseless and non slippery.' The walls of the chapel were decorated with 'suitable tablets of scripture texts in gold.' BUA Monthly, 1934, p.133.

19. Remarks on death sanitation made by Dodgson W. at a lecture given by Jervis J. Medical Officer of Health. 'The Disposal of the Dead', February 1924.

20. The BUA Monthly 1924 suggests that there were 'around 60 carriage masters and 1,000 undertakers in Yorkshire alone.

21. 'Before professionalisation can be established, there are many practices that must be eradicated..' A Wider Outlook, in The National Funeral Director August 1943, p.74.

22. In 1963, Mitford (1963) found a total of 4,500 full time funeral directors. By 1978, the total number of funeral directors was estimated at 3,700. 50% of these were thought to be carrying out less than 100 funerals per annum, 25% were carrying out 100 - 250 per annum and 25% about 250 - 5,000 per annum. (Farthing 1978, p.367). By 1987, this would have shrunk to 2,500 funeral directors (B & M.R. Reports Ltd. Market & Industry Reports. Personal Communication.)

23. By 1984 several 'Funeral Planning Societies' had materialised in various parts of the country, operated by individuals outside the funeral industry who offered to arrange 'simple and dignified funerals at minimum cost', together with, in some cases, follow up counselling. Funeral Service Journal April 1984, p149. Their activities had already been noted by Funeral Directors who remarked at the National Conference of the NAFD in 1983, that 'a PR campaign to combat these would be helpful'.

24. A Conference of 17 Municipal Authorities felt that municipalisation was necessary because of 'widespread public dissatisfaction'. The profit should be taken out of dying. A representative from Newcastle Under Lyme felt that 'funeral charges were not related to costs but to what the area will bear in prices'. Edinburgh stated that 'The profit on a casket is in the region of 600% around Edinburgh, so there is not much chance that we would make any loss at all'. Hull stated that the local funeral directors had 'a cartel'.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT OF DEATH

Part One: The Death System in the City

Chapter Two traced the management of death over the last century from the idealised and open acceptance praised by Gorer (1965) to the invisible and decontextualised management of death within the contemporary city. It was seen that changes in death ritual not only mirrored current values but were also greatly affected by socio-structural factors and by struggles for occupational control within the death system. The present chapter will provide a brief examination of the occupational community which forms the death system and then, following Pine's (1975) analysis of American Funeral Homes, will analyse four funeral organizations in North City, looking at their differing internal features and in later chapters, noting how these features affect the way in which funeral directors see their 'roles' and the kinds of death ritual produced.

The contemporary death system which has evolved to control the processing of bodies out of society, forms a loose knit occupational community with divergent aims and interests. See Diagram 1 overleaf. From the preliminary interviews, it was clear that the bereaved had little idea of the methods by which the dead were removed and were generally unaware of the functioning of the death system. 'When birth was taken out of the home and similarly appropriated by professionals, it was followed up with a full public education and a host of pre and post natal services. Not so with death' (Naylor, 1985, p. 4).

DIAGRAM 1. Death System Organization and Personnel \*

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Pre disposal Stage:

G.P.'s	Police	Registrars
Ambulance staff	Coroners Officers	Medical Officer of Health
Hospitals	H.M. Coroner	Medical Referee
Hospices	J.P.'s	DHSS Staff
Nursing & Admin.	Consular Officials	Social Services F. Dirs
Doctors	Coroners F.Dirs.	Local Government staff
Pathologists		Environmental Health
School of Anatomy		Municipal Services
Hospital F.Dirs.		Ministry of Ag. & Fish

Hospital chaplains  
Parish clergy  
Social workers

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Pre disposal and Disposal Stage:

Funeral establishments		Local newspapers
Funeral directors		Florists
Embalmers		Solicitors
Drivers		Insurance Agents
Bearers		Coffin manufacturers
Carriage Masters		Funeral Furnishers
Knock up Men		Shipping Agents
Freight Carriers		Airlines
Consular Agents	Crematoria	Cemeteries
	Admin staff	Admin staff
	Chapel attendants	Chapel attendants
	Gardeners	Grave diggers
	Clergy	Organists
	Cremator Operatives	Diocesan committees

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Post disposal Stage:

Caterers	Monumental Masons	Support Groups
Local newspapers	Clergy	Crematoria staff
		Cemetery staff

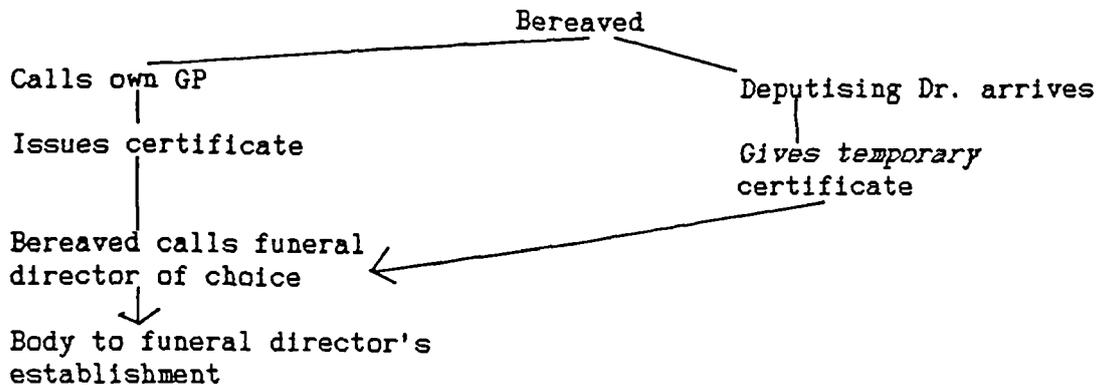
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\*This list does not purport to be exhaustive.

3.0. The initial loss of the body to the system

During the Victorian period, a death at home galvanized the family into a series of domestic rituals designed to cope with its trauma. Today, the trauma hangs over the family until alleviated by the arrival of the funeral director. The instinctive, commonsense ways of handling the body have been dissipated by a set of differing procedures which are dependent upon (a) the type of death, and (b) the place of death. The severity of the dislocation between pre war disposal rituals and present day procedures is not generally comprehended. There are four main types of 'death at home' procedures:

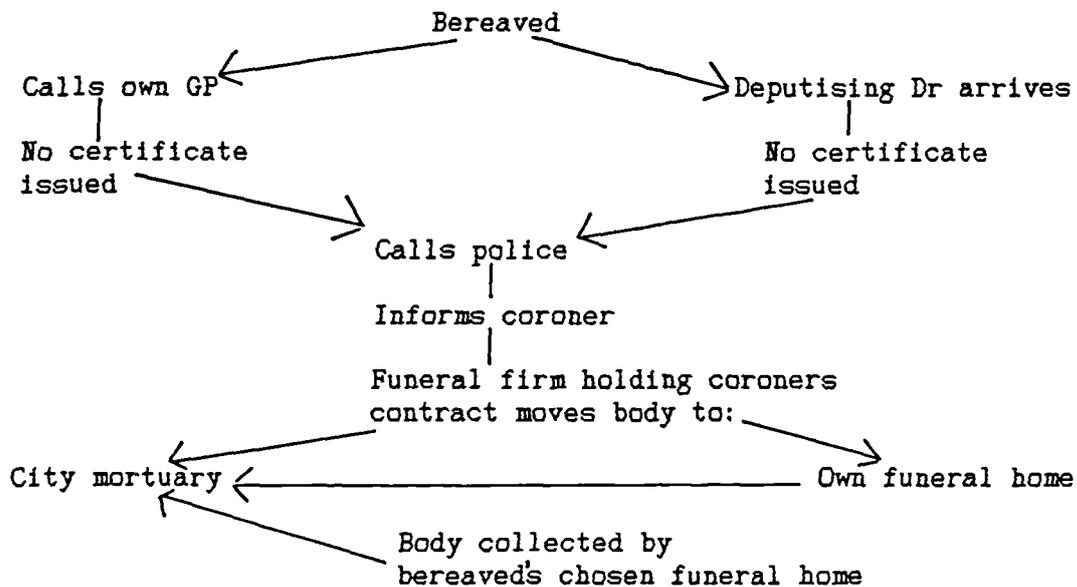
DIAGRAM 2. Death at Home (expected death)



An expected death at home initially retains something of the simplicity of Aries' Tame Death. The dying role may have been acknowledged within the family and the bereaved will have experienced anticipatory mourning and some preparation for the role of mourner. Either the doctor issues a death certificate permitting registration

of the death, or a deputising doctor provides a temporary certificate. If the funeral director is called by the bereaved rather than the doctor, he or she, will be unable to remove the body without the doctors permission, even though required to carry out tests for death. After certification the bereaved may request that the body remains at home until the funeral. Some funeral firms will still embalm at home and the body of the deceased may then be placed in a coffin in a darkened bedroom until the day of the funeral.

DIAGRAM 3. Death at Home (unexpected death)



An unexpected death at home (e.g. from a heart attack) usually finds the bereaved totally unprepared for the ensuing trauma or for the role of mourner. On the occurrence of death, the bereaved may call either the doctor, the ambulance or the police. As illustrated in

Diagram 3, the body may then be removed to and transferred between several different venues in the death system, leaving the bereaved ignorant of its whereabouts.

With an unexpected death, the police will normally inform the coroner's office: the body then falls within the jurisdiction of the coroner and may not be touched without his or her consent. The coroner's officer for the district in which the body was discovered will subsequently arrange for the funeral firm who have the Coroner's Removals Contract to remove the body. The Coroner's funeral firm may take the body to the city mortuary if it is a weekday and between 8am and 4.30pm or to their own establishment outside of these hours. If murder or suicide is suspected, bureaucratic rules are overridden by the coroner who will order that the mortuary must be opened.

Cases of unexpected death almost invariably delay both pre disposal and disposal rituals as the coroner will arrange for a postmortem to be carried out, with or without the consent of the bereaved. Since the death cannot be registered until the registrar has received authority from the coroner, the bereaved find themselves in a bewildering administrative limbo where they can neither view the body, surround it with any rituals nor instruct their chosen funeral directors to take care of it. The body of the deceased is summarily removed, family ties are arbitrarily broken 'A body is not property. It cannot be owned'. (Coroner's officer DP) and the bereaved may not see it again for a period of several days to a week. There is little opportunity to assume the role of mourner and the involvement of the coroner and the imminent postmortem may burden them with elements of guilt and suspicion. The death is not only unexpected but becomes

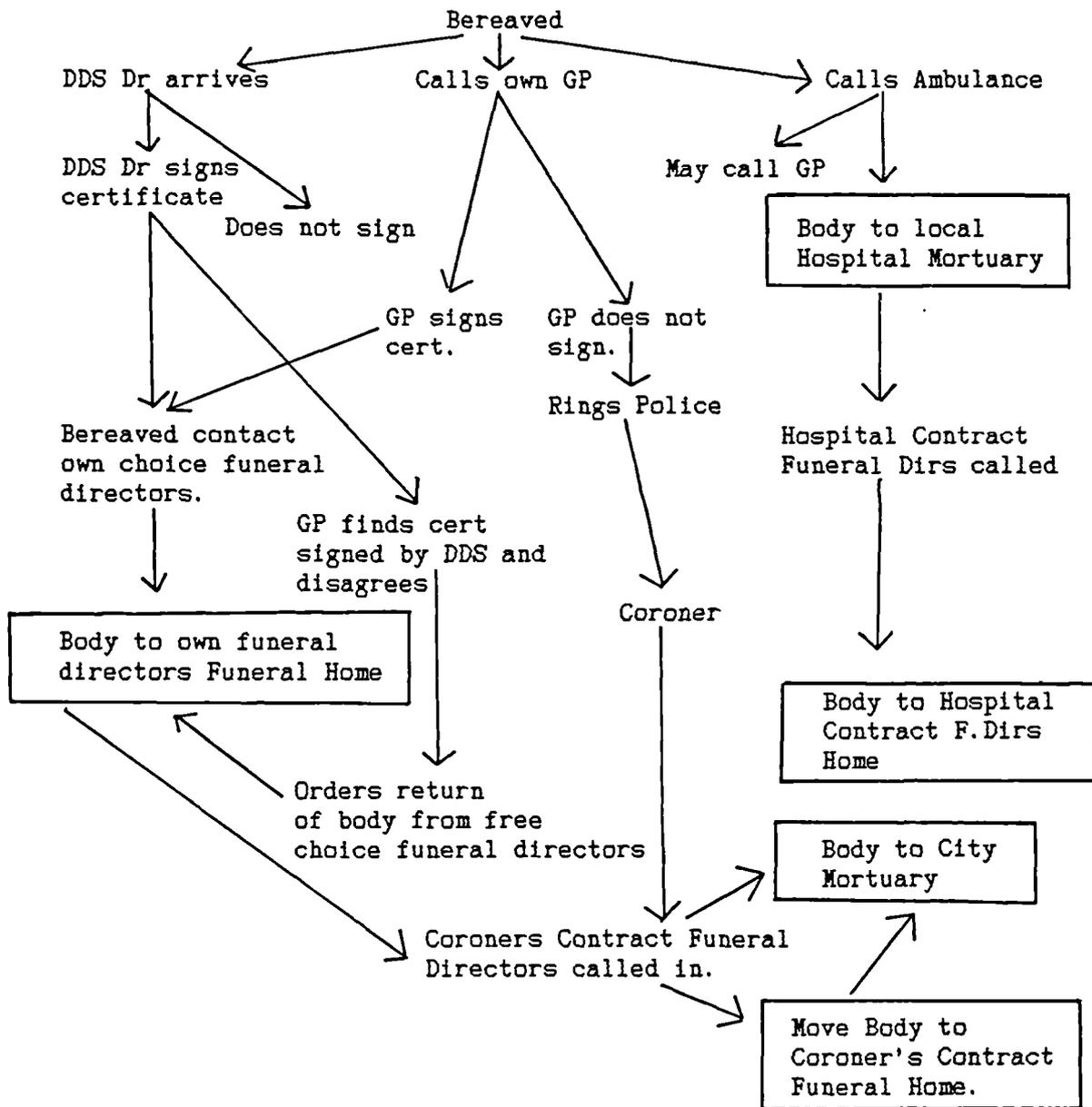
unnatural and alienating.

Nevertheless if an 'unexpected' death at home is a bewildering shock for the bereaved, the apparently simpler 'Death at home where there is some uncertainty about the cause' (e.g. the deceased had a heart condition but had recently been in bed with bronchitis), may be even more complex in terms of official procedures. See Diagram 4.

Where the deceased was suffering from an illness that was not expected to result in death, the bereaved may call either the family doctor or the ambulance. An ambulance will remove the body to a hospital mortuary and from there, its next move will be carried out by the funeral firm who have the Hospitals Removal Contract. Where the family doctor has been contacted, s/he may feel able, on the basis of prior treatment of the deceased to sign a death certificate. Similarly a deputising doctor may feel able to sign a temporary certificate. If it is not possible to ascertain the exact cause of death, the family doctor will not sign but will inform the police who will ring the coroner's office. If a certificate signed by a deputising doctor, which allows the removal of the body to the establishment of a chosen funeral firm, meets with disagreement from the family doctor, he will similarly ring the coroner and the coroner's officer will request that the funeral firm relinquishes the body and takes it or allows it to be taken to the city mortuary. Thus a family may have selected their funeral director and begun to prepare pre disposal and disposal rituals when the body is removed elsewhere within the system. Diagram 4 illustrates something of this complexity where the body of the deceased may be in any one of at least five different places within the city after removal from the

home.

DIAGRAM 4. Death at Home (uncertainty about the cause)



(The body of the deceased may be in any one of at least five places in the city after removal from the home.)

Large numbers of personnel within the death system become involved and the body may easily be 'lost' in an official limbo. Unbeknown to the bereaved, it is a common occurrence for funeral directors to telephone one another asking if they have the body of Mrs. Smith because it was supposed to be at such and such a place or establishment. In becoming the property of the system, the body is dehumanized. Subsequently, ritual remains important not only for psychological reasons but because it performs the social function of restoring personal identity and worth to human remains.

Where death occurs in hospital, (see diagram 5), the dehumanizing process begins much earlier with the elimination of the dying role and the artificial prolongation of life by means of machines and drugs. Hospitals vary in their attitudes to the dead. Some will lay out the body whilst others see it as very much part of the funeral directors role; some hospitals allow the bereaved to view the deceased in the hospital bed immediately after death, others swiftly remove the body to the mortuary and will only allow viewing there if the bereaved insist. In all cases, the body remains within the jurisdiction of the hospital until a registrars certificate and/or an authority to remove the body, signed by a relative can be produced.

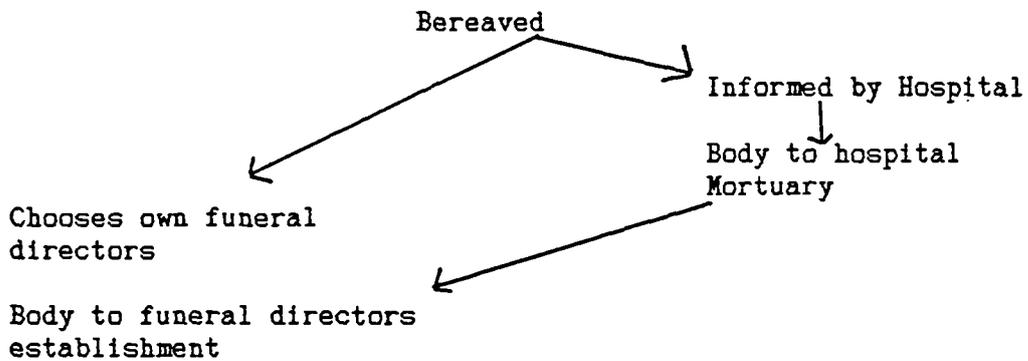
An unexpected death in hospital results in a postmortem taking place in the hospital mortuary if it has the facilities, or removal to the city mortuary. Hospitals sometimes endeavour to prolong their custody of the body if the cause of death is of scientific interest. Thus they may coerce the parents of a child who has died into allowing a postmortem when it is not strictly necessary by stating that the death certificate will be withheld if permission for a postmortem is

not forthcoming (1). Since the bereaved are not usually in a position to contact their solicitors at this time, they may rely heavily upon their chosen funeral director to protect them from the overriding medical interests of this part of the system.

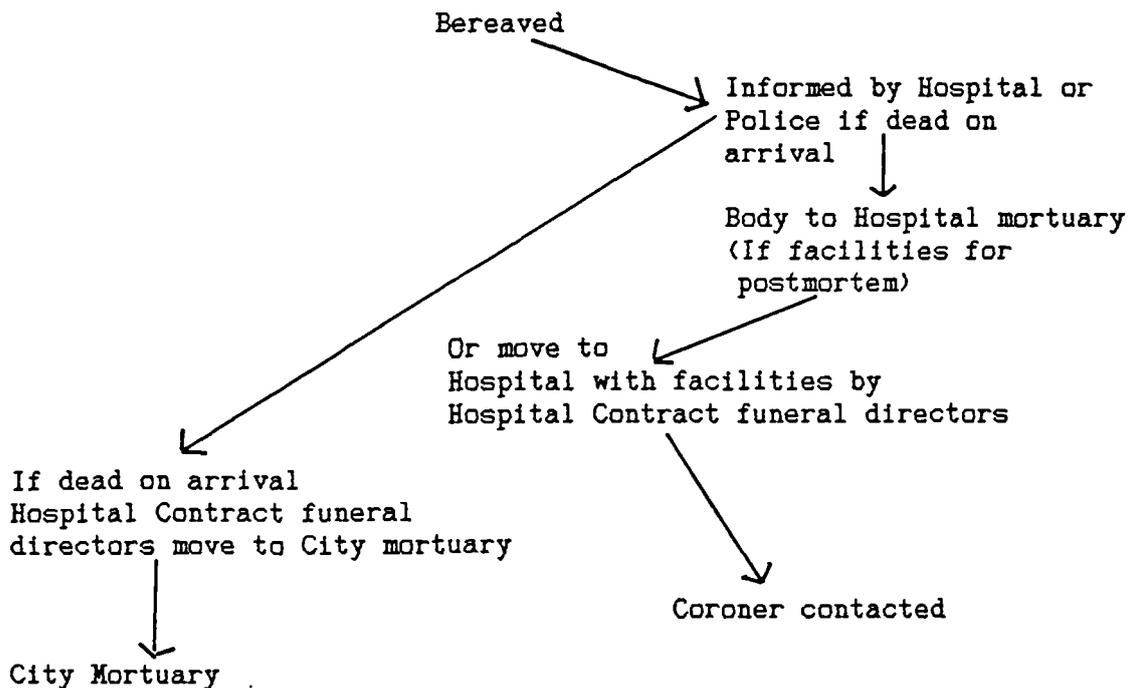
DIAGRAM 5. Death in Hospital (expected or unexpected)

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a. Expected death:



b. Unexpected death:



Few bereaved realise just how pervasive medical and legislative controls have become (2). Even where a doctor has been treating the deceased for several months for a certain illness, a death certificate cannot be signed if s/he has not seen the deceased during the fourteen days immediately prior to the death. Occasionally a doctor may explain to the Coroner that s/he is perfectly satisfied as to the cause of death and the Coroner may then issue an A pass. Or exceptionally, a Coroner may be prepared to wait for the return from holiday of a family doctor (allowing the body of the deceased to be refrigerated for a period of up to 28 days) during which time, all ritual is held in abeyance. The Broderick Report (1971) found that in England and Wales, more than one in five deaths were reported to the coroner for purely medical reasons. Similarly, the medical rules for cremation require two doctors signatures on the relevant forms. Financially the need for a second doctor's signature to confirm the cause of death affects the bereaved's funeral bill by an extra £16 (1984). Administratively it is viewed within the death system as an outdated procedure relating to the turn of the century when cremation was an exceptional mode of disposal. The Broderick Report (1971) argued that the second signature was of little value except as a supplementary income for those having to complete the forms, findings which initiated a major clash of professional interests at a national level within the death system (3).

With the exception of an expected death at home, the majority of deaths now result in the removal of the body from the bereaved to the care of the system and confusion for the bereaved with regard to the operation of the system. It will be noted from Diagram 1 (p.111) that the bulk of the interest of the state is concentrated within the

pre disposal period and how consequently, bureaucratic, medical and legal considerations have ousted and nullified death ritual at this stage.

### 3.1. The city mortuaries as reception points

Every time a death occurs, the first concern of the state is to protect itself through the death system from a premature or illegal expulsion of the body. A body which cannot be immediately certified by an attending practitioner, enters the mortuary and is not relinquished for ritual purposes until an underlying cause for death is located or until a pathologist states that s/he is unable to find a logical underlying cause and that the death is due to 'natural causes'.

Mortuary technicians take courses of instruction leading to certificates or diplomas in Anatomical Pathology and assist pathologists during postmortems. Despite the fact that the work of tidying up the cadaver afterwards may entail intricate surgical work, such as the replacement of colons and the substitution of bones, their para-medical status and lack of professional recognition may lead to defensive work attitudes towards the relatively unqualified funeral directors. Funeral directors in turn tend to view mortuary staff as typical public service employees, taking lengthy tea and lunch breaks and invoking inflexible rules and regulations. During daily interaction, mortuary staff may seek to exert power by refusing to part with cadavers, by delaying their surgical repair until it is too late for the bereaved to view and by keeping funeral personnel waiting for attention for long periods (4). Some conflict may also

arise from the unofficial work practices of mortuary technicians, for example, where attendants are tipped by funeral directors for measuring bodies and relaying the measurements over the phone, or for giving a hand in moving the body from the fridge into the removal van.

While there is integration at professional level between pathologists and funeral directors, with the former providing lectures and technical advice, this is often not enough to prevent a continuing clash of interests. Pathologists are concerned with locating the causes of death, funeral directors with inter alia, hiding societal interference with the body. The 'pathologists are butchers' syndrome was a continuing theme within the death sub culture. Indeed, official complaints of 'excessive mutilation' of bodies (5) have been upheld by pathologists themselves (6).

Conflictual relations in this part of the death system however, are balanced by the positive function of the mortuaries as 'information points.' Utilised by large numbers of personnel within the death system, either in person or by telephone contact, the mortuaries become the focii for gossip and information. The constant circulation of information concerning funeral personnel and procedures makes it difficult to contain 'mistakes with bodies' within the system itself (although there may be a general closing of ranks to contain them from the wider society). The circulation of information allows a continuous exchange of views and provides early warnings of potential changes and developments in the management of death within the city.

### 3.2. The Registrar as Checker in the system

Registering the death allows the first active participation of the bereaved. The Registrar ensures that all deaths are properly investigated, recording information on the deceased's social and physical standing and ensuring that the body is disposed of through approved channels (7). The forms issued by the Registrar are keys to locks in other parts of the system. Without a green disposal form, funeral directors are unable to embalm a body; without photocopies of the death certificate, the bereaved are unable to settle the deceased's affairs and without a disposal form, crematoria and cemetery officials are unable to permit the burial or cremation of a body.

Although funeral directors maintain an amiable contact with the network of registrars offices serving sub districts throughout the city, there is a similar public/personal service divide in relations, with funeral directors seeing themselves as committed to a service ethic which separates them off from the routinised handling of death and bereavement among the public sector bureaucrats.

### 3.3. The Magistrate as Enforcement Officer

Despite the fact that the greater part of the pre-disposal period is taken up with compulsory medical and bureaucratic procedures, the state demonstrates an obvious reluctance to extend this period much beyond 10 - 14 days. The registrar will telephone a funeral director if no disposal notice has been returned to him within two weeks (via the crematorium or cemetery after the disposal of a body has been completed) to enquire about the nature of the delay. Various official sanctions can be enforced if the bereaved endeavour to take

individual action in dealing with the body. Examples include keeping it at home and refusing to arrange for its imminent disposal.

The Public Health Act 1936 gives authority to a Justice of the Peace order a body to be removed to a mortuary or to be buried forthwith, provided that s/he is satisfied that its retention would endanger the health of the building in which the corpse is kept, or the neighbouring building. The fact that the body is not property and technically belongs to no one is no protection against the state removing it from the care of the bereaved.

#### 3.4. The Coroner as Overseer

The bereaved's attitude to the coroner within the context of a rapidly increasing number of postmortems, tends to be one of 'mistrust'. (Coroner's officer, DP) 'They can't understand why the doctor can't issue a death certificate. They can't understand why hospitals who have taken over the role of identifying death and may have done exhaustive tests on the patient prior to death, can tell you 5,000 things which were wrong with him but can't tell you what killed him.'

The coroner routinely orders a postmortem with all of the following types of death: 1. Where the doctor attending the patient did not see him or her within fourteen days before death, or after death. 2. Where no doctor has treated the deceased during the last illness. 3. Where death occurs during an operation or before recovery from an anaesthetic. 4. Where death is sudden, unexplained or attended by suspicious circumstances. 5. Where death could be due to accident,

violence, neglect, abortion, poisoning or to any industrial injury or disease.

The coroner's involvement is a constant source of aggravation for funeral directors as they try to pacify confused relatives. 'Families are really upset about the coroner being involved because they equate it with suicide and murder, with road accidents, suspicious deaths and overdoses of drugs.' (F.Dir.NE). 'Some families are in great distress..but they can do nothing. The coroner is immensely powerful'. (Coroner's officer GW). It is also difficult for families to understand why a certain cause of death will be the subject of a postmortem in one geographical district and not in another. '..our coroner is stricter in some ways than a lot of others..it just does depend on the locality. You know, what on the borderline, some will get away with in one district, they wouldn't in another. For example, miner's chest disease is endemic in South Wales and may thus be treated as 'natural causes' and there may be no inquest' (Coroner's officer DP).

The coroner's autonomy derives from the unique historical roots of the profession: the Crowner or Crownsman (circa 1066) seized the goods of the propertied for the Crown and also became involved in investigating murders prior to the institution of a police force. Coroners are appointed and paid by local authorities to investigate all deaths, the circumstances of which need examination 'in the public interest'. Increasingly, this interest reflects the needs of medical science.

### 3.5. Policing the dead: the Coroner's Officers

Coroner's officers are policemen who volunteer their services. Individual officers take responsibility for geographical territories or 'patches' within the city and liaise with funeral directors, hospitals, mortuaries, welfare workers and the bereaved in the conduct of postmortems. Although unable to visit all of the bereaved whose relatives are the subject of postmortems, coroner's officers in North City endeavoured to see as many as practicable, with the objective of ensuring that 'relatives are got through a difficult time as smoothly and quickly as possible' (Coroner's Officer DP).

During the coroner's investigation, the funeral director relies upon the coroner's officer for information on the 'clearance' of the body. 'In this city, the coroner will tell us that he works on five working days. A death on Thursday means that it could well be five working days, next Wednesday before you know anything, before you can get a result. You've then got to arrange a funeral, so the funeral can be a week to ten days from today.' (F.Dir.LE) Good relations between a funeral firm and its coroner's officer were viewed as essential for the smooth functioning of work routines within the funeral establishment since coroner's officers themselves possessed techniques for delaying funerals, such as allowing a deliberate lag in the completion of paperwork (8).

Where the postmortem shows a 'natural' cause of death, the coroner's officer informs the coroner that there are no suspicious circumstances and the coroner forwards the registrar a pink form which acts as a medical certificate to the extent that the cause of death is written upon it. S/he may also issue a yellow form E for

cremation. In cases of unnatural death, the coroner will if s/he chooses, hold an inquest which will establish the identity of the deceased and when, how and where the death occurred. Inquests do not attempt to allocate responsibility for the death and where it may be due to murder or foul play, the papers are forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

### 3.6. The clergy and the city burial grounds.

Every parishioner and inhabitant of a parish or person dying within the parish has a right at common law to be buried in the churchyard of the parish. This right derives from the canon law principle: Ubi decimas persolvebat vivus sepeliatur mortuus - let the dead be buried where they paid tithes when alive' (Wilson and Levy 1938, p.108). In the contemporary city, the payment of tithes or rates, underpins the right of the deceased to a grave within the municipal cemeteries of the city, or within the churchyard of the parish (if there is room). Burial in a city cemetery where the deceased resided outside the city boundaries, entails the payment of heavy additional burial fees. Funeral directors may attempt to subvert the system and save the bereaved money by suggesting the provision of the address of a relative within the city rather than the genuine last address of the deceased. The funeral director, not only programmes the system but 'plays' the system on behalf of the bereaved by taking unofficial shortcuts. Rights of burial are increasingly expensive. In 1984 a common grave for up to four people would be charged at £26.00. A communal inscription grave: £58.00, a private grave for two persons: £150.00; and for 3 persons: £185.00.

Although many of the non churchgoing public do not know which parish they are in and may not know the parish clergyman, it is nevertheless the funeral director's habit, to inform the clergyman anyway and supply him with the name and address of the deceased and bereaved. This unofficial contract is possibly the strongest aspect of the old element of 'community' remaining within the funeral. The literature constantly remarks with surprise upon the degree of clergy involvement in disposal rituals in a mainly secular society but this involvement is partly determined by the nature of funeral director-bereaved interaction during the arrangements session.

Having appropriated the religious symbolism of the church it may be difficult for funeral directors to split themselves off from the clergy. There are indications however that the secular funeral may eventually be promoted by the larger corporations who have less interest in maintaining ancient parochial ties and more in the provision of consumer choice. 'Do you really need a religious service? This is causing concern at the moment. ..Why inflict a priest the family don't want and have never met?' (F.Dir.GD Large corporation).

### 3.7. The city crematoria

In common with the mortuaries, the crematoria function as information points since they are the daily venue for many within the death system, from funeral personnel and clergy to municipal officials, florists and monumental masons. Contemporary crematoria are licensed by the Home Office and regulated by the Cremation Acts and the Code of Cremation Practice. Within North City, the cemeteries and crematoria were under the authority of the Department of Estates and Development and run by the city council.

Crematoria tend to be located at the outer edges of conurbations and thus fail to become integrated into the daily landscape. A bill presented by a Midlands funeral establishment for permission to open a crematorium within their own establishment was opposed on the grounds that it could lead to the disintegration of the present cremation service structure (9). It was also suggested that it would be encouraging developments 'which would appear to downgrade the rites and ceremonies attached to funerals.' This last suggestion was greeted with disbelief by some funeral directors given the widespread curtailment of ritual facilities on the part of many local authorities (10). Within the death system, channels of communication between funeral firms and local authority employees tend to become difficult and conflictual, especially where complaints, criticisms and suggestions for improvements remained unanswered.

### 3.8. Masons and memorialisation

Together with the reasons for the decline discussed in the previous chapter, the monumental mason suffers from the lack of a direct channel of communication with the bereaved within the death system. Promotional literature sent through the post is met with disapproval from the bereaved, as illustrated by letters to the press regretting the heartlessness of masons (11). Since relations with funeral firms have generally remained distant over time, many funeral directors fail to broach the subject of memorialisation during arrangements sessions unless asked by the bereaved. Funeral directors are unwilling to spend time and effort promoting memorialisation while masons believe that funeral directors are much to blame for influencing the bereaved towards cremations rather than burials. Within the death system, masons have generally attributed the increase in cremations to the

efforts of municipal authorities. The presidential speech at a conference of the National Association of Monumental Masons in 1983 suggested that 'the traditional right to erect memorials was being taken from them (the bereaved). Local authorities have been throwing up crematoria all over the country and virtually bulldozing people into being cremated and having ashes scattered with no memorials.' Endeavouring to save their craft by promoting the concept of memorials for the interment of cremated remains, public relations in the 1980's have hinged upon memorialisation as a focus for grieving.

#### Summary

The death system in the city was seen to be scattered, bureaucratic and largely unfamiliar to the bereaved. Coroners and registrars offices were in separate multi purpose office blocks, cemetery and crematoria bureaucracies concealed within local government offices and mortuaries located at the backs of hospitals. The lack of a cohesive identity contributed to the general normlessness surrounding death and denied the bereaved a common focus for support or discontent. This meant that dissatisfactions were inevitably channelled towards economic or other criticisms of the main identifiable role player, the funeral director.

#### Part Two: Funeral Organizations and Territories

Pine's (1975) study located two ideal type funeral homes in America: the 'Cosmopolitan' Funeral Home, a complex organization serving a large metropolitan area which conformed in most aspects to the bureaucratic occupational model, and the 'Community' Funeral Home: a simple organization with a solo practitioner or a few individuals

working together to carry out all aspects of funeral directing, characterized by the Personal Service occupational model. He suggested that the kind of organization to which a funeral director belonged was 'the most important determinant' of his behaviour. Cosmopolitan funeral directors thus served '...efficiently (but impersonally) considerably more families', whilst Community funeral directors were more 'involved with a total role and devoted a great deal more time to bereaved families' (p.130).

There was also a marked difference in turnover with the Cosmopolitan funeral home dealing with an average volume of 300 funerals per year compared with around 100 funerals per year in the Community funeral home. Pine contended that 'such disparate volumes have fostered disparate services, approaches and practices' and that service volume was 'an important pre-disposing factor in determining the firms organization for a given operation' (p.57).

The most immediate disparity between Pine's funeral homes and those of North city was the turnover or volume of funerals performed, since the largest organization in North city had an average monthly turnover of funerals which exceeded the annual figure for the Community Funeral Home. Nevertheless, the finding that 'service volume' is a major determinant of 'aspects of ritual production' warrants further investigation in the present study. A similar stimulus is provided by Pine's contention that the way in which a funeral home is organized determines the ways in which funeral directors perceive their roles. Pine saw the 'community' funeral director as a 'serving professional' and the 'cosmopolitan' funeral director as having a more 'loosely attached, bureaucratic orientation

to work', i.e. as maintaining little association between their personal life and their work; they did not see their work as a vocation.

### 3.9. A Typology of Funeral Organisations in North City

As indicated in Chapter Two, there were some 300 undertakers within the city in the 1930's carrying out funerals on either a part time or a full time basis and the main characteristics of the occupation were those of 'territoriality' and 'competition'. By 1982, the number of firms had contracted dramatically to around 45. Of these, several were found to be trading under more than one name, with a range of 1 - 4 extra names each. Thus the real number of funeral organizations totalled around 34. Funeral directors themselves were unclear as to the numbers of funeral firms within the city since they concerned themselves narrowly with firms conducting business in their territory or where they were members of a professional organization, with other members of that organization.

The funeral directors' own perceptions of divisions within their number included the primary 'split' between the 'NAFD members' and 'outsiders'. The NAFD members tended to form a 'helping network' which went some way to mitigate the intense competition for business. There was a secondary split between the Co-operative chain on the one hand and all the private firms on the other. This local division was exacerbated by the fact that the Co-operative chain was not a member of the NAFD and that it had its own separate training courses, training establishments and associations. The third and final 'split' was that perceived between the four largest firms in the city - the 'Big Four' - (with turnovers far exceeding those of any others) and

'the Rest'.

'The Rest' comprised three basic types :

(i) The Small One Man Business , (which in some cases, was still located within the home with the sitting room as Arrangements Room and the Garage or Shed as mortuary), producing 1 - 4 funerals per fortnight and relying almost solely upon local custom.

(ii) The Builders/Joiners/Decorators firm which carried out funerals as an occasional activity.

(iii) The Small to Medium sized Family Firm with 2 - 4 employees, carrying out 1 - 8 funerals a week. This type of organization approximated most closely to Pine's Community Funeral Home but in North City its business future was uncertain, since at some point the decision had to be made whether to remain a small and fairly manageable family concern while modernizing its facilities, or to sell out to a larger competitor.

Although the initial research activity included observation and interviews at funeral establishments i - iii and took into account throughout the research, interviews and other recorded perceptions relating to these establishments, the bulk of observation, was of necessity, (for the purposes of recording the continuous production of ritual), carried out within the typology of firms comprising the 'Big Four'. These organizations are categorised as follows:

1. The Centralised Funeral Home (carrying out up to 130 funerals per month).
2. The Commercial Funeral Home (carrying out up to 67 funerals per month).

3. The Professional Funeral Home (carrying out up to 39 funerals per month).

4. The Crossroads Funeral Home (carrying out up to 39 funerals per month).

The distinctive features of each of the 'Big Four' were derived both from the observed organizational features and ideologies and from intra-firm typification. It was taken for granted by organizations 2, 3 and 4 for example, that the Centralised Funeral Home provided an impersonal, routinised service. Organizations 1, 3 and 4 similarly recognised that the Commercial Funeral Home would provide anything that was asked for by the client but would cut corners in the interests of profit. Organisations 1, 2 and 4 all accepted that the Professional Funeral Home actively promoted a superior ethical and professional image, whilst organizations 1, 2 and 3 watched with interest the struggles of the Crossroads Funeral Home as it began to expand and wavered between a distinctive professional or entrepreneurial orientation.

In terms of organization, all four funeral homes conformed to some aspects of Pine's 'Cosmopolitan' funeral home in that the majority were 'complex organizations serving a metropolitan area' and were possessed of 'a hierarchically arranged, highly differentiated staff..' However, the four types differed in the degree to which they attempted to retain the Personal Service occupational model within a complex organization.

### 3.10. The Centralised Funeral Home (CFH)

The CFH was located in a large anonymous looking building in the

inner city. The central operational hub spread out across the city to encompass a separate Transport Department, a Monumental Department and other smaller funeral establishments. The branches, referred to by the parent organization as 'contact points' attempted to represent the neighbourhood parlour which should be 'as near to the families they serve, as possible' (F.Dir.EQ). These local offshoots retained and promulgated the ideals of personal service.

Both the main establishment and the smaller branches of the CFH were characterised by a noticeable absence of the generational mystique which attached itself to the family owned firms. All of the buildings of the CFH were marked by a pragmatic, utilitarian atmosphere. The bereaved, arriving at the main establishment, entered a large reception area where they were dealt with by a secretary/receptionist. The decor was distinctive to the organization, a very plain style in complete contrast to the dramatic regency styles of other funeral homes. Turning left from the reception area, the bereaved encountered the Clergy changing room. Further along were the male and female cloakrooms, the Service Chapel and the individual chapels of rest. The chapels of rest were the size of small boxrooms and all were individually 'named' with names such as 'Wentworth'. This was a device for encouraging continuity of patronage providing as it did, the impression of a 'permanent' family vault. Families returning to the funeral home for a second funeral often requested the use of the same chapel by name as 'their' chapel.

By comparison with chapels of rest in other organisations within the city, the rooms appeared studiously devoid of character. Lined with

white woodchip paper, they did not pretend to be anything other than 'quiet spaces' in which to mourn. Overall, the decor and layout of the CFH suggested to the bereaved that death would be handled in an efficient, dependable manner. The lack of frills also intimated that ritual production would be down to earth and not overly expensive.

In the CFH, ritual was planned within a large old fashioned office with one central desk and wooden Dickensian ledges all around the walls. In strict, hierarchical fashion, the Assistant Manager was addressed as 'Mr' and isolated at the desk, whilst the other funeral directors and a secretary sat on stools at the outer wooden ledges. Communication with the rest of the death system flowed in and out via a small switchboard and a series of telephones along the ledge. In common with many of the funeral homes in North City, windows were either high and inaccessible, or heavily shielded with net curtains or blinds, forming a physical division between the everyday routine outside and the death routines inside.

Details of individual funerals were entered on long white streamers of paper and hung in weekly and daily compartments around the ledges. If a certain form was observed to be still hanging in its place after a number of days, it was obvious that something was wrong. This principle of 'instant visibility' was used in many of the bigger firms as a method of combating the inevitable mistakes and hassles that were inherent in the piecemeal nature of funeral production. A further principle which was strictly adhered to in the CFH was that of checking and double checking. Obituaries were taken by hand to the local newspaper rather than entrusted to the telephone. Special envelopes and receipts were provided for the deceased's jewellery

and rings. Clergy were required to sign receipts for their payments and the bereaved family signed for the return of rings and jewellery. To lessen the risk of error, even the flower tickets were made out by the office staff rather than the florists. The identities of bodies were checked on admission to the funeral home and triple checked immediately prior to departure for the crematorium or cemetery. The production of death rituals en masse was accomplished within a strict bureaucratic administration.

The managers office, separated off from the main office, emphasized the purely administrative nature of his position. Whereas in other funeral homes, the manager or owner could be found conducting and arranging funerals, in the CFH , the manager remained an administrator, rarely becoming involved in individual funerals as 'events'. This impersonality was reflected throughout the organization. The Manager reported to a Chief Executive who reported to the Board responsible for policy. The Assistant Manager distanced from the rest of the staff managed the General Office. Funeral Directors who were Arrangers did nothing but arrange funerals. Funeral Directors who were Conductors did nothing but conduct funerals . Drivers who were not necessarily funeral personnel, perceived themselves as 'transporters of boxes', rarely knowing the names of the deceased or the families. On a daily basis, drivers, bearers and conductors operated in three teams: A , B and C. The timing of funerals was thus crucially dependent upon the prior scheduling of the teams, rather than upon the wishes of the bereaved. If the bereaved wanted a funeral service at a crematorium at 9.30 am and teams A and B were fully booked except for a slot at 3.30 pm the bereaved would be asked to accept 3.30 since a refusal to budge from

9.30 would necessitate the unnecessary mobilisation of team C.

In addition to the clear differentiation of roles and tasks, there was also a major division (as in most of the larger funeral homes) between 'upstairs' staff (the funeral directors, and secretaries) and 'below stairs' staff (the drivers, bearers and coffin makers). In the CFH the latter included 7 - 8 'duty men' who would turn their hand to everything from making coffins and dressing bodies to running errands. This 'class' division was reported (in interviews in other parts of the country) as typical of medium to large firms nationally and symbolised the drawing of lines between the front stage production of ritual and back stage preparations.

Although there is a pronounced lack of union membership within the funeral service as a whole, all members of staff in the CFH were union members. Many belonged to the union for the Construction and Allied Technician Trades (UCATT). 'If we didn't have them in there, they couldn't use screwdrivers and saws etc' (F.Dir.DQ). The presence of unionization affected ritual production. Whereas other funeral homes could and often did, work all hours, the CFH funeral director rarely went out at night to arrange a funeral and usually asked the bereaved to wait until the morning. It was claimed that this would not cause hardship or distress. 'People aren't themselves at that hour. They're not thinking clearly.' (F.Dir. EQ). This attitude was not encountered within the other organizations where funeral directors perceived 'night calls' as part and parcel of the 'personal service' ethic.

Although avoiding the stress of working unsocial hours, the CFH

employee suffered stresses of a different nature resulting from the rational organization of ritual. One funeral director's pocket book revealed that he personally had conducted 93 funerals in 11 days. The stress here, arose from repetition, lack of involvement with the mourners and constant travelling. In the majority of funeral homes, stress resulted from the need for one person to take responsibility for organizing every detail of several funerals as well as having a close involvement with the problems of the bereaved families.

Beyond the offices, in the CFH, a long corridor led to the embalming room: this was fully tiled in white and referred to as 'the mortuary'. The Body Bank, a row of refrigerators, held 12 bodies in the room next door. Adjacent to the Body Bank was the garaging, used intermittently throughout the day. Two of the fleets were a traditional black and one was grey. It was the firm's 'competitive intention' to pursue grey as a ritual colour. When all the other funeral homes in the city had followed suit and gone for grey, the CFH would change to maroon. Decisions on ritual content in some areas were thus influenced less by tradition than by market forces. The CFH possessed the financial muscle for example, to promote its own Advanced Funeral Payment Plans and to engage in promotional activities such as the provision of a voucher worth half the amount subscribed which the potential client could spend elsewhere within the parent organization in other departments and stores. This consumer approach to death could only be imitated by large private corporations or (in the case of the Funeral Pre payment plan) by the Professional Association (the NAFD) putting together a package deal which all member firms could operate.

Upstairs in the CFH a massive joinery shop housed the firm's considerable stock of coffins and coffin sets, purchased in orders of up to 2,000 at a time and received at varying intervals throughout the year. A large lift carried the stacked and prepared coffins to the floor below. At the far end of the building was the catering room: a large hall with long tables, red plastic chairs and red wall lights. In common with the catering rooms of other funeral establishments, this possessed an exit directly onto the street, allowing mourners a natural progression through the funeral establishment.

The success of the CFH and its large share of the market both locally in North City and nationally, despite the perceived lack of personal service, derived from its long association with a primarily working class clientele and its generally lower prices than those of other funeral organizations. However, the CFH's rituals were inevitably characterized by 'loose attachment'. Both funeral directors and drivers generally knew nothing of the deceased or the family because they had not arranged the funeral. Equally, the bereaved family were continually confronted by different employees. This lack of personal service was heavily criticized by others within the death system, whether funeral directors, clergy or crematoria officials. In part, the criticism has arisen from jealousy at the ever increasing funeral turnover of the CFH. But more pertinently it reflects a genuine regret at the loss of the personal relationships which have traditionally characterized the funeral director's role.

### 3.11. The Commercial Funeral Home (Com.FH)

The Com.FH did not slot into either of Pine's two categories but

displayed aspects of both. Having all the features of a 'complex organization' whilst demonstrating a close and overt allegiance to the profit motive, it nevertheless retained far more aspects of the 'personal service model' than the CFH. In contrast with the constrained, inflexible and unionized nature of the CFH, it provided continuity of contact between a given funeral director and a family and also encouraged personal and innovative ritual through a cavalier attitude which boasted that whatever it was asked, it would provide. This cavalier attitude, together with a willingness to take shortcuts, was generally perceived by other funeral homes and individuals within the death system as unprofessional and condemned.

The Com.FH, like the CFH, pursued a policy of expansion and owned two smaller funeral firms which retained their own names. At the time of fieldwork, the funeral home coped with up to sixty funerals a week and boasted an annual total of some 1,400 funerals. (This figure included funerals handled under various contracts.)

Sited on a busy arterial road into the city the Commercial Funeral Home possessed an unappealing exterior with dirty windows and old black paintwork. At a casual glance it could have been mistaken for a warehouse. However, its name, in immense letters across the front wall was easily seen by commuters travelling in and out of the city and provided an ever present advertisement. The bereaved, entering by the front door, found themselves in a small wood pannelled hall and then entered a waiting area laid out at the foot of a staircase. This contained an old dralon settee and two matching chairs and was surrounded by emerald green flocked wallpaper. The frequent choice of heavy designs and fabrics in emerald, crimson and purple within

funeral establishments in the city appeared to be an attempt to create a deliberately 'dramatic' setting which attempted to emphasize such qualities as 'luxury' and genuine care for the body' (12).

Within the waiting area, a small table contained cards advertising the British Heart Foundation and pamphlets asking for donations to a local hospice. The ritual of 'giving donations' was thus actively promoted by funeral directors alongside the more traditional ritual of giving flowers. The stairs led to the main 'arrangements' area with mauve flocked wallpaper, gold dralon sofa and chairs, a small table with magazines and a reproduction dresser. This provided a stage setting for a sitting room, although the homely effect was somewhat spoiled by the fact that five doors and the staircase led into the room, making it a thoroughfare. There was however, a smaller arrangements room next to the executive office.

The main office contained two massive boardroom tables around which there was seating for six funeral directors and two secretaries. During fieldwork the tables were littered with piles of paperwork, typewriters, telephones, ashtrays and coffee cups. In contrast to the controlled formality of the CFH, the atmosphere was that of a frenetic newspaper office. The manager did not have a separate office but sat at the tables with other funeral directors. A separate office was used sporadically by the owners of the firm and a further smaller annex was inhabited by the firm's book keeper who remained isolated from the general cut and thrust of the daily routine.

In both the CFH and the Professional Funeral Home the interior

layout was conducive to a sense of progression through the stages of ritual. In the Com.FH and the Cross.FH however, ritual was produced within an establishment that was haphazard in design. Mourners were taken upstairs and downstairs and in and out of rooms with no real understanding of where they were going. It is notable however, that both the Com.FH and the Cross.FH. offered the most flexible choice of ritual and that their funeral directors were less formal in interaction with the bereaved than those of the CFH or the PFH.

From the General Office and kitchenette rough wooden stairs led up to the joinery shop and down to the embalming room and garage area at the back of the building. Downstairs, at the front of the building the hall led to a small service chapel, the chapels of rest and carpeted stairs up to a series of 'overflow' chapels of rest. At the end of the row of downstairs chapels, a door to the embalming room was kept locked effectively separating front stage and back stage operations.

All four of the major organizations had either permanent service chapels in which the funeral service could be held, or a very large chapel of rest which could double as a service chapel. Following vetoes by the local Church hierarchy, these facilities were rarely used by Anglican clergy, although they were sometimes used by non conformist and other ministers. In the Com.FH. the service chapel often doubled as a chapel of rest, with the coffin being placed upon trestles in front of the altar. Its own individual chapels of rest were referred to rather scornfully within the death system as 'wardrobes' since they consisted more than narrow spaces behind a series of sliding doors. As with the CFH, little attempts was

made to create a particular atmosphere for the pre-disposal ritual of viewing. This contrasted with both the PFH whose chapels of rest were tasteful and predominantly religiously oriented and with the Cross.FH whose new purpose built chapels of rest were smartly designed and furnished and overtly religious.

Beyond the chapels of rest, the embalming or 'prep' room (at least when the research period began) was little more than a cellar with a stone floor. Initially the Com.FH carried out its embalming with the aid of a metal table, a stone sink and curtained shelves around the room which could hold the unprepared bodies. The basic nature of the facilities was typical of those found throughout the area, especially in smaller firms, but the modernizing process had already begun and the Cross FH, the Com.FH and the PFH refurbished or re-housed their embalming facilities. The Com.FH's facilities acquired a new floor, two refrigerators capable of storing three bodies each, a new embalming table and extra cupboard space and equipment. Modernization within all the larger and many of the medium sized organizations within the city, underlined the increasing importance of embalming within the funeral profession.

Although the same primary division between 'upstairs staff' (the funeral directors, secretarial staff and bookkeeper), and 'downstairs staff (the drivers, bearers and shrouders) applied, there was more integration than at the CFH. The administration depended upon this informality since the majority of instructions were given by word of mouth or written on scraps of paper. There were no 'instant visibility' streamers around the walls as in the CFH and no 'instant visibility board on the wall' as in the PFH. Telephone enquiries concerning a

particular funeral led to an urgent request for a small daily clipboard or a delving into various books strewn about the main desk.

By contrast with the CFH, the Com.FH possessed a singular lack of forms and receipts. It was also the only one of the complex organizations to take down funeral arrangements on plain sheets of A 4 paper rather than specially prepared pro formas. The lack of bureaucratic structure meant that a great deal of responsibility was placed upon individual funeral directors to ensure that the details of their own funerals were correctly entered onto the clipboard and into individual books. The high volume of work undertaken resulted in a scheduling of funerals that was a masterpiece of intricate planning with vehicles and drivers timed to within five minutes. Coping with last minute changes, such as funerals which overran their allotted time, or adverse weather or traffic conditions, entailed sending cars and men straight from one cemetery or house to another and joining and rejoining funerals without a break in between. Situations which would have caused hopeless disruption within a bureaucratic organization, were treated as routine: this in turn encouraged a cavalier attitude which led to the ideology that the Com.FH could cope with anything.

Requests from other funeral homes for the loan of vehicles, coffins or men were rarely turned away, even though it might involve an almost total re-organization of personnel throughout the daily chart. On a parallel line, the requests of the bereaved for individual rituals were always met, no matter how quirky or unsuitable they might have been perceived to be by other organizations. For example, a client who wished to hold her relative's funeral without the coffin lid on, because the relative had suffered from claustrophobia was accommodated by the

Com.FH although it would have been turned down by others. Net curtaining was purchased to drape over the coffin for the drive through the city centre and battles were undertaken with local crematoria officials to achieve the cremation of a lidless coffin. When local crematoria within the city refused, a crematorium in another town was utilised.

The CFH, the PFH and the Cross.FH all pursued modernization policies which expanded and updated their premises into 'ideal death environments' and which promoted their images. The Com.FH however concentrated primarily on enlarging its turnover at the expense of image and environment. By cheeseparing on capital equipment and furnishings, by stepping up advertising and undercutting other funeral firms, a steady increase was achieved. The cut back on such items as vehicle replacement or repair however, added unnecessarily to the burden of tension and difficulties for staff. Hearses and limousines were frequently breaking down during the research period.

### 3.12. The Professional Funeral Home (PFH)

The PFH typified the small funeral home which had been passed down through four or five generations of 'inheritors' within the same family and which had managed to expand whilst retaining the ethic of personal service and the ideals of professionalism. The PFH had grown from a small to medium firm, to a large firm by amalgamation with another organization of similar size and pedigree. The funeral home not only kept its own name by this process but also acquired a separate establishment in another part of the city which remained under its original name.

Whilst the CFH and the Com.FH were housed in old and rather dingey buildings, the PFH boasted a modern purpose built brick establishment surrounded by neat tarmac paths and gates, with windows heavily curtained with net. Inside the front door, the bereaved were greeted by two low tables displaying photographs of the original founder of the firm and his successors. Uncertainties in the face of death could thus be stilled by the impression that the PFH was run by experts. To the right of the front door there was a spacious arrangements room which was decorated in regency fashion with striped wallpaper, gold dralon chairs and candelabra wall lights with gold shades. It was obvious that a great deal of thought had been given to establishing a 'proper' atmosphere. 'Putting the final little touches' such as the wedgewood ashtrays, was seen to help. 'I think our turnover of funerals, if you can call it a turnover, I don't really like to look at it that way, has increased in the last few years. I think people do notice' (F.Dir EE)

To the left of the front door, the corridor was carpeted in vivid mauve and led to the chapels of rest. In the PFH, the first chapel of rest was equipped for use as a service chapel, containing a specially imported stained glass window and a large carved wooden piece of furniture resembling an altar. A second chapel of rest was bare except for a cross upon a shelf. A third chapel contained a helio or laying out set. Commonly used in the home a generation ago whilst waiting for the coffin to be made, a helio composes a valance of heavy quilted satin (to be tied around a low table or couch) and a matching quilt which completely covers the body and reaches halfway down the valance. Within the PFH, the continued use of the helio underlined its image as a home where old values and traditions remained important.

As in the Com.FH there was a physical barrier between the chapels of rest and the embalming area. This took the shape of a 'dividing room' containing boxes of shrouds. During the research period, the prep room or embalming theatre, as it was due to be renamed , was being refurbished. Previously an empty square room with an old fashioned sink and pieces of rubber hose strewn about the place like a farm dairy, it was slowly being retiled in white from floor to ceiling and acquiring the latest modern equipment.

Beyond the prep room and the anteroom where bodies waited to be transformed, was the staff room. Of the larger funeral homes, only the Com.FH lacked staff facilities. In the PFH the staff room was an unkempt area with tables and chairs, an old fashioned stove, a wardrobe and a radio. Personnel attempted to eat together at some stage during the middle of the day but invariably some staff were rushing off to funerals or returning from them. Beyond the staff room was the garage housing the traditional black funeral fleet and a modern grey removal vehicle. Adjoining this, were the flower racks where florists and others came to deposit the day's wreaths and sheaves.

Further to the left of the front hall was the catering room which used casually grouped round tables and stackaway chairs. Huge panoramic windows lightened the gloom of the bereaved after the disposal ceremonies. A small kitchen to the side was used to prepare tea and coffee although all the food was home made, prepared elsewhere by volunteer housewives and transported in. As with the CFH, the catering room had its own separate entrance so that the bereaved were aware of a natural sense of progression through the rituals of death.

The small office which formed the organizational hub of the PFH was meticulously kept and characterized by a surprisingly tranquil atmosphere by comparison with other large funeral homes within the city. It contained only three small desks, two electronic typewriters and a modern switchboard. The 'instant visibility' factor, giving the days and weeks funerals at a glance, was provided by a system of three cork boards covering one wall.

The role of the funeral director within the PFH was viewed as that of a practicing professional, dispensing advice and guiding the bereaved towards a presentation of the funeral as it should be: traditional and dignified. An autocratic attitude towards the non unionized staff, both upstairs and downstairs on the part of management was complemented by a caring if somewhat paternalistic attitude towards the bereaved.

In the PFH a particular concern with presentation was part of a longstanding attitude within the ruling family. There was a regard for the aesthetic effect of funeral ritual which was not encountered to the same degree anywhere else within the city. Nevertheless beneath the ideology of vocations and professionalism there was an astute cutting edge typified by a speech by a director of the firm (The Funeral Director 1970) which advised: 'We have just changed the complete clothing of our staff and we hope people are going to notice. If you rent your vehicles out to somebody else, put your drivers in the old clothes that you have just discarded. Do not send them out in the new stuff, otherwise nobody will know the new stuff belongs to you.' At the time of fieldwork, the staff were in the main, young men in their early twenties, the result of a deliberate policy to cultivate a 'clean cut' image and to avoid the stereotype of the undertaker as a doddering

grey haired old man.

A large mirror in the staff room ensured that the staff were continually checking their appearances. All bearers had to be the same height in order to present a uniform image when carrying the coffin. Within the death system, a rumour circulated that new employees had to practice lowering a coffin in unison over the garage inspection pit, to ensure that their movements were precise. Disposal rituals, the formation of the cortege, the carrying of the coffin were certainly accomplished in a unique drilled and polished style which was acknowledged as superior by others in the death system. 'Personal service' was emphasized throughout, not by easy compliance with individual requests, but by meticulous attention to detail, such as removing the cellophane from flowers delivered by the florists.

### 3.13. The Crossroads Funeral Home.

The Cross.FH was caught in the changeover from a medium sized 'professional' orientated family firm to a larger 'commercial' orientated concern. It had a similar, although shorter pedigree to the PFH, having been founded around the turn of the century by the grandfather of the present owner. In the 1980's the owner had begun a wide ranging programme of modernization trying to retain the values of professionalism and personal service whilst taking short cuts in the interests of greater productivity. The new image was set out in a glossy brochure which illustrated the range of services available and the new premises. The Cross.FH had also acquired a second funeral business, retaining the original name and using it mainly as a cover for its wedding car hire business.

By 1983, the Cross.FH's turnover had risen to around 800 funerals per annum. The owner viewed the funeral business as 'lucrative'. 'If you're doing 1,000 funerals per year, you're worth on paper about one million pounds. If you're doing 500, half a million'. The struggle to maintain a vocational image whilst changing over to a business orientation was evident. 'Its more than just a job but you've got to really tackle your individual funerals in a workmanlike fashion. In other words, you've almost got to think of them as just a job to be able to get the work done efficiently' (F.Dir.LE).

Of the four organizations only the Cross.FH remained close to the original concept of the family home with its formal front parlour in which to view the dead. It was located in a large Edwardian villa set back from the road by a long front garden. There the similarity ended since the interior was undergoing a complete renovation and outside, a large existing service chapel had been supplemented by new purpose built buildings which housed the coffin room, three chapels of rest and the new embalming room. The top floor would eventually provide new offices and a shower room for staff. Meanwhile the existing organization downstairs was confined to a cramped office with three desks, shared by the owner, his bookkeeper and the catering lady. Filing cabinets, shrouds in boxes and a photocopier made it crowded and untidy.

Beyond the office was a small sitting room with an old three piece suite where the Arrangements were carried out, although the majority of clients were seen in their own homes. Down the corridor from the front door a large amount of the available space was given over to

two separate catering rooms which could accommodate two different funerals parties at the same time for either a buffet or a formal meal. Further along the corridor to the left was a small staff room with old fashioned tiled fireplace, ancient table, wardrobe and stackaway chairs. Beyond this, there was a large kitchen where the catering was prepared.

As with the Com.FH, the various front stage and backstage regions sat unhappily together. The office could only be reached by walking through the middle of the arrangements room or taking a circular route and entering by way of the glass conservatory where the engraving machine was kept amongst a scattering of wicker chairs. Catering ladies had to carry tea urns back and forth through the staff room where funeral directors were changing their trousers. In these cramped, if homely surroundings, the owner attempted to cope with an increasing volume of business.

The service chapel was the largest in the city, seating thirty and boasting its own music system operated from the staff room. Proving something of a white elephant given the inflexible attitude of local clergy, it was rarely used except as a gathering point for big funeral parties. The owner had considered dividing it into chapels of rest but was reluctant to take this step in case there was a change of policy within the Anglican hierarchy. In common with other big firms, the establishment retained the potential for taking over the funeral service completely, should the clergy and church involvement dwindle away.

The three new chapels of rest were separately housed in a modern

stone faced building with carriage lamps outside the door. The decor was again regency style with thin scrolled ladies' boudoir chairs that appeared more decorative than comfortable. In common with the PFH the new building boasted a full sized stained glass window, obtained from a demolished church (13).

The back yard contained the recently acquired new grey fleet of Mercedes. Grey cars had been chosen in favour of black 'because they look distinctive and we need to be able to hire them out. Mercedes because black mercedes don't look too bad with grey if we have to hire in' (F.Dir.LE). In both the CFH and the Cross.FH, no reference was made to the preferences of the bereaved or to 'what the area would stand' before changing from the traditional black to grey, suggesting that funeral directors were in complete control of the direction of some areas of ritual. The PFH however, firmly refused to break with black, whilst the Com.FH eschewed laying out capital expenditure whilst their ancient black fleets of Rolls and Daimlers remained roadworthy.

Similarities with the Com.FH included a fairly haphazard attitude towards the production of ritual and a lack of routinisation. The staff met early in the morning within the small staff room to discuss the day's funerals. Funeral directors as individuals were responsible for the conduct of their own funerals and it was left to personal communication to co-ordinate daily routines. Hierarchical divisions and specialisation were less in evidence than in any of the other organizations. Adaptability was at a premium and staff had to be prepared to turn their hands to most jobs within the organization. The Cross.FH had one of the smallest ratios of staff

turnover, with four funeral directors, one of whom was also the embalmer. In common with the Com.FH, the Cross FH increasingly cut corners by failing to embalm bodies when very busy. The organisation, caught in the transition stage, considered that it was cheaper to hire in more staff when pushed, rather than pay full time rates for extra staff, even though this led to difficulties at times. While endeavouring to retain its old fashioned 'personal service' ethic, the organization was also imitating some of the short cuts of the Com.FH, such as double booking funerals and worrying about how the organization would cope with them later.

### 3.13. Division of Labour within the Funeral Homes

An upstairs/downstairs division of labour within all four organizations meant that 'downstairs staff' were 'on call' to remove bodies, cover the contract work and generally to 'get dirtier' than the funeral directors. In the CFH, the demarcation was clear: drivers did not carry out funeral directors work, nor would funeral directors be expected to carry out the tasks of drivers or bearers, except in an emergency. Below stairs staff however, were expected to turn their hands to a variety of work, from coffin making to shrouding to taking announcements to local newspaper offices.

In the Com/FH, the demarcation between upstairs and downstairs was less clearly defined. Drivers were expected to turn their hands to shrouding and bearing whilst funeral directors were also sometimes expected to drive, bear and shroud. In part, the overlap could be traced to the high volume of work and the attitude of the management which was more democratic than that of either the CFH or the PFH. Occasionally however, the lack of clear definition of roles led to

violent rows between staff who did not think that they should be expected to perform certain tasks. In the PFH, the upstairs/downstairs demarcation was clearly set out, although unlike the CFH, it could be flexible and funeral directors might occasionally, when there were staff shortages, take over the roles of driver/bearers and also shroud bodies. The demarcation was least marked in the Cross.FH where the majority of the staff were expected to drive, act as bearers, conduct, arrange, shroud and trim coffins. The degree of specialisation within Funeral Homes thus depended crucially upon the size and turnover of the organization rather than its guiding ideology.

In all of the Funeral Homes there was some aggravation and tension between upstairs and downstairs staff. Downstairs staff tended to feel that funeral directors had 'a cushy number' sitting down arranging funerals and making telephone calls for most of the day, whilst funeral directors tended to feel that the downstairs staff had little of the stresses of responsibility for individual funerals and simply had to carry out orders. In addition, there was the potentially ambivalent 'between stairs' position of the embalmers.

Paradoxically, whilst the British Institute of Embalmers represented the only body of theoretical knowledge through which funeral directors might lay claim to professionalism, embalmers were still looked down upon as the 'trade' part of the job. Embalmers were seen as 'the people who mess about with bodies' (Emb ML), the professional image being sustained by the unqualified funeral directors upstairs. Within larger organizations nationally where embalmers did nothing but embalm for 90% of their time, they were

viewed as having the between stairs status of the nanny, in caring for bodies. In these funeral homes, embalmers tended to be used as 'fillers' on a 'do this, do that, and when you've time, just embalm those three in the corner over there.' (Emb ML). Within the city and the four major organizations, the embalmers were all funeral directors who embalmed in addition to conducting and/or arranging funerals. Stress arose in this case from the tendency to overwork funeral directors with embalming qualifications. 'City Embalmer: 'You may start embalming at four or five oclock if bodies are brought in late from hospitals, and work through the evening. Its a strain on the family' (Emb PB).

### 3.14. Inter-Organization Perception

#### a. Territory Extension

The rivalry for territory between the four largest funeral homes was intense and often inherited. One funeral director related how his father would phone up to complain if a rival funeral firm conducted a funeral on 'his patch'. Fieldwork produced numerous instances of the clear perceptions of the ownership of city territories. Referring to a single postal district, one funeral director commented: 'Firm A has X lane sewn up, Firm B has St. Jeffreys, C likes to think he has Y road. Then D did a funeral in Y road. C was furious and made the staff go through all the back records for five years to discover whether D had pinched a family off him' (F.Dir SX).

A 'family' was perceived as the basic business resource comprising the future income of the Funeral Home. The organizations thus had a keen interest in retaining a family which had already placed one

funeral with them, and in addition had a continual interest in poaching and nursing out of territory families. 'I mean if people are going to get us from out of town (ie. out of territory), you know, lets look after them. Because it could be C's area! Ha! ha!'

'(F.Dir.LE). Individual funeral directors continually emphasized that the days of complacency over territories had vanished and that the 'divine right' to certain areas which prevailed fifty years ago, no longer existed.

#### b. Advertising

In commerce at large, advertising is the primary method of securing new business. Whilst this is acceptable in America (Mitford 1963), British funeral organizations in their attempt to retain a professional image and to reduce costs have traditionally been reluctant to consider anything but the most conservative of advertisements. These are normally confined to the 'Family Pages' of local or national newspapers or to telephone directories and church magazines.

During fieldwork however, it was evident that not only were the advertisements of the major funeral homes in Yellow Pages becoming more commercialised and tending to follow the American pattern (featuring photographs of individual funeral directors to emphasize the idea of 'personal service') but that also several of the smaller funeral homes were submitting large advertisements. Subsequently the Com.FH commenced lengthy front page newspaper advertisements boosting its Funeral Pre-payment Scheme following this with smaller advertisements at the back of the newspaper calling attention to its new 'Funerals in Space' Scheme (whereby through links with an

American agency, the ashes of the dead could be sent into orbit.). These innovations in advertising together with a new Funerals in Space scheme, were greeted with almost unanimous disapproval from the rest of the funeral community in the city. Despite modernization, the maintenance of a low public profile remained a sine qua non within the funeral world as a whole. It was also not done to publicise the fact that death ritual could be invented since this failed to protect the less able firms from expensive innovations.

On the other hand, there was little self criticism within the funeral community of existing advertisements which misled the bereaved. As noted earlier a single funeral home might appear under several different names and advertisements, using different telephone numbers which were all located within the same office. During fieldwork in two of the Funeral Homes, the following exchange was typical: A funeral director answered one telephone in the general office speaking to a client wanting an estimate from them as firm X. He provided the estimate, replaced the receiver and waited for the second telephone to ring, which would be answered as firm Y. It was common practice in such cases for the funeral director to provide two different estimates for the same funeral requirements, pitching one considerably lower in order to 'pull' the funeral.

### c. Contracts

After advertising and the purchase of smaller firms, the third most important method of territory extension was via the contracts offered by various institutions within the city. The larger funeral homes competed for the Medical School Contract, the Social Services Contract, the Coroners Contract and the Hospital Removals Contract.

Contracts were put out to tender and allocated on the basis of the lowest figures or the best service. Small organizations were automatically excluded from the contract race since they lacked the necessary manpower and facilities. The Medical Schools contract for example, attracted few bidders since 'body' removals had to be carried out 'immediately' and could not be delayed to fit in with prior work commitments. The value of all contract work derived from its 'missionary' qualities. A funeral firm carrying out a hospital removal for example, would of necessity be introduced to the bereaved family who might live 'out of territory'. If the bereaved family subsequently decided to offer the funeral to the 'removals firm' instead of obtaining their local funeral firm, a 'new' family had been netted and might reasonably be expected to remain with them for their next death.

(d) Touting:

A fourth method of territory extension, touting for funerals, had been officially eradicated with the formation of the BUA and the NAFD. Previously acknowledged as one of the best ways of attracting new custom through the offices of laying out women, doctors, nurses and clergy, touting had fallen into disrepute. Instances of contemporary touting were played down despite the fact that in other commercial concerns, tipping employees or outsiders by way of 'commission' for bringing in new business was viewed as legitimate and positively encouraged.

During fieldwork, there were numerous rumours of touting in circulation. For example that a nursing home, or vicar or leader of a religious community was 'in the pocket of a specific funeral home'.

But only one person was actually encountered who admitted to informing of deaths for commission. 'I have pinched this funeral off firm X for you. Its a large family and they are all getting on a bit. There could be quite a few funerals in it for you if you do a good job' (Respondent DW). Since at the time of research, the average cost of a funeral was around £400, the promise of a steady supply of four or five more funerals was the welcome equivalent of a promise to deliver further income of at least £2,000.

### 3.15. Conflict and Integration between Firms

#### (a) The helping network

Within the spread of funeral establishments in the city, there was an informal but viable helping network which provided a source of integration within the death system as a whole. Such inter-organizational assistance would have been unknown at the turn of the century. By the 1980's co-operation had become a necessity due to the demands of modernization. Smaller firms hired cars from bigger firms and occasionally 'doubled up' so that two small paired firms could share a car or hearse jointly hired from a larger firm. The majority of the larger funeral homes loaned one another vehicles, coffins and staff. 'Last week the phone rang. It was C. establishment . . . . They were in a hell of a panic! They've only got one hearse and it had broken down on a funeral. Would we let them have a hearse? Well we had five funerals that day so we were really pretty busy.. but we had a hearse out back. I said I could do it' (F.Dir. LE).

b. Knock up Men

A common pool of labour comprising the 'knock up men' was utilised by many of the firms. 'Knock up men' were drivers (often retired funeral personnel or taxi drivers) willing to work at short notice, driving the hearses or limousines or acting as bearers. Together with mortuary, crematoria and cemetery personnel at the vital contact points within the death system, the 'knock up men' were the source of a continual flow of information and rumours between funeral homes. This was effective in promoting both integration and conflict depending upon the substance of the rumours.

(c) Below stairs staff

Below stairs staff at the larger establishments also moved from one funeral home to another in search of better pay and conditions, or as a result of personality clashes, carrying with them a great deal of information on their former firm's organizational tactics. Whilst one firm might not be keen to take another's leavings, the shortage of experienced funeral personnel usually ensured their eventual re-employment. However, the smaller 'professionally orientated' funeral homes were the most reluctant to employ circulating staff. 'There are people coming and going and some of them are not the most tactful or helpful of people, because as I said before, its not the sort of thing anybody can do' (F. Dir.BX). In general, funeral directors or upstairs staff, attempted to control the behaviour of below stairs staff and to eradicate behaviour which might mitigate against the image of their establishment. It was noticeable that below stairs staff moving from the Com.FH to the PFH for example, tended to smarten their appearance and to view their role differently.

The majority of funeral directors when questioned in interviews declared that there was no animosity between funeral homes in the city. Informally however, there was a continuous flow of inter-establishment criticism. '..also they (Firm J) have got funeral directors like N, dirty, untidy and smells of beer' (F.Dir NE). 'X claims he gives a high service but there's water coming through the roof of his chapel into a bucket...' (F.Dir.SX). 'B criticised our vinyl coffins but they're our cheapest. B wouldn't use them but he uses plastic handles' (F.Dir LE).

The day to day successes and failures of competitors were also charted nightly via the obituary columns. 'A is busy at the moment. If its quiet, its okay as long as our own area is quiet - if others are getting them from our area, something is wrong. At the moment B is taking them from X now that B is well known. If he takes a family then those families will generally remain with him. His business may bulge and settle back but those families stay with him' (F.Dir.LE).

#### (d) Chaos and Unreality

The predominant factors of competition, territoriality and the need to modernize when meshed with the varying levels of conflict and integration in the death system as a whole, ensured that rumour and speculation were always rife. The fact that a funeral home might loan a rival two limousines in the morning and be actively engaged in poaching a funeral from them in the afternoon, encouraged a schizophrenic view of daily events.

By the time many of the rumours had circulated around the death system, they had become heavily embroidered, making it difficult for

both insiders and outsiders to separate fact from fiction. Examples of such rumours concerned proposed take-overs, mooted prosecutions for malpractice and the imminent implementation of new local government or ecclesiastical rules and regulations. One rumour suggested that the owner of a new funeral firm had arranged to have his own phone tapped because so many of his callers were other funeral directors calling up for bogus estimates to determine his price structure. Another particularly persistent rumour concerned a funeral home which had supposedly sent a body abroad which never arrived. Much of the chaos and unreality arose from the closed nature of the death system where the majority of personnel spent the greater part of their working day involved with death matters which they could not discuss with those 'outside'.

### 3.16. Changes in the contemporary role of the funeral director

As noted in the analysis of the four major funeral homes, the funeral directors perceptions of his/her occupational role was heavily, although not crucially dependent upon the type of funeral home and upon socialisation experienced within that home. Within many of the small 1 - 2 men businesses that had carried out funerals for several generations as a sole occupation, the orientation was strictly that of a professional with a 'vocation' or calling.

Freidson's (1977) definition of a profession suggests that it can primarily be applied to 'an occupational monopoly with a position of dominance in a division of labour' (p.24). The funeral directors' failure to achieve registration, despite continuing attempts since the 1930's can be understood in the light of Freidson's suggestion that an occupation will experience particular difficulties in

enhancing its occupational control where it operates within a field which is already organized and controlled by another dominant profession - in this case, medicine, the law and the church. However, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, the Anglican clergy have taken an increasingly subordinate role within the management of death while medical and legal personnel, together with the managerial agents of local government, have achieved a concurrent increase in power. The occupational advancement of funeral directors has been especially noteworthy. It stems from initiatives to remove access to funeral goods and services from the general public, their appropriation of death culture from the home into a specialised enclave and funeral directors increasing skills in handling a more complex bureaucratic death system.

Despite increasing public respect in some areas. for example, the formation of international embalming teams which are routinely sent to the scenes of disasters and air crashes, public approbation generally has not been forthcoming. As the spate of public inquiries into funeral practices have demonstrated (the Price Commission 1977; the DHSS Survey 1980; the Which Report 1982; the Report of the Office of Fair Trading 1989), public suspicion has increased rather than decreased. The self conscious 'mystique' of funeral directors has enhanced myth and attracted criticism. In addition, much of the claim to professional status is seen to derive unfairly from the shocked, emotional state of the bereaved.

For some, such as the small 1 - 2 men businesses with a professional orientation and many of the 'inheritors' within larger firms, the professional role was assumed without question (14). The work was

part of a total role, a life interest into which they were socialised from childhood; their professional organization meets all of the relevant criteria on education and closure and their professional power follows naturally from the submissiveness and lack of knowledge of the bereaved clients. For many others however, especially employees of large organizations and profit orientated entrepreneurs, the idea of the funeral director as professional is laughable. There is little pretence at being anything other than successful businessmen (15). It is pointed out that the craft skill of coffin and shroud making has been undermined by mechanization and mass production and that educational qualifications for admission to Diploma examinations are minimal, with O levels rating as 'high' qualifications. The regulation of standards and the work of the disciplinary committee are similarly viewed as ineffective in the attempt to preside over and regularise the conglomeration of different species of organization which exist as funeral homes. The occupation has nevertheless maintained one of the major strengths of any profession, the ability to counter encroachments into its territory by other groups.

In North city, the role of the funeral director was perceived quite differently both within and between organisations. Within the larger organisations, it was possible to find both funeral directors who saw funeral directing as just a job working alongside those who perceived it as a 'calling'. Funeral directors within the CFH saw themselves as either having a job and being a member of a team or as having a calling. Funeral Directors within the Com.FH tended to see it as a job although some perceived themselves as a 'bit different' or 'special' to do such work. A professional status however, was

considered unobtainable. 'We can't be on a level with Doctors and Solicitors because the qualifications aren't the same' (F.Dir. QX). Whether or not individual funeral directors saw themselves as professionals did not appear to relate in any way to whether the individual concerned performed multiple roles and acted as driver/bearer/funeral director rather than as funeral director only.

### 3.17. Ideal Role Attributes

A large gap existed between the ideal and what was available in the way of staff within the city. The Funeral Director, March 1964) listed the ideal qualities as 'Considerateness, tactful, dignity, inborn honesty, friendliness. A man of dignity and integrity: a man whose consideration for the living is equal to that for the dead....' (p.174). Funeral directors in the city were formerly butchers, bus drivers, office managers, insurance agents, chefs, salesmen and civil servants. The Com.FH considered that the ideal applicant for the job of funeral director would be an ex butcher who had had the administrative experience of running his own business. An unemployed airline pilot was turned down by this organization as too highly qualified. The CFH retained a similar bias against highly qualified applicants considering that 'O' levels were 'not necessary'. The manager suggested that he first looked to see whether an applicant had polished shoes and a clean collar and after that considered a sympathetic and willing nature to be the most important attributes. The PFH however placed the highest importance on appearance. The management would not tolerate 'smoking or eating or chewing gum or driving with sunglasses' (F.Dir CQ).

In general, the smaller and more traditional the firm, the greater

the perception that the occupation of funeral director could not be classified as an ordinary job. 'You've got to have a feeling for it' (F.Dir.BX) It was frequently suggested that this elusive 'feeling' could not be conjured up by outsiders but had to be mysteriously passed down through the generations within a family. Many funeral directors also felt that they were perceived as having special qualities by the general public. '...there are an awful lot of people who say, well you must be something special..there's no way I could do your job' (F.Dir.QC) A city clergyman commented: 'I think that ..there is a sort of 'craft mystique' in the undertakers role, but, and I think they honestly believe that one of their jobs is this role of 'protection from' rather than simply helping through' (C/AN). Several clergymen felt that the 'mystique' was deliberately manufactured and thus could not be compared with the genuine mysteries of the church attaching to the clergys role. Within the Com.FH however, there tended to be less emphasis upon mystique. '(People) don't know what to expect. We seem to have an air of, of mystery which we in turn try to break down for this firm. Anybody can come here and see anything, ask questions and will be told the right answers.....' (F.Dir.QX).

Contrary to the literature and to popular conceptions of the funeral directors role, the quality most valued by the larger firms, apart from smart presentation, was that of 'resourcefulness'. The funeral director who was 'streetwise', capable of living upon his wits, coping with diverse social situations and controlling large numbers of people was increasingly at a premium in the four major firms. 'You've got to be the sort of person in my opinion that can adapt to a situation..and not let it worry you, not let it get too much on top

of you' (F.Dir.QC). A funeral director who subsequently left his job in a large funeral home commented on the stress of handling large numbers of funerals in one day. 'I couldn't take it any more. My mind was going..I went out and I was just blank' (F.Dir.CB).

A further valued attribute of the funeral director's role which has increased concurrently with the expansion of the death system is that of the 'combatant', the person who goes out to do battle with the system on behalf of the client. The ideal funeral director was seen as someone who was 'prepared to argue on behalf of the client as I've argued with coroners and various other people, doctors etc..'

(F.Dir.NO). This aggressive streak however had to be tempered with two other important qualities: the ability to listen and restraint in the provision of goods and services. 'The funeral director has not got to use his position to rip somebody off because people are very very, um, very prone to um, being sold good coffins for £300 over and above the cost of the funeral and things like that..' (F.Dir.LE).

Various negative qualities were also self-attributed to their roles by funeral directors. Many felt that they were 'used' by the general public and not appreciated. Within the CFH, a respondent commented: 'We're social workers and social outcasts. We have to sort out all their problems, wills, tax, relatives squabbles'. He felt that funeral directors were perceived as '..the vultures who sit around the corner waiting for someone to die..' (F.Dir.EQ). Conversely, a female funeral director stated: 'A lot of people tend to think that funeral directors are a bit goody goody'. She described how the bereaved often hid their cigarettes and threw open windows on her arrival at a house.

There were only three female funeral directors within the area at the time of research, two within family firms, taking over from their fathers and one employed in the branch office of a major chain. These were always grudgingly referred to by city funeral directors as 'exceptions'. The exclusion of women from the funeral service and their confinement to the traditional role of secretary, parallels the experience of women in the church. It might be suggested that the close relationship between funeral ritual and religious belief meant that the presence of women undertakers or funeral directors would have threatened the religious definition of the situation. This is less feasible given the increasing numbers of Methodist women ministers and Anglican deaconesses either conducting or helping with funeral services. One female Funeral Home owner in the city commented: 'There are quite a lot of women in the funeral profession now. I think the men are going to have to accept it whether they like it or not' (F.Dir.UP).

All of the funeral homes exhibited degrees of chauvinism and the more 'traditional/professional' the orientation, the more marked the antagonism. A Professional Funeral Home respondent admitted: 'We're very chauvinistic I think. Basically I don't see it as a woman's job. If we threw a lady funeral director in here and sent her out conducting funerals, people would probably look in horror' (F.Dir.QC). A Com.FH respondent commented similarly: 'I don't think its a job for a lady. I think that a lady has difficulty in handling deceased persons and coffins' (F.Dir.QX). All of these reactions underlined the predominant perception of the funeral directors role as being that of a producer of ritual rather than a grief counsellor. Only in the CFH, the least traditional/professional organization,

did the manager state that he might be willing to employ a female funeral director and that he had 'nothing against them'.

This deep seam of chauvinism ran throughout the death system as a whole. It was not until 1964 that the first woman Superintendent of a large crematorium was appointed (Funeral Director, March 1964).

Mortuary technicians grumbled about having to give female funeral personnel a hand with lifting bodies out of vehicles and fridges and funeral directors and some clergy alluded to the funeral performances of deaconesses with a degree of condescension. In the same way that a return to home births has been resisted as 'unprofessional' by male gynaecologists, so a return to home deaths and the greater involvement of women may appear equally threatening to the male funeral community. In general, the male attitude to funerals is paternalistic, mechanistic and protective. To date, women within the funeral service have tended to be daughters following existing patterns laid down by their fathers. However, their influence in the future may well encourage more individual rituals and lay greater stress on bereavement counselling and memorialisation.

Beyond all the discussion on professionalisation however, it was evident that the funeral directors role remains crucial to the extent that it is now almost the only remaining specialised death role. Whilst the clergy continue to play a significant part within the disposal rituals, their role is much reduced within the pre disposal and post disposal rituals and they have now themselves assumed 'multiple roles' with which they are more readily identified (e.g. as parish social workers). The historical review showed how the removal of a set of roles from death had made social interaction difficult.

Consequently the importance of the funeral director cannot be over estimated. Set apart by special clothing and skills in death related behaviour, the funeral director's role is also that of the generalised other, continuously acknowledging death on behalf of society.

#### Summary

Chapter Three has shown the extent of the medicalisation and bureaucratisation of the pre disposal phase of the management of death and illuminated the stark contrast between actions taken after a death only a few decades ago and those taken now. Loss of ritual activities and the lack of involvement of the bereaved were seen to relate primarily to intensive specialisation and modernization rather than to a denial of death or a loss of religious belief.

The occupational groupings comprising the death system in the city were shown to hold different orientations to death which enhanced its 'decontextualisation' (Kastenbaum & Aisenberg 1972), and which at times, led to conflictual relationships between those responsible for processing the dead. Funeral directors were instrumental in easing the passage of the body through the official constraints. In the process however, they had absorbed a large proportion of current death knowledge into the funeral home and made little attempt to disseminate information amongst the bereaved or social welfare or support groups. The larger funeral homes were seen to be promoting further closure by pursuing expansionist policies which transformed their establishments into 'total death environments', including embalming theatres, arrangements rooms, individual chapels of rest, service chapels and catering rooms. They were also attempting to

enlarge their 'territories' within the city by advertising, poaching and competing for a number of institutional contracts.

As Pine (1975) noted, the funeral director's role perception was linked to type of organization, its size and culture. 'Inheritors' and those in the smaller homes, were more likely to see themselves as 'professionals' or as having a 'calling' or 'vocation', although the link was not invariable and it was possible to find funeral directors with a 'calling' working alongside those who simply saw it as a job. Valued role qualities within the larger homes had moved away from the leisurely pace of the rural undertaker to that of the 'troubleshooter'. The city funeral director was 'streetwise' and resourceful, needing to think on his feet and to cope with the production of several different funerals at any one time. This change of pace occasioned by the expansion of funeral homes and the increasing complexity of the death system, was largely unrecognized by the bereaved who continued to attribute their loss of familiarity with death ritual to clichéd understandings such as the existence of a 'taboo'.

FOOTNOTES

1. '..the aim of an autopsy which is not ordered by the coroner is to determine the extent of disease and not to determine the cause of death' (Manual of Funeral Directing, 1981, Ch.6, p.1).
2. 'About 80% of cases reported to Coroners in England & Wales are natural deaths, usually sudden unexpected deaths from cardiovascular disease ' (Knight, 1977, p83).
3. 'So doctors want to get their greedy little hands on even more money - another rise - this one of 24% no less - for signing forms that Broderick proved years ago to be unnecessary..' (Independent Burial and Cremation Association (IBCA) Journal August 1978, p64.)
4. Pine (1975) noted a similar tendency in America for mortuary attendants to keep funeral directors waiting. '..morgue attendants may be exercising a small bit of power over the funeral director. However, things are speeded up considerably if the funeral director gives a tip or gratuity' (p.109).
5. Reported in The Funeral Service Journal November 1971.
6. Accepting the charge that pathologists might be 'brutal, barbarous crude butchers', the speaker (a pathologist) noted: 'Many of us start like this and I think it is perhaps an index of one's advancing years whether one treats the body as something of completely no value or something which is going to be looked at and which was once the seat of an ego and id..' Calling for restraint on the part of his colleagues, he added: 'If we know that pulmonary embolism has occurred we can search for this in the leg veins without chopping the leg all to pieces...' Reported in The Funeral Director, February 1969.
7. 'Under the Births & Deaths Registration Act 1953, the Death of every person and the Cause shall be Registered by the Registrar of Births & Deaths for the sub District in which the death occurred...' (Manual of Funeral Directing 1981, Ch 6, p.13).
8. The Manual of Funeral Directing (1981, Ch 6, p.1) notes cryptically: 'Coroner's Officers are of variable quality depending upon their experience....'
9. Although Leicester City Council granted outline planning permission for the Funeral Home to change part of their premises to a crematorium, both Leicester City Council and the Federation of British Cremation Authorities subsequently lodged petitions against the Bill which passed a second reading in the House of Commons. In the House of Commons Debate, Mr. Bruinvels for the Bill, pointed out that the Funeral Home was 'a family concern..prepared to offer seven days a week and 365 days a year, a 24 hour service, which genuinely cares and caters for the whole community...It is not just a matter of private versus municipal.' (The Funeral Director, 1983)
10. In 1983, a funeral home in Coventry endeavoured to take over a local crematorium because its restricted opening hours had caused

major problems for families. The bid was rejected by the controlling Labour Council.

11. A report in the Monumental Masons Journal: NAMM Review (Winter, 1980), noted that representatives of a monumental mason's company had been 'calling on distressed families...sometimes within a few days of burial taking place...offering memorial designs and brochures. This had created considerable bad feeling and could bring the entire Association in bad light with the public'.

12. The settings of death were found to be very important to the bereaved who were distressed if the facilities and suggestion of care, fell short of expectations. Bereaved female RS/PS: 'As soon as I walked in there, it was just a stone cold floor. Well they don't know anything because when you're dead, that's it - but to me I thought, well I thought they could do better than that!' A male respondent QN/PS was similarly upset that the room in which he viewed his relative was a 'glorified broom cupboard' and appeared to contain 'old junk'.

13. Religious artefacts were regularly offered for sale within the Association Journals. For example: 'Church pews and Minister's pulpit, ten almost new, light polished hardwood pews, with full length rexine seating and kneelers. Seating approximately 60 people together with elaborate ministers pulpit. Offers around £1,250. A real bargain.' The Funeral Director, March 1985, p.38).

14. A small professional funeral home director asserted that he had turned a funeral salesman away because he spoke of 'boxes'. 'They're coffins, not boxes'. Although the salesman apologised and said he was only joking, 'I showed him the door'.

15. An entrepreneurial funeral director pointed out that there was a great deal of backstairs haggling over coffins. 'Funeral directors are a mercenary lot you know.' He added, 'Funeral directors such as X or Y (two professionally oriented funeral directors) would not tell you the truth about this. They would pretend it doesn't happen.'

CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRODUCTION OF RITUAL: THE ROLE OF THE FUNERAL  
DIRECTOR

After the appropriation of the body by the death system, the preparation and performance of death ritual proceeds in three stages: the arrangements session with the bereaved in which the basic elements are assembled; the production of ritual within the funeral home and its final execution. An examination of the three stages will reveal the nature of the social roles currently being played within the management of death and the degree to which each participant, funeral director, bereaved and clergy is able to control ritual. The interaction will also provide an opportunity to detect the presence of 'denial', the extent of a continuing language of death, the extent of de-ritualisation, of economic and class linkages and of the struggles for occupational control between funeral directors and clergy.

4.0. Assembling the basic elements of the funeral

In North city, assembling the basic elements of ritual was more often accomplished by the funeral director visiting the home of the bereaved than by the bereaved travelling to the funeral home.

Interaction centred around ten main elements: 1. the obituary, 2. the coffin, 3. the flowers, 4. the gown, 5. jewellery, 6. embalming, 7. the cortege, 8. the service, 9, the music, 10. the catering

Funeral Directors within all four major Funeral Homes tended to follow a set pattern in dealing with these 'elements' primarily to cope with the time constraints of dealing with large numbers of

funerals. Funeral Directors who had taken the oral examination for the NAFD Diploma in Funeral Directing were trained to adopt the following procedures: 1. Client details, 2. deceased details, 3. place of disposal, 4. certification, 5. removal details, 6. hygienic treatment, 7. jewellery, 8. registration, 9. funeral service details, 10. cremation forms to be filled, 11. flower arrangements, 12. press notices, 13. estimate, 14. confirmation of arrangements.

Although the majority of funeral directors professed complete 'client freedom' in assembling the elements of ritual, in practice the ideal was sacrificed in the larger firms to routinisation. 'Now unfortunately, the way our business is and the way a lot of businesses like us are, that time is so crucial that you feel that you can't just sit back and listen' (F.Dir.LE. Cross FH.). The majority of the funeral homes had printed forms which structured and formalised the interaction. Small Funeral Homes however could afford to disregard their lists. F.Dir PU:S/PFH, commented: 'I am quite prepared to talk about anything under the sun for, probably the first half hour until they are used to me'.

All funeral directors took immediate control of the interaction and most admitted to being conscious of a sense of power. It was a sine qua non that the majority of the bereaved had no idea what to do or what to expect. 'They're all looking to you to sort it out, to take care of them, to advise and reassure' (F.Dir.SX. Com.FH). Passivity on the part of the bereaved was declared much easier to deal with than over-participation. Funeral directors disliked arriving at a house where numerous friends and relatives had gathered to discuss the funeral. 'The more people, the more changes of mind, arguments

and discussions' (F.Dir.QD.Com.FH). Within the larger funeral homes, funeral directors had developed a number of techniques to control interaction and to lessen the likelihood of errors. One method was not to give the bereaved too many choices. Asking which colour gown was preferred, reduced the chances of the bereaved requesting that the deceased should wear his or her own clothes, a more time consuming and less profitable option (1). A male respondent (QN/PS) commented that the 'undertaker' was outraged when he asked that his relative should be dressed in a suit. 'He phoned up one of his cronies and said: 'er, you know that one..they want him dressing'. 'This was on our phone in our living room. I mean, that's another instance of his incompetence, of his performance. You know, as if he was basically sweeping up the leaves from the garden'. The Cross.FH had taken limitation of choice a step further by linking certain styles of gown to a particular type of coffin. 'We will not be mentioning gowns at all in an interview situation.' On the other hand, the Com.FH carried an extensive range of gowns in varying styles and colours. Choice of ritual goods could thus be either extended or curtailed by funeral directors at will.

In the majority of cases, the bereaved remained ignorant of their ritual purchases, since few samples were taken to the home. This ignorance in a consumer based society, contrasts with the 'oversell' found by Pine in the American arrangements session where clients were shown into a casket display room and treated to an exposition on the merits of different caskets. Although the larger funeral homes in the city possessed rooms which could function as coffin display rooms, they were rarely utilised. Most organisations were concerned not to have to extend their stocks unnecessarily.

Despite increasing promotion within the funeral industry itself, the lavish display albums and photographs of coffins were rarely passed on to the clients. 'Nine out of ten people state: we'll leave it to you' (F.Dir.QB.Cross FH.)

The four major Funeral Homes tended to use a particular type of coffin as a means of emphasizing the organisation's image. 'Its almost a trademark if you like..and it costs us a bomb compared to a lot of other funeral directors coffins. Those are solid oak handles. None of your rubbish...' (F.Dir.LE.Cross FH) The PFH was particularly proud of the superior 'eggshell' finish on its best coffin. By contrast, although both the CFH and the Com.FH were able to offer higher quality coffins, their basic ranges offered much plainer styles.

Since the bereaved were rarely shown examples of the coffins they were purchasing, they were unable to appreciate further 'invisible' differences in ritual goods between funeral homes, often for similar costs. Where one funeral home used cheap plastic to line the inside of the coffin, another used soft, white cloth. Only one funeral home bothered to line the inside of the coffin lid. Some funeral homes used 'shoddy' for the mattress, others, long strips of cotton wool and brown paper (2).

None of the funeral homes found definitive class differences within the purchase of coffins.' ..post war you could go into a home and if it was black and white TV and lino on the floor you knew it was a bottom of the range funeral and if it was colour TV and carpets it would be a middle of the range funeral..' (F.Dir.EQ.CFH). During

fieldwork ,it proved impossible to predict the amount which would be spent on ritual goods on the basis of the lifestyles of the bereaved. A more reliable indicator was that of 'type of death'. Sudden, unexpected deaths, especially of children or spouses, often led to greater funeral expenditure suggesting that the lavish provision of goods acted as a compensatory or propitiatory mechanism.

#### 4.1. Embalming

Embalming was invariably glossed over in the arrangements session. although legally it was necessary to obtain permission from the bereaved before it could be carried out. The BIE recommended 'employing simple limited explanations of the treatment' explaining that it removed risk of infection, that it produced without mutilation a lifelike appearance and that it enabled the prevention of putrefactive changes and disturbances. (Haler 1981, p.19).

In practice, funeral directors either tied themselves up in knots trying to explain their version of 'taking care' of the body or barely mentioned it. There were few differences in attitudes towards embalming between individual funeral directors and attitudes were little affected by the differing orientations of funeral homes. 'If you were to level a fault it would be that we tend to be a little bit shy to sort of, say what we're doing and people tend not to want to know and they tend to keep this little bit of mystique going.' (F.Dir.BX.SPFH). 'They don't ask, so invariably you don't mention it'. (F.Dir QE.CFH).

The four major funeral homes varied in their embalming policies. The

CFH claimed to embalm 'the majority' of their bodies; the Com.FH embalmed 'only when it was necessary' and the Cross FH embalmed 'about 80% of their bodies', with the proviso that if it was really busy, embalming was 'the first thing to give'. In general, the more professionally orientated the funeral home, the greater the claim to a 100% embalming policy. This policy was often supported on the basis of protection for the bereaved. All the families suffered if there were odours in the chapels of rest from an unembalmed body. 'Staff protection' was an alternative argument. 'Your staff's got to be protected when you've got sixty or seventy bodies...you couldn't have sixty or seventy dead dogs in a place without taking some action against deterioration could you?' (Emb ST).

Although embalming supports a steadily growing industry, selling electrical pumps, arterial fluid, instruments and all the accessories of the modern clinical theatre, 'promotion' and knowledge of the skill remains concealed within the funeral industry. Funeral directors often left any mention of 'hygienic treatment' until the end of the interaction when it would be casually included within a breakdown of the estimated cost of the funeral. 'If they ask .....you explain about hygienic treatment which is washing the body and preparing it etc to go into the coffin. Most people don't mention it, because they don't know what goes on to be fair' (F.Dir.QB.Cross FH.)

#### 4.2. Framing the obituary

Actions taken on behalf of the body of the deceased - embalming it, dressing it and housing it within the coffin, tended to be hurried over within the arrangements session to save time and explanations. By contrast, fifteen to twenty minutes could be spent discussing the

simpler rites such as the obituary or the flowers or vehicles required. Where the bereaved had managed to write out an obituary on a scrap of paper, this would be 'translated' into the correct phraseology by the funeral director. 'Well, we use 'cortege' and 'intimation'..its formal, traditional' (F.Dir LE.Cross FH). These conventions were seen as an essential part of the language of death. In addition, the deceased was invariably described as 'dear, dearest or dearly beloved'. The positioning of words was also important: age was always placed before address for example. Several funeral directors pointed out that they were constrained by others in the death system. 'A lot of newspapers have their own style and this varies round the country and even though the family pay the newspaper, the newspaper insist in putting it in their way round' (F.Dir. QX.Com.FH).

Although the obituary alerted others in the community to the death of the deceased and invited or precluded them from attending the rituals, a latent function was that of providing 'territory markers' for the funeral homes. All four funeral homes monitored the obituary pages daily and were able to keep rough 'accounts' of the numbers of funerals being carried out monthly by their rivals and also to note when a 'family' had been 'pinched'. The majority of funeral homes had 'in house' trade marks which could easily be deciphered.

'Obviously we get into a set pattern of doing them and I suppose most funeral directors can look in a notices column and know whose funeral it is by the way its worded' (F.Dir LE.Cross.FH).

Obituaries also provided free publicity for the funeral homes. '.if the person who does generally look up and down the death column looks

and sees Smith's name about six times that night, you know, that's fantastic for Smith that is' (F.Dir.LE Cross.FH). It was suggested that some smaller funeral homes always tried to get their names and addresses into the obituary. The practice was justified because it acted as a 'filter', saving the bereaved unnecessary distress. 'Those on the fringe of the family can direct general enquiries to the funeral director..And then they know they've not bothered the widow' (F.Dir.LE Cross.FH).

#### 4.3. The floral tribute

As with coffins and gowns, few of the funeral homes attempted to illustrate the range of wreaths and sprays available to the bereaved, although individual funeral directors took it upon themselves to do this. Funeral director SX (Com.FH) produced a pack of coloured photographs because he found 'that so many people were unable to visualise exactly what they would like fitted into a price range.' He had taken the photographs himself in a local florists shop and his example was not followed by others within the same funeral home. The majority of funeral directors negotiated the bereaved's choice of flowers in purely monetary terms: 'About how much would you want to spend on the flowers? You can have a spray for £10 or a wreath for around £20'. The use of financial categories obscured the huge array of choice available from most florists and also emphasized the economic aspects of death ritual.

Flowers were seen as one of the most troublesome elements of funeral production. A great part of each day was spent carrying flowers back and forth between vehicles and houses, between vehicles and gravesides, endeavouring to secure them to hearse tops and dealing

with decaying mounds of sprays and wreaths brought back from funerals. At the same time, funeral directors were under pressure from florists within the death system to maintain the popularity of flowers as symbols of affection, remembrance and grief.

Florists were well represented at all large funeral meetings. In part, this was to counteract a growing trend towards giving donations to charity instead of flowers for the deceased, but florists were also endeavouring to invent a new funeral ritual: the giving of 'sympathy' flowers to the bereaved. The uncertainty of ritual trends left them crucially dependent upon funeral personnel. As will be noted in section 4.12., florists attempted to maintain a high profile within the death system by means of offering commission and other inducements to funeral directors.

#### 4.4. The religious service

Despite the well publicised existence of secular funeral officiators within Association Journals, alternatives to a religious disposal ritual were not offered by any of the funeral directors observed or interviewed. A first question to the bereaved: 'What religion was the deceased?' was swiftly followed by 'And where would you like the service?' or 'And your parish priest here, that would be reverend X wouldn't it?' It was not uncommon for the bereaved to claim 'not to know' the religion of the deceased even after many years of living together. 'The sort of universal answer is, they look blank and say Church of England' (F.Dir.BX.S/PFH). Many bereaved did not know the name of the local clergyman. Some did but specifically requested that he should not be contacted. This put the funeral director in a difficult position since by custom and common courtesy

he was bound to offer the funeral to the vicar of the parish in which the deceased lived.

If the service was to be in the local church, the funeral director noted the name of the vicar and presumed that there would be some contact between the vicar and the bereaved prior to the actual disposal service to consider the choice of hymns and readings etc. Despite the contentions of the clergy and monumental masons that the bereaved were pushed towards cremation by funeral directors, fieldwork revealed no instances of this. In the majority of cases, the bereaved had already decided upon either burial or cremation in advance.

#### 4.5. Choice of Music

If the bereaved requested cremation, the most pertinent question after the signing of the forms was choice of music. If none was forthcoming, 'Free Choice' was automatically added to the Arrangements pro forma. This misnomer meant that the music for the ceremony would be selected by an attendant at the crematorium. The majority of Funeral Directors gave the bereaved little time to consider a choice, often rationalising this behaviour. 'When you've just lost your husband you don't want to be sitting down discussing 250 different pieces of music!' (F.Dir.LE.Cross.FH). A female funeral director took quite a different view: 'I tend to think that music is important at a funeral. I ask the family is there anything special they would like. ...Quite often I am asked to suggest something.....' (F.Dir.PU.S/PFH).

The increasing choice of secular music underlined the tension

between the funeral service as civil ceremony and as article of faith. Where a choice was made by the bereaved this would be fully backed by the funeral director thus encouraging the secularisation.' My job is to work for the family. I'm not employed by the church. (F.Dir QX Com.FH). The Funeral Service Journal(1984,p.164) noted that mourners were requesting '..more tunes associated with the dead persons past life..The Party's Over, What Now My Love, Shirley Bassey..We'll Gather Lilacs...requests from themes from symphonies and operas to musicals and gaelic airs.' Funeral director QE (CFH) noted: 'Generally the clergy will accept it. Things like My Way have become popular. We've had all sorts. Mario Lanza, people have all sorts now. You can't blame it on the younger people, the more middleaged or older are just as likely to ask for it'

The choice of popular music marks a dramatic shift away from the long historical tendency for patterns of death ritual to emerge at the top of the social hierarchy and 'filter down'. The new classlessness goes hand in hand with the infiltration of mass culture into the management of death.

#### 4.6. The costing of ritual

All the arrangements sessions observed, concluded with an estimate of the cost, which in most cases would not differ dramatically from the final written account. During fieldwork, a typical account (Cross.FH) was laid out as follows:

To waxed elm and oak moulded coffin with engraved plate.....	150
interior linings and bed.....	20
gown and coverlet.....	20
removal to our chapel of rest.....	18
bearers.....	25
hearse and one car.....	56

taking home prior to funeral.....	18
attendance and disbursements.....	25
Cremation fees.....	55
Ministers fee.....	20
Obit and acknowledgement notices.....	20
Doctors fees.....	34
Total price.....	461

Within the four major funeral homes there was a wide range of funeral costings: from £180 - £700 plus. There could also be a wide range of costings within a given funeral home. For example, the records of one funeral director (Com.FH) showed that of twenty five funerals conducted by him during one month there was a range of £299 - £620. The Com.FH allowed a great deal of latitude to individual funeral directors in estimating costs and those bereaved perceived as less able to pay were often undercharged for a funeral whilst those who were better off were sometimes overcharged. By contrast, the CFH abhorred such a flexible approach and administered a strictly controlled pricing system which allowed no deviation in individual cases. Within the arrangements observed, estimates were not normally itemized unless the bereaved requested this. In failing to itemise their services, funeral directors were doing themselves a disservice, since the total figure did not provide a fair representation of the funeral home's services alone but included the charges of others in the death system, such as local authority fees, doctors and clergy fees. A 1985 television documentary 'Its a Rip Off' provided a good example of this conflation, when it gave a shocked and heavy emphasis to a funeral bill of £934. However, 'The actual funeral cost £270 which (was) fairly reasonable. £177 of the bill belonged to the local authority for the price of a grave, and the largest amount £421 went to the stone mason for a memorial. The bereaved in question, chose to spend a further £64.50 on newspaper insertions' (Naylor 1985b, p.3).

During arrangements sessions, the bereaved displayed a largely 'passive' response to estimates. Typical responses being '..is it as much as that?' or 'Its not as much as I thought it would be..' 'It doesn't matter to me how much it is', or 'when do I have to pay the actual bill?'. There were also questions on how to obtain the death grant, although in real terms the grant had declined by about 83% since 1967 and in 1982/3 represented only between five per cent and eight and a half per cent of the average cost of a funeral. Towards the end of the research period, plans were being made to scrap the death grant and to replace it with a new benefit for low income families.

None of the bereaved were asked about memorialisation, illustrating very clearly, the decreasing involvement of monumental masons in the production of death ritual. Although the managing director of one funeral home stated: 'My men have instructions always to ask the family about monumental work', this was not encountered in any of the arrangements sessions.

#### 4.7. The Production of ritual within the funeral home

Having assembled the basic elements of the funeral, the Funeral Director returned to the Funeral Home to begin ritual production. Unruh (1979) suggests that Funeral Directors are 'representative of workers who are judged primarily by the experience they create and not by any natural product' (p.247). Creating an experience within all funeral homes commenced with the collection of the centrepiece of the ritual, the body.

Dealing with dozens of different mortuaries throughout the

city and surrounding areas, each with their own procedures and forms, funeral directors needed to know at what time they could collect bodies, whom they should see and which sets of paperwork needed to be completed. They also needed to keep their relationships with mortuary personnel in good repair. All bodies were supposed by law to remain in the mortuary for five days prior to their removal to a funeral home. The higher turnover of the larger funeral homes however, meant that pressure on 'funeral space' was such that short cuts were often taken. Mortuary attendants complained that some funeral directors were so 'quick off the mark' that they were ringing up to ask whether they could have the body two hours after a postmortem. 'One of these days they're all going to come badly unstuck. They'll (the coroner's office) will recall a body and it won't be here' (M.Tech.BR).

In many cases, they acquiesced with the requests of funeral directors but at other times mutual concern could be displaced by conflict and lack of co-operation. 'A funeral had been booked for Wednesday. It was a small child and the parents wanted to come and view. I phoned to ask if I could collect the body so I could embalm it. The mortuary staff said, 'you can't have it, its still in bits and pieces and its still in fridge (sic)'. I phoned several times but they wouldn't let me have it.' (F.Dir.QO. Com.FH). Although the funeral home was not at fault they were put into the position of having to tell the parents that they could not have a last look at their child.' Viewing had thus been prevented by others in the death system, although the funeral firm would be blamed by the bereaved.

#### 4.8. Upstairs and downstairs preparations

Turner & Edgeley (1976) in their dramaturgical analysis of funeral

ritual, drew a line between backstage and frontstage procedures, between the production team and the frontstage actors (the funeral directors). Within the four Funeral Homes, preparations for the funeral usually began on a dual level. The upstairs staff, the white collar funeral directors with the professional image and status began to 'sort out' their funerals by lengthy telephone sessions with crematoria, clergy, newspaper offices, relatives, caterers, grave-diggers and knock up men. Simultaneously, the blue collar or semi-skilled staff, the drivers, bearers, coffin makers and shrouders began preparing the stage props. Embalmers, who were usually also funeral directors, had an 'in between stairs' status, moving freely between upstairs and downstairs tasks between the primary commitment of re-humanizing the body. Monday mornings in all of the major funeral homes found the prep rooms resembling a battlefield, with bodies everywhere. The cull included those brought in from homes or nursing homes over the weekend and those which would continue to arrive during the day from various mortuary refrigerators. The longer a body had been refrigerated in a hospital mortuary, the less recognizable it appeared and the more work it entailed.

In a straightforward embalming, blood was drained from the veins and formalin injected into the arteries. The hair might then be washed and blow dried and the body dressed in a silk gown before being laid into a coffin. If there was not enough time to embalm, the mouth of the deceased was sewn together with a very long steel needle similar to that used in rug making. Eyes were cleaned and closed and sometimes set over plastic eye caps to prevent them from sinking into the sockets. Lax facial tissue was coaxed into a slight smile and the hair combed.

A full scale embalming, necessary after a postmortem could take anything up to an hour and a half. Postmortem stitching was removed so that the body could be opened up like a banana skin from neck to pubis. The sternum (breast bone) was taken out and all the innards removed. Heart, lungs, liver etc were usually put into a black dustbin sack on the floor. Subsequently, the stitching was removed from the back of the head and the scalp pulled completely forward and folded inside out over the face, totally obscuring the features. Having removed the outer skin, the top of the skull (previously detached by pathologists with a saw), was removed and placed in the sink. Occasionally the brain would also have been removed by pathologists and located by the embalmer in the stomach along with the rest of the innards.

The blood was swabbed from the torso cavity with wads of cotton wool and the pubis plugged to prevent leakage. Arteries in the neck and arms were exposed and filled with formaldehyde until the limbs were seen to 'plump up' and resume a normal skin tone. The black plastic dustbin sack of innards was then returned to the cavity ; the sternum replaced and the whole area resutured. Cotton wool was packed into the skull and the top of the skull replaced. Some embalmers simply replaced the skull and pulled the features back up; others went to greater trouble and drilled holes through the separate sections of skull with a hand drill, wiring them together to avoid what was known below stairs as 'the Frankenstein effect': a jutting forward of the top half of the skull which was just noticeable through the forehead skin.

After the replacement of the features, the scalp was sewn back in place and the hair sluiced with water and blown dry. Eyes were cleaned with cotton wool and tweezers and the mouth packed with cotton wool and

either glued or sutured shut. Habitually working on their own, embalmers within the major funeral homes tended to 'talk' to their corpses, chiding them for slipping off the table, or being awkward and praising the progressive attractiveness of their features.

All embalmers underlined the imprecise nature of embalming and the lack of guarantee that everything would turn out all right. This was often used to legitimise the secrecy of the procedure. Even the best embalmed bodies were known to 'turn' inexplicably. A further spur to secrecy resulted from the embalmers own difficult initiations into embalming. 'The public have no idea what a full post mortem or a full embalming entails. I think they would be horrified. I don't know if I'm really honest, whether I would like my own wife to be embalmed, but I suppose to be true to my profession I'd have to have it done.'

(F.Dir.RB PFH). The little remarked 'heroic' aspect of the funeral directors role entails the burden of absorbing the worst sights of death daily and endeavouring to erase them for the bereaved. A great deal of time was spent in covering up the hasty work of pathologists and mortuary technicians (3).

The principal of an Embalming School saw pathologists as 'uncaring butchers'. 'I have pulled out of bodies, copies of the News of the World, syringes, stillborn babies. I wrapped up a syringe once and sent it back to X hospital. They're butchers. They don't have to chop an earlobe off. I have confronted pathologists with this but they usually blame the mortuary staff.' Funeral directors in the Com.FH had similarly removed newspapers and syringes from bodies. On one occasion, a city crematorium took them to task over the metal remains of a mop head which had been found in the cremator after the cremation of one

of one of their bodies. The Com.FH knew nothing of this but did not complain to the mortuary for fear of worsening working relations.

Within the funeral home, bodies with blackened skin, with stomachs inflated like footballs, bloated faces and limbs already infested with maggots were where possible, transformed back into recognizable relatives.' There was one where we had to unseal it again because the relative wanted to view. Her face was bulging, her eyes were practically popping out and we had to get hold of her to get her out of that coffin and we were getting her all over us, her skin were coming away. Oh it were terrible! I kept saying to X, I'm going to be sick you know, I can't do it. Get hold of it and get it in that coffin!' he said. It were bad were that. Badly decomposed' (F.Dir.CG Com.FH)

The immense pains taken to 'get the body right', whatever its condition, where relatives were adamant that they wished to view, was not consistent with a denial of death but rather with protection from mutilation and a desire to let the bereaved see their dead relative. A body collected from a city mortuary which had had its neck removed and substituted with a pole, was treated with the utmost care by funeral personnel, even when the family insisted on bringing in the deceased's own clothes for the viewing ritual: a skin tight pullover and jeans. Three helpers were needed below stairs to get the precariously balanced head through the pullover opening and to pull on the jeans. Using the deceased's own clothes for viewing meant that they lacked the camouflage qualities of the funeral home's regulation backless gowns which had frilly necklines or cravats to hide pathology scars, bruising and staining. During fieldwork, the preparation of a small child knocked down by a car for viewing by bereaved parents took the

the greater part of an afternoon. One leg was almost severed at the thigh, the jaw was broken, the face and hands badly scarred, a bone protruded from the other leg and the school trousers became stained as soon as they were put on. After several hours of concentrated care however, the body could be looked on 'in death' rather than in a state of devastating manmade injury.

Cancer patients were similarly cared for with patience and ingenuity. In one case, after embalming, the family wished the body to be taken home for further viewing. But it was found to have leaked all over the shroud and the back had completely gone. The embalmer tried putting it into a body bag in the coffin but found that it looked odd. 'So we went out and bought a load of crepe bandages and wrapped it up like a Mummy. We bandaged the arms to the body etc. Then we put it in a body bag, shrouded it and took it home to the family. They still said it looked lovely, but they didn't know what was underneath.' The secrecy with which embalmers invest their work means that it remains unappreciated by the general public. Pine (1975) draws a revealing distinction between the practices of obstetricians 'who deliver babies with very little mess and then deliberately smear blood on their delivery gown before going to greet the father of the newborn' (the 'apparently dangerous bleeding' appraises the onlooker of the crucial nature of the obstetricians job and his 'importance in the process of birth' p.113) - and the practices of embalmers who behave in exactly the opposite way, removing bloodstained gowns in case it suggests that the body has been ill treated.

#### 4.9. Viewing the body

An NAFD survey (1967) found that 89% of the bereaved used the chapels

and that 64% subsequently viewed their deceased relative. Within the literature, the functions of viewing the dead have been listed as 'demonstrating bonds for others,' making private farewells, dramatizing the fact of death and acknowledging change and mortality. (Raether 1971). During a viewing however, it was found that whilst the bereaved believed that they had come to say a last goodbye or 'pay their respects', they also went with certain expectations of the deceased and the funeral directors handiwork.

It was expected that the deceased would look like himself or herself, i.e. perfectly familiar and unchanged so that the bereaved could be assured that s/he was not saying goodbye to a stranger. It was expected that the deceased would look 'peaceful', an expectation relating to the utopian ideal of death as wiping away all cares. The body was also expected to be on its own and not in the company of another body. These expectations remained psychologically necessary if the bereaved were to have a chance of re-defining death as a 'mysterious process' rather than a medical decision to withdraw life support machines and drugs. Pine (1975) noted a similar expectation with regard to the appearance of the corpse. Cosmopolitan Funeral Home embalmers declared it 'a real pain to go up and change something that doesn't please somebody' (p.117).

All the funeral homes observed four general rules: as far as possible, the body should approximate closely to its pre death state; it should never be viewed until the effects of the death system's interference had been disguised; it should be checked periodically for signs of deterioration; and it should not be viewed in the same room as another unrelated body.

When the dead were in the chapels, funeral directors made periodic checks to 'see how the bodies were getting on'. Although to the bereaved, their relatives were dead, for funeral personnel, the bodies remained 'on the move' since they were in varying stages of decomposition. They were continuously checked for leakage, blood smears on gowns and purging. Relatives were easily distressed if they noted blood around the neck or if the pillow or frills became stained. A fair amount of 'out of hours' work was thus commonly devoted to 'running repairs' on the bodies with embalmers called in from home if a body began to deteriorate.

Where expectations of normality and peacefulness were not met, the bereaved were quick to complain. Badly sewn mouths for example, resulting in the deceased displaying too much of a smile or a grin, were considered as bad as having no smile at all. Despite the fact that legally, the body was no longer anyone's property and might have been shuttled around the death system and in and out of fridges for several days, the bereaved still tended to feel that they 'owned' it until the disposal rituals had been completed.

It was usually easier for the small funeral home to achieve the 'right' appearance for the deceased. 'Because very often they know the bodies they are dealing with and their families which the big firms don't' (F.Dir.UP.S/PFH). Complaints concerning the deceased's appearance were more likely to be received by the larger funeral homes than the small funeral homes.' It was often felt to be an impossible ideal since 'most people don't look like themselves, they're not wearing their glasses etc, their hair is different.' (F.Dir.QC). Women were often unrecognizable without their usual make up but cosmetics

within the larger funeral homes tended to be limited to a pot or two of foundation, a lipstick and some powder. The disinclination to use cosmetics on a regular basis for anything other than covering bruises or discolouration persisted, despite a strong marketing campaign by the embalming industry. Within British funeral homes cosmetization was not, as Kellehear suggested a natural carry-over from the cosmetization of the living. Within the larger homes the extra service of cosmetization was seen as inimicable with a high turnover, while the smaller funeral homes considered it unnecessary. Nevertheless, completely untreated bodies were deemed totally unsuitable for viewing and the rare slip up could cause great distress. In one case, a coffin had been summarily closed since the immediate family had stated that there would be no viewing. Distant relatives arrived unannounced and a caretaker new to his job but wishing to oblige the clients unscrewed the lid. Inside the body was just as it had arrived from the mortuary, with plastic sacking gown, its mouth hanging open, its hair sticking up like a wire brush and its bare feet protruding. The couple were intensely shocked and had to be pacified until funeral personnel could be called to attend to its shrouding.

The ritual of viewing found the bereaved holding certain expectations of the deceased but it provided few guidelines as to their own behaviour. The lack of familiarity with dead bodies in a domestic situation meant that there was an uncertainty which the bereaved were at a loss to resolve. Within the preliminary study, one widow suggested almost defiantly that she had looked under the covers at her dead husband because after all, he was her property.

The ceremonial presentation of the body within the funeral home was designed to cope with some of these problems. The pall, used by a few funeral homes had a psychological advantage. The bereaved could pull it back in stages as they became accustomed to the body. Face cloths were used for the same reason, either silk or net squares, laid over the face allowing the bereaved to remove them as they approached nearer to the coffin.

Within North city, bodies were presented 'high' in the coffins, propped up on padded mattresses and pillows. (In other areas such as the south of England, bodies were presented much lower). Invariably the coffins were lined with coloured silk which matched the gown, and topped with frills and a matching silk coverlet. These fussy northern presentations contrasted with the much plainer presentations in the south of England. The presentation of the body was sometimes complimented by small extra touches which provided a talking point for the bereaved. 'I have put roses in, particularly with ladies. If its a catholic they have a rosary in their hands.' (F.Dir.UP.S/PFH). Sometimes the bereaved themselves had requested that certain articles be placed into the hands or coffin of the deceased: a residue of the old superstition of the necessity for 'grave goods', seen as essential to the welfare of the soul in the next world. Thus children often held teddies, grandmothers: prayer books; men, their pipes.

There was little consensus between funeral homes on the frequency of viewing or on the proportion of bereaved viewing. 'We tend some weeks to get lots of funerals and nobody ever comes to see anybody and then the next we'll have a lot of funerals and everybody is in all the time. The ethnics always want to come. The English either say they want to

come and see them, or they want to remember them as they were. (F.Dir LE.Cross FH). The duration of viewing varied and appeared to be linked to the funeral home's style of showing the body. 'We used to go up to the body, take the face cloth off, stand there with the people. Then I suppose we thought that they needed more privacy and so we removed the face cloth and stood at the back of the chapel. But now its progressed that we remove the face cloth and come back in and leave them to it. And that has made a difference in how long people stay' (F.Dir.LE Cross.FH ).

Funeral director EQ(CFH) noted that the bereaved stayed 'usually a maximum of ten minutes. Odd people stay one or two hours...some people faint or get hysterical. I don't know whether they actually do get hysterical or whether they are putting it on.' Many of the funeral directors felt that the bereaved were 'putting it on'. This may have reflected the lack of socialisation into death behaviour. Relatives, at a loss, act out their perceptions of how the bereaved are supposed to behave during the viewing ritual.

Funeral Director BX (S/PFH) stated that the bereaved 'tend to come in, look, stand a few seconds and walk out. But it does happen that there are those people who can spend quite a long time in there. We often get people who faint.' Funeral director QC (PFH) commented that the bereaved were shown in and asked whether they would like the funeral director to stay with them or wait outside. 'Invariably they would like to be alone, so we wait outside, on hand if we're needed.' The Com.FH. also left the bereaved to their own devices, returning to see if they were all right if they appeared to have been an abnormally long time.

The bereaved who remained longest with the body were often the 'tragic' cases. 'A young girl lost her baby and she got into the chapels to visit the baby and she would not go. She wanted seriously to bring her bed into the chapel...And we had a real job to get her to go. She was there well into the evening. She returned the next day. She spent hours, literally hours over the space of about three days' (F.Dir.LE.Cross FH). Bodies which were the focus of excessive attention were invariably those of young children or teenagers. A constant stream of relatives visited the tiny body of a baby girl, including a grandmother who arrived to apply lipstick and powder to the corpse. Despite the danger of 'skin slip', of which the relatives remained unaware, no efforts were made by the funeral directors to dissuade the bereaved from their ministrations.

The therapeutic role played by the funeral director during the viewing ritual is often given little consideration by others in the system. The clergy especially, tend to dismiss it as a needless 'artificial prettifying of the body'. Although the majority of funeral directors exercised a protective function, dissuading the bereaved from viewing 'horrific cases', many felt that the imagination could invent more horrors than actually existed.

#### 4.10. Chaos in the upstairs preparations

The funeral director's role as the 'producer' of death ritual involved him or her in a continuous 'behind the scenes' chaos in which some funerals were being produced, others were at the rehearsal stage and others again were yet to have their scripts written. Unruh (1979) suggested that a great deal of American Funeral Directors' time was devoted to minimizing various 'risks' which might endanger

a successful funeral performance.

During research in North city, it was evident that 'mistakes' were endemic within funeral performances as an inherent feature of the piecemeal, overloaded and time constrained nature of the work and as a result of complex interactions with the many players in the death system. 'Everybody makes mistakes. Its in the bitty nature of the work. (F.Dir.CG Com.FH). 'I leave a fair amount of time between two funerals for the simple reason that anything can go wrong. You can get a car coming out of the crem or church with a flat tyre. This can throw you ten minutes. If you get a minister who goes on a little bit ..you've lost another ten minutes. Timing is important. Its the one thing that a lot of people don't realise. You can't be appearing to hurry people' (F.Dir.UP.S/PFH). 'Its the little details...I often wake up in the middle of the night and think - Oh Christ!..and I'll write it on the bedside table you know, so that I'll remember it in the morning. You get problems when people start to alter funerals....Somebody takes the message and forgets to write it down...You try to keep control, try to keep a tight rein over them and make sure that there aren't any mistakes' (F.Dir.CQ.PFH).

All of the funeral homes attempted to keep a tight control over their staff to reduce the incidence of mistakes. The CFH's maxim was 'One mistake is one too many, don't let it happen to you'. The PFH demonstrated the chaos that could be caused by someone forgetting to write the name and location of a single body upon their wallboards. In the Com.FH, the management attempted to reduce mistakes by linking them to wage reductions: staff were paid a basic weekly rate plus a bonus which could be partly or wholly removed where mistakes were

made.

Upstairs preparation for the funeral was vitally dependent on the correct procedural paperwork having been carried out first and upon smooth interaction with other personnel in the death system. Staffing problems, union disputes and local authority finance difficulties meant that crematoria were inevitably closed on Saturdays, Sundays, Bank holidays and by four pm on weekdays. Within the city, there was a long running dispute between funeral homes and the local authority over the problem of weekend bookings for the crematoria. Whilst other towns and cities provided funeral directors with a key to a room containing the bookings register or made some other provision, in North city, funeral directors were unable to book crematoria slots until the Monday morning.

Funeral Homes were consequently forced to employ a number of techniques to overcome this problem. On a Monday morning, where slots were required for a large number of funerals booked over the weekend, one technique was to start dialling the crematorium on several phones at once and thus hold all the lines so that other funeral homes could not get in ahead and book too many slots. Another tactic was to give fictitious names to book funeral slots which might be needed later in the week. Funeral Homes were sometimes able to 'poach' funerals from one another in this manner. If the bereaved had contacted one funeral home and was informed that the earliest the funeral could be carried out would be Friday, another funeral home which offered a Wednesday slot could often 'swing' the funeral.

There was a great deal of acrimony generally between funeral directors in the city and local government representatives and employees over the facilities provided at crematoria and chapels. At a funeral conference in the city in 1984, disagreements erupted into open conflict. When crematoria officials from a neighbouring town explained that all their cremation committals were carried out in local churches thus preventing a bottleneck at the crematorium. 'Its a service we provide,' said the official. 'Its a service you do not provide!' protested funeral directors.

Conflicts were common with newspaper offices over misspellings and mistakes in the wording of obituaries, with funeral homes demanding free reprints. Mistakes in the 'naming' or 'identification' of the deceased were particularly upsetting to the bereaved, since all of the death rituals centred around the official marking out of the deceased and his or her ceremonial removal from society. Wrongly spelt names or mistakes with dates of birth were perceived as a slur upon the deceased and also brought forth the spectre of 'wrong bodies'.

Mistakes such as burying or cremating wrong bodies were rare but would be covered up by the funeral home or absorbed within the death system to protect the bereaved. Occasionally such mistakes came to light. The Funeral Service Journal (1984), carried a report of a Rochdale inquiry into the cremation of a wrong body. Other mistakes with 'wrong bodies' had their origins outside the country. A funeral home in a neighbouring town received two bodies from abroad, one of which after checking was found to be the 'wrong female'. It was subsequently discovered that another funeral home in the town had

been sent 'their' female deceased and the bodies were swapped. However, the second funeral home found that they still did not have the 'right' body and the unknown body had to be returned.

A close interest in the 'true' identification of the deceased was followed by a concern for the whereabouts of the 'identity markers' of the deceased such as clothes and jewellery. Rings and items of clothing may be easily mislaid in a large funeral home with a high volume of work. Interviews with the bereaved showed an enduring suspicion of funeral directors where jewellery was involved. Distrust was linked to folk memories of the dubious practices of undertakers and others in the death system and to current adverse media publicity. The clergy demonstrated a similar distrust. 'As long as it (the ring) is left on the body and not whipped you know, by somebody.' (C/KS)..

'My sister's husband when she said, 'I'm going to keep the wedding ring on him, I said, Don't do that Queenie, give it to Geoffrey, which was her son. I said ...when he dies he's gone and you don't know whether somebody's going to take that off his finger.' 'The undertaker's there, who's going to prove if he's opened up and taken the jewellery off then. Because there's so much going on today, you wouldn't be surprised at anything' (Female bereaved RD/PS).

No deliberate misappropriations of rings or other jewellery were noted during the research period. Where rings accumulated, they had done so as a result of a mistake either on the part of the funeral director, the hospital or the bereaved. ' ..hospitals are responsible for a great many of these things. They do not seem to run to any

standard procedure, whether rings should be removed or left on the finger. ..It can vary that much that it varies from nurse to nurse on the shifts....' (F.Dir.CQ.PFH). 'You ask the family if the person has a ring on, they say, yes, a signet ring. You collect the body and there is no ring on. Oh well, they gave it back to us at the hospital. They don't think to tell you that. Then if you didn't ring the family and say 'he hasn't got it, they'd say to you on the day of the funeral, which is too late, have you got the ring? You can't stop and open the coffin and say I'll just check for you.' (F.Dir. LE. Cross.FH).

Failed or crossed communication often resulted in rings that should have been returned to the bereaved being buried and rings that should have been buried or cremated being retained. Some mistakes within large funeral homes had their source in the conflict between 'upstairs' and 'downstairs' staff. For example, a funeral director was informed by the bereaved that they wished to have the deceased's rings back. A driver was sent to the mortuary to collect the body and signed the book for four rings left on the body. At the funeral home, the body was shrouded by a third employee. His instruction slip from the upstairs staff, had 'remove rings' written on it. The shrouder removed the two rings from one hand but did not think to examine the other hand. The rings went back to the upstairs staff in a brown envelope. After the cremation service had been concluded the funeral director returned the rings to the family. They subsequently demanded the other two rings, a claim which eventually had to be referred to an insurance company.

However, in 28 consecutive funerals arranged by one funeral home only two of the bereaved asked for wedding rings to be left on the body. The others were more concerned with lesser mementoes: a rosary placed in the hands, a single red rose and a lock of hair.

#### 4.11. Mistakes with flowers

Second only to the interest in personal identity markers was the bereaved's concern with 'their' flowers.' People look on a funeral to see if their flowers are there. If not where are they? We say, well they weren't delivered to us because we type out a list of any we received. We have a flower rack and each rack is marked with the name of the funeral. But florists just pop the flowers on the wrong funeral rack, that's been done countless times' (F.Dir.CQ. PFH).

A common source of chaos was that of the 'travelling' flowers. A funeral would be held at the crematorium and the family would leave instructions that the flowers were to be taken to four different places afterwards. The flowers were returned to the boot of a limousine. On arrival back at the funeral home, the funeral director would dash into the office meaning to remove the flowers later.

Meanwhile the limousine would have gone out on another funeral with a different funeral director who did not realise that there were flowers in the boot. Consequently, when his family wished their flowers to be distributed at a certain hospital, he would be unable to get them into the boot. A spare driver would have to be located from the schedule to travel back to the crematorium to fetch them.

Disruption occurred within all the funeral homes when the numbers of

flowers arriving for a certain funeral reached saturation point causing them to flood out of the normal flower area and into corridors and hallways. Deaths from cancer often called forth very large numbers of flowers. Child deaths meant that the establishment would be inundated with flowers in the shape of toys together with requests for them all to be taken to local hospitals.

#### 4.12. Funeral Director Fiddles

While fiddles are accepted in most occupations (Ditton 1977, Henry 1981), fiddles within the area of death are the subject of severe social sanctions. The 'normal crimes of normal people in the normal circumstances of their work' (Mars 1984, p.1) are considered 'abnormal' when applied to death workers. Reports of malpractice in the funeral world are always given prominence in the local and national press . This affects all parts of the death system and not just funeral directors. Coroners officers, mortuary personnel, crematoria attendants, and florists as well as the clergy, have been accused of taking advantage of the bereaved (4).

Mars notes that the existence of 'hidden wages' is longstanding dating it back as far as records on Egyptian papyri. Within the funeral community, as discussed in Chapter Two, fiddling in the guise of touting and tipping was not only longstanding but often essential for survival. It remains today as a means of oiling the system. Mortuary attendants are tipped as are crematoria and cemetery attendants, gravediggers, knock up men, drivers, bearers and funeral directors themselves. F.Dir EQ. (CFH) commented: ' X firm pay 75p to mortuary staff. They try to blackmail us saying that Y firm give them £1 and that W firm gives them £1.50. But we always send two men and

we say, if you don't want it, you don't have to have it. But we may raise it to £1 because its an awkward amount for the chaps to find.'

Mars categorizes tipping as an 'informal' (legal) reward, as opposed to actions such as short changing, overcharging expenses etc which are seen as 'hidden economy' (illegal) rewards. Nevertheless where funeral workers are concerned there remains considerable societal disapproval of even the 'informal' (legal) rewards. In December 1984, three coroner's officers who took money from funeral directors in return for notifying them of deaths, were fined at the Old Bailey. 'They took money, one could call them tips, for notifying a particular undertaker in any given case.' The fact that there was no complaint from the families of the deceased and that the defence argued that it was 'a time honoured practice', carried little weight. (The Funeral Service Journal, December 1984, p.505).

The majority of funeral director fiddles were carried out, within Mars' typology by 'Hawks', 'small businessmen bending the rules to suit themselves', and by 'Vultures', employee funeral directors 'needing the support of a group but acting on their own when at the feast'. As Vultures, funeral directors obeyed the unwritten rule that tips should be shared with bearers and drivers but could also carry out individual fiddles. Flower fiddles could be arranged where sprays and wreaths were turned away by a hospital or nursing home. Adorned with a new blank card and taken by hand to a family home they could be re-sold and the cash pocketed. A driver in one funeral home commented sarcastically of a spray of flowers in the garage. 'They've been on about six funerals these!' Funeral directors also received cash tips or backhanders from florists for keeping their custom.

Flower fiddles could go awry however if there were too many vultures at the feast at once. If the Hawk in the funeral home usually added £7 onto the flower bill for 'handling charges and the florist gave the funeral home a discount and the vulture a backhander, the final cost of the flowers could rise alarmingly.

As with Hotel and Catering workers, the funeral industry is little unionized. The low pay of many employees was often made up by working overtime with extra 'call out' money or by taking on extra duties, such as trimming coffins. In addition, some funeral homes gave employees commission for advertising the firms by a sign in their garden or over the door, or for bringing in a funeral from a friend. A typical vulture could also knock down the normal price of a friend's funeral, earning a further backhander from the friend himself. Vultures could work with others when arranging 'distance' funerals or removals, for example, haggling over the cost of hiring a limousine for the journey and splitting and pocketing the difference finally arrived at while putting the original figure on the bill.

Hawks could send a coffin to another city using a freight firm which charged them £10 and then bill the relatives for the use of a hearse. Sending a body from one end of the country to the other could add £300 to a funeral bill. This inevitably caused friction between funeral homes where funeral director X at the opposite end of the country offered to bring the body up and funeral director Y preferred to go down for it.

In particular, Hawks could make substantial profits on coffins and coffin furnishings. A letter quoted in The Funeral Director, June

1975, signed by two funeral supplies wholesalers commented: 'The false impression given that the coffin is an expensive item is due to the practice that most funeral directors have of pricing the coffin to provide them with all the necessary profit they need to conduct their business. This may be because the only actual material object that is sold for a funeral is the coffin'. During fieldwork, basic, unfitted coffins were being obtained within bulk orders for £11 - £16 each and resold for around £160. This did include however, as the writers noted, the profit margin, there being no extra charges for services. An easy Hawk fiddle therefore was that of finishing the coffin by the cheapest possible method, for example, by using 'bones': the cheapest available plastic handles and then quoting for higher quality handles. F.Dir.LE (Cross.FH) commented: 'we don't because you can get some terrible things. The plastic ones are so brittle, they could literally snap when you're carrying it'. Within the death system, the propensity for using the cheapest handles was much deplored by gravediggers who kept a tally of how many times each funeral home's coffin handles had dropped off in the past week. Other coffin fiddles included using old off-cuts of wood for childrens coffins or removing bodies which arrived from overseas in ornate coffins and putting them into cheaper ones, retaining the ornate for stock.

In general, Hawks and Vultures operated in isolation within the funeral homes, although, as noted above, many fiddles were easily 'recognised' by others in the system.

#### 4.13. Timing the procession

The management of the procession or cortege was critically dependent

upon timing. Anywhere in North city was viewed as being a minimum of twenty five minutes to the most popular crematorium. 'Timing points' were vital. 'From this roundabout you've got ten minutes to the ring road, then from the ring road you should be fifteen minutes from X crem' (Driver A CFH). To avoid chaos many funeral directors preferred to be familiar with the church and route beforehand carrying out dummy runs in their own time. Failure to reconnoitre an unfamiliar route could lead to the cortege trailing around vast housing estates or (as in one case) ending up on an airfield.

'You pull away slowly, sometimes the funeral director walks in front, it depends on the firm. Some funeral directors walk the funeral away from the house, then get in at the main road. You can also walk it into the crem' (F.Dir.KC CFH). Walking or not walking the funeral appeared to depend more on individual funeral directors than upon the funeral home, since some funeral directors within the same firm adopted different methods. It was the hearse driver's job to 'pace' the funeral. Driver (CFH): 'Its not easy..You have to remember you've got a long tail. The lights may suddenly change. The last car may come through the lights at red rather than split the procession. A good hearse driver will anticipate the lights.' Mirrors were used closely throughout the procession. Some drivers gave a running commentary on their husbanding of the procession. 'I've got me two reds, I should have a blue and a red. We want two reds together and then a blue and a red. The blue and the red are missing....' (CFH. Driver). Faced with contemporary traffic conditions with cars travelling at up to seventy miles an hour on a dual carriageway, the driver of the last limousine would cross into the fast lane and hog it in order to shield the hearse and cars in front and give them time

to get over. One driver referred to this manoeuvre as 'making a fighter pilot right' (CFH Driver.).

On arrival at the crematorium, mourners were generally assisted from the last car first and from the first car last. The art of 'controlling' mourners was often likened to that of herding sheep. 'You get out of the hearse, hold your finger up as you pass and say, just stay where you are, I'll be back with you, and they normally stay' On the occasions when they don't stay, it makes for an 'untidy' funeral' (F.Dir.LE. Cross FH). Both the PFH and the Cross FH tended to place more stress on the tidy funeral than the CFH or the Com.FH. The former also lined their mourners up neatly in twos before processing into the chapel instead of leaving them to their own devices. Funeral Director (Cross.FH.EL) felt that the bereaved weren't concerned whether they were going in neatly, but that it looked 'crisp' to the onlookers and the bereaved would be appreciative in retrospect. 'Its all down to appearance, because the funeral is 'appearance' isn't it?

#### 4.13. Spoiled performances

Whilst mistakes with rings, flowers and forms were upsetting to the bereaved during the preparations for the disposal rituals, mistakes during the actual performance of the rituals tended to result in a 'spoiled performance' from which there could be no recovery. The performance of the death rituals involved the funeral homes in an endless state of readiness for the unexpected. Hearses broke down or had flat tyres, mourners passed out at the graveside and ambulances had to be summoned. Coffins that were presumed to have been in church the previously evening were located back at the chapel of rest as the

funeral party arrived. Clergy were not notified or failed to turn up. Wet and snowy weather mitigated against the atmosphere funeral directors were attempting to create. After a burial, mourners invariably got back into the cars with clods of yellow clay on their feet, necessitating the vehicles being hurriedly cleaned before the next funeral. Spoiled funeral performances also resulted where a cortege or individual funeral director lost their way en route to a church or crematorium. This was especially likely when carrying out 'distance' funerals in unfamiliar territory and very late arrivals had a knock on effect at other Funeral Homes, throwing all crematorium funerals into disarray for the remainder of the day.

A disposal ritual could be irretrievably spoiled by mistakes occurring with graves or ashes. Where a funeral director had mistakenly ordered a grave for two instead of a grave for three, the situation could sometimes be rectified by the funeral establishment purchasing an adjoining grave space. On an occasion where a grave had not been dug deeply enough so that there was not enough room for a third coffin, the problem was solved by asking the gravedigger to dig out a niche beside the grave, move the last coffin sideways into this and then dig down deeper without actually breaking the law by removing coffins. 'You live on your wits. You try to avoid possible distress before it has occurred' (F.Dir.EL Cross.FH).

Whilst mistakes with graves could often be rectified mistakes with ashes were almost irretrievable. Often due to misunderstandings or lack of communication with the crematoria, the bereaved would come in to collect the ashes of their deceased relative to find that they had already been strewn. On one occasion, because relatives were so

· distraught, the funeral director consulted with the crematorium superintendent to see whether he could offer to dig up a piece of the turf with which the cremated ashes had been strewn.

Where the death rituals were to form part of an important public occasion, such as the death of a prominent local figure, the funeral home would often endeavour to outlaw mistakes and chaos by means of a full scale rehearsal. A police funeral undertaken by the PFH entailed patient drilling and re-drilling of police officers and funeral personnel for the length of a bitterly cold afternoon. Nothing was left to chance as the hearse driver patiently drove backwards and forwards outside the church in an effort to position the front wheels of the hearse on a particular mark on the ground (5).

Occasionally, the bereaved themselves took a more participatory role, to ensure against chaos. One family requested that they should be sent a typed copy of the funeral arrangements, stating that they had been dissatisfied with things that had gone wrong with the last funeral. Although the DHSS Survey(1980) and the Price Commission Report (1977) found that the bereaved expressed a general satisfaction with funeral directors' handling of the disposal rituals, in depth interviewing often revealed dissatisfactions with the performance which had been blurred at the time but which resurfaced several months afterwards.

#### 4.15. Occupational control: funeral directors and clergymen

Within North city battles for occupational control between funeral directors and clergy were endemic. Clergy/funeral director role

conflict has been documented by Fulton (1961) and Bradfield and Myers (1980). In the United States, Bradfield and Myers saw this as a result of the enhancement of the funeral directors position vis a vis that of the clergy, with the conflict involving a 'fundamental issue: the opposition of secular and religious ideals' (p343). They also noted (citing Mitford) that much of the conflict was 'financial', concerned with the clergy's advocacy of moderation in ritual as opposed to the American funeral director's encouragement of extravagant spending. Bradfield and Myers (1980) found however that: 'Most of the clergy (from the Lutheran church) were willing to accept funeral directors in the dual role of professional-businessmen as long as they did not infringe on the clergy's role as religious counselor'. The findings suggested that 'the locus of the funeral is an important consideration in the degree of conflict' (p.343). In a later study, Bradfield and Myers (1987) suggested that conflict arose from 'a lack of consultation when making funeral arrangements' and from the practice of '..employing clergy whose function it is to service families who have no active religious affiliation and to be generally available to any family making use of the funeral home' (p.135).

Within funeral homes in the city, the conflict over pastoral care or bereavement counselling, stemmed not from interference by funeral personnel in these matters, but conversely from criticisms of the clergy by funeral personnel for their neglect of the bereaved. Funeral directors felt that the clergy should make both pre disposal and post disposal calls on the bereaved, arranging religious matters during the former, such as hymns and service details and offering bereavement counselling during the latter. Funeral Director (EQ.

CFH) commented: '..to my way of thinking, the vicar should have known about that death. If he was doing his pastoral care, he should have been visiting the sick before he'd become a death..And I think that if the clergy put their house in order... we could go back to having church services as opposed to crematorium services. But what does annoy me is that you get a minister and I've had these in the city - he's a member of the local council and he's a member of the hospital management and he's a member of this and he's a member of that and he hasn't the pastoral care of his parish.' A second major cause of conflict, perhaps peculiar to the British death system, was the failure of Funeral Homes to give priority to contacting the clergy when arranging a funeral. 'If its a church family, okay, let them(the vicar) know and if its a coroner's, okay. But if its a C of E at the crem its an unreasonable expectation always to be able to let them know. The family aren't interested in the vicar, they're more concerned with their friends and relatives' (F.Dir.QX Com.FH).

In general, the higher the traditional/professional orientation of the funeral home, the greater the attempt made to inform the clergy of funerals at an early stage in their production. This did not mean however, that there was a more benevolent attitude towards the clergy. 'We always write to the clergy, setting out all the details about the funeral.I think by and large, the clergy, if they don't like us, they respect us...If we think they're not doing what they should do, then we're not slow in telling them. And they sometimes take exception to that' (F.Dir.CQ.PFH)

Where the clergy were not contacted, irate phone calls and letters often ensued. During fieldwork an irate vicar telephoned one funeral

home to complain that he had read of the death of a Mr. X in his newspaper but had not been contacted. The funeral director explained that since the deceased had died in hospital, the usual hospital procedure was to contact the hospital chaplain. Thereafter the funeral home's 'tame vicar' had carried out the service. The 'passed over' vicar continued to talk about his lost pastoral care. 'I tried to explain to him that there was no one left to give pastoral care to. The man had left an ex wife who didn't want to know; the funeral was being arranged and paid for by friends at a working mens club after a whip round. I should have suggested that he did his pastoral care round there! I'm not having that little prick telling me!' (F.Dir.QO Com.FH).

The clergy were equally critical of funeral directors. 'What we object to is that the undertaker will pick up the phone and say: 'Vicar. Crematorium, 12.15. Friday, can you do it?' and you say, I'm sorry I can't. - Right, we'll get the next one! - When really, if there had been more liaison we could have said, I can't do 12.15. I could do 12.30. Because the people you know, don't understand why the vicar didn't go to the service' (C/KS). Here the clergy showed a lack of understanding of the difficulties of obtaining and holding crematoria 'timing slots' for funerals. '..they're quite put out if you say, no, I can't possibly do it at that time. They say, Oh well, I'll have to get somebody else..So you say, No, I know this family, I want to do the funeral. And then they're put into the situation of having to go back to the family and say they want to alter the time. There's a bit of blackmail goes on. You know, they know that you're not going to want to upset the family any more than you can help.(C/MS) .

Funeral director QX (Com.FH) stated: 'Clergy are always accusing us

of dropping on them details of funerals, and generally making things difficult, My view on this is that we're contacted by families to arrange a funeral. I know things can now be different and parishes have changed and clergy have a million and one things to do, but if the clergy were administering their parish to the best of their ability I'm sure that they would know when somebody died and would possibly be there when we make the arrangements. I think the clergy are only too fond of handing out the blame.' Towler and Coxon (1979) noted 'If society is unclear about the reasons why the clergyman is rated high in social status it is just as unclear about what the clergyman is supposed to be doing', (p.34). Funeral directors however, appeared quite clear where the clergy's responsibilities lay.

Funeral director (EQ.CFH) commented: 'The funeral director is the man in the middle and he has to fix a time to suit the minister, to suit the crematorium, to suit the people and finally to suit himself. Now..at what point do you start? We ask the clients first. Having established that, do we ring the minister and have him say No - or do we ring the crem and ask them what time they've got available? If we go to the crem and then go to the minister we're putting him last. If we go the other way, the crem may not have a time anyway..'

The lack of availability of clergy was another cause of conflict. 'They're a hypocritical lot. One you can never get out in the cricket season. Another, he will only do it on a certain day at a certain time. We have a lot of trouble with this one' (F.Dir.SX. Com.FH). (6). During fieldwork, one firm tried for two days to obtain a vicar. 'The funeral was for Monday and he didn't ring back until ten to five Friday pm to let us know that he couldn't make it. The funeral

director concerned meant to get someone else but in the flurry of paperwork on Friday evening, forgot. On Monday, the paperwork still had the original vicar's name down. A different funeral director who had elected to conduct the funeral arrived at the crematorium with the funeral party and found no vicar. He telephoned the original clergyman and tore him off a strip. This did very little for the relationship and the vicar insisted on a letter of apology.

(Com.FH). All of the funeral homes could cite cases of vicars forgetting to turn up at all for the service or turning up too late to conduct it, occasionally with serious consequences for the funeral home concerned.

Overall, there were eight main causes of conflict between funeral directors and clergy which had their roots in the loss of control and diminishing status of clergy, the constraints of the death system and a growing tension between the perception of the funeral as Christian ritual and as personalised ceremonial fulfilling a human need. (i) Arguments over how and when the funeral director informed the clergy (ii) Antagonism by the clergy to the bereaved's choice of secular music for the crematorium service and the funeral directors support for such a choice. (iii) Upsets occurring from the differing perceptions and importance of the timing of funerals. (iv) The funeral director's emphasis upon the body of the deceased. (v) Disapproval of the clergy/funeral directors increasing interest in financial aspects. (vi) Suspicion on the part of the clergy that funeral directors made no attempt to retain church services but channelled the bulk of funerals towards the crematoria. (vii) Conflicts between bereaved, masons, funeral directors and clergy arising from church restrictions on the siting and choice of

memorials. (viii) General dissatisfactions arising from attempts to delimit and redefine the content of one another's roles.

Leaving aside (i), already discussed, (11) the selection of music, was one of the most common causes of 'ritual battles'. Occasionally the clergy expressed their disapproval so harshly that it resulted in a 'spoiled' funeral service. 'It was a funeral with one of our ministers. The family asked me for 'Sailing' by Rod Stewart..I knew what he (the minister) was like and I said to the family, well you'd better make sure its all right, and they said, Oh yes, we'll speak to him..and I never thought anymore about it. So I played it at the end of the service and he stormed out. He was livid about it. He was going to see the church solicitors and oh gosh! He said to me, 'I spent all my time with that family getting them to accept it and you play a needless piece of music like that and they all break down crying. He said, I'm just wasting my time' (F.Dir.CQ.PFH). Funeral Director QX (Com.FH.) thought that although the clergy should be consulted over the music, they had no power of veto. 'I've had occasions where a clergyman has taken the service and then at a given point he's left the service - very discreetly. He's stood outside, not very pleased, shaking his head. But possibly the music in its own way might have done as much therapy for the family as the clergyman's service.' Female funeral director (PU.S/PFH), commented: 'All I do is just mention it to the vicar and say, you know, we've had a request for this..I assume you have no objection. Some ask for the same music they had for their wedding. OK the vicar might not consider that's appropriate but obviously to that woman its something that was part of the most important day of her life..'

Clergymen tended to reject pop songs in an attempt to retain the integrity of the Christian service. Since the bereaved had voluntarily subsumed themselves under a religious framework, it was felt that they should not degrade it. 'I would want to look at the words of any pop song and I would encourage as far as I could a basis of hope in God who raises the dead rather than in the good deeds of the person who has departed' (C/BH). 'I wouldn't sort of walk out in protest. I mean again, you've got to be where people are...But I would discourage it..because you're going through a religious ceremony' (C/KS). Others took a more liberal view: C/MS: 'A lot of music thought of as not religious can be a very spiritual expression and people have a right to that if it is helpful to them.' C/BK noted that 'the ramifications of people's personalities and therefore their spirits, are much more wide ranging than the very narrowly religious look at people.'

Although the clergy felt able to express approval or disapproval of choice of music, other ritual embellishments were subject to control by the crematoria officials. Thus the IBCA Journal, (1984) noted that a request by mourners to allow Morris Dancing in a crematorium chapel had been refused on the grounds that it might cause nuisance to mourners waiting for another service. All such decisions on ritual were the province of individual crematorium superintendents who could bypass the wishes of the clergy.

Interviews conducted with the bereaved during the preliminary studies revealed that they usually remembered very little of the religious service. By contrast, any personally chosen music would be especially memorable. Female bereaved (aged 32: on the death of her child):: Well it was very short. (The vicar) said a prayer I think. I can't remember

a lot about it, it was totally unreal.' Bereaved male (on the death of his father): 'The vicar began a very regular pronouncement, no sense of anything out of the ordinary about it. I don't recall very much about the funeral service itself.' A few of the clergy recognised the importance of 'atmosphere' to the bereaved and were able to downgrade the prominence of the liturgy. C/MS: 'I don't think the words help at all so much, um, because people when they're bereaved don't hear the words. What you do experience is the atmosphere.'

Within the city, the facilities offered by crematoria and cemetery chapels for providing 'atmosphere', varied considerably. One cemetery chapel offered a single tape with a choice of ten hymns or songs; another produced several pages of mimeographed titles of records which could be played on a very ancient stereo system. Amongst those considered suitable for disposal rituals were 'the Treorchy Male Choir', 'Harry Secombe', 'Mario Lanza' and the 'Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra'.

Irritation was often expressed within the funeral homes with the poor selections of music available. A funeral director (.F.Dir NE PFH), telephoned a city crematorium for 'The Dream of Olwen' and later, 'The Warsaw Concerto' and the crematorium hadn't got either. Amongst the recent requests made of a funeral director (Com.FH. F.Dir.SX), were 'The Mull of Kintyre', 'One day at a time Sweet Jesus', 'Amazing Grace' and 'The Last Rose of Summer'. Individual funeral directors varied in the lengths to which they were prepared to go to help the bereaved to obtain their choice of music. A few went to endless trouble to find particular tapes or records in city music shops; others steered the bereaved towards 'free choice' saving themselves work.

Effort was often excused on the grounds that the timing constraints at the crematoria meant that many chapel attendants only played the first two verses of any hymn or song. 'We just give them two, that's enough' (Chapel attendant IG). The attendants then needed to clear the mourners out of the way for the next funeral. Nevertheless, the increasing demand by the bereaved for music which personalised the disposal rituals and imbued them with meaning not only reflected dissatisfaction with the impersonal nature of the contemporary management of death but also a need for greater participation.

Where services were held in the bereaved's local church the clergymen took control of the ritual and funeral directors were reluctant to make promises to obtain special requests. A request from a client for the service to be from the old prayer book met with the response: 'I don't know whether he'll (the vicar) let you - they don't use that anymore.' (F.Dir.CQ. PFH). Both clergy and funeral directors felt that the choice of funeral hymns for a church service had remained fairly static over the years. Funeral director (SK. S/JFH). 'The Lord is My Shepherd to Crimond' - I've heard that until I'm absolutely fed up of it.' Many of the clergy professed themselves equally tired of the staple hymns: 'The Lord is my Shepherd', 'Rock of Ages' 'Abide with Me' 'The Old Rugged Cross'. C/BS: 'The invariable choice is 'The Lord is My Shepherd'. I think that its a bit to do with folk religion but I think that the more informed they are as Christians, the more likely they are to go for something with a strong positive belief in the resurrection.' C/BK gave the top four hymns as 'The Lord is My Shepherd', 'In Heavenly Love Abiding', 'The Day thou gavest Lord is ending' and 'Abide with Me'.

(iii). Conflict over Timing

There was a finite amount of 'funeral time' available in a week which was governed by the workings of the local cemeteries and crematoria. 'First the local crem allowed us twenty minutes for a service, then they gave us thirty minutes. This lengthening actually cut the availability of funeral time. Then they put it back to fifteen minutes and now its back to thirty minutes again. Its too big a gap. But we fix the times so that we always go in late...' (F.Dir.NX M/PFH).

Although it suits funeral directors to arrive at the crematorium or church a little early, clergy insist that it is better for funeral directors to be late. Many clergy refused to start the service until the appointed time and would keep mourners waiting outside in inclement weather rather than begin. 'The cortege arrived for a service and burial in my parish church..and they arrived twenty minutes early. Now this was a funeral to which quite a few in the village were going to come casually..what do you do? Well if you go in and start, you're going to virtually have finished by the time that half the people are just arriving. Or do you make them sit ten minutes in their cars, you know, adding to the stress load. Late isn't quite so important..but earliness is a terrible bad sin!' (C/MS).

Funeral directors in all of the funeral homes tended to regard this as perverse behaviour on the clergy's part. Driver (PFH): 'They moan like hell if you're a few minutes early and they make you wait. Once a couple of years ago, it was so windy we had to hold onto the hearse when we got out..mourners were holding onto one another. There were still three minutes to go and he made us wait outside in the bitter howling gale. You would think out of common kindness he would think

it better to let people inside.' (F.Dir.SK) commented of a local clergyman, 'He was a devil. You could not put a foot right with him. If you weren't there dead on time, he'd make you wait. And if you were there before time he'd make you wait.' Funeral Director EQ, (CFH): 'Ministers can be damned awkward..some of them think they're a law unto themselves. If they decide to be awkward its very difficult to deal with them.' This funeral home had a large file of letters documenting a series of hostile exchanges between themselves and clergy within the city over the years.

(v) Finance

Within the literature, economic critiques have been almost wholly directed at funeral directors, excluding an examination of the ever increasing costs brought to bear on funeral ritual by others in the death system, such as medical authorities (increasing doctors charges for certification), local authorities (rising crematoria and cemetery fees) and clergy fees. Although Harmer (1963) noted that American funeral directors have suggested that clergymen were concerned with material reward, little consideration has been given to the problem in this country.

Within North city, clergy and funeral directors both considered each other too money conscious. Nevertheless, the funeral directors criticisms of the clergy went across the board, from directors heading large corporations to the small two man funeral director. The director of a large southern based corporation commented: 'Clergy are characterized by greed and avarice'. (F.Dir.GD). While the owner of a small joiner/funeral home stated: 'Its part of a Ministers job and it didn't ought to be so much.' Some of the difficulty stemmed from the

much lower fees charged by non conformist clergy and their insistence that there would be no charge for the use of their chapels for the service. Anglican clergyman KS commented: 'Well funeral directors make a hell of a fuss about the fees the clergy charge..but of course, they're laid down by the church commissioners and they're part of our income.' The Report by CIO Publishing on Funerals and Ministry to the Bereaved(1985) revealed that there appeared to be '...very little official liaison between the Churches and the secular authorities. Acknowledging that the fees for funerals were not uniform it commented that there were 'sound pastoral reasons for..establishing a common system and fee structure' (p.20).

Funeral directors within and without the city were however, vociferous in their complaints during fieldwork. 'They're (the clergy) out for grabs, they don't do as much as they should' (F.Dir.NX PFH). 'They have bells at X church..and as the vicar walks past this porch, he goes BOOM! - and that's a pound! And if you've got a lot of money, he might do it twice.' (F.Dir.NE PFH). 'They're supposed to charge £16.50 for a funeral but all that lot up at St.X charge anything from £22 (F.Dir.QO ComFH). 'The minister officiating is highly respected in the city. I asked him 'how much?' He said, £24. I asked him if he had any change because I only had five £5 notes. He said, 'No. I'll take the £25. They (the family) can afford it' (F.Dir CG. Com.FH).

The disillusionment over clergy charging practices is longstanding. The Funeral Director (1970) noted the propensity of clergy to ask for mileage allowances which then covered other jobs they had to carry out in the city. In 1985 a representative of the NAFD explained to a representative of the Church of England that members were 'extremely

concerned at what they consider overcharging on the Statutory Church fees for funerals 'The Funeral Director, (1985, p.30)'

Clergy fiddles were viewed as more reprehensible than those of funeral directors since they appeared at odds with ideological role requirements. Funeral director LE (Cross.FH) professed himself shocked by the vicar who had asked him for £100 towards a colour television set that he then offered to 'pay off in funerals'. He noted that he was asked for anything from £8 to £31 for the use of Anglican churches within the city. 'We just give them what they want.'

For their part, the clergy did not appreciate the manner in which funeral directors paid them their fees. C/BK commented: 'They have an annoying habit as soon as they arrive at the church of holding out their hand to you. You think they're shaking hands and they're putting the money in your hand. Loose pound notes, you know, with the family coming along behind them and they will not learn that this is inept. They're very efficient in the arrangements but they have an insensitivity in some of the detail which is appalling. Almost universally. They worry about the time, at the end of the ceremony, they're fishing around in the vestry, you can see them. Looking in and opening the door to see whether you've finished...I know they're under pressure at the other end but no minister is going to delay them more than he needs. I've been wanting to say this for years. And from what I know of them when they see people in a bereaved situation, they find it very difficult to talk to people about their real feelings, just about their 'list of things'. They don't believe they are in 'the Caring Game, but I think they are. For many people its the only caring contact they are going to get. After all they get enough money for a

funeral, they ought to be given more training.'

(viii) General dissatisfactions

Whilst the majority of Funeral Homes claimed to 'get on with' their local clergy and to have satisfactory relationships, a sense of tension was never very far from the surface. Funeral directors felt that they did a lot more for the bereaved than the clergy especially in those funeral homes where they were called out at all hours of the night. 'No one calls the vicar out at 4 a.m.' (F.Dir.CG. Com.FH). Both funeral directors and clergy criticised one another for lack of sensitivity, for 'spoiling' funeral performances and for lack of care for the bereaved. C/MS commented of funeral directors: 'Occasionally you get one who seems to believe in the service, not seeing it as something that they've got to get through in the shortest time possible to increase their throughput. I realise that they've got to fit in with the system.'

Many of the clergy stated that they would like to see a closer liaison between clergy and funeral directors. 'At least we would know what each other is doing.' For their part, the funeral directors continued to try to maintain judicious relationships in the belief that clergy still had the power to deflect business from 'their' territory if relationships deteriorated. Funeral director LE(Cross.FH), puzzling over his firm's sudden lack of funerals of a certain denomination during the research period stated that he carefully re-examined their relationship with the clergy of that persuasion in the city.

4.17. De-ritualisation

The historical perspective showed the endeavours of clergy to reduce

much of the ritual surrounding the funeral and, their dislike of the common religious values with which it has been imbued. They were totally disinterested in the continuation of superstitions concerning the coffin, especially the custom of taking coffins into and out of buildings feet first. Funeral director QR (CFH): 'Well this is tradition. The coffin is always carried feet first in English traditional funerals.' The clergy however belittled the tradition. C/MS: 'It must be pagan. I mean I wouldn't know which end came in first, but the undertakers seem to.' C/CS: 'I 've never really noticed. It wouldn't worry me if they did it the other way. ' C/BK: 'I get totally confused as to which end I'm meant to be at. No one's ever told me. You end up fighting with the undertakers, trying to swing this wretched thing round and not knowing whether I'm at the foot or the head.' While the majority of domestic superstitious rituals, such as covering mirrors and stopping clocks on the occurrence of death, have completely vanished, those inherited by undertakers have been selectively preserved in the enhancement of their 'mystique'. Their structures remain, but the meaning changes. (Jarvis 1980).

Nor were the clergy concerned with the manner in which the coffin was transported. Several considered it a good idea to use trolleys instead of carrying because it was less of a strain on the mourners as to whether they were going to drop it. However, only the PFH consistently used bearers. Other organizations linked their own use of trolleys to lack of manpower. Funeral director BX (S/PFH), stated that he would like to see his coffins shouldered but to do it he would need four bearers of the same size. When drivers were hired in they tended to be different sizes.

As noted in Chapter Two, the clergy had allowed a great many of their own traditional anchors to pass into oblivion. The 'experimental' period of the 1970's resulted in the disappearance of the old prayer book in favour of the Alternative Services Book. Funeral directors had little interest in lobbying for the protection of church concerns, whilst local authorities seized the chance to introduce less costly booklets or plasticised service sheets. Funeral director SK (S/JFH) felt that the words of the old prayer book service had fallen into disuse because ministers thought that they had to protect people from the truth of death, that clergy themselves were showing evidence of denial. Some clergy agreed. C/MS: 'That awful one about 'though worms destroy this body, I never say that. Its gone in the new service.'

Boocock (1974) suggested that the liturgical changes had 'been concerned to reduce the element of natural religion or mystery cult..and to introduce changes that symbolise and evoke the view of the church as a 'sacred community' with a participating laity, instead of the reliance on the words and actions of the priest alone' (p.74)

Clergymen recognised the new participatory nature of the services and the degree of flexibility allowed to them. C/MS '..the new service involves the congregation giving more responses than they did before.'

He tended however not to use the new service 'because I don't think at a funeral people want to join in an awful lot with unfamiliar words.'

C/KC: 'There is enough choice amongst the readings and prayers to make them variable.' This variability meant however, that the old familiar patterns of sound had vanished. 'The reformed liturgies are lacking in language that taps ancient memory, the individuals consciousness and the commonplaces of an old rhetoric that have become part of everyday life..in its place a new document that speaks with administrative

terseness rather than with the verbal rhythms of the people themselves' (Fenn 1984, p.121). Increasingly the mystique which remains within the disposal rituals is the mystique with which funeral directors and the bereaved themselves invest them.

#### 4.18. Liturgical apartheid.

All the clergy not only differentiated between rituals in church and rituals held in the 'municipal ritual halls' but also distinguished (some to a greater degree than others) between those perceived to be 'church people' and 'others'. One referred to 'streaming' the bereaved into 'C of E types' and 'church families', another to 'our own people' and 'others'. 'I'm afraid so, I'm afraid that um, there is a difference between those where in the words of the ASB which talks about those who have professed the faith and those whose faith is known to you alone. And I think there is a difference in emphasis..I don't think that means to say that you deliberately set out to say, 'Oh fine, we're going to have a second string funeral for these people..but certainly your address at the beginning differs' (C/MS). Habgood (1983) spoke of 'serious theological and liturgical objections against using services clearly designed for committed believers in contexts where the commitment is to say the least, doubtful' (p.85). There was a feeling of being used by those who didn't care. C/JK commented: 'I speak more for the believers in the congregation than for the bereaved themselves'.

#### 4.19. The Tame Vicar

Given the continuing conflict between funeral directors and clergy there was an obvious temptation for funeral directors to take the easy way out and acquire a 'tame' vicar who would go anywhere at any time.

Tame vicars were a growing phenomenon in the city partly because of the increasing work load of funeral homes and partly due to the need for someone who would play his 'role' well and not 'spoil' the funeral performance. Funeral director SK (S/JFH): 'And you've got to watch 'em you know, because they just muddle everything up. You've nearly to paddle 'em. Its not easy watching some of t' Ministers. You get one you know who you can trust to do what's needed and not fly off at a tangent and throw everything across.' A funeral director from one of the largest London based corporations in the country confirmed that the phenomenon was national rather than local. 'Something that is coming in more and more is the practice of having our own vicars - someone you can trust, that you know gives a good service because you have gone in and listened to it, that you know will contact the family at least by phone even if he can't go and visit' (F.Dir.KL). Funeral Homes in other words were tending only to use clergy over whom they had a certain amount of control and whose interpretation of their role coincided with their own.

'We can call on a stock of retired vicars for helping if we're stuck' (F.Dir.NE PFH). 'He (a colleague) drags old Reverend X round with him all over the country ' (F.Dir.QO Com.FH). Tame Vicars were popular because 'they (provided) a source of elasticity in the system and because they (were) more likely to view the funeral service as ' a human service' and to tailor it specifically to the individual with a judicious mix of orthodox religion and non religious sentiment' (Naylor, 1985c). They also provided an answer to the ongoing dilemma of the 'rejected' clergy (8). Funeral director NX (Neighbouring town) considered the ideal situation would be for every funeral home to have their own resident minister to conduct funerals in the service chapel. 'Then you could shut the door on them (the clergy)'.  
 1

Funeral directors retained some ambivalence and perhaps guilt over tame vicars however, both making use of them and castigating them. Tame vicars did generate annoyance in Funeral Homes by taking on more than they could reasonably cope with and disrupting the fine timing mechanism of the day's funerals. Thus a gravedigger at a major city cemetery: 'There'll be one or two that can't take half an hour (for a service). They've a funeral here at ten oclock and they've another one at ten thirty at X crem so that's it isn't it, they're rushing about ' (Gravedigger A. H. Cem.) This dashing from funeral to funeral across the city caused aggravation to funeral directors who found that their tame clergyman had telephoned shortly before the funeral to ask: 'Can you arrive ten minutes late with the cortege because I'm likely to be at Y crematorium until 10.20. He would then have telephoned the Funeral Home who had the funeral at Y crematorium and asked them to bring their time of arrival forward by five minutes.

Tame vicars themselves tended to be unrepentant. 'And when I have had to go quickly from one to another, I've gone to no end of trouble to explain the the principal mourners. Now please don't think anything of it. I haven't time to say Good Morning to you as you leave the chapel. As soon as the service is ended, I'm going to you know, slip out of the side door. You will know why. I've got to be at Y crematorium twenty minutes later ' (Clergyman MS).

#### 4.20 Services in Funeral Establishment Chapels

In North City, as previously noted, the use of funeral establishment service chapels was prohibited by the Diocesan Bishop. In an adjoining town however, where the hierarchy held a more lenient attitude, services were frequently held in Funeral Home service

chapels. In one funeral home observed, the disposal ritual had accumulated its own distinctive set of rituals. Mourners walked to the altar at the beginning of the service and around the open coffin to take a last look at the deceased. Flowers were hung in specially made wooden racks on the pews at either side of the coffin. After taking a final look at the deceased, the bereaved retired to a side waiting room for a few moments while the funeral directors replaced the coffin lid and covered it with flowers from the racks. The mourners then returned to the pews for the service. Here, there were many more contact hours between funeral director, clergy and bereaved and arguably less misunderstandings. One clergyman officiating stated that he was happy to do so. 'All it says in the prayer book is that the body should be decently interred. Before the crematorium you could go straight to the grave, it was never automatic that you went into a building. The funeral chapel is just an extension of the church' (C/KY). Another commented: 'Legally you're not supposed to do it. But we work what we call a 'flanker'. We go and take some prayers in the service chapel or house, then take the legal part shortened at the crematorium or the grave. You just shuffle it around' (C/DF). A funeral director within this home noted that within his town there only 'about five clergymen who won't come into the service chapel, so I avoid them. By law you're supposed to inform them, but if a person has been poorly and they haven't known....!' (F.Dir.NX).

The acceptance of Funeral Home Service chapels in this area, it was suggested, occurred as a result of 'economic necessity' rather than any flight from the church. 'The cemetery chapels were atrocious and also the crematorium is awful, therefore funeral directors started to

build their own chapels and everyone followed suit. Some clergy are grudging but you can always get a nonconformist' (F.Dir. NX). The ease with which nonconformist ministers could be obtained throughout the country suggests a gradual movement of funeral ritual under funeral director control. A funeral director within North city (Cross.FH) subsequently admitted that he occasionally used his own service chapel when families wanted it, getting over his problem by asking the families 'if they really are Church of England. (I wish this tape wasn't going.) For instance, we tell them that if they are Church of England we are going to have difficulty organizing a service in the chapel of rest. However a Methodist minister would take the service in our chapel. And when people look into this, they do find that there is a Methodist connection in the family. Quite often' (F.Dir.LE).

From having a lame vicar to take the service within the Funeral Home chapel it was a further short step to omitting the presence of a clergyman and having funeral directors to take the service. Many within the city had already done so in cases of emergency where a vicar failed to turn up. Funeral directors in general did not see a complete takeover of the funeral as feasible because it would add to their workload. It was easier to employ clergy who could be adequately controlled. Only one funeral director who was also a methodist preacher (F.Dir.SK S/JFH), had regularly taken funeral services. 'Well it isn't everybody as can do it like I can, but I don't like both conducting the funeral and conducting the service, its too big a strain. Because you're watching your mourners to see what they're doing, if they're in their right places and so on and

you've to watch what you're doing to do the service. And its not easy.'

Some clergy were philosophical about losing their grip on the funeral. C/BK: 'Yes, I mean I wouldn't particularly welcome it but it might happen and I think we might get rather like a wedding so that everyone has a civil wedding and that only those who wanted it have a church service.' Writing on the decline of the parish in the Funeral Service Journal (1984), a vicar implied a rapid decline in the role of the parish church and suggested that in twenty years time (by the year 2004) training courses would be set up by ministers to equip funeral directors to take services for funerals (9).

#### Summary

A 'routine' approach was found necessary within the four major funeral homes in order to cope with the large numbers of rituals, both within the arrangements session and at the production stage. Funeral directors took control in the majority of cases and the bereaved assumed a predominantly passive role. The bereaved remained ignorant of many of the choices of ritual available and were almost always 'under informed' on major purchases such as coffins, gowns and flowers. As Clark (1982) has noted, the expectation of the funeral director's role was that s/he would 'do everything.' Funeral directors nevertheless had a vital role in playing the system to the advantage of the bereaved. They fought with bureaucrats to alter unpopular decisions and provided the bereaved with a voice with which to protest against shortening funeral times at crematoria and cemeteries. They advised the bereaved of their rights in deflecting unnecessary postmortems and helped them with money saving subversions

of red tape. Little resentment was expressed by the bereaved over the cost of ritual, despite the fact that they had purchased much of it 'sight unseen'. There appeared to be some evidence that to many it was still regarded as a 'debt of honour' (10).

Within the funeral homes, a great deal of attention was given to the care of the bodies of the deceased and this was sometimes supplemented by the concern shown by some of the bereaved who brought in relatives' own clothes and added small cosmetic touches of their own. The large numbers viewing and the participation did not suggest a fear of death, or denial, but demonstrated a trust in the funeral director that s/he would ensure that the bodies were recognizable and 'all right', i.e. not displaying the marks of suffering or mutilation.

Gorer's explanation for the persistence of the religious framework of death ritual was a continuing belief that 'the soul continues to exist after death and is judged'. Observation during fieldwork suggested that the presence of the clergy was taken for granted by funeral directors and secular alternatives were not offered. Factors hindering the development of alternative frameworks included the longstanding alignment of funeral directors with religious symbolism, behaviours and phraseology, the nature of the parish contract, their expectations that the clergy would handle the emotional/psychological components of grief, the bereaved's interpretation of C of E as a social rather than a denominational label and their lack of knowledge of secular alternatives.

By contrast with American studies, conflict and struggles for

occupational control between funeral directors and clergy in Britain appeared to be increasing rather than decreasing. Little improvement could be noted since 1925 when the BUA Journal (p256) noted that the clergy were complaining about being left out of the arrangements and were 'chagrined by the lack of punctuality of undertakers' and wanted to see 'due regard for the sacredness of the occasion.' In general, funeral directors were viewed by clergy as dealers in the death system, as movers of bereaved, bodies and boxes. They were seen as traders with a veneer of professionalism rather than professionals of equal status. Throughout the research, the clergy insisted on referring to them as 'undertakers' rather than funeral directors. Funeral directors equally held many clergy in low regard. It was thought that only a handful genuinely cared for the bereaved or put themselves out to give a good service, that many were only in it 'for the money', with varying and often excessive charges requested. Funeral directors unanimously disliked the distinction the clergy made between church members and non churchgoers. The development of the clergy's role within an urban environment with its emphasis upon group and committee work was seen as detrimental to the individual caught up in the experience of death. For the funeral director, the ideal clergyman was the same Vicar, reliable, capable of giving an excellent performance and willing to go anywhere for anyone at short notice.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Within the preliminary sample however, three of the bereaved had chosen their own clothing for the deceased. 'A very pretty nightdress she'd kept for many years to be buried in' (DE/PS). '..a babygro outfit which he'd worn a lot' (TH/PS). 'In his suit with his Navy tie on and so forth' (QN/PS).

2. This might be contrasted with the 'luxury' furnishings of caskets viewed during a personal trip to North America. Caskets worth upwards of one and a half thousand dollars were displayed in the Funeral Home's Slumber Room and the funeral director emphasized that the mattresses were all 'fully sprung'. 'Many people never get to sleep on a mattress as good as this all their lives.' (Funeral director. Nova Scotia. 1983). Whereas in America, Pine (1975) emphasized the importance of the status value of the selection of the casket, in North city there were no definitive class differences in purchase.

3. In 1971 the National Union of Funeral Service Operatives called for an enquiry into the condition of bodies leaving London Teaching Hospitals after postmortem examination. Its members had had 'to cover up excessive mutilation so that relatives could view' (Funeral Service Journal, November, 1971).

4. However it is not generally realised that overall, the proportion of fiddles within the death system is comparatively smaller than those within many other countries, for example in America recently (1989), a funeral home with a cremator was found to have stacks of bodies awaiting disposal and mounds of ash dumped in a nearby field; in Italy, funeral directors have offered prizes to those bringing in news of a death. One of the last major British trials for malpractice was that of the 'Coffins Case' in 1944 when the *Managing Director* of a Scottish Crematorium was charged together with a funeral director for stealing lids from coffins, nameplates, coffins and shrouds. Employees of the crematorium had used coffin lids for making blackout shutters, seed boxes, repairs to sheds, garden stakes and other articles. The Lord Justice-General commented: 'I do not suppose that a case has come into this court which contained details so horrifying, so outrageous to public feeling, and so repugnant to ordinary decency as those in this case.' A similar case showing a much greater degree of exploitation was noted by Simis (1982). In the 1970's, 'Crematoria staff at the Moscow Crematorium stripped bodies 'ripping out gold teeth and crowns'....'The coffins and wreaths were returned to the funeral supplier and would be resold twice, even three times over...The clothing and underclothing would be sent on consignment to a second hand shop and the gold sold...'One could not help be struck by the callous efficiency and matter of factness that prevailed in the trade dealing with the death of Homo sovieticus..' (p.172).

5. Service funerals entailed a similar degree of preparation in accordance with a standard order of procession. 1. Officer Commanding. 2. Colour or standard party (if appropriate). 3. Firing Party. 4. Band & Trumpeters. 5. Hearse or Prime Mover & Trailer, bearers and pall bearers. 6. Insignia Bearers (if any). 7. Chief

Mourners. 8. The Queen's Representative (if any). 9. The Lord Lieutenant of the County in which the funeral takes place (if present). 10. Attending party. (Manual of Funeral Directing, Ch.12, p.7).

6. One clergyman was the subject of spontaneous adverse criticism at three of the major funeral homes. 'It doesn't matter when you ask that chap, he can't come. He won't put himself out, he isn't interested. (F.Dir.KE/CFH). 'He's always too busy having jumble sales' (F.Dir EL/Cross FH). 'He always wants fetching that one' (F.Dir SX Com.FH).

7. The majority of the bereaved interpreted the funeral service as a last farewell to the deceased. '..its the last thing you can do isn't it. Its really the final farewell of the family to the corpse. Whatever you make that funeral, whether its a nice one, whether its only an intermediate one, a roughshod one, is what the family thinks of that corpse. And I think that a funeral should be well, to my mind, religious and quiet and that. And I think that the funeral that you put on, is what you, well, is really your thoughts ' (DG/PS). 'Well only a farewell, a formal farewell I think, in a way, to the person who has died' (TH/PS).

8. Although dealing with the 'rejected' clergy was a constant problem in North City, it was even worse for those in smaller towns. 'I know of one particular village or small town whose rector almost regards it as a right that he should take the service for his parishioners. I get very seriously wrong if I do not tell him when one of his parishioners has died, be he non-conformist or nothing at all. Equally I have the circumstances when I go to a house and the first thing I hear is 'We don't want that chap at any price.' What do I tell him?' (Reported in The Funeral Director, January 1970, p.25).

9. Discontent was also voiced nationally. A vicar in Staffordshire suggested that relatives should consider conducting their own funeral services at home with a few words and their favourite music. He was 'uncomfortable' taking *funeral services for mourners who did not believe in religion*. (Funeral Service Journal, April 1984, p.156) A vicar in Leicestershire was reported in the national press as stating 'I'm fed up with people like the "Smiths" who never step inside a church until someone dies and then expect the church to rally round them' (Today, October 1988).'

10. During fieldwork one bereaved was outraged at a funeral home's offer to 'knock something off the bill' when a hearse had broken down. Despite the anguish it had caused him, he insisted that he wished to pay in full for his relative's funeral. A sum of money was eventually sent by the funeral home to his nominated charity.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BEREAVED AND THE DEATH SYSTEM:

PRE DISPOSAL RITUALS

As discussed in Chapter One, a period of fieldwork was followed by an intensive study of a number of funerals from beginning to end.

Transcriptions of the taped interviews provide the data for the present chapter and Chapter Six. The intention was to examine the behaviour, ritual choices and interactions of the main participants within the three stages of death ritual.

5.0. A brief outline of the case studies

CASE A: The deceased was a female aged 81 who died in hospital after a long confinement in a nursing home. The bereaved, a middle class woman in her late forties had been informed of the death at 6am. The funeral director was at the house by 10 am.

CASE B: The deceased was male, aged 89. His wife had died only a few months previously. He was taken into hospital whilst his son and daughter in law were on holiday abroad. They returned and were with him in the evening before he died.

CASE C: The deceased was male, aged 75. He died in hospital following treatment for cancer, in the early hours of the morning shortly after the bereaved had left the hospital. The bereaved were a middle class couple, living in an affluent area of the city.

CASE D: The deceased was a female aged 73 who died in hospital

following a six weeks illness. The bereaved daughter was shocked by the suddenness of the death.

CASE E: The deceased was a male aged 70. He had been a chronic invalid for thirteen years and died in hospital. The bereaved, a working class widow, lived in a council owned maisonette.

CASE F: The deceased was a female aged 78 who died unexpectedly at lunch time from a heart attack. The bereaved brother (retired working class) was talking to his sister only five minutes before she died.

CASE G: The deceased was a male aged 41 who was found dead in bed one morning. Although he had a history of heart trouble, his wife initially thought that he might have taken an overdose because he had been depressed.

CASE H: The deceased was a working class male aged 72. He died of tuberculosis in hospital and had no traceable relatives. A Church Army Sister in her thirties acted as executor and arranged the funeral from her own house.

CASE J: The deceased was a young working class woman in her twenties who died unexpectedly in the night having had no previous illness. She was discovered dead in bed at 7am by her husband who was subsequently taken into police custody until cleared by the postmortem.

## 5.1. The occurrence of death:

There were 5 'expected' deaths where the deceased died in hospital (A,B,C, D and H), 3 'unexpected' deaths where the deceased had some previous illness ( E, F and G) and 1 'sudden' death where the deceased had been in good health (J). The 'expected' deaths all followed the same pattern with the deceased assuming a 'sick role' and the bereaved becoming sick visitors within the hospital. The 'expected' deaths were characterized by relief on the part of the bereaved: both that the deceased had escaped from constant illness and/or that the burden of caring for the relatives had been lifted from their shoulders. These deaths were also perceived as 'natural' or 'inevitable' endings to a long life span.

In three of the cases, the bereaved had already undergone some form of anticipatory mourning. 'For the last few years, Mother as she was, has been dead to me. The last couple of years of visiting, she didn't always know it was me' (Case A, expected death). In case B (expected death) the bereaved son and daughter in law had found caring for the 89 year old a great burden as he was going blind and also drank heavily. In case C (expected death), where the deceased was dying of cancer, the bereaved daughters also stated that they were 'prepared' for the death.

In two of the cases there had been less time to come to an acceptance of death. In case D the imminent death of the 73 year old female was only expected towards the end of a stay in hospital. The daughter had experienced great difficulties in accepting the medical efforts to prolong life. For nearly six weeks she had spent all day at the hospital. 'Its awful to say it but towards the end I didn't want her

to live because she was in such a state. ..The insulin was just prolonging her life. I gave them permission in the finish to take the food away..I more or less blame myself for giving them permission afterwards.'

Again, in case E (expected death), although the 71 year old husband had been a chronic invalid for most of his life, with the stay in hospital perceived as a relief, the death still came as a shock. 'I said to the taxi, Go like hell because me husband's dying. But he was already laid out and he must have died before.'

Within the category of 'unexpected' deaths, the shock to the bereaved was more marked. Whereas the bereaved in the 'expected' deaths category were generally composed and able to talk about the death at some length during the Arrangements session, the unexpectedly bereaved were not. Despite previous illnesses and despite death occurring in two cases in the home, they were unable to interpret the deaths as 'natural'.

In case F, the bereaved had been talking to his sister only five minutes before she died. She had gone to the community hall in a sheltered housing complex for her lunch. 'Next minute they came to fetch me, she'd collapsed.' An ambulance was called and the police arrived. The bereaved appeared numbed by the unreality of the situation and was at times close to breaking down.

The deceased in case G was a male of only 41 and his wife discovered him dead in bed when she called him to get up for work. Although he had a history of heart trouble, the bereaved initially thought that

he might have taken an overdose because he had recently been depressed. 'I rung the ambulance..' '..I just panicked..I didn't think it could happen so suddenly.' The body was removed to the mortuary for a post mortem and the bereaved did not see it again. She was severely shocked and had to be given tranquillisers. The shock and distress continued for months and was still severe at the time of a second interview some 12 weeks after the death.

In case H, the bereaved was unrelated to the deceased but had been a close friend and appointed executor because the deceased was a 'drifter' who had no known relatives. She had not seen the deceased around for a few weeks and then was suddenly informed that he was dead. Although calm during interviews, she wished that she had 'prepared herself' for it.

Logically, preparation for death depended upon the recognition of a series of stages of illness. None of the bereaved made reference to metaphysical causes such as 'the will of God' or 'fate'. Case J in particular illustrated the extent to which links between death and uncertainty have been destroyed in contemporary society. The deceased was a 25 year old mother. Her husband had been awakened by the wetness of the bed and thought at first that his wife had 'had an accident'. He then found that she was dead. When the ambulance men arrived 'they were very suspicious. I mean she was only 24, 25..The doctor arrived, the police came and you know, they treat people with caution....' Despite the presence in the house of two friends who were staying the night, the apparent lack of a medical cause immediately became grounds for suspicion of foul play. The bereaved found himself spending two hours in police custody whilst a hurried post mortem was carried out.

The post mortem found that it was death from 'natural causes'. '..that was quite a relief! - I mean what might you actually do in your sleep?' Together with the shock of the death, the initial police and official attitudes, the bereaved subsequently reacted with total detachment, barely participating in the funeral arrangements.

The case studies illustrated that an acceptance of the medicalisation of death had made finding the cause of death more important than acknowledging the fact of death, the task normally facilitated by ritual. Ritual prior to and immediately following death had become almost non-existent as had any recognition of the element of chance in life. The loss of domestic ritual meant that the bereaved were unprepared for the role of mourner and on hospital territory, remained 'sick visitors' rather than mourners. Up until the post mortem had been completed, the deceased constituted a clinical problem rather than a dead person to be mourned. The lack of involvement of the clergy meant that the language of death was medical and official.

Notwithstanding their loss of role in the pre disposal phase, the clergy expressed their concern over the general public's failure to prepare for death. Clergyman A felt that there should be some kind of death education because 'people are totally thrown'. Clergyman H thought it 'increasingly important that there was education both to help people cope with the deaths of others and also face up to their own as well. I do feel that an important part of the grief syndrome is the fear of your own mortality.' Clergyman C was concerned that death ought to be 'something we can face and grapple with'. It had been his intention for a couple of years 'to put into my worshipping parishioners hands, a sheet to put into their wallets, purses, handbags

to carry around with them, which will have prepared them for that day. Who is their priest, who they would like as their undertaker, what form of service etc...' Although the clergy as a group had well formulated ideas for dealing with the trauma of death, their lack of involvement in its management meant that they were rarely put into practice.

#### 5.2. The selection of a Funeral Home

All of the bereaved contacted 'professionals' to take charge of the death situation as soon as possible. Female bereaved A contacted the funeral director 'at the earliest possible moment'. In cases J, F, and G, the ambulance, the police and funeral directors were called. The rest summoned a funeral director within a few hours or within 24 hours of the death. None of the bereaved called a clergyman. However within the sample, only one of the bereaved referred to the funeral director as 'funeral director', the other eight bereaved and four of the clergy referred to them as 'undertakers'. Despite all their claims to the special status of professionals, the public perception remained that of dealing with a trade and service occupation.

The bereaved's reasons for choice of Funeral Home depended upon three main factors: proximity, familiarity and knowledge that the funeral home put on a 'good performance'. Many of the bereaved proved the theory held by the Funeral Homes themselves: that a 'family unit' would tend to remain faithful to a single Funeral Home. The importance of 'performance' and 'proximity' was stressed by bereaved E: 'they seem to put a good service on..he wasn't too far away...I think I more or less fell for the cars.' The bereaved in cases B and C both selected Funeral Homes they had used before, with one requesting the same funeral director by name.

The importance of contract work to the Funeral Home in extending territory was also ratified by case F with the bereaved making the decision to stay with the Hospital Contract firm whilst waiting in the hospital. '..well you see these undertakers have this job to collect bodies, but they impressed on me, and also the police did, that I didn't have to have this undertaker ...I could have any of my choice you see. Because obviously there's been some little bit of backhanding going off..' He nevertheless decided to stay with the contracted funeral directors (Com.FH) even though he had previously had a funeral carried out by the CFH.

The malleable state of the bereaved immediately after a death was indicated by their readiness to accept early suggestions by outsiders as to their choice of funeral home. Bereaved G revealed that the name of the funeral home was suggested to her by the ambulance drivers. 'The ambulancemen came first and I think it was them that said: 'Would you like the Crossroads Funeral Home?. So I said, well its nearest and probably best. So they phoned them.' Bereaved D chose the Commercial Funeral Home because 'the Sister in the ward suggested it'. Although touting had been officially eradicated in the city, it continued unofficially within the death system. Prior knowledge of a funeral home or verbal recommendation appeared to carry more weight than newspaper or yellow pages advertising.

### 5.3. The Arrangements Session

On average, an 'arrangements' session lasted from 30 - 40 minutes, although the range was from 20 minutes to an hour and a half. In case

A which lasted an hour, the funeral director explained that he was taking more trouble than usual because it was an 'out of area' client. The time spent in the house by the funeral director depended more upon the individual funeral directors than upon in house styles. It was also constrained by other factors including, daily workload, type of client (whether an old acquaintance etc), type of death and numbers of relatives/bereaved present. In case C (expected death): the funeral director had difficulty in getting away from the four bereaved relatives who were in an unusually jolly mood and intent upon plying him with sherry. This session lasted for over seventy five minutes. This was his third visit to the house. 'They weren't on their guard.' They welcomed him as an old friend, called him by his first name and cracked jokes throughout the interview. In case F (unexpected death), the arrangements session lasted an hour and a half because the funeral director went to inordinate lengths to help the bereaved who were in a shocked state.

In general, all funeral directors attempted to keep the sessions as short as possible in order to return to the office and begin programming the system. If the bereaved wanted a funeral within a couple of days, the obituary had to be placed before 5pm the same day, the clergyman contacted and a time slot booked at the church or crematorium. Interaction was essentially businesslike, with the funeral director pressing on with questions even where the bereaved were upset. In none of the sessions observed did the funeral director feel it incumbent to discuss the death or death per se. Control was achieved by keeping the discussion on a rational level. It was taken for granted that any discussion of death on an emotional or religious level would be undertaken by the parish clergyman if and when he paid

his pre disposal visit.

#### 5.5. The role of mourner

The arrangements session provided the bereaved with their first opportunity to relinquish the role of 'sick visitor' and assume the role of mourner but the role was so variously interpreted that it stressed the decontextualization of contemporary death. The lack of prior socialisation, the lack of a body within the home and the lack of knowledge of the death system, led the majority of the bereaved to look to the funeral director and take their cues for behaviour from him.

In the majority of the cases observed, there were few signs of mourning within the rooms during the immediate post death situation. None of the bereaved wore black at this stage and only in case B (expected death, working class home), were the curtains slightly drawn. Making tea counteracted feelings of helplessness as did searching for documents. In case F, (unexpected death) the sitting room was strewn with papers. The bereaved could not find the deceased's birth certificate and were bothered by this. Funeral director F: ' Families are always unprepared even though they've known..the suddenness always seems to hit them.'

In cases of unexpected death, the bereaved gave little thought to role play and were so overcome by grief that the arrangements session passed in a blur. In case G the bereaved widow sobbed uncontrollably throughout the interview. Her son was weeping and also present was another female who did not speak throughout the interview and to whom we were not introduced. It was very difficult for the funeral director to progress through his format of questions in the normal manner. 'You

try to make the arrangements as quick as possible...because folk are a bit lost. They don't know what to do.' The bereaved stated (some weeks later) that she could only vaguely remember some of the questions the funeral director had asked her. '...I think you just answer on the spur of the moment.' There was little conscious participation in putting together the elements of ritual and it was entirely left to the funeral director. It may be a later recollection of this helplessness, which helps to harden attitudes against funeral directors.

In cases of expected death, the bereaved were much more in control of the situation and had often formulated some idea of the role of mourner. In case A, where the daughter had previously engaged in anticipatory mourning for her mother, she had already written out the obituary, decided upon the music for the disposal ritual, decided to obtain her own flowers from the market, decided upon the catering, thought about the music for her own funeral and made her own will. Throughout the interview she appeared matter of fact, pleasant and controlled. At a later interview however, she would reveal some of the insecurities and uncertainties which this attitude had concealed. An examination of case A would suggest that there was no simple causal link between ritual and adjustment (as advocated by Gorer), but that the process was much more complex.

The bereaved in case B (an expected death) were also fairly well prepared with their ritual requirements, having the obituary already written out and giving clear instructions that the deceased's coffin should be draped with the Union Jack. No checks were made by the funeral home as to the deceased's entitlement to a Union Jack. 'Your Aunt Mary can have it for all we really get involved in it.' The

potential for personal, innovative ritual remained wide although several of the bereaved failed to take this opportunity and felt constrained by their lack of procedural knowledge and their anxiety to 'do the right thing'. Bereaved B, having come to the funeral home for the arrangements session showed curiosity about their surroundings and ignorance of the role play of mourning. 'Are people usually dreadfully upset when they come here?' they wanted to know. The funeral director commented later on the confinement of death behaviour to the funeral home: '..they want to know what a human acts like. Is it natural for them to be weeping or is it unnatural..You know, this is the sort of thing..because they don't see other people doing it...' Although the slow acceptance of alternative secular rituals appeared to be related to factors such as the type of death and previous experience of death, underlying this was a total lack of information, suggesting that funeral directors were not doing all that they could to promote general knowledge of death and its procedures.

#### 5.6. The Funeral Director's Role

Overall, funeral directors tended to maintain a businesslike and fairly formal role. This was viewed as the best way of helping the bereaved to plan while in a shocked state and of retaining control over a highly emotional situation. For some bereaved however, the businesslike nature of the funeral director's role led to adverse perceptions. Bereaved male (case J): 'You tend to get the impression they're fairly cold people, very, very efficient, smart, solemn. I didn't get the impression that if you cracked a joke he would laugh. He came, he did a job and he went.'

### 5.7. The choice of disposal ritual

Discussion of procedures, registering the death, dealing with the coroner, obtaining disposal certificates etc took precedence at the outset. Once these had been settled, together with the wording of the obituary, the major ritual decision, was that of the method of disposal of the body. Clark (1982) remarking on the nature of individual choice and the decontextualization of death stated that there were five major choices of disposal ritual:

chapel/burial, chapel/cremation, church/burial, church/cremation, crematorium/cremation. This list was found to be essentially conservative, since for Anglicans alone the choices of disposal rituals encompass: (1) church/burial; (2) church/crematorium; (3) church/crematorium/ash burial in churchyard; (4) crematorium/ash strewing; (5) crematorium/ash burial in churchyard; (6) church only/unattended cremation/ash strewing; (7) church only/unattended cremation/ash burial in churchyard; (8) variations 2 - 7 with the addition of retaining, rather than disposing of the ashes; (9) variations of the above with burial of the *body at sea or in the garden at home*; (10) strewing of the ashes at sea or at home.

The choice of disposal rituals indicates how this section has been significantly expanded since the turn of the century. However, during interaction, this wide choice was often foreshortened by the funeral director posing a simple alternative: 'Is it to be a burial or a cremation?'

For the majority, the choice depended upon the existence of a family grave. Within the sample there were 7 cremations followed by ash strewing at the crematorium, 1 cremation with burial of the ashes

in a grave and one burial. The burial was carried out because there was an existing grave and the burial of ashes because there was an existing family grave which did not have enough room for a body. An existing grave often meant that the bereaved felt obligated to use it, despite personal preference. Bereaved F: 'Me mother bought a grave at X cemetery. So it had to be burial'.

The majority of bodies were cremated on the decision of the bereaved, even though in case E the deceased husband had expressed a preference for burial and in case G the bereaved thought that her deceased husband may have preferred burial. Despite the contentions of the clergy and monumental masons that funeral directors tend to push the bereaved towards the 'easier' disposal method of cremation, no such influence was noted. Several of the bereaved however (including one in the case studies, and one in the preliminary sample) had mentioned the influence of doctors. Bereaved F was uncertain as to whether he had done the right thing in having his wife cremated because of the quickness of the decision. 'I couldn't make up my mind when she died because I was that upset. The doctor said, Well I want to know because I have to get a second opinion you see for cremation.'

The taboo on the social discussion of religious matters suggested by Towler and Chamberlain was evident in the embarrassment with which the majority of the bereaved responded to questions on the religion of the deceased. In case G, the bereaved was uncertain as to her deceased's husband's religion. She was C of E, but he was originally Catholic. The funeral director commented: '..she knew he hadn't practised and that's why I suggested that perhaps she ought to wait and discuss it with the family rather than offend anybody. We left it

open and actually it did come back to C of E.....I don't know whether its fear of the Catholic faith or an inbred fear that the priest won't want to know them, or whether they feel that they have done wrong themselves by lapsing in their religion and this is where you get the hesitation.' The bereaved continued to have second thoughts about her decision in having her catholic husband cremated with a Church of England service but was reassured by her mother in law telling her that 'it was up to the individual'.

The interchangeability of religious labels was further illustrated in case F where there was some embarrassed discussion as to whether the deceased was Church of England or Methodist. Eventually 'we thought we'd better make it Church of England'. Funeral director F did not think it was important that people might be buried with the 'wrong' ritual. However, this was obviously of greater importance to the clergy. The clergyman in case G commented that it was ridiculous that people did not know their spouse's religion. '..you'd think it was something that people would be very sure about one way or another!' He stated that it did happen that the religion was often in dispute. He had shared a funeral himself with the local Roman Catholic priest 'because the religion of the deceased was..such an uncertainty within the family'.

Overall, the increasing choice of cremation meant that the clergy were more often involved in taking funeral services out of their own territory and within the 'municipal ritual halls' where they were seen to have less control over ritual and where they were subject to severe time constraints. Where they accepted the inevitability of cremation, the clergy still considered that the funeral directors

were failing to offer the bereaved the opportunity to have a service and committal in church prior to the cremation.

#### 5.7. Contacting the clergy

Clergy criticism in the city centred around the tendency of funeral directors to contact the parish vicar last or not at all. But in seven out of the nine case studies, the funeral director attempted to contact the relevant clergyman. It should be noted that the bereaved were not asked whether they wanted a clergyman or religious service, but were asked directly for the clergyman's name. It was thus taken for granted within the session that the death rituals would be carried out within an orthodox religious framework. However, only four of the bereaved knew the name of the parish clergyman and one of these specifically requested that he should not be contacted.

In case A, the bereaved stated at the outset that she did not want the local vicar to conduct the service. 'We had a disagreement with him.' Funeral director A commented: 'When they state they don't want their own vicar it can put us in a difficult position. I suppose I could have rung Reverend X and said I've just arranged a funeral at A avenue but they don't want you..' To retain a workable relationship he was put in the position of making an excuse to the parish clergyman.

Case E pointedly illustrated the estrangement between clergy and parishioners since although the clergyman lived practically next door to the bereaved, they were not acquainted with one another and the bereaved left it to the funeral director to contact the vicar. The bereaved commented: I didn't know that vicar till then. I

couldn't now, after the funeral, remember his name. We've been in these flats ever since they opened you know. And all that time I've never known the vicar. He lives just at the end of this block.'

In case D, the funeral director asked the bereaved whether they wished for 'Any special minister'. 'Now usually I try to get the minister out of the parish, if at all possible. I did actually try to ring Mr. X who is the local minister. I tried a couple of times. I drew a blank and so I got a chap (the firm's same vicar) that I knew would ring the family and take a few details.

Five of the bereaved received a pre funeral visit from a clergyman. Of the four who did not, one bereaved had gone home (100 miles north), one was involved in a split funeral (between two towns), one clergyman neglected to visit on grounds of distance (some 5-6 miles) and one clergyman had no relative to visit. The comparatively high incidence of visits carried out by the clergy within this small sample did not support the funeral directors contentions that the clergy in the city were failing to make pre-funeral visits.

However, none of the clergy assumed the role of 'grief counsellor' so jealously guarded by American clergy. Nor did they discuss religious aspects of the death unless the bereaved were 'church people'.

Clergyman A commented: 'On one occasion I buried a very faithful person and the family were very faithful and were able to talk about prayers. But with most people I find, on the whole its not helpful to discuss it with them..I sometimes give a brief outline of what the service is trying to do, tell them that we're going to hand the person over to God, but before that, we're going to remind ourselves

of the Christian hope of the Resurrection.' Bereaved A could only remember afterwards that they had 'discussed the arrangements'.

Clergyman E argued that pre funeral calls were lapsing 'in some parishes in a city like this', although, 'Not this one, its very compact. The farthest to travel is half a mile or so.' In common with clergyman A he felt that the words exchanged helped very little. Goals were limited. Making a first visit shortly after the death you're not going to be able to say a lot that's useful. I aim for two things: 1. The idea of a sympathetic presence, of one not in the thick of it. 2. Building a bridge for the funeral itself. Gaining familiarity of face, of voice'.

Despite Clergyman E's specific goals, bereaved E could not remember afterwards what he had said to her and had difficulty initially in deciding whether he had called or not. 'Yes, I believe he did. I know he did visit me. Once. He told me he would be at the service and that, you know. And I were really pleased like it was the vicar here, in a way. He didn't ask me about the music.' Clergyman E said that 'the music (was) not much discussed. If its straight round to the crem this tends to be out of our hands. I always tell people that the service will be simple and informal. That its not intended to be a formality, but a help. ..Its putting yourself out on a limb because if they come and its an absolute boney ,you know, you make a complete mess of it, you've raised expectations and then failed to fulfil them.' He had found bereaved E to be 'a very sensible person. She was able to talk. There was a sense of, yes, there was a sense of real relief about it because he'd..kept her housebound.'

Clergyman B stated that he always tried to call before a funeral or left a card with his home address on it if the family were out, or he might deal with the situation over the telephone. In this case he had paid a pre funeral visit and noted that the daughter in law did not seem distressed. 'And we didn't really talk much about it. I think he was quite an age. ..a bit of a handful at times.' In common with all the clergy interviewed, he differentiated in his handling of practising churchgoers and 'the others'. 'If its 'a church person' I hear about the death very quickly. If they just happen to be resident in the geographical area of the parish, I hear through the funeral directors.

During his visit he always asked whether anything in particular should be said about the person. 'Usually one tries to mention them.' People think up all sorts of marvellous things, even if they haven't spoken to the old bat for forty years! In this case something had to be said because it was so unusual having a big Union Jack on it (the coffin). Bereaved B commented that the clergyman hadn't asked whether there was anything he could do for her. 'I think he could tell I wasn't terribly upset.

Similarly in case G, the bereaved could not remember much about the clergyman's visit. 'I think he come..I don't know if it were weekend, maybe a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. She couldn't remember how long he stayed because she was still upset. She couldn't remember what they talked about except that he said he'd called 'mainly so that we wouldn't be strangers on the day.' She perceived the visit as being of little help. Had she been '..a churchgoer and a proper religious person, then I would have sat down and spoke to him and had

a conversation'. 'Clergyman G referred to his pre funeral call as 'not a walking disaster area I suppose, but a..bad slip up on the undertakers part. Because I didn't hear anything about it (the death) until he'd been dead for nine days. ..it was a coroner's job you see.' He blamed the undertakers for 'not wanting to get in touch with you until we'd got it finalised. 'It meant that that was a very, very difficult pre funeral visit to do. Because you know, there was almost a feeling within the street here, ..that Saint X's hadn't bothered'. As a pre funeral visit he considered it 'useless'. 'The wife was simply not coping at all and its fairly unusual to come across somebody who over a week after, was as completely prostrated still. It was a bad 'un. '...your immediate feeling was: Oh terribly tragic, forty one year old bloke..out of the blue. The first thing was, it wasn't out of the blue. He'd been ill with serious heart trouble earlier and he'd been given a regime..and he was very reluctant to..do what the doctor said. Sometimes, I think that people, even at that age, they make their own decisions....I may be totally wrong..but its possible that the wife was carrying to some extent, the load - If I'd really been a lot firmer with him, he'd still be there with me.'

In case D the clergyman had visited one member of the bereaved family but not the bereaved daughter. The bereaved daughter commented that she would have liked to have talked to the clergyman because she had wanted a few of the deceased's friends mentioned in the service 'such as the Friendship Club and that, but that wasn't mentioned you see, with him seeing me brother. Clergyman D stated that he always made pre funeral visits where he could. 'What I don't want is to be presented at a funeral with a name of someone and a date and age..in

the nature of things it happens sometimes because you go and there's no one at home'.

Of the bereaved who had not received clergy visits, the bereaved in case J had thought that no clergyman had visited him because he was not a practising Christian. 'I thought it was because I didn't go to church that no one had come.' Similarly the bereaved in case C presumed that no one had been to visit them 'because my father wasn't a regular churchgoer'. Whereas the clergy had a specific purpose for the pre funeral visit, the bereaved appeared to have little understanding of the reason for the call. When asked about it afterwards, they could barely bring to mind anything that was said. And although the funeral directors were adamant that it was part of the clergy's job to make pre and post funeral calls, few of them gave any thought to whether the bereaved welcomed these calls, or considered warning the bereaved during the arrangements session that such calls might be made. Further since all of the clergy in the sample differentiated so strongly between 'church people' or 'our own people' and 'others' or 'C of E types', it emerged from comments made by the bereaved that the continuing tension between doctrinal considerations and ordinary religious beliefs was sensed and at some level resented.

#### 5.8. Dealing with the body of the deceased.

There were four possible coroner's cases out of the case studies, being the four unexpected deaths. Case A, an expected death, also potentially entailed a post mortem when the bereaved revealed that her mother had fallen and broken her arm a couple of weeks prior to the death. In the event, all but two of the cases (cases J and G)

were subsequently 'cleared' by the coroner. Although case F had been a sudden, unexpected death, the deceased's doctor signed a certificate as he had been treating her for heart disease. A third postmortem was carried out on case D at the request of the hospital.

Contrary to the prior assertions of funeral directors in interviews that the permission of the bereaved had to be obtained before a body could be embalmed, embalming the body was not mentioned to the bereaved in seven out of the nine cases. . In case J it was mentioned by the funeral director because there would be a delay between the death and the funeral occasioned by the post mortem and the transfer of the body to another town for the disposal rituals. In case G it was mentioned because it was the individual funeral director's custom to tell the bereaved. Questioned afterwards, the bereaved were completely ignorant of what embalming entailed and the clergy were similarly uninformed. The clergy variously presumed that embalming was carried out: in the interests of commercialism; only when the body was to be buried or only when the body had become disagreeable. With one exception, the clergy were not in favour of embalming perceiving it as running counter to a willingness to 'let go' and being 'a denial of death'.

In case A embalming was not mentioned during the arrangements even though the deceased was subsequently embalmed. The bereaved commented 'I just took it for granted that with a well known funeral director, it was going to be all right.' Funeral director A stated: 'There was a reason why it was not mentioned. Because like I say, we're not great high pressure salesmen. She said she didn't want to view didn't she?'

In case J the funeral director did not mention embalming but spoke of 'hygienic treatment'. 'I sometimes mention it amongst the totting up of what the overall cost is going to be, hoping that they understand and won't ask me to expand on it.' The bereaved agreed that it had been mentioned 'because of the length of time.' He presumed it was done 'due to the moving and possibility of decay, obviously they had to do something, but in principle I would be against it.' Clergyman J admitted to knowing 'very little about it'. He felt that it was something to do with 'the undertakers' commercial interests and wasn't really necessary in cold climates.

In case G, the funeral director mentioned that the body would be hygienically treated. 'I mention this because its a good thing in many ways. 'It improves the skin texture and that instead of somebody being cold and clammy to touch, they are dry and more parchmenty. Because when people do visit, they are very much inclined to stroke the forehead and the hair; they very often reach over and kiss them.' After the arrangements session, Bereaved G began to worry about her brother viewing her deceased husband. 'the undertaker asks you whether you want something doing to the body you know, to make it look better if somebody does go. I couldn't remember whether I'd said yes. I wondered whether I had agreed to it. Otherwise would it look quite all right?'

In case E the bereaved was not asked about embalming although the funeral director was in favour of it. '..because it gives a more lifelike appearance. Also there are no bacterial problems with handling the body that bit more.' She could not remember afterwards whether she had been asked or not. 'Well when you've never had it to

do you see, you don't think of these things do you?' Clergyman E had assumed that 'you mostly get embalming at burials.

The funeral director in case C commented that the bereaved occasionally queried the term 'hygienic treatment'. 'I just say its a certain treatment that we have to carry out to make the appearance as near natural as we can make it. Er, um, but you wouldn't mention eye caps or..sewing up the mouths or whatever.' Clergyman C. was against embalming. 'I would say that if you took a cross section among us, its a waste of money.' He suspected the motives of funeral directors in promoting embalming, being doubtful as to whether the body was really infectious. '..one wonders sometimes..whether there isn't a bit of exaggeration, so that they can make it the norm.'

Embalming was not mentioned in case H because there was to be no viewing. Funeral director H: 'There was a relatively quick funeral and you know, why charge them another £10 - £15 for embalming? The bereaved had no knowledge of the process. 'I just assumed all these things were standardised, whatever they do.

#### 5.9. Dressing the body

Within the literature, economic critiques of funeral directors have been preoccupied with the funeral directors pressurizing the bereaved into purchasing expensive ritual goods. This was not confirmed by the case studies nor within field work generally. The main selling technique appeared to be that of sales by default. In four cases the gown or dressing of the body was not mentioned by the funeral director on the grounds that: they had been socialised into not discussing it by their funeral home; that they only raised it if

the coffin was going home or if there was no real choice. For example if the deceased was Catholic, a special 'catholic' gown would be used with religious pictures or markings on the front.

The ritual dressing of the body was carried out on all but one of the corpses in the sample, regardless of whether there was to be viewing. The exception being that of the body of the loner in case H. In case A, the colour of the gown being purchased was not mentioned. In case J, the bereaved particularly requested that his deceased young wife should be dressed in blue. 'It was my special wish. She liked blue.' He was unable to understand his own actions. 'Its strange, because you're trying to be quite logical about it, but wrapping somebody in blue with blue flowers is really, bringing back the sentiment, because you know she's dead and yet you're going to wrap her up in blue!'

Some thought was given to the choice of blue by the bereaved in case B. 'We thought Grandad, he was a very masculine man, we thought pink wouldn't be suitable for him. He was also a strong Conservative so we thought blue would suit him. And, if he did look down on us, you know!' In general, funeral directors with a professional orientation tended not to mention the colour or to go into details of the gowns, whilst funeral directors with a non professional attitude gave the bereaved more information and choice. Funeral director B, with few pretensions to a professional attitude, looked on it as 'selling a product'. 'I think that's what its all about isn't it?' In case F the bereaved were asked what colour gown they preferred. Funeral director F also described the gowns. 'I sometimes say its a silk type material with a frill like this and a coverlet coming over...'

Bereaved E was not asked about a gown. The funeral director (professional orientation) commented: 'Its only mentioned if the coffin is going home. Then they are asked whether they want a better quality gown or not. There are all sorts of special ones, but it is a means of charging out more money when somebody's at a vulnerable point.'

No jewellery had been left on deceased A or B. Bereaved B commented: 'It frightened me when I read about the Ripper digging up and taking rings off.' When her son later died, the bereaved had wished to leave 'some lovely gold cufflinks' on his body. 'But I was frightened that if anybody talked about it, they were going to dig him up. For that, I just had some ordinary ones put on.' Bereaved G. was sceptical about the security of jewellery. 'Some of the tales from what you hear years and years ago, they weren't left on body, they were rifled (sic).' '..You hear of one or two don't you. Round about the time of Ripper there were somebody going, or were it him? Working in cemeteries, taking rings. So it goes somewhere doesn't it?' In case C, no rings had been left on the body again because the bereaved distrusted funeral workers. 'I would have taken them off anyway. I mean if I didn't, someone else would.' Clergyman E disliked the attention paid to the dressing of the body and its adornment with rings. 'This is something that is a very real atavism. Its got to do with the ongoing identity of the dead body of the deceased, one of the reasons why I honestly don't like it.' bereaved D stated that she would have left her mother's wedding ring on the body, had it not already been given by her mother to a grand daughter. In case E the deceased's ring had been removed in hospital and returned to the bereaved.

Two of the bereaved in the preliminary sample had also made reference to the possibility of rings and jewellery being stolen from the body demonstrating a continuing low level distrust of funeral personnel.

#### 5.10. The selection of the coffin

Despite the fact that the coffin was the centrepiece of the death ritual there was a striking lack of discussion over its purchase. Often, the expensive transaction would be accomplished in a few brief sentences. 'And what about a coffin? Just the standard coffin?' If the bereaved nodded or asked the price, it would be explained that this was the middle of the range. The lack of discussion was seen by several funeral directors as a mark of confidence in their professional judgement.

In case J there was a short discussion on coffins with the most expensive selected for the deceased 25 year old by her parents. In case F, the standard coffin was offered and accepted for the deceased's 78 year old sister. In case E, for the 78 year old husband, there was no discussion and no illustrations. In case C the funeral director asked 'Just the normal coffin, same as last time?' The bereaved immediately nodded and agreed.

In case B, the bereaved couple ordered a standard coffin for the 89 year old father. However, a couple of months later, when their son who was in his twenties, died in a tragic car accident they would order an expensive real oak coffin. Funeral director B commented: 'I said to him, well you know, its expensive. I aren't bothered about that, he said.. I just want the best.' In case H the funeral director

quoted his cheapest coffin without offering a choice to the executor of the loner's funeral. 'I used my initiative. I didn't say Right, we have a traditional or we also have a cheaper one. I just quoted her the cheaper one.' In case D the bereaved chose the standard coffin and the funeral director said afterwards that he generally advocated this. 'If they're talking about a coffin at four hundred pound, I'll say to them, yes, we can do a coffin at four hundred pound, there's no problem, but, if I can just say one thing to you, the coffin at two hundred pound, it looks the same, its not the same wood, but its entirely up to you. So, I do give them an alternative.'

The choice and alternatives offered appeared paltry when contrasted with those of American Funeral Homes with their display models with sumptuous velvet and silk linings. Such models were available to British funeral homes but factors mitigating against their promotion included the lack of available storage space, the smaller capital expenditures of the average funeral home, the contraction of funeral linked insurance per capita, the predominance of cremation and an innate conservativeness.

#### 5.11. Viewing the Body

The body of the deceased was viewed in 5 cases out of the 9. Of those who participated in the ritual, four viewed at the hospital after the death, two viewed at the funeral home, two did not wish to view and one did not view on the grounds that the deceased was not a relative. There were no apparent class differences in viewing. However, the younger deceased and unexpected deaths tended to draw a greater number of viewers per body than the deaths of the elderly or expected deaths.

In all cases except one, the clergy disliked the ritual of viewing. The accepting clergyman considered that it was a courtesy to the bereaved to view the body, but the majority felt that it related to 'the ongoing identity of the body' or was 'a misunderstanding of the Christian faith in that it represented 'an act of farewell'. Within the arrangement sessions, the viewing ritual was offered in every case, even if the bereaved had already viewed at the hospital or mortuary. Thus this particular pre disposal ritual was being consistently maintained over time by funeral directors.

Of those who did not view, bereaved A 'preferred to remember her mother as she was.' Bereaved G did not to view her 41 year old husband's body. 'His brother went but I wouldn't go. I wouldn't even go and see me mother. Its a personal thing.' ( Co-incidentally it seemed, both the respondents who did not view at all, in later follow ups were found to be having difficulties coming to terms with the death. In case A, the daughter who had not viewed her mother volunteered the information that she was seeing a psychiatrist and in case G, the widow remained heavily grief stricken and on tranquillisers.)

In case J, the bereaved viewed the body of his wife after it had been embalmed and found that it did not come up to his expectations. 'She looked old. But there again, she didn't have much hair. Bald like me.' (In this instance the deceased normally wore her hair over her forehead in a fringe, but the funeral home embalmer, having no information on the hairstyle, had brushed it straight back, leaving the forehead bare). Expectations were also unfulfilled for bereaved D, viewing her mother: '..it didn't look like her...I was rather

upset when I came out but it wasn't their fault. Well, she had her hair very straight and I don't think she had her false teeth in. So I suppose with her having to have the autopsy, they couldn't get the teeth in or something.'

Clergyman J commented that in his area (some 100 miles north of North City), it was the custom to leave the coffin in the house with the lid off and to invite callers to view the deceased. Very often the clergyman was also asked. 'When I've looked at a dead body, I've thought how empty it is. Just a shell. On these occasions I let people say something rather than say anything myself and quite often its appropriate to say a prayer. It sets the thing in rather better context than remarks on, you know, how peaceful he looks, or the undertakers done a good job.'

In cases F, E and B and C, the deceased had been viewed in hospital when relatives were summoned back to the hospital after the occurrence of death. The bereaved were then less likely to wish to view it a second time on the funeral home premises. Bereaved F thought on reflection that he should have viewed the body of his sister a second time. 'Not from their point of view, but you don't know whether there is a body in that or not do you? They might be shoving down an empty box for all you know.' Again, the act of handing over of the care of the body to strangers was attended by traces of suspicion and guilt.

#### 5.12. The Floral Tributes

Five of the bereaved ordered their flowers through the funeral director. Two obtained their own flowers and two of the bereaved

wanted Union Jacks instead of flowers. More time was spent discussing flowers than coffins perhaps because the bereaved felt more familiar with the subject. Again they were prepared to make their purchases sight unseen. None of the funeral directors carried photographs but relied upon vague gestures of size with their hands: 'a cross about so big' or 'a medium sized cross' In Case A experience with a previous funeral allowed the bereaved to judge that flowers could be obtained at a lower cost and better quality from the local market.

In two of the cases, efforts were made to obtain 'special' flowers which were considered to be appropriate to the deceased. In Case A, yellow roses which the deceased had had on her wedding day, and in Case J, blue flowers. Funeral director J felt that flowers were necessary for the people that were actually buying them. Clergyman J defended flowers on the grounds that a lot of people were inarticulate at the time of death. Two of the elderly male deceased (B and C) had specifically requested the Union Jack on their coffins. Clergyman B did not disapprove of the Union Jack; Clergyman C however, disapproved and thought it 'inappropriate'. 'I thought it was a bit what I might call jingoistic. 'Its inappropriate to raise those things at that point ..(at) a sacred moment.'

In Case G, the widow opted for family flowers only and a simple cross which cost £12. 'The rest went to X hospital, donations. Summat like £40 left from collection at work. I mean if money's going to help somebody else...I don't like to see a hearse go by with no flowers on though. It just makes it look as though there's nobody.' In case F, the choice of flowers entailed a lengthy discussion between the bereaved brother and his other sister, eventually settling for two

sprays. Clergyman F commented: 'I used to think they were a wicked waste of money. But I came to realise that if this was the way that people wanted to show their 'respect' as they call it, well then all right.' In case E, the bereaved had ordered flowers from the funeral firm and commented afterwards on the large amount that arrived. 'He had a lot. I would rather they had gone to a charity but his lots a funny lot you know. And I don't think they'd have sent owt (sic) to anywhere you know. But flowers..they'd be, forced to bring some you see'.

Clergyman E applauded when people didn't want a lot of flowers and would rather have donations. 'And yet its funny to see a coffin come in without flowers on the top at all. This is not theological . Its just one of those gut things. Flowers say something about the transience of it all. These things are a long way below our real rational level.' In general the clergy considered flowers to be a waste of money, The majority preferred donations to be sent to charity and the coffin to be adorned with a single offering of flowers. A completely bare coffin was perceived as somehow sad, as if nobody cared.

#### 5.13. Music for the Disposal Ritual

The majority of the bereaved appeared unprepared for the question 'Is there any special music?' Only one immediately had a request ready. In three cases music was not mentioned as it was to be a church service and thus the clergy's territory. The other five bereaved all acquiesced in 'free choice' which allowed the crematorium attendant to play anything he liked. Where choice of music was mentioned by the funeral director, the bereaved were given only a few moments to make

up their minds. Funeral directors explained that they were unable to leave the choice 'hanging over' as the relevant forms had to be filled in and dispatched to the crematoria. The majority of the clergy were disparaging on the subject of crematoria music. It was suggested that the music was only there as a framework for coming in and going out, that the clergy should endeavour to control the type of music played to retain the integrity of the ritual and that 'personalisation' should be discouraged.

In case J no particular music was requested. The bereaved felt that 'the idea behind the music is to endorse a general feeling of remorse at the death.' Clergyman J commented that most bereaved had only the vaguest knowledge of hymns. He considered it fortunate that his local crematorium normally played Bach Organ music. 'I normally complained so volubly if we had 'Melachrinos Strings' or someone singing the 'Old Rugged Cross' they never dared put it on again if I was coming.'

Bereaved F were not asked whether they required any special music. The funeral director commented that he didn't normally mention the music if it was a burial at X cemetery because the facilities were so poor and the choice limited. Clergyman F felt that the majority of English people don't want to sing at a funeral. He deplored the usage of pop songs. 'You get the young football fan who's been killed on the motorbike and about the only piece of music his parents think he would like is that bum song: "You'll never walk alone"..well its their funeral.' Bereaved widow G had given no thought to 'having hymns and singing'. She thought that if there were hymns there would be 'more sobbing than anything else. Funeral director G (of

professional orientation) expressed himself quite happy to search for particular pieces of music for people and had recently taped 'The Halleluja Chorus' for a family. 'I taped that part and then tipped the minister off, you know. Don't come straight out because this is specially taped.' Clergyman G felt that the choice of music was fairly irrelevant for the crematorium setting where it was only used to provide a framework for coming in and going out. The most requested hymn chosen for church services was 'The Day thou gavest Lord is ending.' 'Its the most emotion provoking one but in a sense its nothing to do with funerals, its a complete transference of ideas.' He completely disapproved of personalisation of the service and had 'followed an absolutely dreadful (funeral) at the crematorium where the music consisted of the two grandchildren of the deceased singing to recorders.' He reported that 'the minister who had taken the service said, he didn't know whether the service was going to end with everybody in the chapel in tears or with him being sick!'

In case C, the bereaved left the music at 'free choice'. Funeral director C felt that funeral directors needed to prompt the bereaved and then they would often come up with something. 'Oh I'm glad you asked me because he liked so and so! What did he like Mother, he always used to sing that song, you know!. Prompting the bereaved, 'to bring it out in them, what type of funeral they want', was seen as part of his job. Clergyman C felt that there was a 'great wealth of classical music which (was) ..suitable for the occasion.' He attributed a general lack of awareness of the possibilities in music to 'the undertakers for not making people aware and for not giving them enough time to make a choice.'

Bereaved D left the music at 'free choice' for her 73 year old mother's funeral. . Clergyman D approved of 'free choice' because he felt that music tended to 'pile on the agony'. Funeral director D recalled a recent dispute with a minister 'when he's told me that he dictates the music at the funeral service and that funeral service is his.' 'The family concerned had wanted: 'The Sunshine of your Smile' and 'Grandad'. 'So he says, 'they're not going to play it. I suggested, do you want me to get another minister?' He says, No, I'll do it, but I'm coming straight out. And before the music started, he'd run out of the chapel.'

In case H, the death of the loner, the choice of music was not mentioned because the committal at the crematorium was to be preceded by a church service. In case A however, the bereaved had a ready answer and had chosen 'Now the Day is Over'. Clergyman A thought that 'free choice' entailed 'routine authority death music.' 'I've never dared tell X in the music room what I actually think of him or that I hate how he does it. I do wish he had some musical sense. He switches the thing off when the door shuts. On occasions you're in the middle of a most amazingly beautiful cadence and bang, its finished'. Alone amongst the sample of clergy, he considered that in a crematorium 'its the deceased's service more than mine.'

#### 5.14. The Cortege

In case A, the bereaved ordered a hearse and one limousine at a cost of £56.00 since the majority of mourners would be travelling in their own cars. She could have gone in the family car herself but felt that it 'wouldn't have been quite the thing for me husband to have driven me in our own car'. The retention of the cortege over time, despite

adverse road conditions acknowledged a continuing need to mark out and care for both the deceased and his or her immediate relatives by ceremoniously conveying them to the place of disposal.

Bereaved E, retaining old working class attitudes allotted a great deal of importance to the cortege. 'Well I thought I would have had to get three or four cars you know, which I would have done, but they said, Oh you mustn't do that, we prefer to go in us own cars you see.' Eventually she ordered a hearse and two limousines. Bereaved G ordered a hearse and one car. The executor in case H ordered a hearse only and meet at church. 'I thought it was not necessary for the funeral procession to come from here. I mean I wasn't family. It seemed inappropriate.' She did not feel the need to be 'marked out' as a main mourner. The greatest number of vehicles ordered from a funeral home occurred in Case J (sudden death), where the bereaved husband ordered a hearse and three limousines. Throughout the sample there was little emphasis upon the length and composition of the procession but it was still thought very necessary to use a hearse for the conveyance of the coffin and a limousine for the conveyance of the main mourners and to begin the public ceremonial at this point.

#### 5.15. The ritual of drawing the crematorium curtains

Within crematoria generally, small technological rituals were used to compensate for the lack of the drama of lowering the coffin into the ground: catafalques slid backwards or sideways through an opening in the wall, or sank through the floor or were surrounded by silently closing curtains. Mourners arriving at the crematorium expected to see some dramatic manifestation which symbolised the final removal of

the deceased from society. Within North city however, the 'curtain ritual' was only available at two of the crematoria since the third had a catafalque without curtains which no longer moved.

Bereaved E was not asked about the curtains during the arrangements session and this omission on the part of the funeral director caused her some disquiet during the disposal service as she found herself 'waiting for something to happen' Clergyman E approved of having the curtains closed, feeling that ' (it) isn't a bad thing, even if that is a bit of a wrench'. Bereaved A asked for the curtains to be left open. Funeral director A suggested many people preferred this because it was not quite so final. Clergyman A preferred the curtains closed: 'It seems to me the committal is an odd part of the service because nothing actually happens.' Having something 'happen' at the committal appeared important to some mourners particularly those who had not attended a crematorium before and who imagined the coffin sliding away into the flames. It was not important at all to others who were already familiar with the crematorium routines.

#### 5.16. The Funeral Tea:

Two of the bereaved asked for catering at the funeral home and one asked the funeral home to provide catering elsewhere. Four of the bereaved had funeral teas at home. One did not believe in 'tea parties' and there was no funeral tea for the deceased loner with no relatives.

Of those who asked for catering at the funeral home (cases A and E), both requested this early in the arrangements session with bereaved A announcing: 'We'll come back to your place.' The bereaved thought

that the catering at £1.50 a head was very reasonable. 'I don't really know how they could do it a lot cheaper.' Bereaved E was also quite definite in her desire for catering in the funeral home premises. Living in a maisonette, she had little room to accommodate a funeral party. The rest of the bereaved held small gatherings at home after the funeral. Despite their purpose built catering rooms, the low charges for catering, and the consistent offer of catering during the arrangements session, the majority of funeral homes in the city have found that the formal funeral tea is in decline. This illustrated that individual death rituals could not be promoted by funeral directors against major social changes such as geographical mobility, the loosening of the bonds of the extended family, the loss of the element of community, the demands of the workplace and perhaps other factors, such as the failure of crematoria and cemetery chapels to function at weekends.

#### 5.17. The Estimate

Only one of the bereaved felt that their funeral bill was too expensive. The remaining eight accepted the cost and professed themselves to be 'not worried or concerned about it'. In case D the bereaved were surprised that the funeral charge was only £600. They had expected it to be much higher since it included the further separate ceremony of burying the ashes in a village cemetery afterwards. 'We were really amazed at the price. We expected it to be more'. Despite the expense of funerals, none of the bereaved were in favour of their municipalisation. Bereaved D: 'It would be a case of the ordinary people would all have to have standardized funerals and the wealthy or the Lords and all that would be able to have their own little cliques of funerals as they'd arranged. It wouldn't

be the same for everybody, it would be a case of class distinction.' The comparative classlessness and individuality of the funeral was perceived as being a hard won victory which would not easily be relinquished.

Bereaved A did not think her bill excessive at £402. She was pleased that a discount of £15 was given for payment within six weeks commenting that at the time 'the cost of it doesn't seem to enter into it... and its afterwards you know, when you get the bill, then you start thinking'. In Case J, although the deceased's parents were shocked by the bill of over £700, the bereaved himself said that it was the least of his worries. 'I wasn't particularly bothered. I reckoned I had enough to cope with..'

In case E the bereaved widow had been saving up to a target of £500 for the funeral for many years and so the actual cost of £440 did not bother her. 'We saved it up ourselves. He was insured and then I insured him. When we couldn't have insured any higher with him being in ill health, that's why we started saving up.' Clergyman E felt that there was not a lot of resentment about it because there was still a prevailing tradition in North City that 'you should put 'em away proper with three kinds of meat.'

In case B, the cost of £430 was not queried by the bereaved who a few months later paid another £770 funeral bill (for a burial) on the occasion of the death of their son. In case G the bereaved, a working class woman with no capital was anxious to pay her bill of £430 before the six weeks was up and said that she would rather pay if she could than have a funeral on the rates. In case H, the funeral bill

of £320 swallowed up nearly half the loner's insurance policy but the executor made no comment on the amount. She was against the idea of council run funerals. 'No, it will depersonalise the whole thing..its taking away individual decision and personal preference which I think is very wrong at such an important time.'

In case C the bereaved were paying for their third funeral in a year and the funeral director had kept it abnormally low to retain their custom, at £380. 'I made it the same price as the last one. I sort of did me homework on that. As soon as he (the bereaved's husband) rang me, I took the file out, looked at how much the price was and then I had the price with me when I went to the house. I said, well the last one was £380, this one is the same. I think to pull a funeral you've got to make it as low as possible. I could have afforded to go another fifty pounds down anyway. But lower than that I'd have to ring X (the managing director) and then leave it to him.' Bereaved C stated later that with the first of the three funerals he had 'rung around for estimates'. They then remained with the funeral home giving the lowest estimate.

The one voice raised in dissent was that of Bereaved F who felt that his bill of nearly £500 for the burial of his sister was 'a lot for one following car, a hearse and a plain coffin.' A breakdown of the bill showed that the coffin was £160, gown £20, removal of body £20, bearers £18, Hearse and one limousine £56, treatment £18, disbursements £20, re opening the grave £80, minister £20, obituary and acknowledgements £20, flowers £16 and catering £35. In this case, the re-opening of the grave plus the clergyman's fee had added £100 to the bill, making it considerably more expensive than a

cremation.

The reactions of the bereaved suggested that paying for the funeral was still viewed as a social and family obligation and a matter of some honour. There was no support for Pine's contention that there was a direct relationship between funeral ritual and the economic status of the bereaved. The most striking differences occurred between the expenditure on expected deaths and that on unexpected or sudden deaths.

#### 5.18. Attitudes and Perceptions of Participants during the Pre Disposal Interactions:

How the participants interacted and what they thought of one another during the pre disposal period provided a further perspective on contemporary death behaviour and expectations.

In case A, the interaction between bereaved, funeral director and clergy was good throughout. Bereaved A had chosen the funeral home because they were 'not a gloomy firm'. At her father in law's funeral, the funeral directors all had long faces. Her chosen funeral directors were 'more human'. Clergyman A had similarly had 'poor expectations' of the funeral directors but found this funeral home 'extraordinarily co operative and rather caring'. Bereaved/clergy interaction progressed well since the bereaved had particularly requested this clergyman rather than her parish clergy. She was nevertheless worried by his appearance during the pre disposal visit since 'he had such a lot of black hair and this terribly untidy beard.' She was subsequently very relieved that he had been to the

barbers for the day of the funeral and it was 'very tidy'. Her concern underlined the continuing social nature of the disposal ritual as a 'public performance'. The appearances and performances of both clergy and funeral directors assumed a high importance.

In case B, it was noticeable that bereaved B (husband and wife) automatically assumed quieter tones, as if in a church when on the funeral premises. By contrast, funeral director B spoke in atypical, almost boisterous tones. Although the funeral director had a non professional, jokey attitude, when interviewed later, the bereaved remembered his behaviour as 'just perfect. Very quietly (sic) and earnestly(sic) you know'. This however was largely based on his later demeanour at the disposal rituals. Clergy/bereaved and clergy/funeral director interaction went less smoothly. Clergyman B felt that the bereaved had not really seemed distressed and they had not talked much about the death. The bereaved commented: 'I think he could tell I wasn't terribly upset. She described him as 'very, very nice' but the lack of communication was underlined by the fact that she could not recall much else about his visit. Clergyman B's perception of the funeral director was evasive. He noted that there were 'funeral directors and funeral directors. Some I think, are thieves'. He didn't think that they 'behaved themselves'. He felt that funeral directors in general did not respect the clergy. 'I don't mean that I go around expecting people to be deferential to me, because I don't but at the same time..' He certainly could not see funeral directors taking over completely. 'Not whilst I'm here. He though it would be more feasible to dispense with the services of the funeral director.

Bereaved C had chosen the same firm as they had had for a previous funeral and the same funeral director whom they addressed by his christian name. Although the interaction remained on a lighthearted level, the bereaved, some twelve weeks later, considered that the funeral director was 'a bit rough, but he was all right'. They later also criticised him for his behaviour at the disposal ceremony since he had apparently said to the bereaved outside the crematorium, 'You realise that there's an extra so much to pay for all this.' Bereaved C stated 'And at the time I thought that it was absolutely shocking.' Since there was no pre disposal clergy visit, the bereaved had no prior interaction with the clergyman. Nor did funeral director/clergy interaction go well. Funeral director C felt that the clergy did not take enough interest. 'Some of them just think a telephone call is good enough. We all feel that they don't take enough interest in families you know. All they want is to get paid off at the end of the funeral and then get away as soon as possible.' Clergyman C made disparaging remarks on funeral directors: 'Ah, the high priests of the graveyard! Of course in this city, quite a number have got good Christian convictions. (He referred here only to the Professional Funeral Home funeral directors). Although clergyman C was adamant that he couldn't see a time when funeral directors might take over the rituals entirely - 'As the church has retracted in numbers its become much more healthy in its thinking. And they will never allow that to happen', the bereaved themselves felt that it would not make a great deal of difference if the funeral director could carry out the service and 'act accordingly'. Again, for the bereaved, ritual was viewed very much in terms of sentiment and performance.

Bereaved D felt that the funeral director was 'extremely nice'. She appreciated that he did 'everything' for us. 'We'd nothing to do as regards putting it in the paper or thank you afterwards. He did it all for us which was, a very big weight off our minds. It did help. ..I felt that I needed somebody to do these things. I felt as though I wouldn't have been able to cope with all the running about and everything that you would have to do.' She did not feel that there ought to be more death education. '..you've got the professional people to look after it.' Clergy/funeral director relations were also cordial since the clergyman selected was the funeral home's same vicar. However, funeral director D held clergy generally in poor regard, considering that only a handful really cared about the bereaved or gave a good service. '..they go through the standard patter and they come out and its ten minutes. I'd sooner something a little bit more personal be brought into it. There is a minister that does this all the time. I can't tell you his name but he'll go in, bang, bang, bang and out, and that's it, you know.' Clergyman D was equally selective on the subject of funeral directors. To be a really good funeral director 'you need to be a particular kind of person...if you haven't got the gift of sympathy and understanding, then keep out of it.' Although he could see a time when funeral directors might take over the service he felt that the majority of bereaved would always prefer a vicar: '..people are very strange in this kind of regard. They want their funerals done, as they put it, done properly. Now if its not been done by the vicar, its not been done properly. Its as simple as that.'

The arrangements session in case E was a fairly tense affair since Bereaved E's son took up a protective stance behind his mothers chair

throughout the interview and stared in an unsmiling manner. Funeral director E regretted being unable to address the bereaved widow directly but having to go through the son. 'I'll look after you, you know. And really we want to talk to her. We don't want to talk to her through an interpreter.' The widow herself remained calm and self possessed, in a later interview stating that she had been given tranquillisers by her doctor and this is why she was 'all settled inward'. Funeral director E who normally maintained a high professional image, later felt constrained to provide some explanation as to why he was 'rattling through that one'. 'I hope somewhere along the line I did say, Well I'm going fairly quickly because I'm trying to catch tonight's paper. I didn't want her to think that I always did that.' It would have saved time if he had telephoned the newspaper from the house but he didn't wish to do that because 'you have to go a bit over the top with the girls (in the advertising department - with compliments and sexy backchat) in order to get it in at short notice'. The kind of verbal exchanges needed to oil this part of the system would have been out of place within the trauma of the arrangements session. Bereaved E had little to say about the funeral director other than that she perceived him as 'very nice'. She showed more enthusiasm for his fleet of limousines. Again, the remembered rituals tended to be those of the disposal stage - the effect of the display, the actual performance of ritual, rather than its arrangement. Bereaved/clergy interaction appeared straightforward although there was little real communication. Bereaved E was at first unable to remember whether or not he had called. Although Clergyman E felt that the clergy's role should encompass an area of social pastoral care, the bereaved saw the clergyman in terms of a necessary symbol or figurehead, rather than

someone to whom she could relate on a personal level. Clergyman B felt that his relationship with funeral director E's funeral home was 'on the whole, exceedingly good'. However, he had strong feelings about different firms and disliked the impersonality of the larger organizations.

The two bereaved in Case F were initially very quiet and conversation lagged. They gradually relaxed although they appeared to be making a conscious effort to control their emotions. After a lengthy discussion on flowers and after being quite composed, the male bereaved suddenly exhibited signs of acute distress. His face reddened, his eyes filled with tears and he became very subdued for five to ten minutes. Then he appeared to pull himself together. Funeral director F (non professional orientation), sitting in an armchair, used his briefcase as a table, allowed plenty of time for the discussion of each point and stressed that the bereaved were free to change their minds. The bereaved needed a great deal of help to decide upon the deceased's religion, to arrange for registering the death and to cope with the catering. Although the interaction appeared to have gone smoothly, and although Funeral director E had gone to immense trouble to be helpful, the bereaved subsequently compared him unfavourably with the funeral directors of a previous funeral he had arranged with the CFH. Again, it appeared that the extreme helpfulness of the 'arranging' funeral director was obliterated by the attitude of a different funeral director who subsequently conducted the disposal ritual. The bereaved had found him 'offhand' at the cemetery. His attitude had been 'This is a business and that was it.' It was the 'spoiled' performance of ritual

at the disposal and post disposal ceremonies rather than the role play of the funeral director during the arrangements session, which remained in the bereaved's minds.

There was little communication between the bereaved and the clergyman since the bereaved had returned to their respective home towns in the interval between arrangements and disposal ritual. Bereaved E stated that he had no particular interest in receiving a pre funeral call and could well imagine funerals without the clergy. Clergyman E regretted that people wanted 'a funeral service without being committed Christians.' Their faith is very, well, you've only got to read the er, In Memoriam columns in the newspaper. ..they're more concerned with the flowers and the trappings.'

The arrangements session in case G was characterized by overwhelming distress and sorrow and the constant crying made interaction difficult for the funeral director. Nevertheless he continued with his questions in a quiet, sympathetic manner. Taking a professional stance, he commented ' I'd hate to feel that I was doing it as a business.' The role play of the funeral director subsequently led the bereaved to believe that all funeral directors were quiet and solemn and that funeral homes were tranquil places. She was thus extremely distressed some weeks after the funeral when telephoning the funeral home to hear funeral directors laughing and joking in the background. 'They'd given me an estimate you see. And the person that answered the phone had to go away to find out and I could hear them all. It was a bit of a surprise because I suspected it to be a right quiet place and I could hear them all, laughing and talking about what they'd seen on television night before, and what a busy

day this one had had on Monday. He'd ten to do all by his self. And at the time you know, I thought it were terrible. It were awful to hear them talking like that. But, since, after, I've thought, well, they've got to be cheerful haven't they..But the way he said ten! At the time I wish he'd said to me, well can you ring back in five minutes. I wish I hadn't of heard that.' Bereaved G had nevertheless been glad to have everything organized for her since she felt she could not have coped. Afterwards she stated that there were things that she might have thought more about, or changed. Bereaved/clergy interaction was acknowledged by both as a disaster. Clergyman G classified his visit as 'poor' and blamed this on the funeral director. Although she herself had nothing to say to the clergyman, the bereaved felt that 'deep down most people would want a clergyman there, or a priest.' At the same time she did not want to talk to him because she was not 'a proper religious person'. Funeral director G hoped that the clergy saw funeral directors as 'a helpful part of the community. I should be very disappointed if they didn't. He disliked however the distinction the clergy made 'between church members and non church members'. 'You can say that if they're a church person, the service will be a full 25 minutes and ...if they're not church members they last about a quarter of an hour. Now this is really wrong to my way of thinking if they believe in their faith.'

In case H, bereaved/funeral director/clergy interaction was straightforward since no relatives were involved. The death highlighted the anonymity of inner city life and the failings of the death system in that within a few days a friend or acquaintance could slip from the grasp of the immediate community without their being aware of it. The clergyman stated: 'He'd been in four days and he

died. It was the first we heard. ...either the warden of housing or the hospital had fallen down badly on letting people know. So there was this sort of..it was fed upness, you know, that we hadn't been able to be with him and help.' In the arrangements session the interaction was very much concentrated upon the procedures of death - the importance of advertising the death adequately in the newspapers in case long lost relatives came forward; the necessity of demonstrating to the Medical Examiner on the cremation forms that everything possible had been done to trace relatives, prior to signing the authorisation for cremation. Funeral director H stated: 'They have come back to us on that in the past. You get a phone call from the Medical Referee - Now then, we're still a bit worried about this one etc. And you can't blame them. Because I mean those questions are all about the city council actually burning a body. They've got to be right. If that person is cremated and then a son arrives from London and says What the hell's been going on here? I mean the balloon would really go up.' The need to save money from his small estate, which had been left to the church, meant that only the bare essentials of ritual were provided. Ritual itself assumed less importance where the deceased had no relatives. The bereaved perceived the funeral director as 'Very nice, very charming, debonair, gentlemanlike and courteous.' Her later criticism however was that funeral directors did not say what services were available to help the bereaved as 'whole people'. They were too narrowly concerned with procedures and ritual. Clergyman H felt that funeral directors '..very much want to feel that we're doing the bit they think they can't do.'

. Bereaved J had perceived the funeral director as cold and efficient. He had obtained his preconceptions 'from television portrayals'. He felt that the funeral director ideally should be 'laid back' and not too forceful. Funeral directors should not dictate to clients. Funeral director J considered that bereaved J had seen him as 'someone who is going to take control of everything. He perceived his own actions as 'businesslike' and 'friendly'. '..you mustn't be too pushy, mustn't get too close, but on the other hand, you've got to be able to be sympathetic.' Although the funeral director tried to draw the widowed husband out by asking him what he wanted, the bereaved had felt sick during the arrangements session and 'unresponsive'. There had been no pre disposal visit from the clergy. Clergyman J who officiated later at the crematorium commented that it was a 'very untypical funeral'. He normally made pre disposal visits in his own parish and always endeavoured to let the bereaved tell him the circumstances of the persons death. There was tension in his relationships with funeral directors. He had refused to conduct services on funeral home premises and felt that funeral directors would like to take over the whole funeral. 'This is the tendency people felt when funeral directors had these chapel places.'

#### Summary

Where the bereaved had arranged a previous funeral and had some prior knowledge of the questions which the funeral director would ask there was a greater degree of participation. Thus in cases A and B, the bereaved took a much more active part in the interaction and had already made certain choices and written out their obituaries.

The individual's autonomy and control over the immediate post death situation was illustrated by the bereaved's efforts to comply with the deceased's wishes with regard to the types of ritual chosen. Thus in Case A the bereaved made efforts to purchase the deceased's favourite flowers; in cases B and C the deceased made prior requests for Union Jacks rather than flowers and in case D cremation was decided upon because it was the deceased's wish. The bereaved in cases F and G were quite troubled because they had not taken the time to ascertain the preferences of the deceased when they were alive. On the other hand, requests could be overridden by the bereaved if he or she did not consider them suitable. Thus in case E the bereaved chose cremation for the deceased rather than the burial he had requested.

Within the literature the malleable state of the bereaved has led to increasing speculation on the degree of exploitativeness of funeral directors. Yet in this sample and over the fieldwork generally there were few indications of deliberate exploitation. Nevertheless, a great many ritual goods and services were provided on the basis of the briefest of descriptions, a situation anomalous in consumer society. The lack of detailed or alternative information was defended by reference to the bereaved's emotional state, to the urgent demands of the workload within a large funeral home and the need to programme the death system. Although in theory, the bereaved could have almost anything they asked for, in practice, too much input into the decision making process of ritual production was discouraged.

Rituals which were open to influence by the bereaved included the wearing of black, the ceremonial viewing of the body, the provision of 'grave goods', flowers, donations and flags, the choice of music,

the provision of the cortege, the continuance of the funeral tea, ash rituals, the In Memoriam column and the provision of memorialisation. The influence actually brought to bear, although consistent, was seen to be of a lesser degree than that of other groups within the system. Women especially, appeared to have relinquished the wearing of black concurrently with a diminution of their role as carriers of death culture and in line with the increasing informality of dress in daily life. Failure to wear black had little to do with a taboo on death but depended more upon the availability of the appropriate clothes within the wardrobe.

One of the greatest areas of influence demonstrated by the bereaved was in the area of floral tributes. Promoted by florists rather than funeral directors, to whom they represented one of the worst sources of chaos, the purchase of flowers had in the 1980's become a sub cult. The bereaved both purchased and requested new floral artforms, with flowers in the shape of toys, vehicles, books, cushions and animals. Within the sample, a great deal of thought was given to flowers (respondent A searched for yellow tea roses and respondent J specially requested blue flowers). Remaining one of the most potent visual cues to death, sole inheritors of the panoply of mutes, feathers, trays, weepers, batons and crepe draperies, flowers tended to mirror the 'type of death' with tragic accidents and sudden deaths attracting the greatest numbers. The attempts of florists to promote flowers within the pre and post disposal phases however, by the use of sympathy flowers for the bereaved or the concept of a single flower with donations, had not been accepted by the bereaved. Several were inclined to the new ritual pattern of giving donations to

charity instead of flowers.

Promoted as a ritual by funeral directors, the ceremonial viewing of the body had clearly been retained as important by the bereaved, who often held clear expectations of the kind of tableau they wished to see the : the deceased looking like him or herself, appearing peaceful, immaculately attired and lying on his or her own. Since the bereaved were under no pressure to view, it suggests that this ritual enhanced rather than denied the reality of death. Viewing retained its validity within the bereaved's common religious framework, in the necessity to redefine death as a mysterious process rather than a medical decision and in the provision of an opportunity for distant relatives to remind themselves of family ties. Whilst the bereaved aligned it with 'taking care of the body' however, the clergy identified it as part of an unhealthy unwillingness to let go on behalf of the bereaved. For the funeral directors, embalming hid decay but not death. It was the 'untreated' body which aroused fear and disapproval, 'untreated' being synonymous with lack of care or abuse.

The ritual provision of 'identity markers' or 'grave goods' remained solely a property of the bereaved, manifesting itself in objects left on or with corpses in the coffin and also with personal requests for Union Jacks on the coffin rather than flowers. Within the sample, respondents B, G and C all expressed doubts as to the safety of any jewellery left on the body once it had left their care. The lack of trust suggested that the secrecy and mystique with which the British funeral director has traditionally surrounded death practices, continues to have unintended (negative) consequences.

Choice of music was clearly an area of decision making left to the bereaved but not always accepted. The increasing choice of popular songs for crematoria services indicated a growing concern with personalisation and common religious values, relating ritual firmly to the deceased. Within the sample however, only a minority of the bereaved exercised their choice and the rest were given little time to reconsider.

There was no support for Pine's finding that there was a direct relationship between type of ritual and the economic status of the bereaved. There was a marked lack of social differentiation within ritual expenditure, which was linked instead to other factors, predominantly to type of death experienced. The most expensive and often the most personalised ritual was reserved for the unexpected or sudden deaths, suggesting that ritual was being used in the old propitiatory sense, as if to compensate the deceased for his or her untimely loss of life and to assuage extreme grief.

Medicalised grief was experienced by at least three of the bereaved during the arrangements. (Others may have been similarly tranquillised and not volunteered the information). Grief was characterized as private and family centred. There was very little discussion by the bereaved with either funeral directors or clergy about death per se. Following the later interviews however, the bereaved often expressed their gratitude for being able to talk about the death to someone, suggesting that follow up counselling sessions with professional counsellors within the home would be a beneficial additional service for some bereaved.

## CHAPTER SIX : DISPOSAL AND POST DISPOSAL RITUALS

The present chapter continues an examination of the case studies, following through the ritual and interactions during the disposal and post disposal sections of the funeral.

### 6.0. The assumption of mourning clothes

There was no predominant pattern of wearing black on the day of the disposal rituals. Five of the bereaved (main mourners) wore black and four did not. Those who did not assume traditional mourning, included two of the bereaved who had experienced unexpected deaths and those who did, included three of the bereaved who had experienced unexpected deaths. The lack of a consistent relationship to 'type of death' was underlined by bereaved B who wore black for the expected death of her father in law in his eighties but did not wear black for the sudden death of her son in his twenties some months later. 'I didn't wear black..and I couldn't have been more desperate.' She could not explain this disparity. Whereas several decades ago, people would borrow black items rather than wear colours, contemporary mourners simply wore whatever seemed to the individual to be suitable. Bereaved B wore a black skirt and black pullover with a navy blue coat, she nevertheless felt that black was dying out and not linked to feeling. Clergyman B noted that male mourners generally wore suits or sports jackets and that the women tended to dress up. The nature of the formality had changed. 'Instead of going into deep black or purple to show respect, you wear your best.' Bereaved A wore a darkish grey dress with a navy blue coat and no hat.

She saw this as a 'result of' the age we live in. We're more casual about things.' Clergyman A felt that theologically, 'its not always helpful to identify death with black.' Bereaved C and her sister both wore black for their father's funeral but stated that dressing in black did not necessarily affect 'feeling'. Clergyman C however, considered it particularly necessary to mark out the professional role players. He was loathe to see the day when undertakers turned up in 'polo neck shirts,'t' shirts and blazers'. Bereaved D wore grey. She recalled that the majority of the mourners had worn a darkish colour or grey. Bereaved E wore black. 'We old ones still believe in that. Years and years ago I bought a black mack with a funeral in mind if I ever had to go to one.' Nevertheless she commented that black was much less worn 'even among them that have lost their own today.'

Bereaved F wore his 'interview and funeral suit' suggesting that 'People who died would not wish you to go to a lot of expense and be mournful.' Clergyman F agreed. 'You don't very often now, except with older people get it, or even men wearing black ties. I think these customs should die out.' Bereaved G had worn 'a black velvet jacket, black skirt and black polo neck jumper. I think it was something I just did automatically.' Respondent H wore her church army uniform. Few of the mourners at this funeral had worn black. 'I don't think its necessary as a Christian because of my beliefs. Bereaved J who had lost his young wife suddenly, wore a black suit and a black tie because he liked wearing dark clothes. Many of the other relatives had also worn black.

Black had obviously lost most of its power to mark out the mourner

as someone of 'special status'. Nevertheless all of the funerals attended could be recognised as such from the steady sprinkling of black ties and 'best' or black clothing within the group as a whole. Failure to wear black was seen as having little to do with a conscious or subconscious denial of death but more to do with changing mores in the social history of clothing. The fact that black continues to be worn to the funerals of the aristocracy and the upper middle classes suggests their greater attachment to formality of dress.

#### 6.1. The Cortège

Cortège A consisted of one grey limousine and a grey hearse. Clergyman A who travelled with the driver in the limousine approved of keeping the cortège and used the travelling time to say 'prayers for the bereaved and for the body.' Reciting prayers also prevented him from having a conversation with the driver 'who sometimes can be totally irrelevant.' Clergyman A acknowledged passing cortèges in his daily life as he felt had been standard practice among ordinary passersby several decades ago. 'I normally do just sort of stand there and think and in fact say a blessing.' Cortège B and Cortège C both consisted of a black hearse and one black limousine with the coffins transported in the hearse both being covered with Union Jacks instead of flowers. Neither family considered foregoing the procession which was considered to be an integral part of the ceremonial. Clergyman C similarly claimed to acknowledge the passing of a cortège in the old fashioned manner, by marking himself with the sign of a cross. Cortège D was made up of a black hearse and two black limousines. Clergyman D, as a tame vicar with several funerals a day exhibited less of the traditional clergy concern for the cortège. Unable to

afford the leisurely progression between churches and crematoria, he travelled back and forth in his own car, feeling strongly that the old custom of the hearse travelling at 15 miles an hour should be discontinued because they were 'a menace'. He often found himself being held up behind them when he was late.

Cortege E consisted of two grey limousines and a grey hearse and provided the high point of the day for the bereaved who had always admired them. 'And then I thought, on the morning - Oh and I'm in one and all! In car at the time' (sic). The journey in Cortege F, by contrast, was only remembered by the bereaved for the unusual speed at which it had travelled to the cemetery for his sister's burial. The funeral party had been delayed - '...when we got going we went fairly fast! In fact my brother in law mentioned it - he said God, I've never been in such a fast funeral, you know.' The unexpected speed of the hearse and limousine (caused by the funeral director being delayed by a phone call at the office) was perceived as 'spoiling' the overall funeral performance. (1).

Cortege G consisted of a grey hearse and grey limousine and a string of private cars but bereaved widow G, in the blur of grief for her husband could not remember afterwards whether she had travelled in a grey cortege or a black one. There was no cortege for the loner in funeral H, only the hearse. At the opposite end of the range, cortege J for the young deceased female consisted of three black limousines and a modern black hearse.

As the cortege travelled to the church or crematorium, some mourners conversed and others remained silent. Funeral director J commented:

'It varies, some families are more aware of the occasion, others, maybe chat and talk to get over their unease.' His own role play had altered with increasing experience. 'At first I used to observe the solemnity of the occasion very much and hardly said a word, but now..I do tend to converse with the driver.'

#### 6.2. Numbers of mourners attending the disposal ritual

Gorer's data lacked information on the numbers of mourners attending a funeral. Historical and oral evidence suggests that funerals drew much higher attendances a century ago and that these had greatly diminished. Firth et al (1970) commented on 'the inability of our informants to remember what kin were present on occasions often quite a number of years past' (p 243).

Within the case studies, the range varied from 17 to around 50 mourners. (a): female (eighties):17; (b): male (eighties): 23; (c): male (seventies): 50, including a large contingent of British Legion members; (d): female (seventies):40, many were friends from a club; (e): male (seventies): 33, the bereaved knew only about five of them since the deceased had a previous marriage; (f): female (seventies):18; (g): male (forties): 26, less than expected for the age of the deceased; (h): male (seventies): 35 plus, the clergy had requested support from the church; (j): female (twenties):30.

Throughout fieldwork, numbers attending both the disposal rituals and viewing rituals were considered by funeral directors to be related to the 'age' of the deceased and to the 'type of death'. Within the sample however, larger attendances were achieved where the deceased had been a member of some association or club. And in the third

highest attendance (for the loner with no relatives) numbers were boosted by a special request to the church community to attend. The element of 'community' in funeral attendance remained strong, although the communities were now likely to be specific to the individual and related to his or her work or leisure communities.

### 6.3. Arrival and Assembly at the Disposal Ritual

Behaviour among mourners differed considerably between the settings of church and crematorium. At the church services, mourners arrived and took their seats within the church, reserving the front rows for the immediate family. At the crematoria, mourners waited outside in small groups and were later directed to seats by the funeral directors after the entrance of the coffin and the main mourners. Several of the disposal services were characterized by the queuing of vehicles from different Funeral Homes. Clergyman A felt that queuing resulted in the experience taking on the nature of a processing machine. The funeral performance was also flawed by the emission of smoke from the crematorium chimney. As Cortège G entered the drive, thick, acrid black smoke issued from the chimney. Still being emitted on departure, it covered the coats of mourners with black specks.

Many of the mourners showed unfamiliarity with their surroundings. In funeral G, a group of teenagers debated whether they should go in before the coffin. At disposal B mourners continued to chat to one another as they entered the chapel. Clergyman B considered that this was normal behaviour for the crematorium, 'bearing in mind that you get a lot of people who have no background of churchgoing and church behaviour'. Mourners were also confused at funeral H, where the service was held in a modern church in the centre of a community

complex, being unable to find their way in and ending up in the kitchens. Respondent H commented: 'The church finds it can best exist as a modern integral building where it has a community centre and it has old folks dinners and so yes, we take coffins into the smell of cooking cabbage and things like that.' Although media representations of funerals continue to show the old traditional cues of lych gates and church porches, within the city these are becoming redundant.

In Funeral G, the performance of the clergyman greeting the mourners was almost 'spoiled' by the failure of cemetery personnel to switch on the music at the right moment. As the bearers propelled the coffin and trolley towards the entrance, one of them whispered audibly: 'The music! Switch on the music!' The mourners were suddenly aware of the unacceptable silence as the cemetery superintendent vanished to activate the system. A similar 'spoiled' welcome marred funeral J, where mourners, coffin and bearers approached the crematorium doors only to hear the clergyman whisper loudly to the funeral director: 'I don't know them I'm afraid.'

#### 6.4. Removing the coffin feet first

This ritual was studiously adhered to in all of the funerals in the sample. The tenacity with which it was maintained, long after the original meaning of the superstition had been discarded suggests that it plays a part in underlining the importance of the funeral director as the new 'carrier of death culture'. The coffin was carefully turned and 'correctly' aligned at the door at the commencement of the service and again at the altar before coming out.

Within the sample however, only bereaved D showed any awareness of the ritual. 'Its always been feet first. - I'm going to be carried out feet first sort of thing.' The remainder of the bereaved had not noticed. Bereaved J commented: 'If someone had remarked it was the wrong way round I would have said So what?' The clergy were similarly unimpressed although all waited patiently for the coffin to be turned at each disposal. Reasons suggested by the clergy for its continuance included convenience, ease of carrying, that it was a formality, that it was 'religious' in origin, that it was part of the undertakers manufactured 'mystique'. The funeral directors themselves could not give any logical explanation for the custom, only that they would feel uncomfortable if they failed to comply with it.

More surprisingly, the bereaved did not notice whether the coffin had been carried by bearers or wheeled on a trolley. In disposal A, the coffin had been pushed on a trolley into the crematorium. Questioned some weeks later, the bereaved affirmed that the coffin had been 'carried'. In Funeral E the coffin again went on a trolley but the bereaved could not remember whether it had been carried by bearers or taken on a trolley. The difficulty which the bereaved experienced in recalling details of the disposal rituals only weeks afterwards suggested that the overall 'atmosphere' and smooth running of the ceremony is of greater importance than type of ritual. Although 'type of ritual' may be noted by friends and relatives less emotionally involved.

#### 6.5. The Disposal Service

Within the case studies, bereaved and mourners would have had little prior knowledge of the kind of service they were attending unless

they had previously attended another funeral taken by the same clergyman. Each clergyman within the sample had very definite individual views on what constituted 'the standard Anglican rite' and at the same time, little knowledge of the way in which fellow clergy conducted their funeral services.

Thus clergyman F had abandoned the traditional reading of the opening words from the church or crematorium door and now read them from the pulpit. 'I don't know how many of my colleagues do that but it struck me as being more commensensical to begin the sentences when people were in their places otherwise they couldn't hear them.' Clergyman B commenced the opening words when standing at the altar. 'The opening sentences were actually there in the old prayer book, to take up the time, from the lych gate to the church door and in...' Thus whilst the funeral directors were protecting and adapting old rituals (such as turning the coffin and maintaining the cortege), the clergy appeared more ready to abandon them. This concurred with Martins (1983) findings on the Portugese clergy's abandonment of old rituals within rural areas.

Each clergyman had developed an individual format for the disposal service and for some, these formats were subject to constant revision. In addition, some clergy 'tailored' their services to the perceived religious affiliations of the bereaved. Clergyman A commented that what he was trying to do in the funeral depended upon 'the family's degree of religious belief'. For those who had 'a very minimal religious belief', 'I'm trying to provide a ritual, but something which is a very visible, tangible end to the life. If they are more open to a religious view of life, I'm trying to present, a

sense of mystery. A sense of something significant having happened. If they're more explicitly Christian, then I'm quite happy to take the chance and re-state the Christian belief in the resurrection.'

When all the mourners had been assembled Clergyman A commenced with 'a moments silence'. 'I don't begin with a potted biography of the person because I always feel that its so obviously third hand. One says what a wonderful person he was and he was an old hell you know.' He always used the same order of service with little comments before hand,' what the reading is on about or what the Te Deum is on about..where it says Welcome Death and Take away the sting of death.'

Clergyman F (a lame vicar) had used the new Alternative Services Book but abandoned it because he did not care for it. 'There doesn't seem to be very much depth in it and I've gone back to me prayer book service which I really think has a lot of meaning. People aren't in the mood for a theological discourse. So what I do, there are two very nice ones from Revelations, Ch 7 and Ch 21. I normally use one for a woman and one for a man. The one for a man finishes up: 'I will be his God and he shall be my son..And the other one for women is that lovely one: 'These are they that are arrayed in white robes, these are they which came out of great tribulations, and it is a very lovely passage.' Although clergyman F felt that the funeral had three elements: 'thanksgiving to God for the earthly life of someone you have known and loved, a service committing the deceased into the hands of our heavenly father and the disposal of the earthly remains, he' was able by means of a creative juggling of religious elements to provide a 'meaningful' service for the bereaved which he felt that they would understand.

Clergyman B worked from a similar premise. He had conducted around 700 - 800 funerals and because of the difficulty of reading the service freshly each time, had adopted his own 'slowly adapting format'. 'Its important to keep some sort of framework because when the mind flips, you can always just fall back into the framework. At the start I always used the 1928 prayerbook. In the last ten years I began drifting further and further from that.' He was continually changing his service. 'I never know when I introduce something new into a service whether its going to have 'lasting power' or not. The purpose of the service was 'to help people in that bit of the act of letting go'. He felt that 'gratitude' should be at the centre of it. 'Its not a ceremony of regret but for thinking thankfully of the life in which you have shared. 'The third thing is that, however irreligious you think the family context, you put the God Slot in, in the form of prayer for help, coping with grief, the element of hope. The funeral is also a context for dramatising the need for mutual support. At the same time to do the little ginger bit, to point out that caring doesn't stop when you leave the chapel.'

He always began the service by stating that no books were needed. He explained that he would say a few prayers and 'we would join our assent by the use of Amen.' There was one reading. 'In my Father's House are many mansions...' Throughout the service he ignored the coffin and concentrated his attention on the congregation. 'Funerals are for those who are left behind.'

Clergy differed in the degrees to which they adhered to prayer books or the alternative services book. The book bound were attached to the 'community model' of the funeral service which emphasized the

participation of all the mourners, with hymns and singing. The other group of vicars, which tended to encompass the tame vicars, felt that services were better if they were not book bound as it enabled individual mourners to concentrate on the words more. 'I think if people are able to really listen and soak in the words, they can't fail to come away, you know, very much filled with hope and er, assurance that all is well.' Clergyman F felt that the reliance on books confused the mourners. 'We're on page three now..will you turn now to page six. You're sort of playing liturgical bingo..' Clergymen J, B,C and H all firmly believed in the community model of service. Clergyman C used Funeral Service No 3 stating that that was the book provided by the crematorium and that he was a believer in 'congregational participation'. 'Its their service and they need to be part of it. And if you use anything else, they hadn't got anything in their hands..'Clergyman J commented that often a lot of working friends put on suits and came along. '..and there are things to join in and they don't do it. They stand there dumb and they've all got a service card in front of them...you're very very tempted to be cross and say Well, why on earth are you here! I mean I know why I'm here. And the answer they'll come up with is that they're here to pay their respects. And my answer to that would be, well you're not paying your respects at all!'

Clergyman J felt that there were four levels to the service: 1. the religious level: to pray for persons deceased, 2. the intellectual level: the Christian teaching about life and death, 3. the psychological level: a ritual to cope with it and 4. the social level: a coming together of people. With different people and groups, different levels predominated. Despite his comments on the different

levels of the service, Clergyman J read the words in a dull monotone, paying very little attention to his congregation. There was a conspicuous lack of eye contact throughout. Without preamble, the congregation were asked to stand and read aloud from their plastic covered service sheets. The congregation read two psalms and then sat down. Clergyman J then read from St. John the passage beginning 'In my father's house are many mansions' followed by six short prayers including The Lord's Prayer mumbled by the congregation. In one prayer he mentioned the deceased by name but said nothing further of her life. This omission was later explained on the grounds that it was necessary to make it clear that the funeral service was 'a God directed occasion, not a corpse directed occasion'.

Clergyman B kept a similar distance between himself and the congregation, fixing the mourners with a severe stare. He noted that if there was limited contact with the family, 'or they're not very co-operative, there's no rapport between you, that is when there are difficulties, when you find that they are almost anti church. If you know the family, you can share something with them. If you receive nothing but opposition it does become more automatic.' Clergyman B's service began with a prayer from the booklet Funeral Services No 3. Later, in a short address, he made reference to the deceased's bravery. Prayers were offered 'for Christian men and women who have departed this life, in particular those known to us, and in particular those especially dear to the deceased and those who will have welcomed him home.' He later explained that he always spoke of 'heaven' as 'home'. 'And always after that I pray for ourselves in remembering that we too are mortal, that one day we will die.'

Clergyman H adhering to the community model felt that one of the difficulties of the funeral service was that the mourners failed to realise that they had come 'to participate in an act of worship. That its not something like a man coming to turn a handle where the thing just disappears with some suitable words. We haven't come to worship the dead body, which is often what people think they've come to do!' He shared the service for the loner with his deaconess. She commented: 'I've only taken four funerals. Each one has to be thought about and prayed about, so I see myself as doing the liturgy and the service according to whoever's funeral I'm taking. I'm really playing it by ear at the moment.' People had been surprised by a woman taking the funeral service and she had been the recipient of adverse comments by the bereaved in a neighbouring town. Not everyone could accept a female clergyperson.

Clergyman H stated he was looking closely at 'ongoing bereavement'. He acknowledged his own part in the deritualisation of the funeral explaining that 'the prayer book language of the nastiness of death, would just pass straight over the heads of a lot of the people'. Within the sample there was a clear split between the clergy who favoured congregational participation and those who felt that the congregation preferred to observe a single performance, that of the clergyman. The majority of the clergy felt that the religious language of death was no longer appropriate and no longer comprehended by the bereaved. However, adapting their funeral frameworks to fit the modern idiom, inevitably entailed a loss of cultural values and expectations held in common.

#### 6.6. Clergy control and the expression of grief

The majority of the funeral directors left the control of the disposal ritual entirely in the clergy's hands and waited outside for the duration of the service. The clergy had developed a number of methods for coping with the trauma of the disposal to ensure that it ran smoothly. One technique was that of absolute familiarity with the framework of the service. Clergy also gained in confidence with experience. A clergyman from the preliminary sample had explained that, when younger, he felt that it was very important to feel in control of a funeral 'lest it got out of control and I lost me place on the page and messed it up.' A second had considered it important to be in control in case the funeral itself got out of control 'and frightened people'.

The more experienced clergy were not frightened by the expression of grief on the part of the congregation. Clergyman F commented: 'I tell them, if you're upset, its the best thing in the world, get it out.' The clergy nevertheless felt that there were two varieties of grief, the real and the false or 'show' grief. They claimed, as did funeral directors, to be able to differentiate between the two. 'You often feel that the funerals where most emotion is shown are often the ones who have the shallowest grief. The emotion almost comes in to account for the fact that they don't really feel all that much'. This belief was echoed at a Funeral Conference in North City when a Methodist Minister commented that the greatest displays of grief at funerals often came from those who were guilty of neglecting the deceased prior to his or her death. She related how she halted a funeral service when it was disturbed by hysterical outbursts by several of the bereaved. 'I asked them to be quiet, then I told them why they were crying. They hadn't

been near their deceased relative for a year. I asked them to say prayers admitting their guilt if they were able to do so. You have to help people to face the truth of a situation.' Similar findings resulted from Unruh's study in America. '...at Black Funeral Home, many family members seemed almost hysterical, uncontrollable in their weeping, and physically aggressive as they occasionally attacked the funeral director as the casket was closed or attempted to throw themselves into the grave. Important as it is to note that the funeral director generally interpreted these actions as simply arising out of guilt, or that people "were just acting", the point remains that uncontrollable responses may endanger the ongoing believability of a funeral service' (1979, p.256).

Bereaved A acknowledged that she cried during the service for her estranged mother. 'I know I cried dreadfully which was unusual.' It was because she 'realised that her mother had gone' that she broke down so much. 'It came into my mind at that time, that apart from my son, she was my last living relative.' Clergyman A commented that he felt that excessive weepiness could be tricky. 'It can get tricky because I normally start these things off by a moment's silence.'

Bereaved J had not shown any emotion throughout the service for his wife but her parents and sister had all cried. In particular her mother had sobbed dreadfully with her handkerchief stuffed into her mouth to prevent racking sobs from interrupting the service. Clergyman J, who believed in congregational participation, appeared not to notice but continued to read through the service in a lacklustre monotone. In funeral F, the bereaved appeared distressed during the service, particularly the older sister and the brother who had carried out the

arrangements. In funeral E, the service for the invalid who had been cared for by his second wife for many years, the main mourners were all sobbing very heavily with the notable exception of his wife.

Clergyman F remarked on her composure afterwards. ' I remember when I went to see her she told me she'd had a good cry. The unnaturally brave ones gets one worried sometimes. ' The bereaved said 'I tried to keep myself right all the time. I were taking it all inward you know. Biting me thumb kind of thing you know.'

In funeral service B, several of the mourners became very distressed. Some of the men were blowing their noses loudly and the younger women were crying. Clergyman B commented that he thought it was good for people to cry but that some people were in a state of shock, totally numb and they went through the whole funeral without crying. He felt that he wouldn't know how to curb excessive displays of grief but was positive that he could distinguish between 'genuine' grief and 'show grief'. He recalled a girl who got into 'the screaming habdabs' at a funeral where four women were trying to outdo one another. 'The biggest, who was really fat, got the edge on the others by throwing herself on the floor. And as a consequence, the three men that were behind her, tripped over, knocked the people pushing the coffin, who shot forward and pushed me forward - it was incredible, it really was.'

Clergyman E's comments echoed the growing feeling amongst death professionals that the person who broke down at a funeral was often expressing guilt rather than grief. 'I could list the number of occasions that were difficult because of emotional disturbances and again and again the focus has been somebody ..where there's been neglect. Pre visiting helps because in the half dozen worst funerals

I've taken, in four cases I've known that it was going to be a tricky one before the service, from things said.' He noted that there were other occasions at funerals where it might have happened but didn't simply because 'two of the stronger sort of relatives decide that it won't.' He described an elderly lady 'more or less frog marched out of the church by relatives.'

In funeral C the clergyman stated that if he saw that the mourners were terribly upset he sometimes cut his remarks to the 'absolute minimum'. In the event, main mourners C were both crying when they arrived. They cried throughout the service in the crematorium for their deceased relative and one of them collapsed hysterically onto a chair afterwards. Questioned later, the bereaved could not remember crying at all. Asked later whether she had cried during the service she replied: 'I don't know. I should imagine I did. I can't remember but I should imagine I would.' In funeral G, the clergyman commented that the bereaved female who had lost her 41 year old husband was 'inert'. 'I think she was well sedated and she didn't cry.' His expectation had been that it was going to be difficult. In the event only one or two of the neighbours proved to be emotional. As the experiences of Clergyman B had illustrated it was felt that there was a need for clergy to develop coping mechanisms to prevent the rituals from dissolving into chaos.

#### 6.7. Further problems in the control of the funeral performance.

Loss of familiarity with the old rhythms and behaviours of a church going population provided further difficulties for the clergy.

Clergyman C felt that the concept of 'reverence' had gone out of modern life. 'They have no ear, no understanding or ability to be aware of the

presence of God in their midst. Modern buildings, the multi-uses of buildings don't help it. And er..the young are not brought up with it.' The role of the mourner had been affected by a general loss of socialisation into churchgoing behaviour of the young.

Clergyman A echoed the loss of reverence. 'I had one service where all the mourners just talked loudly throughout and giggled a bit as well.' He had thought the way to tackle them was 'to put my book down and glower at them and tell them to shut up, but then I thought perhaps chattering was a way of coping with their bereavement. So I carried on, and it was a matter between God, the deceased and me and we got on with it.' Clergyman F felt that the problems with congregations stemmed more from 'disengagement'. '..how much of the service do they actually hear? You see their mind isn't on it in many instances.' He also drew a distinction between old people's understanding of death and the younger generation. 'Its not the churches, its society in general, trying to sanitize death out of existence.'

Clergyman E coped during funeral E by mentioning his own family bereavements during the service. He stated later that he didn't normally personalise it in this way but on this occasion he was finding the service 'a bit hard going', because it was his fourth in three days. '..and I'd got a church one in the middle of it all and at that stage, I'd already got three more on the stocks. So you know, it was probably part of a deliberate attempt to make sure I wasn't just going through the motions.'

Other factors which might 'spoil' the funeral performance included bad family atmospheres (2) and lack of procedural knowledge. Of the

former, Clergyman D commented that where someone had been divorced and the former wife arrived as well as the present widow, 'you can very often cut the atmosphere with a knife. And they won't sit together. You've got two lots of people. They don't speak to each other and you can sense that there is this rotten atmosphere. And there's nothing you can do about it.'

Lack of procedural knowledge led to many disruptions at the crematoria. A clergyman within the preliminary sample had described a service in a crematorium 'where you had this button system, you pressed a button and the coffin receded. This so took the people by surprise that they started screaming and sort of pursuing the coffin, which took me completely by surprise. They had been almost 'outraged'. They hadn't expected this and it was my fault for not leading them to expect it.' Here the funeral director was primarily at fault for failing to provide enough prior information to the bereaved. However, as noted by Clergyman B, it underlined an important difference in the skills of impression management between clergy and funeral directors, with clergy 'arriving cold at these things' and funeral directors receiving a certain amount of in house training. Pine (1975) found that 'an important part of the training of funeral directors involves imparting to them a sense of calm during the service. ...'Never run, even when something drastic happens, such as someone fainting beside the casket, or somebody knocking over a basket of flowers.' The funeral director's facial expression must also be managed 'so as to give the impression of care, interest and understanding, not dismay, fear, or panic' (p.103).

Procedural ignorance caused distress to the bereaved in funeral E since she was waiting for the coffin to move and nothing happened. It also

caused a mourner to block the aisle in funeral A when he went up to the front of the chapel in expectation of witnessing some movement to the coffin and stood jiggling coins in his trouser pocket, watching avidly. Ignorance generally derived from the variance of procedures from crematorium to crematorium, the failure of funeral directors to inform the bereaved what to expect and the lack of common cultural learning.

#### 6.8. The ritual of the Committal in the Crematorium

The majority of mourners attended a crematorium service with the expectation that something dramatic would happen at the act of committal. In North City, to compensate for the lack of drama, the clergy themselves had attempted to dramatise the committal by the use of various techniques. During committal A, the clergyman crossed to the coffin in the crematorium and gazed at it very hard. Explaining why he had been deliberately staring at the coffin, he stated he was 'exploring how to get something in at the committal. I've stopped doing it again now because I think it creates too strong a sense of attention to that rather than the commendation.'

Clergyman E remained standing at the altar for the committal whilst verses from 'The Lord is my Shepherd' issued forth from the crematorium tape recorder. He then walked to the coffin for the committal and stood with his hand resting upon it. 'Just as you would bless the living, so you are sending the departed out. Our hands are the means of conveyance.' This unexpectedly theatrical gesture was something that he had arrived at 'by trial and error'. 'Most of us arrive cold at these things..we don't go to colleges to be trained as clergymen..I went to learn theology; and to learn how to pray.' He noted that his own particular performance was disliked by the crematoria officials in the

music room because they temporarily lost control of their monitoring of the proceedings. '..because you lose sight of the microphone. They like to hear everything that's going on in that office there!'

Such 'committal dramas' could only be carried off to good effect where the clergy were familiar with a particular crematorium. Arriving as a newcomer at a strange crematorium, care had to be taken that control was not lost due to unfamiliarity with the stage effects. Clergyman F noted the unfamiliarity of a colleague with one of the city crematoria: 'It was like Blackpool Illuminations! Because you see there's a switch and you turn it if you want the music off and then you press it back when you want it on again. Well he'd been quite unfamiliar with the arrangement down there, he'd got 'Crimond' at the beginning, then he'd pressed his switch in the middle thinking that the thing was going down and and it didn't you see and he'd got 'Crimond' in the middle and then when that happens a light goes on outside, so the blokes (funeral directors) came in, realised that he wasn't ready and went out again. So he had them all muddled up. He didn't know that it (the coffin) stayed put.'

In funeral J, as the words of the committal were uttered, there was a loud eerie swishing noise as a green patterned curtain came across. Clergyman J commented: 'When you say the words of committal, you pull the cord. Unfortunately the microphone picked up the noise of the mechanism of the curtains. And so there was this awful BRRGH! noise and anybody who hadn't been to the crem before might think that this was the furnace heating up or something.'

The committal at a burial remained less beset by technical

difficulties and well understood by the participants. In funeral F, the main mourners stood on a raised dais covered with plastic grass and watched as the bearers appeared on either side of the grave to let the coffin down on webbing. The clergyman recited the words of the committal and the cemetery superintendent threw in sand from an aspirin bottle in three long sweeping movements. Sand frequently replaced the traditional earth, since clay stuck to the hand and was messy and tended to bang on the coffin lid.

Despite the natural drama, clergyman F disliked the graveside ceremony and often attempted to persuade mourners to have the committal inside the church and to leave the coffin there for the gravediggers to bury. 'Very often with elderly people, I will suggest to them, Now why don't we have the whole service, committal and everything in the chapel. Sometimes they'll say, Oh, that is a good idea. Then you'll get others who'll say, Oh no, no. We shall have to go to the graveside. Doesn't matter if the heavens are opening. And it is so futile. The way some of them stand there looking down (into the grave). I don't know what it is that they expect to see. I don't know why they do it.' The same respondent proclaimed his reluctance to use the traditional words 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust - like something out of the rubbish bin! - You can get away with it by saying, 'we therefore commit his body to the ground.'

Although the clergy were instrumental in trying to deflect the bereaved from some of the old patterns of ritual, many of the bereaved refused to be swayed and showed some control over their maintenance. During committals at the graveside, a flourishing ritual remained that of throwing flowers and other objects into the

grave. Clergyman B had relinquished control at one of his funerals where the mourners insisted on throwing down an assortment of objects. '..when I'd said you know, rest eternal, they started throwing things into the hole. It sounded like pennies, key rings and all sorts, bottles. And I turned round to the funeral director and said What are they doing? He said, don't bother, just keep walking'. The behaviour of the bereaved and mourners at the committal illustrated a desire for 'drama' at the final stages of the disposal ritual. In part this may have been explained by the loss of the familiarity of the old burial rites and in part by a continuing need to underline the finality of death.

#### 6.8. Ending the Disposal Ritual

At the crematorium, the disposal ritual concluded with the clergy pushing a button which either caused the curtains to be drawn, and/or the music to be played. Crematoria personnel tended to allow mourners a maximum of two verses and then abruptly shut off the music in readiness for the next funeral. In funeral A, the bereaved's choice of music 'Now the Day is Over' was played briefly on entrance and exit. In funeral J, taped 'free choice' music crackled over the system sounding as if it was coming through heavy traffic.

Where there were no curtains to close, the ceremony lacked a natural end and was resolved in most cases by the funeral director re-entering and asking the main mourners to follow him. 'That's the end of the service, please take your time. We'll bring the flowers out for you to have a look at, have a chat with the people that have attended. The cars are ready whenever you want to get in them.' In funeral E, where the coffin remained upon the catafalque, a male

mourner dramatically fell on his knees in front it, putting his arms around it and sobbing and kissing it, before being persuaded to leave by other relatives. Clergy departure styles varied. Clergyman A shook hands at the door and then stood alone and rather ignored as groups congregated in the forecourt. 'I hang around there in case someone wants to come and talk to me. I don't just shake hands, I always say and I really mean, God bless. Sometimes in fact, yesterday, the chief mourner was very distressed and threw herself on me. ..I find it exhausting really.' He found making an exit from the ritual a continuing trial and was disturbed by the abrupt disconnection between the spiritual and the demands of the death system. 'I go out and hang around, trying desperately to ignore the undertaker who wants to sort of slip £16 into my hand...that's the one thing that really infuriates me. Why they won't send me a cheque I don't know. I mean I hate having to handle money. No, I loathe it, its so dirty. They usually say, 'See you in the vestry Sir and then you huddle together in a little group and then the fellow always says Now how much is it? They damn well know how much it is!'

Clergyman F stood in the doorway and shook hands with all the mourners. 'I say God bless you, and that's about that. But I will not make conversation because I think that there are just a few times in life when the time is best to leave people alone. ' Clergyman E similarly shook hands with mourners but did not stay to talk.

Funeral director B. emphasized the need to assume firm command both before and after the disposal service because the bereaved did not know what they were doing.'I've seen families where there's a flood of tears in front of them and they don't even know which car they've

just got out of. They've no idea where they are. Because of the time schedule, you've got to be in command otherwise they'll stop there all day.' In general, departures were easier and less formal and awkward at burials than at the cremations.

#### 6.9. The bereaved's perceptions of the disposal service

For the majority of the bereaved, the disposal service had seemed 'unreal', 'an ordeal', something which they could only remember fleetingly. Bereaved A felt that the day of her mother's funeral passed quickly and yet at the end of the day, 'it seemed as if it had been a long day'. She had appreciated what Clergyman A had said and his words had 'given her comfort'. 'He's a very nice style.'

Bereaved B drew a distinction between the funeral of her father in law in his eighties and the later funeral of her son. In the former funeral (of the case study) it hadn't mattered to her that the service was short. 'Grandma and Grandad, they had their life. But when my son died that was different. I think in a way you want it to last long because you don't want the coffin to go down.' Where death was tragic or unexpected it was important for ritual to be tangible and long lasting. It thus acted as a solace, a way of bringing the deceased nearer.

She could remember little of the content of the disposal service. 'I think it was very nice. He (the clergyman) didn't say a lot, but he said it warm.' She did not know what the purpose of the funeral was but considered that one had to have one. 'It would be awful just not to have anything. Because after all, people believe there is a God don't they? I think you know, sort of, putting this loved person in God's hands.'

Bereaved C had cried throughout the service but she made no reference to this, stating that the service had been 'extremely nice. They don't rush you. You don't get the feeling that you're being pushed out or rushed out.' Although she knew at the service that her father was dead, she didn't accept the fact for about 'a couple of weeks'. Bereaved D who lost her mother, had just had 'an awful empty feeling on the day of the funeral.' Things that helped were 'the atmosphere, the friendliness of the people that came and how your funeral director is and the clergy.' The funeral director conducting was 'so friendly and he seemed to put everybody at their ease.' Her prevailing feeling during the ritual had been of emptiness. 'I just felt empty somehow.'

Bereaved widow E saw the disposal ritual as something of an 'ordeal'. 'Oh I was glad to go through it and get everything you know, get him put away nicely and that you know. You see its funny, you're so upset inside, too full up like.' She could not remember much about the crematorium. A neighbour had mentioned the large angel which marked the entrance to the building. 'But I said I don't remember anything. I don't.' The only thing which stood out clearly in her memory of the day was the way in which her husband's first wife (a stranger to her) had approached her as she was sitting in the limousine afterwards. '..the car door opened and this lady threw herself onto me and was crying and loving me and saying Oh I'm sorry and one thing and another and, I thought, well, I don't know you. Of course, it was twenty years since I'd seen her.'

She felt that it was 'quite a nice service' but she could not remember much about it nor what was said. 'Well you feel a bit full

up, you know, to er, remember things. I seemed to be satisfied with everything you know.' She could not imagine not having a funeral service. 'I think it would be more deadly. I think the service just brightens things up a little bit...' As with bereaved C, she was relieved when the day was over. Yes, I thought, thank God everything's over now.'

Bereaved F felt that the day had passed 'in a bit of a blur'. He considered that people were so upset that 'it doesn't really matter what they are getting or have got in the way of funeral ritual. He thought that the clergyman was 'all right. A nice easy fee. That's gone on the bill as well, like everything else.' Bereaved G similarly remembered nothing of the service. 'It passed in a blur.' She could only remember seeing her family, a neighbour, the deceased's work friends and an Aunty. 'But anybody else, I didn't see.'

In funeral J, the bereaved husband commented that he had found the disposal service 'very hard and cruel and crude.' (His own behaviour during the service had been that of someone totally estranged from the ceremony.) Clergyman J remarked on his surprise at 'how far back among those who were mourning, the husband was'. Bereaved J commented that he knew that he had been 'unresponsive', but felt that he was only there out of social obligation. 'I would rather have carried on with life. I would, personally, have rather been working all the time.' He saw the service as a time of 'suffering for the things that you believe you've missed' and also as 'a bit of a show really. In the sense that functionally she's not going to be cremated there and then. She goes behind the screens and they do them altogether.' The bereaved, in common with many others, held the mistaken belief that

all the days' coffins were saved and cremated at the same time. He expressed curiosity as to the crematorium procedures: ' I mean do they actually burn the boxes? I think its a waste of wood. Sounds very cool and callous but you know, I would have thought they would have taken them out before they put them in'. Griffin and Tobin (1984,p.70) noted in Australia, a similar 'widespread but quite erroneous assumption that the coffin is not buried with the body and can be re-used.'

The common thread running through the bereaved's perceptions was the element of unreality, of being 'watchers' at the disposal service rather than participants and afterwards being unable to recollect much of what had happened. Despite the clergy's efforts to make the disposal service 'God directed' rather than 'body directed', the focal point of ritual remained the body of the deceased and the bereaved were unable to think in abstract terms about the purpose of the funeral beyond treating it as a formal farewell.

#### 6.10. The Funeral Tea

Leaving the crematorium, the mourners in funeral A travelled back to the Funeral Home. 'We just had the buffet, with them bringing the fresh pots of tea and the china cups and saucers, it makes such a difference.' Bereaved A appreciated having everything done for her. The purpose of the funeral tea was seen as providing a social opportunity to talk freely about the death, the deceased and also to unwind after the tension of the disposal service and to consolidate family ties. Bereaved A commented, 'Once its all over you start talking about your own things and about how many years is it since I saw you?'

One of the dilemmas of the funeral tea for the bereaved, was whether to ask the officiating clergyman back to the house or funeral home. A churchgoer herself, Bereaved A afterwards regretted not asking him back. 'It was because none of them here, apart from me cousin, were particularly religious. And I felt so dreadful afterwards. I thought, well, should I invite him in. And I thought, well, a lot of them would feel uncomfortable. They wouldn't feel they could chat quite the same.' Clergyman A on the other hand was eager to attend funeral teas. 'If ever I get invited and I possibly can, I do. I've felt that certainly on some occasions that they've leaned on me as the person who can actually help them get normal life going again, If I can, I make a point of going back there and after being sort of rather holy and rather formal in the crem, I'm able to be much more relaxed'. He thought that the funeral teas got rather jolly if enough alcohol flowed.

Funeral B's catering was carried out at a restaurant chosen by the bereaved. 'We took people to a restaurant for sandwiches, tea and cakes. There was nobody coming back afterwards.' Clergyman B had not been invited. He interpreted funeral tea invitations as some kind of merit reward for good pastoral care. 'If they invite me back and I can actually fit it in, its not often that it happens. Except where you've really done quite a bit, you've got your visits in and they are people that do appreciate that. I should imagine that out of every four times I've been asked, I've been about once. I mean if I could go to all four I would.'

Bereaved C had not laid on any formal catering. After the cremation the bereaved had gone home with the immediate family members for a

cup of tea and sandwiches. 'A few people came in for drinks.' They had not invited the clergyman and he would not have been likely to attend, since he discriminated between his own parishioners and 'others'. 'I have been obviously, if they are members of the congregation. I would go to the house and whatever function is going on there, I will participate - better not to go further than that had I! Incriminate myself! But where people have a function that's put on outside, no thanks!'

Bereaved D attended a funeral tea at her son's house. 'He catered like. We had (outside) caterers, ..because he's a bigger house than I have. There were thirty odd back there. All the family went back and a lot of her friends. They were all more or less relaxed.' The presence of extended kin helped to take the bereaved's mind away from her grief.

Funeral party E were very late arriving at the funeral home for catering causing chaos in the Funeral Home kitchen since there were two funeral teas taking place within the establishment at the same time with a third expected within the hour. Bereaved E commented: 'Oh I had them put a good meal on and everybody was satisfied and then they said, if you want to take the rest home you know...' She had not asked the clergyman back. 'I think it was mentioned and he'd another, there was another funeral more or less straight after us.' Clergyman E commented: 'I don't go if I can possibly avoid it. You have the horrible feeling if you start it will get around. The vicar expects to come to the funeral tea.'

Bereaved F held a funeral tea for his deceased sister in the

the recreation hall of the old people's flats where she had lived. 'The warden organized it all.' He described the atmosphere at the tea as 'relaxed'. 'They tend to talk more of the merits of the person who's died. ' Clergyman F did not attend the tea.' In the nature of things you normally haven't time. They'll often ask you. Someone did last week. It suited my book to be quite honest, because it was lunchtime, to go back.' He was realistic about his involvement. 'It didn't get them going to church or anything like that'. He felt that the teas functioned as useful therapy sessions. 'All their pent up feelings come out. They're with relations and friends and they start to talk.'

Although stating that she did not believe in 'tea parties', the deceased's aunty, his brother, his mother, a cousin and his wife, all went to bereaved G's home for a cup of tea. The numbers of mourners accompanying her to her home illustrated the almost involuntary supportive action of close relatives. Clergyman G did not go home with the family if he could possibly avoid it. There was no funeral tea for deceased H (the loner). The executor was uncertain whether such a tea would have been attended, despite the massive support of parishioners at the church service. 'Not every person in the church was the sort of person who would sit behind the deceased, talk to him or even listen to him.'

In funeral J, the catering was carried out by the deceased's parents at their home. Invitations were issued on an ad hoc basis. Leaving the crematorium the deceased's father walked down the line of mourners greeting each one and saying: 'You'll come back to the house?' He included the funeral staff in his invitation, although due

to the constraints of the daily timetable it was not possible to accept. The clergyman was not invited. He commented that he only attended where he knew the people well. 'With other people, its sensible to see them later'. Funeral director J often received invitations. '..for a sherry or even a drop of the hard stuff. When its cold you're much more often asked in for a warming drink'.

Within the sample, only funeral H (the deceased without relatives), failed to progress to a funeral tea following the disposal rituals. Three of the bereaved had arranged refreshments within their own homes, two had catering within a funeral home, one had outside caterers in a hall, one had outside caterers in a restaurant and one had outside catering provided within their own home. Despite the downward trend in formal funeral teas, the basic post disposal ritual remained as a further venue for enacting the social roles of death and for providing support for the bereaved. It was also particularly important for prolonging ritual for some bereaved who were devastated by a 'sudden' death. Just as bereaved B had not wanted the funeral service for her son to end, a female bereaved in the preliminary sample (who had lost her child in a cot death) had not wanted the funeral tea to finish. 'I didn't want them all to go. I mean it. You know, just because it was something going on. Time was disappearing if you like' (TH/PS)

#### 6.11. The rituals of the ashes

Although there are no laws regulating the disposal of cremated remains - The Births and Deaths Registration Act (1926) infers that a body is disposed of when cremated - the statutory regulations governing cremation have provided that the ashes of the deceased

should be given into the care of the person who applied for the cremation. The person may then dispose of them in any manner wished provided that it does not contravene laws of trespass or create a public health hazard. Within the Anglican Church, ash disposal is recommended by burial, either in unmarked shrubberies or formal lawns.

For the bereaved, there was a wide choice of 'ash rituals', from strewing or scattering the ashes at the crematorium (attended or unattended), burying the ashes within an existing grave, or a designated spot in a churchyard, scattering the ashes in a river, or some other selected spot. Little attention however was ever given to the disposal of the ashes during the Arrangements Sessions. Decisions on such post disposal rituals were normally left to the bereaved and the crematorium. In all cases, the bereaved were given insufficient information on the subject. Within fieldwork some were waiting months afterwards for the return of the ashes when they had already been scattered by the crematorium. Others, who had informed the funeral directors that they would collect the ashes, subsequently forgot and left collections of ash containers sitting on shelves in the funeral home.

After funeral A, the deceased's ashes had been strewn at the crematorium. The bereaved was well acquainted with the procedure from previous funerals and could produce the relevant paperwork. 'They were strewn in the same area as X (the deceased's husband) in the Flower Circle. I spoke to some cremation people and he said, Well what do you want? And I said, for her to be reunited with Dad. She was cremated on the Thursday and I went up to the crematorium on the

Saturday and had a really good cry.'

Just as bodies have been buried consecutively, one after another in the same family grave and said to 'join one another', so ashes are now often scattered on the exact spot that related ashes had been scattered many years previously, in the tenacious belief that they would then be 'joined' or 'reunited with their loved one'.

Bereaved B had requested that the ashes of her father in law should be scattered in exactly the same place as those of his wife and had gone to the crematorium to attend the 'scattering ceremony'. The ashes had been scattered in the form of a cross by the crematorium attendant. The ashes of deceased C were also scattered in 'a family place': 'onto the rosebed which we have with a rose that is commemorating my grandmother and the ashes were scattered there and mother's were scattered there as well.' Although the ritual of securing a family grave and tending that grave has drastically declined, it appeared obvious that the basic ritual of having a particular 'family place' which belonged to no one else and which could be visited and viewed over many years, remained strong.

Bereaved C had not attended the ceremony of ash strewing.

Nevertheless, at the time of the interview she was attending the crematorium 'probably about once a month now'. 'The grounds are always pleasant and its a pleasure to go. There's no untidy graves, no headstones been bashed in by vandals. Its just a tiny little plaque in memory.' Bereaved D had her mother's ashes buried in a family grave (in a village churchyard some distance from North city). This entailed a separate ceremony. The family arrived by minibus and

included several small children. Funeral director D commented: 'It were a pleasant day out. All the tears had gone. They saw it through to end. (sic)' At the graveside, the clergyman stated that he was not going to repeat the funeral service. He said a couple of prayers over the wooden casket as it lay in a small hole dug by the funeral director. Bereaved D's husband remarked of the clergyman: 'I don't know whether his heart was in it or not but even so he felt that he had to put a bit of a show on.'

Bereaved E's experience with her husband's ashes illuminated the lack of client involvement with the funeral director after the main disposal ritual. She had not attended the strewing of her husband's ashes because she stated she had not been invited. Nor did she know where the ashes were. 'Well, if they (the crematorium) sent word, I think I would have gone. But they just sent word would I send them some money and they'd er plant some bulbs'. Bereaved G had been asked about the disposal of her deceased husband's ashes during the Arrangements session but had asked for longer to decide. Funeral director G explained that the crematorium would hold the cremated remains for a month 'before they natter us' (sic). Bereaved G had not attended the crematorium for the scattering, nor had she attended a subsequent memorial service. 'They had a service a fortnight later, it could have been three weeks. But I wouldn't even go to that.' Both the crematoria and the churches in North city held communal memorial services at intervals throughout the year. Although none of the bereaved in the sample had attended these, they offered at least one instance of continuing support for the bereaved within the death system.

The ashes of deceased H were left at the crematorium after the disposal and neither executor H nor the clergyman involved knew what had happened to them. The executor commented: 'I'm not quite sure what the procedure is. Nothing was ever mentioned to me. Really they ought to mention it didn't they.' Clergyman H stated that they were 'scattered as far as I know.' There was to be no continuing marker for deceased H, in death even further abandoned by the community than in life. Bereaved J received a card of remembrance from the crematorium in his deceased wife's home town but did not travel up for the scattering of the ashes. 'I thought that was a little bit of a show again. I think her mother did.' He was unimpressed by the card considering that it was 'a bit of commercialisation.'

The majority of the clergy who conducted the burials and crematorium services had little knowledge of the ash rituals. Clergyman A felt that it was 'not my province'. 'Normally I'm not consulted you see.' He had been unaware of the habit of one of the crematorium attendants of saying a few prayers as he scattered the ashes or that he scattered them in the shape of a cross. Clergyman A commented that he felt 'a bit professionally jealous of that one. I would hope that if the crematorium attendant does do this that he actually is praying (sic) and not just saying the wretched things. I would be uneasy if someone was just reading prayers in a totally callous way'.

Clergyman B felt that ash rituals continued because they meant something to the people. 'Some like them to be in the rose garden, some like them to be in the wood and some like them to be buried in the family grave or thrown in streams or in the river.' Clergyman C felt that ash rituals were 'a ritual of graveyard or crematoria

assistants' and showed some cynicism towards their activities. 'I gather from conversation with them that one or two of them say prayers themselves. I haven't asked them what it is that they're saying and what they think they're doing.' Clergyman D felt that scattering ashes on a football pitch was irreverent and he was not happy about some of the more bizarre things that people wished to do with them.

In general, the clergy had little involvement when ashes were strewn or buried at the crematorium or strewn elsewhere, but became involved where ashes were buried within their own churchyards either in a grave or a designated spot. All of the funeral directors had however strewn ashes at some time. Funeral director J described strewing ashes outside a churchyard with the clergyman walking along beside him. 'He just said a sort of blessing but it was very short.' The funeral directors had less compulsion to strew in the form of a cross and did not say prayers. . Funeral director J commented: ' I just strew in a line.'

None of the bereaved within the sample opted to keep the ashes, although the funeral homes all provided free polytainers or reasonably priced urns and caskets. Personal possession of the ashes remained a matter of some importance to a minority of the bereaved. Funeral directors had commented within fieldwork on the problems arising when relatives wished to divide the remains between themselves into two or more caskets, photocopying the certificate and presenting separate caskets for separate services of interment in different places . This amounted to two burials of the same person. Funeral director SX (Com.FH) related how an interment ceremony had

been disrupted at the crematorium when a second funeral director screeched up in his car and shouted: 'Don't inter those ashes!' There had been a last minute dispute with another relative who had claimed them. The first funeral director drove to the claimant's house and an agreement was eventually reached on the division of the ashes, with the claimant keeping hers in a casket and the other relative continuing with the burial (3). Whilst cremation authorities remained uneasy about such practices, very little interest or guidance had been provided by the church. In the absence of specific guidelines, individual superintendents were left to make their own rulings on the matter (4).

#### Post Disposal Rituals

##### 6.12. Memorialisation

Aries suggested that within the Invisible Death there were now only 'two places to cultivate the memory of the dead: at the tomb, a custom that is disappearing more rapidly in England than on the Continent; and in the home' (1983, p.578). Fieldwork demonstrated however, that there were a plethora of new forms of memorialisation available to the bereaved. Amongst these in North City, were columbaria, kerbside plaques, trees, rose bushes, garden seats, inscriptions in the Book of Remembrance and bulbs. It was not clear however, and it was beyond the terms of the remit of the research, to discover which of these were most favoured by the bereaved. As noted in Chapter Five, memorialisation was not generally mentioned during the Arrangements session and unless they actively sought help from the funeral director it was left to the bereaved to make their own contacts with the crematorium or with monumental masons.

Bereaved A had not decided upon any further memorialisation of her mother beyond strewing the ashes in the designated spot. Bereaved B had considered putting her father in law's ashes in the columbarium but decided against it. 'My husband and I thought that they looked so dusty there you know, and I thought it was better to be under grass and let things grow.' Bereaved C purchased a plaque and another rose tree for her father. Bereaved D had her deceased mother's name added to the family grave headstone after the interment of the ashes in the village churchyard.. Bereaved E relied upon the promise of the crematorium to plant bulbs which she would not be likely to see. Bereaved F had the existing headstone on the family grave cleaned, and his sister's name added to it. Bereaved G had purchased no memorial for her husband and was still half regretting having him cremated rather than buried. In part this was because she continued to visit her own mother's grave every Sunday and had done so for the past five years. In cases H and J the bereaved did not intend to do anything about memorialisation.

There were few common factors linking the bereaved's intentions and behaviour with regard to memorialisation. Where there was an existing family grave, headstones were cleaned and names added. Where there was a new grave, (as in the later death of her son experienced by bereaved B) a new headstone would be purchased. Where there was a cremation and the ashes were strewn on a memorial spot already perceived as 'belonging' to the family, there was less impetus to purchase further memorialisation.

Clergymen in the city remained defensive on the subject of memorialisation. Bereaved B had experienced difficulties when wishing

to mark the site of her son's grave with a temporary cross until the headstone was ready. Not only was their choice of monument circumscribed, 'You have to have a certain size, and you're not allowed black. You can have dark grey or light grey', but also their cross was forbidden. 'I felt like is (sic) in East Germany, alles verboten. People have no say in it today.' Both monumental masons and funeral homes were able to produce numerous instances of acrimonious correspondence between themselves and the clergy on the subject of memorialisation. When questioned, the clergy often passed the blame to the diocese claiming that the individual clergyman himself had little influence on such decisions (5).

Within the city cemeteries, the traditional rituals of placing flowers, vases and other artefacts upon graves were threatened by the impermanence of a disposable consumer society. Cemetery superintendent F commented that within the largest corporation cemetery in North city flowers were removed after a few days. 'Vases, you can't guarantee anything stopping in this place for more than a couple of days. People bring in satin flowers, they come in very upset because they've been pinched.' In part the vandalism and neglect was viewed as a result of the lack of understanding of death of the younger generation and in part attributed to the loss of concepts such as 'respect', 'reverence', 'dignity' etc. People walked on the graves and allowed their dogs to foul the headstones and used the cemetery as a playground and thoroughfare.

Although the lack of popularity of 'common graves' indicated the continuing need for individual memorialisation, a major obstacle in the masons' promotion of headstones was the economic status of their

clients, with the majority being elderly widows of limited financial means. This was not helped by government strictures which decided that commemorative items were not 'essential expenditure' and therefore subject to VAT. At a national conference the presidential speech of the monumental masons association threw the blame onto local authorities suggesting that the bereaved were being forced towards cremation by the continuous building of crematoria. The situation however was far more complex and included economic factors, lack of labour for cemetery maintenance, inner city vandalism, lack of information, increasing church strictures and inflexibility, as well as changes in the nature and functions of memorialisation.

#### 6.13. The In Memoriam ritual: a communal memory

In sharp contrast with the efforts of funeral directors to maintain such rituals as 'viewing', 'the cortege', the 'turning of the coffin' and 'funeral teas' and with the efforts of masons to retain traditional memorialisation, the ritual of placing In Memoriam verses has been maintained solely by the bereaved, with encouragement from the local and national press. Only a handful of the smaller funeral homes would undertake, as part of their service, the responsibility for putting in the yearly memorial verses for the bereaved. The continuation of the ritual despite increasing insertion costs and high unemployment suggested that it continued to provide a useful function, a channel of 'family' or neighbourhood expression which could not be found anywhere else.

Bereaved A stated that her parents used to put verses in the paper for a number of years. 'I used to join with them. We stopped because of the costs. They used to pick different ones each year. But I've

not done it for Dad and I won't for Mum.' Bereaved B had not used the column but considered it useful. 'Some of them (the verses) are very nice. I think it puts their feelings.' Bereaved C suggested that the commemoration needed to be directed to others in the family. She had put verses in the paper for her grandmother when she died but had recently stopped. 'I stopped this year because most of the people who knew her had gone. So I rang up my sister and said what do you think? So we agreed to send the money instead to a cancer appeal.' The verses nevertheless formed a continuing memorial since her sister had cut them out each year and pasted them into a scrapbook.

Bereaved D expressed her intention of putting a verse in the paper for her mother 'at least for the first year'. She had done it for her grandmother and for her husband's father. Bereaved E also stated that she would be putting in a verse for her deceased husband. 'Oh yes, you can't forget them can you.' She would be putting in 'something simple'. 'Quietly remembered or something like that.' She felt that etiquette prevented her from being too expansive and putting in a full verse. 'Had I been married to him all me life, I might have put a nice verse in. When there's another, ex wife, I think it makes a lot of difference.'

Bereaved F did not compose verses for his sister, although he considered that they provided a therapy for the person writing them. 'It is an emotional thing.' Bereaved G like bereaved C, had put verses in the paper for her mother for about five years, but had recently felt able to halt the process. 'We think about her, so why do we have to announce it to everybody else. So this year we sent a cheque to cancer fund.' She couldn't see the ritual disappearing .

'Well its first few years, then as time goes by, odd ones drop off, one will forget one year and then other will forget another.' There were no verses for deceased H or J. Bereaved husband J commented: 'I don't need telling to remember'. In total, only three of the nine bereaved announced their intention of using the In Memoriam column. However of the six who would not be putting in verses, three had previously put in verses for some other relative. Thus six of the nine had used the ritual at some time or another. The fact that several of the bereaved had given up the practice after a few years or mentioned that they would only put them in for the first year, suggested that the practice (1) represented the remnants of the formal mourning period; (2) constituted a useful channel for the expression of grief and (3) helped to maintain family links. Very often the cost of an insertion was shared between family members and a decision to abandon the ritual would be made after consultation with others or taking a cue from the non insertion of other family members.

As with memorialisation in the form of headstones, crosses and columbaria, the ritual of inserting In Memoriam verses was generally deplored by the clergy on the grounds of their content. Clergyman A felt it a hypocritical activity.' The verses are very soppy. Its folk religion at its most sordid.' Clergyman E commented that the verses made him cringe despite the fact that the sentiments expressed were 'honest'. 'Its the aesthetic really, they're such lousy verse! Clergyman F found the In Memoriam verses 'distressing to read. You think, Oh dear, if that's people's philosophy or theology its very poor.' His own interpretation of a multiplication of verses within a single family was that it showed a not very united family. Clergyman

B felt that the verses were 'a waste of money. But if that's the way they express their grief...' (7).

Despite criticisms, the ritual purchase of poetry by phone was accepted as performing some kind of useful function for the bereaved. The In Memoriam verses displayed vestiges of 'correct mourning behaviour' and were part and parcel of the old communal values surrounding death. Since ordinary language was unable to cope with the immensity of death and religious language had fallen into disuse, the use of 'verse' or 'poetry' continued to be viewed as a suitable means of expression.

#### 6.14. The Aftermath

Aries suggested that death was now so 'denied' and obliterated from contemporary society that 'The period of mourning is no longer marked by the silence of the bereaved amid a solicitous and indiscreet entourage, but by the silence of the entourage itself. The telephone does not ring. The bereaved are in quarantine' (1983, p.580).

Certainly, immediately after the disposal and post disposal rituals, the majority of the bereaved experienced an abrupt disconnection of attention from those within the death system. Subsequent communications with the funeral home were likely to centre around the funeral bill. Similarly those with the monumental mason and crematorium, although the crematorium or the church might later post an invitation to a communal memorial service. At this stage, the set of social roles assumed during the period of the funeral had dissolved and the bereaved were left with no visible signs of being in mourning beyond the yearly insertion of the In Memoriam verses. However, within the sample, only one of the bereaved mentioned

'loneliness' and that related to the previous death of his wife. The majority claimed to have received a great deal of support. This did not include however, post disposal calls from the clergy. Only Clergyman A stated that he had visited Bereaved A, but she subsequently commented that he had not called. She had instead received an invitation from the church to attend a communion service for those who had had somebody die during the previous months. She had also received some nice letters of support and felt that 'even the briefest letter was better than a printed card'.

Bereaved A believed that there was an 'afterlife' and that family members would be reunited. 'I like to think my brother is there waiting and father and various brothers and sisters who've died.' She described herself as 'not a deeply religious person'. At the same time she felt that there was 'a soul somewhere that does go to heaven'. Although she had felt her deceased father's 'presence' for about a year after he died, she had not yet felt her mother's presence. 'I can't really say about getting over it (the death) because I'm going through a funny stage with nerves.' (She was currently waiting for an appointment to see a psychiatrist.) Although she had expressed herself as satisfied with the funeral ritual, in Gorer's terms it had not helped her subsequent adjustment.

Bereaved B was not bothered by the lack of a post disposal clergy visit, although she considered that the clergy had it within their power to offer comfort in certain types of death, 'especially if you lose a child'. Clergyman B did not think there was anything to be gained by always doing a 'before' and an 'after' visit. Little affected by her father in law's death which was perceived as a natural

end to a full life, the bereaved was badly affected at the time of interview by the recent death of her son in a road accident, and resentful of the fact that people expected her to show a gradual measure of recovery after the funeral. 'People keep asking now, How are you? And they want you to say, I'm much better. But you can't.' She felt that people including her neighbours thought that she should be much better by now and that they did not understand the chasm between the two completely different types of death. Disturbed by the lack of regard for her continuing state of mourning, she had turned to mediums for comfort. Bereaved C had also visited a medium. 'I was hoping that she would say that, like my father was here.' She felt that the dead came back in spirit form and was convinced that her dead father watched what she did, although she hadn't yet experienced his presence. She had experienced the presence of her grandmother. 'She sat at the end of the bed chatting to me.'

Bereaved D was still getting 'very very upset' some twelve weeks after the funeral.. '..I can be as right as rain for weeks and then suddenly me Mum's there and it upsets me all again.' Only a few of the people who met her in the street avoided the topic of death. Most of the people she had known a long time talked about it quite openly. She held a firm belief in the afterlife and was inclined to believe in re-incarnation, hauntings and the para-normal. She had not felt her mother's presence since she died but she commented that her own son had. '..and he felt relieved, but she hasn't been to me yet.'

The death of her invalid husband had meant a complete change of lifestyle for bereaved E. 'For years I've been more or less a prisoner..' Now she was able to go to the shops and take her time.

'I've nothing to hurry back for, where I always used to be panting.'

She had received a lot of support from friends and letters afterwards asking her to come and visit. Friends and neighbours had all been helpful. The afterlife remained a mystery to her. She considered that 'you just have to think there is a God and make the best of it'.

Bereaved F considered that the reality of a death took about six months to be comprehended. That was when 'it really hit you'. However, he had found the previous loss of his wife more traumatic than the present loss of one of his sisters despite the unexpectedness of the death. He believed in reincarnation, feeling that 'people keep getting recycled coming back as someone else'. His main problem was that of loneliness.

Bereaved G had had four weeks off work after the unexpected death of her husband but could really have done with longer. 'But the way the work situation is now..I know they say that when you're on sick you're covered and they can't sack you, but if it comes down to a matter of redundancies, they'd take into account' (sic). Remaining at home in mourning was seen as an unwarranted luxury in the nineteen eighties. The intense grief was still very much with her and she cried throughout the interview. . 'It does all seem unreal. Sometimes even now summat'll come back to me that I had forgotten.' She had received 'loads and loads of letters and cards'. She had also been to a medium prior to her husband's death and claimed that the death had been foretold. 'I were told this (the death of her husband) were going to happen three year ago. I think he knew as well.' The worst experiences the bereaved had had subsequent to the ritualisation of the death were with the legal system. As the second wife, she had only just learned that her husbands first wife and children were making claims on the estate. 'I know one thing now, I shall make a will.' Bereaved G was convinced that there

was some kind of afterlife. 'Oh yes, there's got to be. Unless this is hell on earth here!'

Executor H stated that she had always maintained that people needed at least six months to mourn. 'You know, that's real emotion, then you start to recover a bit.' She held strong beliefs about the afterlife and cited medical 'near death' experiences. 'What I do find strange I suppose, as a Christian, is having non Christians experience exactly the same accepting love.' Bereaved J found that the worst time after the disposal rituals came at Christmas 'when I had three weeks off, because I had to make a decision about the baby'. He described removing his baby daughter from the care of her maternal grandparents and taking her back to North city with him. 'I just had to do it. I'd been so concentrated up till that moment, to avoid having to think about X (his wife). It just hits you now and then. You can feel your eyes coming up you know. There's not a lot you can do about it.'

Overall, the bereaved had not experienced a lack of support from friends and neighbours nor did they feel themselves 'in quarantine'. However, in the cases of 'sudden' or 'unexpected' death, it was suggested that occupational demands in particular and society in general allowed little recognition of the degree of emotional devastation.

#### 6.15. Belief in the afterlife

Within fieldwork and the sample, the majority of the respondents, bereaved, clergy and funeral directors professed belief in some kind of afterlife. The most prevalent belief amongst the bereaved was that of

being reunited with loved ones. The clergy were less anxious to be specific about the form that it might take although sympathizing with the beliefs of the bereaved on reunion. 'I wouldn't like to say it doesn't happen. I wouldn't want to make too much of it. Its so open to the kind of unuseful (sic) sentimentality' (C/BK). 'One's Christian feeling would be that the closeness of what you might describe as fellowship, community or bonding that one feels to be with God and of God with other people is going to be even more so the other side of death, but beyond that I don't think I would venture to stray' (C/BR). Many of the funeral directors, despite days, months and years spent handling dead bodies, were prepared to state fairly certainly that there was an afterlife. 'I'm pretty convinced in my own mind that there's an afterlife. What its like, I haven't a clue' ( F.Dir UP). 'Well its a mystery. The only person that came back is Christ. The only person to be raised from the dead was Lazarus. But I've been in this world an awful long time and I've had my hair creep up the back of my neck in the early hours of the morning when I've gone into a chapel of rest where there's been dead people. And I've felt a presence. I'm not saying, ghosts or anything like that. I'm just saying, its a feeling. I think there's something after death, an afterlife' ( F.Dir EQ). 'I'm sure (there's an afterlife)! I couldn't go on with job (sic). I couldn't have gone on with job if I hadn't!' (F.Dir SK). 'Your life span is nothing to the length of time. So what's it all about? There's got to be something you know' (F.Dir.LE).

#### Summary

Due to the small size of the sample, it was difficult to state whether as Gorer suggests, a lack of ritual was maladaptive. Certainly where the desire for a particular ritual or for more ritual was thwarted (as

in case B where the deceased wished the service had been longer and had wanted to erect a temporary wooden cross for her son), it hampered recovery. Whereas in case D, cremation with churchyard ash burial, the ritual had been perceived as deeply satisfying. The bereaved received a good deal of support immediately after the post disposal rituals, but within a few weeks, the expectation was that they would have begun to recover from the death as from an illness. De-ritualisation was evident in some areas and not in others. The cortege had diminished in size and was no longer solely black. Although it retained the remnants of the old baronial procession (with some funeral directors walking the funeral away from the house) the only group to acknowledge it in the traditional manner were the clergy.

While mourners and clergy continued to meet together within the same framework, they held radically differing expectations of it. The bereaved expected a sympathetic, personalised service and a good performance from the clergy. Clergy throughout the preliminary study, fieldwork and the main sample, used a multiplicity of formats and addresses and styles of conducting the service. They were split between those who expected participation from the mourners and those who felt that the bereaved were in no fit state to participate, between those who felt that the christian message should be communicated regardless and those, usually ~~same~~ vicars, who felt that mourners were not in the mood for a theological discourse. Towler and Coxon (1979) saw the Anglican clergy 'divided between 'Radicals' who undermined distinctions between Christian and non Christian practices and 'Conservatives' who attempted to pull back the church to old patterns' (p.200). They argued that the majority of those within the parish were the conservatives. Within the present study few of the clergy were attempting to revert to

old patterns in the sense of adhering to the 1928 prayerbook or carrying out the committal or other religious rituals to the letter, they were instead tending towards individual funeral formats and interpretations. Nevertheless, in the matter of drawing distinctions between Christians and non practising Christians and between the setting of the Church and that of the Municipal Ritual Halls, they could all be judged 'Conservatives'.

Clergy were much concerned with developing coping mechanisms for the disposal rituals. Difficulties were experienced in controlling the behaviour of a non churchgoing congregation, in dealing with difficult family atmospheres, with lack of procedural knowledge and with controlling grief. Any grief which was not perceived as 'genuine' by the clergy and funeral directors tended to be viewed negatively. Aries (1983) argued that the suppression of mourning was due to 'a merciless coercion applied by society. Society refuses to participate in the emotion of the bereaved' (p.579). Within the case studies however, it was noted that 'genuine' grief was encouraged whilst bad (guilty) grief was discouraged since it was centred upon the self rather than upon the deceased. It also threatened to disrupt the disposal ritual bringing the 'chaos' of death into the open and was dysfunctional for clergy and funeral directors constrained by the short time spans allotted for each funeral.

For the bereaved, the disposal rituals were characterized by unreality and a sense of being taken out of time. Their recollection of actual events and actions were hazy and they were only conscious of their emotions and the atmosphere. Lack of provision of reasonable facilities (some crematoria or cemetery chapels had only one or two

tapes of Solemn Music), antiquated sound systems and poor selections of music added to the meaninglessness and conveyor belt character of many disposal services. These failings of the death system contributed to the poor image of funeral directors when disposal rituals were perceived as 'flawed'. Overall, the disposal rituals were judged very much as 'a public performance' and the data support Pine's (1975) conclusion that '...it is the appearance created, expressive behavior emitted and the impression fostered by funeral directors that are of the utmost importance to the funeral performance' (p.105).

Within North city, all of the main sample cases except that of H (the loner with no relatives) proceeded to a funeral tea. This contrasts strongly with Clark's (1982) findings in Staithes where only the Methodist 'chapel/burials' concluded with a funeral tea and the Anglican 'church/cremations' ended immediately after the disposal ritual. Clark linked the continuance of many of the rituals firmly to 'burial' suggesting that the attenuated church/cremations were the funerary style of the 'foreigner' who was not integrated into the community. However, in the urban environment the funeral tea was not seen as an integral part of community behaviour but, as discussed, could be linked to the smaller groupings of family, work and leisure. In case F for example, the bereaved brother and sister held a formal funeral tea for residents in the Sheltered Housing Centre where their sister had lived even though they themselves lived some 100 miles away.

Research demonstrated that the post disposal phase remained relatively free of legislative constraints and church interest and was open to new ritualisation. The post disposal rituals were maintained primarily by the bereaved and the monumental masons without much support from either

clergy or funeral directors. It was noted that there had been a movement of superstitious and common religious beliefs from the pre disposal stage to the post disposal phase, which now exhibited signs of belief in the paranormal, in presences, mediums, spirits and in new urban folk beliefs centred upon the crematorium. Basing his comments upon Gorer's 1965 survey, Aries commented that it was 'only among the old that one encountered the anthropomorphic eschatology of the nineteenth century. The subjects interviewed see their dead again and talk to them' (1983, p.576). Within both the main sample and the preliminary sample however, there were claims to having seen the dead and spoken to them or having been aware of their presence. Bereaved DE/PS of her mother: 'She was bending over me smiling. And I saw that ever so plain but I never said anything to anybody'. C/ BK commented: 'Many people have described this to me. Whether the personality of the person who has died has made itself felt or whether it is a projection from the mind of the bereaved, I don't know. There's no way of proving whether its from outside or from inside.'

Although tested by the contemporary medical framework which interprets the body as a physical resource, the same themes of 'continuation and reunion could be found within the In Memoriam and the ash rituals. The 'family verse' was the sole indicator of the continuing social status of the bereaved as mourner. Despite the antagonism of the clergy and the disinterest of funeral directors, the attachment of the bereaved to memorials remained high. In case E the bereaved were making a special trip to Scotland for suitable memorial stone for their son's grave as they could not find anything they liked in the city; in cases D and F, the bereaved added second inscriptions to existing stones. Case D also had the kerbing removed and the grave tidied. In all but

one of the crematoria disposals the bereaved were purchasing bulbs, rose bushes and inscriptions in the Book of Remembrance.

Documenting the frequency of grave or memorial visiting was beyond the scope of the present research, although the bereaved in case studies A, B, C and G all showed patterns of visiting and in the preliminary study, one bereaved was visiting the grave of her deceased child six months after the funeral 'about once a week' which she described as 'not very frequently'. Several authorities have justified the lack of expenditure on crematoria and cemeteries by the claim that the relatives of the deceased are conspicuous by their absence within quite a short period of time. However, discussion at a funeral conference in the city (1984) revealed that very different patterns of visiting were in operation between different crematoria and cemeteries, with some superintendents claiming frequent weekend visitors and others lacking visitors. It was emphasized by a funeral director (F. Dir KR. Neighbouring Town), that it was 'not sufficiently recognised in public authority circles how many people visit crematoria and cemeteries which often attract more visitors than the traditional parks'. To this end it was suggested that better landscaping was needed and more thought given to the public amenities. Throughout the research there was not a great deal of support for Aries contention that 'The relative of the cremated person rejects the physical reality of the site, its association with the body, which inspires distaste, and the public character of the cemetery' (1983, p.577). Although the suggestion found favour with many of the clergy. C/BH commented: 'I don't know why so many people go back to X Crematorium but there are these extraordinary services on Sunday afternoons which I have done once and I don't particularly want to do again and it seems to me that to try

and think of the person who died in the context of some place he hardly ever went to (is) rather peculiar!'

While funeral directors failed the bereaved by omitting to give information on post disposal rituals, those who wished, managed to set up their own communication with the crematorium. At the time of the interviews, Bereaved A, B and C had all paid further visits to the crematorium. Within the preliminary sample, a male respondent (BW/PS) had also spent 'several hours' looking for the spot where his father's ashes had been strewn with only the aid of a number on a form to guide him. In general, in an urban environment, the diversity of visiting behaviour appeared to be affected by factors such as the frequency of buses, the layout and beauty of the grounds, the type of memorials allowed therein and the type of death, rather than as Clark (1982) found in the village of Staithes, the continuation of an established community custom.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Office of Fair Trading Survey (1989) noted a similar complaint on the speed at which the hearse travelled. (See Chapter Seven).

2. The bereaved sometimes issue threats to funeral directors as to the disruptive action they will take at a funeral if a certain person turns up, often a second or estranged husband or wife. There are threats to cause a scene, to scratch the person's eyes out, to stop the funeral etc. Many of the threats are also a result of disputes over the method of disposal. For example, a wife wishes her child buried, while the estranged husband wishes it to be cremated. During fieldwork, one spouse announced that she was contacting her solicitor to have a cremation stopped. It was explained that all such communications should be directed to the superintendent of the crematorium and that it would need a High Court injunction to stop the funeral. Although the complainant continued to threaten disruption, she was closely shadowed by a funeral director on the day and the ceremony was successfully concluded. Few of the threatened behaviours take place once the funeral party arrives at the church or crematorium, although there were at least two instances of fighting breaking out at funerals within the city.

3. The increase in divorce and estranged families has led to an increased incidence of squabbling over the remains of the deceased. Again it is the funeral director who takes the role of intermediary and attempts to settle the quarrel by suggesting that one member of the family keeps the ashes or that they should be split. If no agreement can be reached however, the ruling is quite mercenary. The one who pays, keeps them. The ashes are the property of the person from whom the funeral director has taken instructions for the funeral.

4. Independent Burial and Cremation Authorities Ruling in IBCA Journal, Spring 1984.

5. Prohibitions issued by the Ripon Diocese for example, are wide ranging and include the following: No black or all-polished granite of whatever colour, no white marble, synthetic stone or plastic. No raised kerbs, railings, plain or coloured stone chippings, built in vase containers, figure statuary, open books, bird baths, cameos or portraiture. No artificial flowers whatsoever. (Personal communication).

6. The National Executive Officer of the National Association of Monumental Masons described some of the rules being imposed by churches and local authorities as 'severe and unacceptable', noting that he had to 'scour the length and breadth of the United Kingdom learning of these restrictions and contesting them as and when I can'. 'When the church authorities say the rules do not permit a certain type of memorial they are adding to the distress of an already distressed person' (Reported in The Funeral Director, August 1983, p30)

7. Clergy within the city generally, were outspoken in their dislike of the In Memoriam verses. 'Those awful verses!..I think that sort of

public reminder of loss is not of very great service to the public...to inflict it on the public rather outrages me..So they make my stomach turn over most of them' (Clergyman BK). '..on the whole they appall me with their triteness and vulgarity...I think its an indication of the paucity of human imagination' (Clergyman BP). 'They really are pathetic. That people can believe that kind of sugary nonsense. You know, Gentle Jesus up above, give Uncle George all our love..You know, its horrible isn't it' (Clergyman KS)'.  
  
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## CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

## 7.0. Overview

Gorer's (1965) thesis suggested that 'the majority of British people were without adequate guidance on how to treat death and bereavement and without social help in living through and coming to terms with grief and mourning. This was attributed to the loss of the extensive rituals of mourning and open discussion of death which prevailed during the Victorian period. This loss, Gorer contended, was brought about by an interchange of taboos from sex to death which resulted from a shift in religious belief denying the certainty of the afterlife. He suggested that the pomp and glory should be returned to death and rituals 're-invented' since their absence was anomalous when compared with 'the vast majority of recorded human societies'. Aries (1974,1983), following Gorer, similarly argued that death had been denied and was now 'invisible', 'feared' and 'dirty'.

The present research has demonstrated that the Anglican funeral in Britain had been subject to all the major forces of change inherent in capitalist societies and that the modernization of death management was an ongoing process involving increasing bureaucratization, secularisation, professionalisation, medicalisation, corporate development and loss of individual autonomy. Death ritual mirrors the current values of society and whilst appearing somewhat static under the influence of the basic structure with its clearly defined pre disposal, disposal and post disposal phases, inevitably reflects change. Several historical periods were seen as exerting a particularly marked influence on both the management of death and the social roles

it offered.

### 7.1. The loss of social roles

Chapter Two demonstrated that over time, the experience of death was managed within a set of clearly defined roles: dying, lying in state, as well as that of the mourner and the ancestor. The dying role enabled meaningful interaction between the dying and their relatives but proved incompatible with hospital bureaucracy and medical ideology. Hospitals also undermined the legitimising role play of the clergy while legislative changes nullified the wishes of the dying, underwriting their impoverished social status. Aries (1983) argued that the hospital was 'the only place where death (was) sure of escaping a visibility - or what remains of it - that is hereafter regarded as unsuitable and morbid' (p.571). These remarks, based on the results of Gorer's survey (that only a quarter of the bereaved had been present at the death of a close relative), appeared to be a misinterpretation of denial, since it was evident that the bereaved within the present research were distressed when their relatives died just after they had left the hospital or just before they could reach it. They would have preferred to have been present. They were also more afraid of the process of dying than of death. Currently the dying role is only selectively available, to hospice patients or those able to be cared for at home.

The role of 'being dead' or lying in state' filtered down from the top of the class structure. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, the church condoned the practice. Interaction with the corpse and its inspection by friends and neighbours within the home was considered part of a social duty towards the dead. Familiarity with

corpse began to fade when the body was removed from the home under the growing influence of the medical profession and the specialisation of undertakers. It has nevertheless been maintained by funeral directors who routinely offer the ritual of viewing.

The role of the mourner was greatly expanded during the Victorian period, promoted by the fashion industry and the example of the upper and middle classes. The bereaved were expected to act out their grief publicly regardless of the degree of loss, in a manner which currently attracts criticism from clergy and funeral directors alike, as not always being 'genuine'. It is not clear to what extent this judgemental attitude depends upon medicalised conceptions of extreme grief as 'abnormal' or upon the severe curtailment of time allowed by local authorities for disposal rituals. The obligation to wear mourning, first eased by two World Wars, was not revived and contemporary mourners re-interpreted the 'formality' of the situation by wearing 'best' rather than 'black' clothes. A mourning group however, can still be identified by the steady sprinkling of black. Rituals such as 'viewing the body', the funeral tea, ash strewing, memorial visiting, memorial services and bereavement groups provide further venues in which the role of the mourner can be enacted. Although deplored by the clergy, the In Memoriam columns act as a reminder to friends and relatives that the bereaved are still in a private, if not publicly acknowledged, state of mourning.

The role of the ancestor diminished in line with the change in the nature of death ritual from a community to a privatised family function, with the lack of recognition of the role of mourner and the loss of a class aspect to post death status. There was no longer a

social duty to tend the grave of a departed member of the family. This did not mean that he or she had been totally forgotten however. Within the research, many of the bereaved visited 'family places' in crematoria where the ashes of several family members had been strewn. They were also aware of 'presences' or made efforts to contact the deceased through 'mediums'.

#### 7.2. The nature of death ritual

Jarvis (1980) suggested that superstitions 'retain their structures but change their content' (p.294). Death rituals were seen to have followed a similar pattern. Viewing was no longer carried out to ensure that the deceased was really dead but to allow a private farewell and to satisfy the bereaved that the body had been 'taken care of'. The turning of the coffin so that it left buildings feet first was not maintained to prevent the spirit of the dead from returning, but as a 'tradition' which emphasized the funeral director's pre-eminence as the carrier of death culture. Memorialisation had changed from commemorating the status of the dead to providing an important focus for grieving. The funeral tea was no longer a gift from the deceased to the community, but functioned as a de-briefing and supportive ceremony for the bereaved. New rituals were also being created, the disappearing catafalque at the crematorium, compensating for the lost drama of the coffin descending into the grave. Many of the concepts informing the rituals had changed. Social duty, reverence, status, were replaced by the bereaved by concepts such as family duty, privacy and personalisation. Within the research, ritual helped to dramatize the reality of the situation. It could be used independently of orthodox religious belief and remained important as a defence against meaninglessness and a vehicle for the legitimate expression of grief.

a. Control of ritual by the bereaved:

The thesis presented the bereaved as generally passive and system dominated. Nevertheless there were clearly areas where their influence or control could be discerned. Although the pre disposal ritual of the procession had been maintained by funeral directors over time, it was largely with the collusion of the bereaved. The case studies demonstrated that the immediate family of the deceased felt that it was not 'right' to travel to the disposal rituals in their own transport and preferred to use the symbolic 'care giving' qualities of the funeral limousine. Again within the pre disposal rituals the bereaved were responsible for initiating a 'cult of flowers' which were increasingly given the shapes of household or leisure objects. (An example of the attachment to this ritual was manifested in the immense floral shrine of the recent 1989 Hillsborough Football Disaster.) The bereaved were similarly responsible for supporting the additional pattern of giving donations to charity instead of or as well as flowers. Within the sample and fieldwork generally, these donations were primarily given to local rather than national charities and were not the subject of promotion by funeral directors. The bereaved's interest in the rituals of dressing the body and viewing, did not demonstrate a fear or denial of death but a concern for the well being of a relative who had not yet formally departed from society.

Increasingly the bereaved chose to personalise the rituals. The deceased were often dressed in their own clothing and grave goods were added to the coffin or (less often) to the grave itself. Union Jacks were chosen to cover coffins in two of the case studies and popular songs were chosen within the sample and noted within fieldwork.

Feelings of faith and meaning which may once have been transmitted by

hymns and the old burial service (Fenn 1984) were now sought within music relating to the deceased. Although traditional memorials were in decline, there was some evidence that 'sandblasting' pictures onto gravestones - of the deceased engaged in a typical leisure pursuit - were becoming popular. Again within the post disposal phase, the bereaved endowed the site of the ashes of the deceased with as much importance as the grave. Overall, the bereaved's push for personalised ritual increasingly reflects the individualism and privatised nature of contemporary society. The responses the bereaved wish to give are their own family responses, rather than those orchestrated by the community or by orthodox religious beliefs.

The push for personalisation also results from the general 'decontextualised' nature of death. There is now no single overarching framework. Death is defined by the understandings of competing groups within the death system and many bereaved are caught wrong footed by the orthodox religious framework. As Prior noted '..the explanatory frameworks for death..have been increasingly medicalised, routinised and bureaucratised' (p.56). The research clearly demonstrated that power struggles for control within the system were important because they represented struggles for the dominance of the different interpretive frameworks of death.

At city level, the predominant features of competition, territoriality and secrecy, the myths, the system rumours and general ignorance surrounding death; the necessity to control grief and emotional outbursts and the varying levels of conflict and integration within the death system as a whole, illustrated something of the potential chaos underlying the occurrence of death in society, the chaos which Aries

linked to the savagery of nature. Without commonly perceived, controlled ritual, death could lead to disorganization and disarray for society.

b. Control of ritual by funeral directors

The sense of chaos could also be perceived within the funeral homes in the piecemeal production of funeral ritual, in the large daily turnovers of bodies and in the insistence upon checking procedures. Chaos lurked beneath the efforts to construct and carry out a 'flawless funeral performance' (Unruh 1979) and a schizophrenic atmosphere resulted from the necessity to constantly separate front stage and back stage operations (Turner & Edgeley 1976). A single irritant or mistake during the disposal rituals tended (for the bereaved) to wipe out a previously favourable perception of the funeral home. As noted by Pine (1975), in his comments on the funeral directors' attitude and presentation, the acceptance of the fact of death was crucially dependent upon the creation of the illusion of normality. A death had occurred but the world had to be perceived to hold fast and not to disintegrate around the mourner.

The bereaved had only a vague perception of the funeral director's role in society (1) and over time had demonstrated a reluctance to assimilate the re-labelling of this occupational group. Only one of the bereaved in the main sample referred to the funeral director, the other eight and four of the clergy referred to them as undertakers.

'Undertakers' were invested with a range of stereotypical role attributes from 'goody-goodies' to 'vultures'. They were seen as lacking in humour, efficient and cold. They were also predominantly male, the exclusion of women paralleling the exclusion of women within the church. This appeared to be a changing situation in line with their

gradual acceptance into the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The lack of role knowledge arose from the insularity, secrecy and mystique with which funeral directors admitted having invested their occupation. This secrecy also served to obliterate the beneficial functions of the occupational role from the wider society. The funeral director increasingly acts as 'carer' of the body in its processing through the death system. It was seen as important that someone should deal with the corpse in a manner that retained its personhood rather than allowed its immediate perception and handling as dead meat. The 'heroic' role, much publicised by other professionals (e.g. surgeons emerging from the theatre; police officers tackling offenders), remained muted and underplayed, despite its important social benefits. Funeral directors as embalmers dealt with the horrendous aspects of air crashes, piecing together bodies for identification, exhumed and preserved the remains from war sites (such as the Falklands), were first on the scene to remove bodies found in varying states of mutilation or decay and risked infections such as hepatitis and Aids. They showed a great deal of ingenuity and patience in repairing bodies damaged by pathologists in order to provide the bereaved with a therapeutic last meeting with the deceased. For this, they received little recognition. Funeral Directors also helped to control the potential disruption of death for society by playing a mediating role within family disputes, ensuring that the deceased's formal departure was not marred by quarrels. Perhaps the most important aspect of their role however, was that of facilitating the role of the mourner and the expression of grief within a number of social settings. Overall, the bereaved expressed their satisfaction at being able to leave it all to the funeral director since it freed them to be alone with their grief.

The contraction of the formal period of mourning supported Parsons and Lidz (1967) contention that a short period of mourning was functional for modern society where work roles must be quickly resumed. Workers were constrained however, in areas of high unemployment, by fear of long periods spent on sick pay. This was perceived as particularly hard in cases of 'sudden' or unexpected death where a week 'off work' was not long enough for the bereaved. In the release from the formal strictures of mourning the pendulum had swung a little too far the other way and failed to differentiate between the 'types of death' experienced by the bereaved.

Interaction between the bereaved and funeral directors during the case studies and fieldwork showed that there was a consistent lack of high powered selling techniques. In no instances were the bereaved encouraged to pay more than they could afford for the funeral or made to feel that they should purchase the most expensive artefacts. Several funeral directors adopted the opposite stance and attempted to show the bereaved how it was possible to save money. Although Chapter Two demonstrated that funeral directors had promoted such rituals as the dressing of the body, viewing, the cortege, the phrasing of the obituary and the funeral tea, British funeral directors have not been overly concerned with the expansion of ritual, despite pressure from others in the death system such as florists, masons, coffin manufacturers, embalming equipment manufacturers etc. Kellehear's (1984) comments on the cosmetization of the dead as part of normal capitalist marketing strategy did not apply. Efforts have been directed to the low key maintenance of ritual and its protection from devaluation by other groupings. It was also found that the expansion or maintenance of a ritual was difficult if this ran counter to prevailing

social trends.

The repeated appearance of economic critiques of the funeral on both sides of the Atlantic, together with the periodic examples of corruption publicised in the media, illustrate a deeply ingrained belief in the facility with which profits may be made from the dead. Unease may also stem from a basic cultural resistance to placing a monetary value on procedures involving the human body such as the sale of human organs, surrogate motherhood etc. In addition, much of the negative attitude displayed towards funeral directors results from the failure of the bereaved to play a normal consumer role. There may be guilt and resentment that choices undertaken in a blur of grief have not been clearly considered and the suspicion that funeral directors have taken advantage of this.

Within the research, funeral directors were suspected of removing rings, jewellery and coffins. Three of the main sample bereaved were concerned about the possible theft of artefacts from their deceased relatives, with distrust being triggered by rumours of the grave robbing activities of the Yorkshire Ripper (2). These negative stereotypes were further fuelled by the bereaved's lack of knowledge of the procedures of death and the secrecy with which funeral directors have so long invested their work. A number of actual fiddles were revealed during fieldwork but these were greatly outnumbered by rumours circulating within the death system. Although the failure to completely eradicate such practices was a constant source of embarrassment to the NAFD, it was pointed out (Mars 1982), Henry (1981), that they should be interpreted in the context of the 'hidden system of rewards' within occupations and that the large

scale corruption within the death system noted in other countries was completely missing in Britain.

Much of the failure to alleviate their poor image however, lies with funeral directors themselves. Over time they have done very little to educate the general public, thereby encouraging the suspicion that they have a vested interest in maintaining the bereaved's isolation and docility. They have failed to acquaint them with the changing content of their work routines in a complex urban setting, not promoted the beneficial aspects of ritual, neglected to discuss ritual purchases in anything but monetary terms and in particular, have not demonstrated positively the ways in which they are able to protect the bereaved's ritual choices within the bureaucratic functioning of the death system. As noted in Chapter Six, it appeared that funeral directors were carrying the major part of the burden of public dissatisfactions experienced within the death system as a whole.

Negative stereotyping and scapegoating were identified as major hindrances to professionalisation and enhanced occupational control. Despite the fact that the goal of registration had been sought for the last sixty years and despite the fact that the battle proceeded along two separate yet conjoined paths: funeral directors and embalmers, success eluded them. In theory, many of the common attributes of the professional had been attained (examinations, diplomas, disciplinary committees, a degree of closure, the successful thwarting of other groups and interests) and yet, public recognition and approbation was withheld.

Freidson (1977) argued that control of an occupation could not be explained purely by 'length or content of formal education or by some intrinsic character of skill' but that it presupposed 'a successful political organization which can gain the power to negotiate and establish favourable jurisdictions in an organized division of labour and to control the labour market' (p.23). Although funeral directors appeared to have succeeded in manoeuvring the clergy into a subordinate position, they are themselves able to work only by permission of the medical profession and are similarly limited by the greater power of other professional groupings within the death system such as Coroners, Pathologists, Registrars and Local authority personnel. In addition, the very low educational entry requirements have ensured that the public retains its perception of them as tradesmen. Although the Co-operative Societies have contributed to raising standards nationally, with their own training college and management courses, a proposed degree course, promoted by the NAFD was abandoned on economic grounds. This contrasts vividly with the experience of American funeral directors who have degree courses in Mortuary Science and who themselves are empowered to register deaths on behalf of society. The failure to achieve professionalisation has been exacerbated by the split within the occupation between the small, traditional professionally oriented funeral directors and the entrepreneurs. Although the professionally minded and well qualified may be located both within the higher reaches of the NAFD and the larger corporations, it appears to be the entrepreneurial ethic which is in the ascendant.

c. Control of ritual by the clergy

Chapter Two traced the relative loss of power of the clergy over

time. Pre disposal visits, once of real comfort to the bereaved in ensuring a smooth transition between dying and death had become 'formal identification procedures'. Post disposal visits, unless the bereaved was a regular church goer or a 'proper religious person' were viewed as useless by both parties.

The increasing redundancy of the clergy despite their control of the disposal rituals echoed Towler and Coxon's (1979) suggestion that as a social group the clergy had begun to be regarded as 'fundamentally irrelevant to society' (p.31). This kind of recognition underlay much of their conflict with funeral directors. They were well aware of the funeral directors' efforts to relegate them to adjuncts of funeral home service chapels. Some moves in this direction were seen to have been accomplished nationally in the institution of the ~~same~~ Vicar, a reliable clergyman, who was prepared to put himself at the funeral home's disposal (Naylor 1985c). Where a ~~same~~ vicar could not be obtained, the funeral homes would sometimes subvert the system by suggesting to the family that they use the services of a nonconformist clergyman. Since denominational labels appeared to be of less significance to the bereaved, few objections were raised.

Some of the criticisms held by funeral directors of the clergy and by clergy of the funeral directors, were revealed as unfounded by analysis of the main sample funerals. For example, funeral directors maintained that the majority of clergy rarely visited the bereaved and were failing in their pastoral duties. Within the sample, five of the nine clergy paid pre disposal visits to the bereaved with three of those being unable to visit for quite valid reasons of distance. Similarly, the clergy criticised the funeral

directors for diverting the bereaved away from the church and failing to contact the parish clergyman. Yet, within the sample, it emerged that in seven out of nine cases the funeral director did attempt to contact the vicar for the parish.

Other criticisms of the clergy were held with great consistency across funeral homes both locally and nationally. In particular, the clergy's perceived 'excessive' interest in economic rewards. Funeral directors particularly resented being scapegoated for 'ripping off' the bereaved whilst clergy were adding increasing amounts to funeral bills. And on behalf of the bereaved, funeral directors unanimously deplored the prevailing 'death apartheid', the propensity of the clergy to distinguish between 'their own people' and 'C of E types', between services in church and services in the municipal ritual halls. Funeral directors felt that in death, all bereaved should be treated equally and that a service should not last twenty five minutes for church goers and fifteen minutes for the rest. The funeral was viewed as a human service transcending denominational or other barriers. A poor service at this time was perceived as unchristian.

For their part, the clergy held strong views on the 'good' funeral directors and the 'bad' funeral directors. 'Good' funeral directors were those who showed a proper appreciation for the Christian liturgy, who stayed in during the service and took part in prayers, who gave lifts automatically to the clergy, who paid them discreetly and in full, who let them know in good time about funerals and who did not lay down too many rules and expectations about clergy behaviour. Over time the clergy were seen to have engaged in a

series of ritual stripping and ritual deploring activities. These continued with clergy disinterest in viewing and ash rituals and increasing regulation of memorialisation. Whereas a few decades ago, the bereaved had been familiar with the words and resonances of the standard Anglican prayerbook funeral service, the bereaved in the contemporary city held few common expectations. As a consequence, the liturgy, address and prayers were little heard, comprehended or recollected by the bereaved. 'The atmosphere' and 'not being rushed' and the feeling that the clergyman's words were 'nice' or 'warm' proved to be the most important variables. The bereaved needed personalisation and comfort and had a limited understanding of what the clergy were trying to achieve. Nevertheless, several clergy, especially the same Vicars made a sustained effort to find a good funeral format.

Whilst acknowledging that the need for funeral ritual related to the emotions and not to the rational world, clergy were unable to bridge the chasm of understanding between their orthodox religious interpretations of death ritual and the bereaved's desperate need for human ceremonial. The main purpose of the funeral service for the clergy was to commend the deceased into God's keeping. It was not viewed as a ceremony of regret but for giving thanks for a life shared. For the majority of the bereaved however, it remained an occasion for the open and sanctioned expression of sorrow and the hope of reunion. Clergy were much concerned within the disposal service with finding 'coping' techniques since they were in charge of arguably the most difficult phase of funeral ritual: the formal passing of the body out of society. This was made increasingly difficult by the loss of familiarity among the bereaved with church

going behaviour, by difficult family atmospheres, by lack of procedural knowledge and by the clergy's own disinclination to accept the embellishments of pop songs and other personalising activities.

Although situated on the outer edges of the death system, along with the monumental masons, the clergy nevertheless exerted considerable influence over the contraction of traditional memorialisation and were perceived as unsympathetic to the monumental masons efforts to revive their craft. Relations between Masons and their Diocesan Authority Committees were often conflictual and it was pointed out by a representative of the National Association that this negative ecclesiastical approach could result in their being no one to repair the churches. The Funeral Director, August, 1983, p30).

Over time, the clergy's interpretative framework for understanding death has been superceded in line with their own decline in significance within the death system. The present superiority of the medical framework of understanding emphasizes the relative power of the medical profession, their negation of the dying role, their pervasive appropriation of the body via increasing numbers of postmortems and appropriation of the pre disposal phase. Currently however challenges being issued to the framework include those coming from the bureaucratic and legalistic managements of local government who increasingly assume the mantle of 'protecting public sensibilities' (for example, in approving memorial inscriptions, deciding the length of disposal rituals , deciding the suitability of types of ritual (vetoes on morris dancing) and deciding the type and provision of ritual facilities: catafalques, music systems, curtains, cremation memorialisation etc etc). Underlying all of this, as noted

by Towler (1974) (3), remains the lesser sentimental folk religious understandings of the bereaved which has retained over time consistent, simplistic, humanitarian responses to death.

### 7.3. The present situation

Although Clark (1982) found that death ritual in Staithes was still a property of the community and depended to a certain extent upon 'adequate agents of transmission', within the city, ritual originated from different groups within the death system reflecting differing power interests. It also originated from the innovations and personalisations of ritual by the bereaved, who placed some reliance upon funeral directors as mediators.

Increasingly however, it is the loss of personal relationships which characterizes funeral ritual as cold and anonymous. The bereaved's relationship with the clergy is fleeting and often embarrassing and the bereaved's relationship with the funeral director often shaped by the routinised demands of administering funeral homes with large turnovers. Although funeral directors have an understanding of the bereaved's needs and act as their agents, the encroachment of large corporations seriously threaten, this, the last of vestige of individual care and service.

The present research was carried out between 1982 - 1984. Since that time, two of the major funeral homes in North city, the Professional Funeral Home and the Commercial Funeral Home have been taken over by two major Co-operative chains. Subsequently, the Crossroads Funeral Home was acquired by a major southern consortium. In all cases, the original establishment names and advertising remain. A report in the

Manchester Evening News noted that 'Hundreds of independent local funeral directors are being systematically taken over, but their new trade names are not shown. People still honestly believe they are dealing with local established family firms of undertakers - but that is a myth. Deception and trickery are being practised. The sooner we open the doors of this highly secretive industry the better' (Reported in The Funeral Director, April, 1989). Although the report represented a polemical attack by a Labour M.P., the feared loss of personal service is real. The bereaved appear caught between the spectres of death ritual provided by an industry or by municipalising councils. Both seem inimicable with personal service. (The largest funeral directing business in Britain now claims a turnover of 8.3 million and recently announced a pre-paid scheme whereby clients may purchase death ritual in the shape of pre-determined 'plans'.)

#### 7.4. Report by the Office of Fair Trading

Following a resurgence of public criticism, the Office of Fair Trading issued a report in January 1989 on a random survey of 893 people who had arranged a funeral in March 1987. Findings were supplemented by letters and telephone calls to the Radio Four Programme 'You and Yours'. The majority of findings supported those of the present thesis including the conclusion that barriers of ignorance prevented the bereaved from considering the kind of funeral they really wanted. It was noted in Chapters Four and Five that although some bereaved arranged personalised and meaningful ritual, others found their choice restricted by the nature of the interaction within the arrangements session. However, where the Office of Fair Trading Survey suggests that demand for ritual is shaped entirely by the industry, the present study has illuminated something of the constraints of the death system as a

whole and the ways in which funeral directors act on behalf of the bereaved to maintain rituals against the demands of other groups.

The survey gave some recognition to the involvement of others within the death system, by its recommendation that crematoria authorities should consider in discussion with funeral directors, ways of reducing inconvenience suffered by some mourners as a result of their tight timetables. But it showed a limited understanding of the problem since funeral directors nationally already consult with crematoria officials in efforts to achieve better facilities and improved timings. Many of the objectives fail to materialise on the grounds of finance and unionised labour which precludes longer opening hours for crematoria. It was also noted within the study that local authority attitudes towards the suggestions of funeral directors are often either distant or dictatorial. The OFTS Survey gave no consideration to the protracted battles of some funeral firms to take over local authority crematoria in order to provide a better service for the bereaved, or to build their own.

The generalised distrust noted in the present study was echoed in the survey and included the belief of respondents that coffins were re-used at the crematoria and that bodies were robbed of gold before being cremated. The main concern of the Report however, was the lack of compliance by funeral directors with key requirements of the Code of Ethics, the provision of price lists, written estimates and the provision of the basic simple funeral. Within North City, the majority of firms provided verbal estimates, (these were especially frequent by phone) and a written estimate would be provided if requested. Although only 7% of their survey admitted difficulties in

paying the bill (only 7% of the respondents in the DHSS Survey admitted difficulties, and none of the bereaved in the present study), and although only 1% of the bereaved felt that they had been pressed to choose a type of funeral that was specifically more expensive than wanted, the Report nevertheless suggested that a more formal intervention might be needed if efforts of the NAFD and individual funeral directors did not lead to 'visible improvements in the operation of the market' (p.38). Within the immediate post death situation however, it was obvious to the researcher that the bereaved, often crying and distressed, did not want to be approached within their own homes by a stranger waving a price list. It was observed in Chapter Four that the discussion of ritual in purely monetary terms detracted from its perception as a satisfying and creative resource. As already noted and as suggested by the OFT Survey, a much wider circulation of information on funeral prices to the general public prior to bereavement, might be more acceptable. This also implies giving more attention to the dissemination of death education within the community (Naylor 1986).

Those who were dissatisfied with the funeral director's service represented only 1% of the sample. The dissatisfactions noted by this insignificant proportion of respondents clearly reflected all the 'knock on' effects of the functioning of the death system discussed within the thesis. 'I was asked all the time to decide on details immediately whereas I felt that this could have been left to the following day when I was not so upset' (p.27). 'The ride home was unsatisfactory, like a bloody racing car' (p.26). They also reflected the errors inherent in the high turnovers of large funeral homes: 'We requested that the flowers be sent to a local hospital but they were

lost and never got there.' 'They got his age wrong on the coffin' (p.26). Respondents were highly critical of the funeral director's bearing and demeanour, and of the settings of death, reflecting the importance of the variables of 'performance' and 'atmosphere' for death rituals found within the present research: 'Their attitude was very casual' (p.26). 'The chapel of rest very shabby (sic), it was a tin shed above the garage' (p.27). A few of the bereaved surveyed appeared to recognise the influence of other groups within the death system. 'The local authority charge for the medical certificate is excessively high for a very routine procedure'. 'I couldn't see why the clergy had to be paid that much for a five minute service - plus £100 for opening a grave we already possessed' (p.25).

The OFT survey noted that others had written to the radio programme saying that 'the state should pay' for funerals (p.29). It is not clear from this statement whether respondents meant via the Death Grant, which would allow individual choice of ritual, or via the municipalisation of the funeral which would promote the standardisation of ritual. The latter trend was not generally favoured by respondents in the present research on the grounds that it would curtail individual choice. Although the OFT survey found that 'there was a substantial demand for a simple funeral', it may well have been that this was a function of the phraseology of the survey questions. It was noted during fieldwork, that those respondents granted 'simple funerals' by the state, e.g. DHSS funded funerals, would afterwards, add on or pay themselves for further rituals such as extra cars or floral tributes. In addition, it was suggested within the present study that paying for the funeral remained a matter of some honour, a finding noted by Unruh (1979),

(4).

The absorption of small funeral homes into the larger chains was discussed with the suggestion that this might lead to higher prices, reduced quality of service and that the traditionally run businesses might disappear in favour of more dynamic organizations. The OFT did not consider that this was a bad thing unless it curtailed the bereaved's choice. As found during the thesis however, there was a tendency for some of the larger funeral homes to curtail choice in the interests of higher productivity.

A final methodological criticism of the report is that the gap of eight months between the actual performance of the funeral and the interviewing of its participants is much too long. Within the present research, it was noted that a gap of 8 - 12 weeks between the performance of ritual and its recollection was enough to cause inconsistencies in recollection on the part of many of the respondents, including the professionals.

#### 7.5. Future trends

Positive action will be needed to deal with the increasing impersonality of relationships within the death system. Some twenty years ago Fry suggested that the ceremony of death 'should no longer be left divided between local authorities, private companies, undertakers and religious bodies of many kinds but should be brought together, not as an aid to administration, but to rescue it from degradation...' (1969 p.122). A lot may depend upon the direction taken by the large corporations. Within the funeral service, it may be that the existing protective chauvinistic pattern of ritual

production may change with the influx of more women into the death system and the introduction of bereavement counsellors to supplement the pastoral care of the clergy.

Towler and Coxon (1979) felt that the future of the Anglican Church lay with the conservatives since 'It is they who have already adjusted the traditional parish to the conditions of modern society or are rapidly doing so' (p.205). Nevertheless, the role of the clergy within the management of death was seen in need of re-appraisal. It is possible that some vicars will become an accepted institution within funeral homes or that courses will be set up to equip funeral directors to take services. It is not argued that the bereaved would immediately abandon the religious framework but rather that there would be gradual changes over time. A small, but growing demand for Humanist Funerals has already been noted, with over 1,300 being conducted in 1988 (Miller 1989, p18). Non religious funerals are also conducted by the National Secular Society. Tobin and Griffin (1984) noted, 'There would seem to be a need in a pluralistic society to provide for a number of options and since 'no religion' is the fastest-growing census category, the non religious funeral has its place...' (p.86). They note however that 'One of the difficulties with non religious funerals is that it has proved extraordinarily difficult in practice to frame rites which say something worth saying and which are not just imitations of church liturgies. The mystery of death calls for a response at depth. Secular liturgies have little to fall back upon for that depth when the transcendental is excluded by definition' (p.83). (5).

In law there is no requirement that a funeral service must take any

particular form or be carried out by any particular person. Bergen and Williams (1981) found that 91% of their respondents questioned on 'alternative funerals' felt that a funeral should be 'a structure which sanctions and enables one to work through personal grief' (p.94). Such a structure could take almost any form, as noted by the director of a large southern funeral consortium: 'In answer to the question, What is a funeral? - a funeral is when people have what they want.' (F.dir. GD).

The research suggested that what the bereaved wanted was the opportunity to bid a formal farewell to the deceased in an unhurried and dignified ceremony which was a fitting end to a life. Although Aries (1983) argued that the contemporary model of death was 'invisible' and in the face of a loss of belief, an admission of defeat, this was only seen to reflect medical orientations to death. The bereaved did not express or demonstrate a particular fear of death, rather the general orientation was that of death as the end of a fulfilled life. Death is denied by depersonalisation, but the study showed a trend in the opposite direction. Nor was there a loss of belief in the afterlife, although such beliefs were rather more tenuous and diverse than the certainties of the Victorians. Rather than a profound shift in belief argued by Gorer (1965), Aries (1983) and Morley (1971), the study demonstrated that the 'implicit' or folk religious beliefs which have always underpinned death ritual have remained constant over time. It was also noted that support was available to the bereaved from friends and neighbours, memorial services and bereavement groups.

### Summary

Given the small sample and localized area of study, it is not intended that the present research findings should be generalised to provide patterns of behaviour on behalf of all bereaved, funeral directors and clergy. It is hoped however, that the long overdue empirical data will have provided a base from which to examine the contemporary management of death and to move forward from Gorer's 'taboo' thesis and the outdated arguments of Aries and Mitford. Even the 1989 OFT Survey was reduced to quoting Mitford and Waugh! It commented: '..if the descriptions which Jessica Mitford gives of the industry in the early 1960's is accurate, it is clear that funeral directing today more closely resembles the practices she described than it did' (p.35). The debate should now move on to include a much wider discussion of the meanings with which people imbue death and the way in which it is perceived and apprehended by different groupings within a complex environment.

An immediate involvement in the deaths as they occurred and were 'managed', enabled a better understanding of the differences and similarities of apprehension between some of these groups. It was shown that the class nature of the funeral had vanished, that it was little related to status but more closely allied to 'type of death'. There was a greater need for death ritual where death was sudden or unexpected or where society experienced a major tragedy (6). It was thus, in some circumstances, an enabling resource which helped members of society to assimilate apparently 'meaningless' deaths which could not be explained rationally.

It is hoped that the present data will be of interest to a variety

of branches within sociology, including the sociology of the professions, womens studies, community studies and the sociology of religion. Clark (1982) stated that no empirical study had yet been carried out which attempted to understand folk religion in the modern urban context. The present data may have gone some way towards filling this omission since it points to the continuing relevance of 'implicit' or folk religious beliefs in making sense of a major human experience. Nevertheless, a great deal of research remains to be carried out. The sociology of religion might do well to consider what it is that society should provide with regard to death rituals. A decade ago, a former President of the Cremation Society commented: 'We do not know..what the public actually want when they go to a crematorium..' (Greenwood 1970). There is still a great deal that we don't know, including the bereaved's preferences for memorialisation, their need for counselling after a death, how death affects relationships within a family, and within the working environment. Death rituals are important in a society because they underline the value of human life. The research revealed that they are uncompromisingly perceived as part of a 'human service' which should be freely available to all. The saddest feature of the lack of an alternative secular ritual is that it entails the failure of some to consummate human relationships. 'One family said that they didn't want a service, they would say something themselves. Well, you can hear what's being said, and there was nothing, absolute silence. They just sat there in the pews and then after a few minutes they all got up and shuffled out. Well you'd have thought one of them could have got up and said something, even if it was only, 'Well, this was my mum and she was one of the best' (F.Dir.BX).

FOOTNOTES

1. 'Funeral directing is a career that to the general public is shrouded in mystery. Many people who apply for a position have no idea what the work involves'. (The Funeral Director's Manual (1981). Ch.18, p7).
2. Peter Sutcliffe (the Yorkshire Ripper) when working as a gravedigger had 'offered his sister a choice of half a dozen rings'. 'When she asked where he got them, he'd said "Off the bodies at work"...' A fellow gravedigger confirmed that he had opened coffins on a number of occasions although 'he never saw him touch any rings.' (Burn 1984, p.58).
3. Towler (1974, p.155) concludes that 'Conception, birth, adolescence, courtship, marriage, menopause, failing health, sickness and death are all surrounded by beliefs and practices enshrined in common religion, which differ only in detail from what was known in earlier centuries'.
4. Unruh noted that at a Protestant Funeral Complex in America, 'the corpse of a six month child was displayed in the reposing room for almost two weeks as the teenage mother scrambled to raise the burial fee...the funeral director explained that the mother wanted to pay the fee herself (that is, without welfare funds or parental assistance). (1979, p.254).
5. By 1983, most Australian Funeral Directors had 'one or more civil celebrants' they could regularly call upon. 'The Australian Institute of Civil Celebrants exists to promote the concepts of non religious funerals. The founding chairman noted: Non religious and non churchgoing people have the same need for a meaningful cultural celebration as churchgoing people for a religio-cultural celebration' (The American Funeral Director, May, 1984. p.51).
6. The 1989 Hillsborough Football tragedy where a large number of spectators were crushed in the stands, not only led to the appearance of a massive, spontaneous floral shrine within the grounds, but also to calls within the media for the cancellation of football games and a formal period of mourning. 'There should be a proper period of mourning during which clubs need not play matches' (Today, March 1989).

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